

Demand Management

Many HIAs are experiencing growing difficulties in meeting the increasing levels of demand for their services. This demand is set to increase, particularly as new requirements under Best Value and Supporting People frameworks are likely to place added pressure on agencies to promote their services wider and to target their promotion at those people and groups in most need. For some agencies this added pressure on already stretched resources could increase the risk of the most vulnerable people in the community being unable to access agency services.

With this in mind, it is becoming increasingly important for agency managers to consider introducing effective demand management policies and procedures in an effort to structure and prioritise agency workload and to ensure that clients receive an equitable and effective service.

Introducing demand management policies will inevitably result in difficult choices being made about which clients receive help from the agency and which do not.

The focus of this good practice guide is on providing advice and ideas about devising and implementing demand management policies. It draws on examples of good practice from within the HIA movement and the wider housing and social sector.



- The importance of Demand Management ■
- Demand Management Policies ■
- Prioritisation Schemes ■
- Communication Issues ■
- Case Studies and Points-system examples ■

Demand Management Policies

The Importance of Demand Management

Due to the high demand for HIA services and limited staff resources, agencies often find themselves with more client applications than they can manage on a day to day basis. Understandably, without greater resource provision to cover this excessive demand then agencies may be left with service delays and a client backlog. However, by implementing a demand management policy agencies should find that applications are prioritised, leading to more efficient and effective service delivery.

Implementing an effective demand management policy should also assist agencies to provide evidence to support any requests for additional funding and other statutory contributions which will be required under Supporting People. The government has made it clear that under Supporting People, agencies must be able to provide their local authority with data relating to the demand and need for their services. There are many strategies and methods which HIAs can employ to anticipate and meet demand in an effective manner. Nonetheless, it is important that agencies consider making this cultural and operational change in light of these imminent government policies.

Implementing a Demand Management Policy

Before deciding whether to implement a demand management policy many agencies have found that assessing the current state of service provision can be helpful:

- What are the aims of our service?
- Do we meet these aims in the most efficient way?
- What client groups do we target?
- Are there any other client groups we would like to target?
- Are there groups who we should not target?
- Do we prioritise client cases?
- Could we implement a more effective prioritisation system?
- Are clients offered the most effective service possible?
- Conduct a Cost Benefit Analysis Calculation to highlight any long run gains/losses to be made from implementing a system



Demand Management

It is an unfortunate fact that, as demand for agency services continues to increase, agency staff will find it more and more difficult within existing resource levels, to assist every potential client. Introducing demand management policies will inevitably result in difficult choices and decisions being made about which potential clients receive help from the agency and which do not.

Agencies should consider how they wish to approach the issue of demand management. Before embarking on a particular approach there are a number of difficult questions that need to be asked:

Should we try to help every potential client that approaches the agency?

Can we offer every client the same level of support?

Should we offer limited support to all clients or full support to a limited number of clients?

How do we choose which clients to help?

How do we record the level of demand for our services?

Agencies that have examined and dealt with these issues have found the choice of demand management policy easier to make.

Each Agency will approach these difficult choices in a different way, due to the individualistic nature of HIA services. It should be remembered that there is no right or wrong solution to the issue of demand. Agencies will need to take account of their existing resource levels, their aims and objectives and the priorities and targets agreed with the local authority. This guide provides agencies with a number of examples of demand management policies. It will assist the decision making process about whether to implement a demand management policy, and what sort of policy to put in place, easier for any agency.

Defining Potential Client Markets

By looking at local population data and determining the largest potential client group, agencies can target their service towards the most appropriate prospective customers. Limiting target markets reduces service demand.

By reducing the size of the potential client market, and by ensuring that publicity materials are explicit about who is – and who is not, eligible for the services, a more rapid service delivery is provided. Some agencies have adopted demand management policies and have successfully lowered service backlogs.

Good Practice in Prioritising Caseloads

It is valuable for HIAs to balance and prioritise applications as demand for their services increase. To effectively manage rising demand over time an agency should try to prioritise its target markets more accurately. The review process may include:

- Cessation of certain types of lower priority work, such as window repairs
- Innovative 'fast track' arrangements being developed to process less complex lower-value work
- Prioritisation of particular customer groups or certain types of work

Targeting Potential Client Markets

Case Study 1

Some of the Devon and Cornwall HIAs have implemented a strict demand management policy by restricting their potential client market to the elderly. Only people over the age of 60 are eligible for the HIA services.

