

THE NHS HOUSING INITIATIVE - A DIFFERENT SORT OF PROCUREMENT

Staff retention and recruitment is key to the government's NHS reforms.

A crucial part of this is the Government's pledge to provide affordable accommodation the setting up of the NHS Housing Initiative and the appointment of an NHS Housing Co-ordinator to tackle the problem of affordable accommodation for health workers on moderate incomes.

The Initiative's policy aim is to provide nurses and other NHS staff with a choice of type, cost and location of rented accommodation.

To ensure a co-ordinated approach the housing team are working with NHS Trusts to ensure that adequate, affordable, appropriate and accessible accommodation is made available to staff.

The target, set out in the NHS Plan, was to facilitate access to an additional 2000 units of affordable accommodation for nurses in London by July 2003 either by directly contracting or assisting NHS Trusts in negotiations. This target has been exceeded.

The accommodation has been sourced by no capital injection but largely on the basis of a combination of using the size of the NHS to achieve reduced rents and a risk on occupancy. The risk on voids is either borne by Trusts individually or collectively by a pooling arrangement across London. The Initiative is now being extended to the South East and other hot spots.

One example of the accommodation made available to date is East Central House in EC1 which is comprised of a mixture of single and double en-suite rooms as well as some studio flats. Another example is Acorn Estate, Kilburn Park, NW6 which provides self-contained flats, with rents substantially below the market level for accommodation in this part of London. Other schemes now available are located in Islington, Kensal Green, Whitechapel, Forest Gate, Homerton, Stoke Newington, Isleworth, and in EC1, EC4, SW8 and N10.

Negotiations are currently under way for a mix of type to satisfy demand for family accommodation. In sourcing these schemes we are seeking to create low rentals.

In the light of the Government's recruitment targets for nurses and other health workers, a review was carried out in the Autumn on future anticipated accommodation needs across the country.

We recognise that the accommodation needs of individuals vary and are seeking to source a range of facilities in the rented and ownership sectors that offer a choice to nurses and other NHS staff. The aim is not to simply replicate rooms in the old fashioned nurses homes. As a consequence, the portfolio will include a whole range of types of accommodation with the aim of meeting the different needs of both the transient employment market in London and the more permanent ownership market.

An NHS accommodation web site and help-line (www.nhs.uk/accommodation/) were set up to make immediately available to staff information on type, cost and location of accommodation and a person to contact.

The Government's Starter Home Initiative has helped NHS staff and social workers get a foot on the property ladder and will play a major part in retaining staff in areas where they are priced out of the property market. 50% of the £250 million Starter Home Initiative budget was allocated for health workers and it is intended to assist around 5,000 nurses and healthcare workers by the time the scheme finishes later this year.

In February last year, the Government set out its action plan *Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future* (commonly referred to as 'the Communities Plan' for short). Although the Plan sets a framework for the long-term, it outlines spending £22 billion over the next three years to tackle the most urgent pressures, and bring about a step change in the development of sustainable communities.

Further details will be announced in February this year which means that we should be busy for a little while longer yet!

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and Chairman Elect of The Healthcare Supplies Association