**Project planning for Action Hosting**

I have written up the main issues that I have encountered setting up **Action Hosting** these last few months. I’ve taken advice from other schemes, and some issues then had to work to fit our organisation. One of my main findings is that all schemes operate differently based on how their organisation operates already and what their capacity is for setting up and managing a scheme. These are some of the headline issues that I looked at when first setting up ours. They are by no means the definitive guide or the only answer, but may help others starting from scratch.

**Hosts are volunteers**

* Anyone acting in your organisations name without pay, is a volunteer for you, and needs to have procedures set up for them to be treated as such. I got advice from the Volunteer Centre in Newcastle who delivers training about working with volunteers, and our legal responsibilities to them.
* A volunteer agreement, problem solving policy (for dealing with complaints and discipline issues), a volunteering policy, support and training need to be considered for hosts.

**Public liability insurance**

* See separate information about this. Some companies will not provide insurance that specifically covers hosting, and you will need this insurance for hosts.

**Who are the guests?**

* What are the criteria for guests that you are helping? We are only helping single destitute refused asylum seekers at Action Hosting, and we have support officers at Action Foundation who will work with them to look at their potential options.
* We are intending for hosting to only last up to 12 months for a guest, as hosting is not a long term solution. We have shared houses for destitute asylum seekers and we will be looking at who is on the hosting scheme when vacancies come up in these houses.
* Who will refer clients to you? Which agencies are working with clients already that might be guests? We are working initially with just one agency who are based in Newcastle and provides financial support to destitute asylum seekers. This may mean that our host locations could be more limited to nearer where the client gets support. We may need to work with potential guests to consider further afield.

**Hosts**

* Have you got any potential hosts? You will need an application form for them to complete. This would be followed up by a home visit with a home assessment and property assessment. We then send off for a dbs checks , and two references.
* We will be delivering induction training for hosts which will be the equivalent to one full day but is likely to be split over two days. It will cover: the hosting process, expectations, boundaries, confidentiality, safeguarding, communications and staying safe. There will then be a scenario exercise where we look at lots of different scenarios and work out would be people do. Everyone has to do this training before becoming a host.
* **Issues that you will need to look at for hosts**
  + **Council tax- single persons discount**. Some local authorities are removing the single person discount for those that are hosting a guest. We have agreed with the local authorities that there will not be a change to any single persons discount if they are hosting a guest for up to 4 weeks. Any host placement that is longer than 4 weeks could though impact on their discount.
  + **Housing benefit** Again it is up to each local authority to decide if hosting will affect a non-dependant charge if someone is hosting and on housing benefit. We have agreed with the local authorities that there will not be a change to any housing benefit if they are hosting a guest for up to 4 weeks. Any host placement that is longer than 4 weeks could though impact on their housing benefit.
  + **Potential car insurance issue**. If you are asking your host to transport their guest as part of their role, this then means you need include it as part of their tasks and you have to check the car is road worthy and they must inform their car insurance company. If you tell them it is definitely not their role, but they can still do it of their own free choice, then they are free to choose do this.
  + **House insurance**- hosts need to check that they are allowed to have non-family members/non-paying guests stay. Our public liability insurers Case have said that they want written confirmation that the host household insurance allows them to host, for our public liabilities to cover them.
  + **Right to rent**. There are issues regarding right to rent if someone is hosting who is a private rented tenancy or housing association tenancy NOT a council tenancy. Even though the hosting is not involving any rent, someone new staying in the house, means the landlord needs to be informed and then the right to rent check would be needed if the tenancy was about to be renewed. Sue Lukes from NACCOM is an expert on such things, and can advise on this.

**Risk assessment approach**

* **For the hosts** we are doing: home visits, a basic property assessment, DBS checks, and asking for two references.
* The property assessment asks for a current gas safety check on the boiler, smoke alarms and a carbon monoxide alarm. The fire service will fit smoke alarms for free if they do not currently have them fitted. We will also provide a first aid kit to each host household.
* There are a lot of differences of opinion around DBS checks for hosts and it took us along time and a lot of checking with CCPAS, who is the umbrella organisation who does our checks. We are doing enhanced checks **without** regulated activity. Our hosts are more than happy to have the checks done. We use CCPAS service and having a volunteer checked is £10 which we are paying for, and they normally turn them round within a few weeks.
* **For the guests:**  West End Refugee Service refers their client to us. I then meet the client with our senior support officer to do a detailed interview and risk assessment. I have modelled this on the assessment that our housing service have been using for the 10 years at Action Foundation. It is very detailed, but we are keen to replicate procedures through our different services.
* We have set up an Information Sharing Agreement with the police so we can do checks on client for criminal records in this country. They already do this with Nightstop in the north east and respond within 24 hours. All requests are done with client consent and through cjsm, which is a secure email.
* A risk assessment is then completed about the client’s suitability to hosting and any risk management that is needed.
* The guest will sign an agreement about being on the hosting scheme.

**Length of hosting placements**

* We are not doing emergency hosting and we are asking hosts to consider either a month placement or longer than a month, length of time to be agreed with each guest and host. I am seeing the shorter term hosts acting as respite hosting for the longer term hosts or taking a guest on between the longer term hosts. It will all be quite fluid based on the host’s needs, and will involve a degree of matchmaking and juggling, so that guests have somewhere to stay.
* Single person households will only be able to host for up to 4 weeks based on the agreement we have had from local authorities about the council tax discount.
* Placements will always be for an agreed and defined amount of time and there will not be indefinite hosting.
* We will have a week’s trial period with each new placement, which will be extended up to 4 weeks initially, and then potentially extended further.
* We will be linking the guest to a support worker in Action Foundation. We are seeing hosting as another way to help clients who are being supported by our service, but with a different accommodation set up.

**Paperwork and forms**

* I spent a long time writing up the paperwork that will need to be used for the scheme. I used examples from lots of other organisations and amalgamated things to something that kind of suits us. This took quite some time. No one set of forms from another organisation is exactly right for another scheme as everyone does it differently. However it is important to get it right for you.
* I was also advised to get a spreadsheet /database set up that could hold all the information that is needed in a useful way. This should allow us to work out where people are in the application process, that we have all the paperwork sorted including home visits, dbs etc. We need to then store information on where guests are, and how long they are there for, and host availability at any time.