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Evaluation of Rochdale Families Project

Analysis of Rochdale Boroughwide Housing Management Data

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Key Points:

- There was no evidence of a significant reduction in levels of rent arrears or nuisance complaints received by Rochdale Boroughwide Housing for the nine case study families during the period of Rochdale Families Project intervention
- One family accounted for the large majority of nuisance complaints in both the pre and during project intervention periods. Two other families were subject to one complaint in relation to the behaviour of a child. One family was subject to a Notice Seeking Possession in relation to drugs found at the property during the project intervention period. All of these families had also been the subject of recorded police incidents.
- One family was subject to legal action on the grounds of rent arrears in the pre-project intervention period (although a further three families had been subject to historic legal action several years ago). No family was subject to legal action on the grounds of rent arrears during the project intervention period. Although the majority of families had rent arrears (primarily as a result of Housing Benefit direct claim status), in most cases Rochdale Boroughwide Housing reported that these were under control, including the use of Direct Arrears Payments
- The family accounting for the large majority of nuisance complaints was subject to an Acceptable Behaviour Contract and had subsequently been re-housed
- The findings indicate the importance of support being provided to families to manage their financial affairs and to facilitate their communication with social landlords and the importance of multi-agency working between the police, social landlords and family support projects.

1. Introduction

This report utilises housing management data provided by Rochdale Boroughwide Housing to provide additional quantitative and qualitative measures of change in the circumstances and behaviour of families being supported by the Rochdale Families Project. Its aim is to complement the qualitative data being generated through other research elements of the evaluation. The presentation of the key findings is followed by a brief summary account for each family (in Annex 1).

2. Methods

A request was made to Rochdale Boroughwide Housing for data relating to 14 families receiving support from the Rochdale Families Project who had given consent for agencies to share data about them with the University research team. Data was requested based on family names and addresses. For each family, data was requested for two time periods: the 12 months prior to their being accepted on to the Rochdale Families Project and the period from their date of acceptance on to the project to 5 November 2010 (this second period varied for each individual family, from seven to 13 months).

There are two important caveats that need to be considered when analysing the data and reflecting upon the results presented in this report:

1. The sample includes only nine of the 18 families being supported by the Rochdale Families Project. Four families did not agree to participate in the research and data were not available for five of the families as they were not tenants of Rochdale Boroughwide Housing.
2. The comparative time periods are not equivalent for some families, and in particular the period of project intervention is less than the comparative 12 month pre-project intervention period. The time period for comparing five of the families is only seven months, for the rest of the families it is between ten and 13 months.

3. Classification

Rochdale Boroughwide Housing classified the data provided to the research team into four categories, in terms of:

- a) Levels of rent arrears
- b) Legal action (in relation to rent arrears only)
- c) Nuisance issues
- d) Other housing management issues

4. Results

Rent Arrears and Legal Action

Rochdale Boroughwide Housing provided three forms of data about the families' rent payment history and circumstances:

- The amount of rent arrears or credit in their rent accounts at the beginning and end of the pre-project and project intervention periods
- Details of any legal action taken in relation to rent arrears
- A short narrative summary of rent circumstances

Table 1 presents the data for the levels of arrears or credit in each of the families' rent accounts. The data show that seven of the families were in arrears 12 months prior to their involvement with the Rochdale Families Project, with the amount of arrears ranging from £68.63 to £660.89. By the end of this period (immediately prior to families' engaging with the Rochdale Families Project), arrears had reduced for five of these families, with a total reduction in arrears of £153.42, or seven per cent.

During the project intervention period, only three families had a reduction in arrears and six families had an increase. There was an overall increase in arrears of £1440.29, or 66 per cent, although this could be accounted for by significant rises for two families (in one case of over £1,000). Two of the three families who had a reduction during the project intervention period had also had a reduction in the 12 month period prior to project intervention.

