

An introduction to Elmore Community Services

Our History

Elmore Community Services first started as the Elmore Committee in 1968, as a voluntary body who managed accommodation in Oxford for homeless ex-offenders alongside the Probation Service. By 1984, the Committee had extended its support to individuals with mental ill health, which later led to a Working Party being formed to identify need, investigate provision, and make recommendations to meet this need.

A subsequent survey by the Elmore Committee in 1986 identified 138 people in Oxford who were known locally as 'difficult to place'. Typically, these people experienced multiple problems which compounded each other, and required support from several agencies resulting in difficulty coordinating and providing the range of support that clients needed.

The concern began to grow that people with multiple needs were always on the margins of services, but never really engaged with them. They were the people who were often excluded by the referral criteria of services, which became stricter as budgets were squeezed, leading to further exclusion of these individuals.

In 1988, the Elmore Committee were awarded a two-year grant from the Department of Health and Social Services, and by 1989 the Elmore Community Support Team was formally inaugurated. The formal structure to which the new team became accountable to expanded to include representatives from Social Services, City Housing Department, local psychiatric services, GPs, and local voluntary sector providers.

In our inauguration speech Lord Franks identified the purpose of the Elmore project:

"First, it will provide sensitive care and follow-up support for difficult to place people, and, also, seek out those who seem likely to join this sad group and help them to become stable within existing arrangements.

Second, it will seek to enhance liaison work. Inter-agency cooperation, of course, already exists. The aim will be to encourage and strengthen it.

Third, it will distil from its experience and the degree of success it attains, principle and practice about what makes people become difficult to place, and further, record what are the best ways of intervention and prevention."

The Elmore Committee was founded by **Robert Elmore**, an academic (and later deputy chairman of the health authority), with an interest in social policy. Other members included Lady Franks (chair of the Oxford Bench), Dr Peter Agulnik, (local consultant psychiatrist), Pat Goodwin, (senior probation officer), and Patricia Vereker, (chair of the Elmore Committee, as well as chair of the juvenile bench).

Elmore's *Support for Difficult to Place People in Oxford* (1986) report, concluded that support depended on bringing together the many agencies and services concerned with the clients. Although an intricate network of inter-agency panels had been developed in the city, alongside increased support from mental health services, (including for patients with no fixed address), this 'network' had limited resources for continuing support to hostels or continuing packages of support to clients to enable them to manage more successfully. This meant that the existing agencies were better able to contain the 'difficult to place' in the short-term, rather than meet their long-term health and recovery support needs, ensuring that they remained 'in the system' for much longer than necessary.

Our research & expertise

Research has been at the heart of Elmore's work over the last thirty years. The aims which Elmore's various research projects have sought to achieve include:

- To assess the factors which, singly or by interacting, prevent people from using the support and services which would ordinarily be available to them. This research is directed toward the facilitation, encouragement, and strengthening of local inter-agency liaison at all levels, to meet the particular needs of clients.
- To monitor and evaluate the work of the Elmore team. This research is directed toward the improvement of the quality of Elmore's work and ensuring that is always relevant to the people whose needs we are seeking to meet.
- To distill the experience and expertise of the Elmore team. This research is often intended for the education and training of people whose statutory or professional roles bring them into contact with our client group.
- To identify accurately and speedily new client groups whose problems mean they have no current or meaningful contact with agencies, even if they are working in collaboration. This research is directed towards the facilitation, encouragement, and strengthening of local inter-agency liaison at all levels.

Some of our research:

- Elmore worked alongside the Gatehouse Project to produce a new Network Directory, a guide to agencies in Oxford's homeless network, for people in need (1996)
- Funded by the Department of Health, Elmore published a new report which mapped Oxford services for people with the dual diagnosis of mental ill health and substance misuse. Researched by Jeremy Spafford, the report made recommendations as to how services could be improved (1999)
- Elmore's manager Lesley Dewhurst and the National Homeless Alliance's multiple needs coordinator Pip Bevan shared 'the Elmore Model' in the report *Inhabiting the Margins*. Launched at the National Homeless Alliance Conference, the report was aimed at agencies with an interest in effective models for working with people who have multiple needs (2001)
- The national charity Shelter published a report *Beyond the Margins* after fifteen months of monitoring Elmore's work with rough sleepers (2005)
- Elmore produced a report into the needs of prisoners returning to no fixed abode in Oxford, as part of a six-month evaluation for Oxford City Council (2006)
- Elmore was selected to be a recommended charity by New Philanthropy Capital, which then undertook a review of our services and produced a positive report on our work to meet the needs of people with multiple needs (2009)
- Elmore was commissioned to develop clear and robust pathways for sex workers to access support and produce an information handbook for sex workers and professionals to use as a resource (2014)
- Elmore produced a handbook to be shared with probation services to detail all the specialist communications resources accessed during the life of a project ran for the Ministry of Justice to support offenders with communication difficulties (2015)
- Elmore completed research to generate a stronger evidence base on which city and county-wide bodies responsible for community safety could better assess the threat, harm and risks posed by modern slavery to adults and children in Oxford, understand what kinds of exploitation are taking place, where, and who is vulnerable, and develop more effective responses to identify, protect, refer and support victims (2018-2021)

Elmore Today

In 2019, Elmore celebrated our 30th anniversary, showcasing how the Elmore model has stood the test of time for engaging with people with multiple needs.

Elmore continues to enjoy a prominent position within the Oxfordshire network, makes excellent use of the team's skills base, and remains true to our remit of supporting people with multiple problems. The model is clear and simple, so that it can be resilient and effective for working with our client group, but also for the model to be used and reinterpreted for differing situations elsewhere.

Over the last thirty years, Elmore has delivered a range of services including:

- Offering support to people with complex needs in prison prior to their release from custody. The project supported three vulnerable groups in particular - young offenders, female offenders, and persistent repeat offenders (2005-2012)
- Our Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) service provided support for people with multiple needs also subject to ASB orders, including young people causing ASB and those at risk of losing their tenancies. In 2009 the service was a finalist in the Social Landlords Crime and Nuisance Awards for exemplary practice (2007-2015)
- A Community Parenting Project in partnership with Children's Social Care, aimed at people aged 16-25 with complex needs, who were either pregnant or had a child <2yrs. In 2011, the project was hailed as an example of multi-agency working in the Monro Review of Child Protection (2009-2012)
- Sub-contractor for the new drug and alcohol services across Oxfordshire, working with the prime provider, Turning Point (2015-2018)
- Our modern-day slavery team offered intensive support to victims/suspected victims of slavery to escape their exploitative situation. The project refined the model of support and helped to develop pathways into support, in consultation with a wide range of agencies (2015-2018)
- Providing support to adult survivors of child sexual exploitation, who are often still enmeshed in the exploitative relationships that started in childhood, and dealing with the long-term consequences of severe and prolonged trauma (since 2015)
- Our Mental Health (MH) Floating Support Service and Complex Needs (CN) Floating Support Service form part of the Oxfordshire Mental Health Partnership alongside NHS and local voluntary sector organisations (since 2015)

In 2023 Elmore Community Service expanded to Berkshire and Buckinghamshire to deliver services across the whole Thames Valley for the first time.