This has helped the Agencies offer a more speedy service to the elderly client group, as it has meant that resources can be targeted towards one potential client market, instead of the agencies having to handle a broader client market.

The Benefits of a Waiting List

Implementing a waiting list prioritisation policy leads to the creation of a structured system. Other advantages include:

- Increased uniformity and equality of opportunity
- Improved accessibility
- Greater accountability
- Greater reassurance and transparency for the client
- Economies in administration and resource management
- Improved ability to target local, socially excluded groups
- Generates a "true picture" of satisfaction levels (as most clients will not experience an immediate service)
- Better access to data on client and client needs which is obligatory for reporting requirements and funding applications
- Can be developed and tailored to LA's Community Care planning and policy
- Initial costs, such as staff training, is likely to be offset in the longer term through efficiency savings

Waiting lists

One of the simplest, most successful ways agencies have found to manage demand is by implementing a waiting list system.

If implementing a structured waiting list system is not feasible, agencies should consider implementing an alternative 'demand management' policy. This enables agencies to target their resources towards the dominant client group in their area.

The image shows a form titled 'ADAPTATIONS - PRIORITY SYSTEM'. It is divided into three sections: PRIORITY 1, PRIORITY 2, and PRIORITY 3. Each section contains a list of services with checkboxes and a 'Priority' column. PRIORITY 1 includes 'Remediation and repair adaptations required', 'Specialist adaptations of furniture', 'Ramp access', 'Ramp access to building', 'Transportation/adapted arrangements', and 'Specialist building work to facilities'. PRIORITY 2 includes 'Specialist adaptations of furniture', 'Ramp access to building', 'Lighting/Phone/Warning adaptations', 'Car/Workstation required', and 'Access to staff premises'. PRIORITY 3 includes 'Specialist adaptations of furniture', 'Ramp access to building', 'Lighting/Phone/Warning adaptations', 'Car/Workstation required', and 'Access to staff premises'. There are also checkboxes for 'Yes/No' and 'Priority'.

The image shows a detailed form with a grid structure. The grid has columns for 'Status', 'Priority', 'Date', 'Time', 'Location', and 'Notes'. The rows are categorized by service type: 'Remediation/Repair', 'Specialist Adaptations', 'Ramp Access', 'Transportation/Adapted Arrangements', 'Specialist Building Work', 'Specialist Adaptations of Furniture', 'Ramp Access to Building', 'Lighting/Phone/Warning Adaptations', 'Car/Workstation Required', and 'Access to Staff Premises'. Each cell in the grid contains a 'Yes/No' or 'Priority' value. There are also sections for 'Client Details' and 'Notes'.

Prioritisation Schemes

The following section is intended to help agencies determine what sort of prioritisation scheme is most appropriate to them. The four most popular ways of prioritising are:

1

Date Order

Clients are dealt with in chronological order, first come, first served basis

For

- Simplistic
- Impartial
- Easy to calculate waiting time for service

Against

- Doesn't always lead to a fair result
- Not needs based
- Over simplistic
- Puts the most needy at greater risk

2

Points System

A 'points system' is created and potential clients are sorted according to the points allocated for certain criteria relating to their home and individual living circumstances. The nature of the work of agencies means that sometimes a very vulnerable client may not fit into any of the defined categories. For this reason, there should be a process in place for awarding discretionary points. The system will also need to consider how an applicant's change of circumstance is dealt with.

For

- All factors relevant to an application are included
- Factors are weighted according to need
- Systems can be modified easily
- Potential for bias is reduced

Against

- Easy to devise a poor system
- Irrelevant factors often included
- Important factors omitted
- Factors are not always easy to implement objectively
- The assessment of need makes administration more complex

3

Group Systems

Potential clients are placed into broad categories depending on the degree of priority given to their case. Within each group priority can be determined by waiting time. Groups are either ranked according to level of urgency or the administrative route through which the client application passed.