Table 1: Changes in Rent Arrears

Family	Pre-Project Period (12 months)			Project Period (7-13 months)		
	Start	End	Change	Start	End	Change
A	474.20	361.16	- 113.04	361.16	404.62	+ 43.46
B	369.18	221.10	- 148.08	221.10	46.95	-174.15
C	282.61	343.59	+ 60.98	343.59	1389.26	+ 1045.67
D (a)	68.63	356.09	+287.46	356.09	249.97	- 106.12
E (b)	403.43C	493.47C	+90.04C	493.47C	129.36	+ 129.36
F	265.15	8.83	-256.32	8.83	136.48	+ 127.65
G(c)	52.21C	210.75	+210.75	210.75	651.77	+441.02
I	215.65	142.66	- 72.99	142.66	15.30	-127.26
J	660.89	538.71	-122.18	538.71	599.47	+ 60.76
Total	2336.31	2182.89	- 153.42	2182.89	3623.18	+1440.29
	(d)	(e)	(-7%)	(f)	(g)	(+66%)

(a) This family were re-housed during the project intervention period.

(b) C indicates that the account is in credit. These in credit figures have been treated as zero in calculating arrears and change

(c) C indicates that the account is in credit. These in credit figures have been treated as zero in calculating arrears and change. There was also change of tenancy during the data period.

(d) Two accounts were in credit to a sum of £455.64. This gives a revised figure for total arrears of £1880.67

(e) One account was in credit to £493.47. This gives an alternative figure for total arrears of £1689.42.

(f) One account was in credit to £493.47. This gives an alternative figure for total arrears of £1689.42.

(g) The change in one account (family E) was from £493.47 in credit to arrears of £129.36. For the purposes of this analysis, this is recorded as a change of +£129.36 in arrears.

Table 2 provides data about legal action and a summary for each family. Three of the families had a history of being subject to legal action (but these dated back to 2005/06). One family had recently been subject to legal action shortly before engagement with the Rochdale Families Project. One other family was reported to have increasing arrears during this period. No issues were reported for the other seven families. In the period of project intervention, no families were subject to legal action on the grounds of rent arrears, although three families had issues relating to Housing Benefit claims. Five families were on Arrears Direct Payment, which is made directly to Rochdale Boroughwide Housing from tenants' Department for Work and Pensions payments to reduce arrears (at £3.30 a week plus a water rate element).

In summary, although no families had been subject to legal action on the grounds of rent arrears during the period of project intervention, there was no evidence that the Rochdale Families Project

had impacted on rent arrears levels (which were related to fluctuating Housing Benefit status and payments).

Table 2: Rent Arrears: Legal Action and Summaries

Family	Pre-Project Period (12 months)		Project Period (7-13 months)	
	Legal Action	Summary	Legal Action	Summary
A	NOSP served 10/11/2009		None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No issues On Arrears Direct Payment
B	SPO from March 2006 Suspended eviction from June 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No issues for 12 months prior to project 	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No issues On Arrears Direct Payment
C	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No issues, on Arrears Direct payment, awaiting HB claim at end of period 	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Started period ok Big issue with HB claim towards end of period which is still not resolved
D	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial increase in arrears Moved onto Arrears Direct Payment and arrears under control 	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No issues On Arrears Direct Payment
E	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No issues Account in credit 	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No issues Small arrears but under control
F	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No issues Full rent paid regularly 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No issues Onto HB and payments irregular
G	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> initially good payment Onto full HB and arrears rising steadily 	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tenancy ended as result of bereavement HB stopped and arrears increased until tenancy ended in March 2010
I	SPO from July 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No issues On Arrears Direct Payment 	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No issues On Arrears Direct Payment
J	SPO from October 2005 3 evictions suspended by consent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No issues for 12 months prior to project On Arrears Direct Payment 	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Issue with HB claim and overpayment leading to rise in arrears that need to be addressed On Arrears Direct Payment

NOSP= Notice of Seeking Possession
SPO= Suspended Possession Order
HB= Housing Benefit

Nuisance and Other Housing Management Issues

Seven of the families had not been the subject of any complaints about nuisance in the 12 months prior to Rochdale Families Project intervention. During this period there were 20 reports of nuisance about Family D, received from the police and neighbours and all related to one child in the household. There had been a complaint in August 2009 about Family C in relation to ongoing nuisance (noise and abusive language) from youths and visitors to the property. There had been an issue relating to Family B with regard to an electricity meter being allegedly tampered with, which was reported to the supplier.

