

## EXETER CITY COUNCIL

### SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – COMMUNITY 10 MARCH 2009

#### PORCH: PROLIFIC OFFENDERS RESETTLEMENT THROUGH CO'ORDINATED HOUSING

#### 1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Members of the progress of the PORCH Project that is run by Exeter Community Initiatives (ECI) and funded, in part, by the Council.

#### 2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 PORCH was originally developed in 2006 from funding and support provided to ECI by the Government's Innovations' Forum and the Home Office (£80,000), the Safer Devon Partnership, Government Office South West (£20,000), the Devon and Cornwall Probation Service, various charities, East and Mid Devon Districts and Exeter City Council (£15,000). The project went live in September 2006.
- 2.2 The project was developed as a response to the challenge of breaking the cycle of offending amongst prolific offenders. With over 60 prolific offenders in the Exeter (42), East and Mid Devon (18) areas in 2006, it recognised the need to ensure that, on discharge from prison, prolific offenders received "effective housing resettlement to reduce re-offending".
- 2.3 The project aimed to:
- establish a specialist floating support service for prolific offenders through housing, criminal justice and treatment regimes;
  - build the capacity of existing housing providers (all tenures) to accept the risks presented by these offenders, co-ordinate assessment and referrals and get access to appropriate learning/training and resources etc;
  - empower offenders to take greater control of their lives by helping with their personal development: skills, knowledge and behaviour; and;
  - intervene at key points in the criminal justice system to ensure that housing needs were addressed.
- 2.4 By March 2007, cumulatively PORCH had supported 38 prolific offenders, of which 20 had been found accommodation. During the first 18 months of the project, the University Of Plymouth Social Research and Regeneration Unit monitored and evaluated the Project overall. In February 2008, their final report confirmed the positive effect that PORCH was having on the lives and behaviour of individuals. It concluded: *"a comprehensive referral and assessment process has been established for Prolific Offenders that is considered to be appropriate and effective by all staff and referral routes to the Project. Although 13 of the 66 clients assessed chose not to engage further with the project, by the end of November 2007 a cumulative total of 34 beneficiaries had been successfully housed in accommodation that is suitable within PORCH terms of reference."* On the basis of the final evaluation and other performance information, the Council provided further revenue funding of £16,000 in 2008/09.

- 2.5 PORCH also underwent some developmental changes. During 2007 it became clear that there was a good deal of overlap with the issues faced by clients in the Closing A Revolving Door (CARD) Project, which was also managed by ECI. CARD provided case management and mentoring support for mainly short-sentence prisoners. This led to a merger between the two projects with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008. The new CARD PORCH Project now provides a more integrated mentoring and housing support service.
- 2.6 By January 2009, since its inception in September 2006, the team has supported 108 prolific offenders, at least 83 of which could have become homeless on leaving prison if help had not been provided. The majority of these were accommodated in the private rented sector with the PORCH team supporting them through the process, for example, assisting them to deal with any tenancy sustainment, landlord or neighbour issues. Only 2 clients approached Exeter City Council to make homeless applications and neither had to be accommodated. Whilst not all of the 83 people would have been in priority need, PORCH has proved its value as a homelessness prevention project and undoubtedly saved money from the Council's housing advice/homelessness budgets.
- 2.7 Following the "credit crunch", the Project's future has become more uncertain. The Council had not budgeted to support the project beyond 2008/9 and given our current financial situation is unable to provide any funding for PORCH in 2009/10. However, given that the project does contribute to achieving the Council's homelessness targets, further funding maybe possible if savings can be found from within the Council's annual Homelessness Prevention Grant (currently £350,000 per annum)

### **3. RECOMMENDED that**

- 1) the report and the achievements of PORCH be noted; and
- 2) officers support PORCH in its efforts to secure funding for 2009/10 to continue the Service.

## HEAD OF HOUSING SERVICES

S:PA/LP/ Committee/309SCC3  
24.2.09

## COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE

**Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)**  
**Background papers used in compiling this report:-**

CARDPORCH Outline Strategic Plan April 2009 – March 2012 and Quarterly Statistics 2007-2009