For

- Factors are weighted according to need
- Systems can be modified easily
- Potential for bias is reduced
- Agencies can ensure that a number of 'different priority cases' are being dealt with at any one time

Against

- Group format means not all individual factors are accounted for
- Difficulties in creating groups that most accurately reflect need

4

Merit Systems

Merit systems have no set rules and individual judgement is used to determine the priority of each client case. At the present time this tends to be the system most in use by agencies.

For

- Flexible to individual situation
- Include factors that cannot be measured easily

Against

- Easy to corrupt
- Inequitable
- Erratic

When Easington Care and Repair Agency was opened five years ago it inherited a large waiting list. In an attempt to overcome the long delays the Local Authority and Social Services introduced a **waiting list policy**.

Easington divides clients into two waiting lists according to the type of grant aid they receive: 'Disability Funding Grant' and 'Home Repair Assistance Grant'

Both lists are handled in **chronological order**, but an equal number of clients are taken from each list.

Priorities are given to emergency cases, such as clients living in properties with no central heating, no electricity or a leakage.

By implementing a structured system, Easington has managed to reduce the length of its waiting lists considerably.

Suggestions for Criteria to be included in Priority Assessment Forms

If the agency decides to implement a point scoring priority system, criteria suitable to the aims and objectives of the organisation should be established that also reflect the potential client groups of the HIA.

Once you have formed criteria appropriate to your organisation they need to be rated accordingly

The following criteria are examples taken from a range of agencies:

- Level of Disability
- Age
- No of dependants
- Condition of property
- Family support
- Length of Wait for service
- Social problems

Any combination of the chosen criteria can be used, for example: The agency may choose to rank potential clients according to their level of disability and the length of time they have been waiting for the service. For example, 10 points may be allocated to a potential client for every unfit aspect of the property identified and 2 points allocated for every month the client has been waiting for the service.

Good Practice checklist for effective Prioritisation Systems

- Provide simple and readable information on eligibility rules to all applicants who will qualify for assistance.
- Provide information that explains how the system works
- Provide information that explains the expected length of case (from enquiry to completion of work)
- An explanation (either over the telephone or in writing) of why a person has not been entered onto the waiting list
- Cultivate perfect record-keeping – i.e. as well as home telephone numbers, obtain work, relatives', mobile numbers
- Monitor and evaluate customer satisfaction in line with the procedures in place
- Compare your system with other agencies and with social services and share good practice
- Ensure that Occupational Therapists are familiar with your prioritisation systems and that they will explain their own prioritisation system (and waiting list) to the client
- Frequently review your waiting list. Where necessary, write to all those on the waiting list – informing them of the length of the waiting list
- Use 'sign posting' as a way to inform clients of any other forms of assistance that may be available (i.e. heating grants, welfare benefit help lines, community centres etc)
- During this review – remind clients that you will keep them on your waiting list, *unless they tell you otherwise*

First Contacts with Client

The 'first contact' with a client is essential for agencies that are operating to a waiting list system. It is imperative that agencies clearly indicate how the service operates and how long a client may need to wait before the service is carried out.

Good Practice Checklist for First Contacts

- Following initial enquiry and telephone 'assessment' as to whether the applicant can be assisted (i.e. age, vulnerability etc), a letter should be sent to the potential client within a 48-hour period
- The letter needs to clearly explain that there is a waiting list and should indicate the points system (where appropriate) and the length of time they can expect to wait before they are visited
- Where appropriate, clients are given clear guidelines about how to apply, and client application forms are user friendly
- Introduce a telephone 'model script' for anticipated increases in enquiries. This will also assist new agency staff during their first few weeks at work
- Applicants should be offered a specific date when they will be visited. This will assist with increasing satisfaction levels amongst clients
- Clients should be offered the chance to change the date of visit
- Agencies should aim to group visits to particular areas on the same day; this is particularly relevant to HIAs serving rural communities



Good Practice for First Visits

- A priority assessment form should be completed during first visit to the client's home
- The Caseworker and client should complete the form together wherever possible
- The Caseworker should ensure that procedures are explained thoroughly to the client
- The Caseworker should remind clients that there is a waiting list and following the visit, a 'priority category' will be allocated to them.
- The Client should be reminded that following any changes in their circumstances, they should contact the agency as this may affect their place on the waiting list. Provide the client with a pre-paid envelope where this is likely to occur
- Steer clear of telling applicants about their position on the waiting list, as positions will constantly change and this could cause confusion for the applicant and their families

Middlesborough Staying Put Agency

Case Study 3

Middlesborough Council Social and Housing Services, in conjunction with the Middlesborough Staying Put Agency, carry out an assessment of need in order to establish which client cases should be handled first.