Six of the families were not subject to any complaints about nuisance during the period of project intervention. Family A were served with a Notice Seeking Possession in January 2010 and drugs were found after execution of the warrant. Family D were subject to 14 complaints during the period of project intervention, received from the police and neighbours and all related to one child in the household. An Acceptable Behaviour Contract was drawn up for this child by Rochdale Boroughwide Housing and the police and signed at the end of May 2010. Damage to the property and re-chargeable repairs was also discovered. The family were identified as requiring a larger property due to the size and particular needs of household members and have since been re-housed. Family B were subject to a complaint by other residents in September 2010 with regard to a child in the household shouting and being abusive.

In summary, the patterns of complaints about nuisance and other management issues were very similar in the pre project and project intervention periods. There is therefore no evidence of a reduction in complaints comparable to the findings from the previous analysis of police incidents data (although this would have been impossible given that seven of the nine families were not subject to any complaints in the pre-project period). No significance can be attributed to the reduction in complaints about Family D from 20 to 14, given the shorter (seven months) duration of the project intervention comparison period.

5. Conclusions

The data provided by Rochdale Boroughwide Housing does not demonstrate any discernible impact from the Rochdale Families Project on the case study families in terms of housing management. The levels of arrears increased during the project intervention period (although this was largely related to Housing Benefit status and payments, particularly with regard to two families). However, the personalised budget data did show that some modest emergency rent payments had been made and no families were subject to legal action on the grounds of rent arrears during the project intervention period.

The most significant finding is that the majority of families were in rent arrears and, although this was being managed by Rochdale Boroughwide Housing, it does provide further evidence of the poverty and difficult financial circumstances of the families (albeit that rent may be paid fully and directly through Housing Benefit). It also demonstrates the crucial importance in families being supported to manage their financial affairs and to be facilitated to interact with their social landlord.

The data does not demonstrate a reduction in housing management nuisance complaints during the project intervention period that would be comparable to the reduction in recorded police incidents. This is primarily due to the majority of families having no nuisance complaints recorded in either the pre-project or project intervention periods. However, the fact that some families did have recorded complaints emphasises the importance of multi-agency co-ordination between the police, social landlords and the intensive family support projects.

Annex 1: Individual Family Case Study Data Summary

Family A

- Rent arrears increased by £43.46 during project intervention period but no rent issues reported
- Notice seeking Possession served just prior to the project intervention period commencing
- No complaints about nuisance in the pre-project period but Notice Seeking Possession in relation to drugs on property in first month of the project intervention period

Family B

- Rent arrears decreased by £174.15 during project intervention period and no rent issues reported
- No complaints about nuisance in the pre-project period. One complaint about noise and abusive language at property during the project intervention period
- Alleged tampering with electricity meter in the pre-project period

Family C

- Rent arrears increased by £1045.67 during project intervention period, related to a Housing benefit claim that is unresolved
- One complaint about noise and abusive language at property in the pre-project period. No complaints about nuisance during the project intervention period

Family D

- Rent arrears decreased by £106.12 during project intervention period and no rent issues reported
- 20 complaints about nuisance in the pre-project period and 14 complaints about nuisance in the project intervention period
- Rechargeable repairs and damage to the property identified
- Acceptable Behaviour Contract agreed during the project intervention period (May 2010)
- Family re-housed during the project intervention period

Family E

- Rent arrears increased by £129.36 during project intervention period but no rent issues reported
- No complaints about nuisance in the pre-project and project intervention periods

Family F

- Rent arrears increased by £127.65 during project intervention period as result of movement onto Housing Benefit
- No complaints about nuisance in the pre-project and project intervention periods

Family G

- Rent arrears increased by £441.02 during project intervention period as a result of the death of the tenant and cessation of Housing Benefit. Tenancy ended in March 2010
- No complaints about nuisance in the pre-project and project intervention periods

Family I

- Rent arrears decreased by £127.26 during project intervention period and no rent issues reported
- No complaints about nuisance in the pre-project and project intervention periods

Family J

- Rent arrears increased by £60.76 during project intervention period and issue with Housing Benefit claim and over-payment
- No complaints about nuisance in the pre-project and project intervention periods