The assessment looks at **12 Disabled Facility Grants** criteria as identified in Schedule 23 (1) of the 1996 Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act. Properties are assessed and allocated points according to the condition of the specified criteria.

Disability and Individual needs are also noted and taken into account when clients are being prioritised

The clients living in properties allocated the most points and with the greatest need/disability are handled first.

Staff Skills

Both the social housing and social services sector will testify to problems that all too frequently occur when staff are not familiar with, or have not been trained adequately on the prioritisation system.

Staff Skills – Good Practice Checklist

- All staff should receive adequate training about the manual and IT systems
- Staff need to be aware of the 'human element' that always must come first when operating a prioritisation system
- Staff need to be aware that they should share a consistency of decision making
- A 'checks and balances' approach will ensure that staff continue to abide by policies and procedures
- Where parts of a system appear not to be working or hampering the welfare of clients, staff should be encouraged to suggest changes

Systems and Communications - What Other Agencies Are Doing

Forest of Dean

- A letter is sent to each applicant to acknowledge his or her application.
- All cases are reviewed and prioritised
- Each client is judged on an individual basis
- 'Disability' and 'Property structure' are the two main points of consideration

Bournemouth Help and Care Agency

- After initial contact is made with the agency each client is allocated a caseworker
- Each client is visited within a week
- Clients are informed when visited that there is a wait before work is carried out
- Clients are prioritised on two main factors: 'Type of payment' and 'work needed to be conducted'

Hounslow Care and Repair

Case Study 4

Hounslow Care and Repair have established a waiting list/priority assessment system in order to help tackle the huge demand for their services. Using information on Clients *age, health* and *property condition* the Agency is able to prioritise their clients on a needs basis.

The Prioritising Procedure:-

- A priority assessment form filled in on first contact with client
- The Client form on MIS system filled in with information from priority assessment form, case identification number is kept on hard copy of priority assessment form.
- An administrator's name is assigned, as the caseworker at this point. Only when the officer who will work on the case takes up the case, is the caseworker name changed
- Hounslow utilise existing fields from the MIS, for example date of birth and mobility. This saves time in the long-term as when the client becomes a priority some of his/her details are already input into the MIS
- *Clients are grouped* according to property condition, income, ethnicity and level of support received.
- *Cases are prioritised* according to group categorisation and length of wait

Metropolitan Care and Repair (Haringey)

Case Study 5

Metropolitan Care and Repair have a waiting list **prioritisation scheme** in place for all elderly referrals, which is based on a points system.

There are 5 main factors used to prioritise referrals:

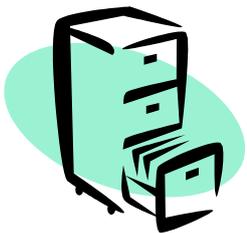
- Date of Application
- Age of Client
- Income of Client
- Extent of Disrepair
- Disability

A **weighting system** is used in each of the above categories

For example, maximum points are allocated to those waiting the longest for the service and those on income support. More points are allocated to a client as the length of time they are left waiting for the service increases.

Those aged 60-64 receive minimum points and those above 80 years old receive maximum points.

The system also offers discretionary clauses for those who are deemed to be in an emergency situation such as dangerous wiring, roof leaks or no electricity.



Useful Documents

The Local Inter Faith Guide, The Inter Faith Network for the UK, 1999

Improving Matters, A Guide to the development, Management and Running of Home Improvement Agencies, Care and Repair England, 1997

Local Authority Policy, Practice on Allocations, Transfers and Homelessness, DETR, 1999

Common Housing Registers: The North West Perspective, University College Salford and the University of Salford for the National Federation of Housing Associations, 1996

Community Lettings: Local Allocations Policies in Practice, Margaret Griffiths, John Parker, Robert Smith, Tamsin Stirling and Tony Trott

Care and Repair Scotland: A Good Practice Guide, Scottish Homes The National Housing Agency, February 2001