

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
Scrutiny Panel 3 (Homelessness – Pre Decision Scrutiny)

Your attendance is requested at a meeting to be held in The Jeffrey Room,
The Guildhall, St. Giles Square, Northampton, NN1 1DE on
Thursday, 22 September 2016 at 6:00pm

D Kennedy
Chief Executive

If you need any advice or information regarding this agenda please phone Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer, direct dial 01604 837408 email ttiff@northampton.gov.uk who will be able to assist with your enquiry. For further information regarding **Scrutiny Panel 3 - Homelessness (Pre-Decision Scrutiny)** please visit the website www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny

Members of the Panel

Chair	Councillor Zoe Smith
Deputy Chair	Councillor Terrie Eales
Panel Members	Councillor Rufia Ashraf Councillor Mohammed Azizur Rahman (Aziz) Councillor Sally Beardsworth Councillor Muna Cali Councillor Vicky Culbard Councillor Janice Duffy Councillor Terrie Eales Councillor Elizabeth Gowen Councillor Phil Larratt Councillor Dennis Meredith Councillor Cathrine Russell Councillor Samuel Shaw
Co-opted Member	Pete Smith, Head of Partnerships, HomelessLink

Calendar of meetings

Date	Room
24 November 2016 6:00 pm	All meetings to be held in the Jeffery Room at the Guildhall unless otherwise stated
26 January 2017	
30 March	

Northampton Borough Scrutiny Panel 3 - Homelessness (Pre-Decision Scrutiny)

Agenda

Item No and Time	Title	Pages	Action required
1. 6:00pm	Apologies		The Chair to note any apologies for absence.
2.	Declarations of Interest (Including Whipping)		Members to state any interests.
3.	Deputations and Public Addresses		<p>The Chair to note public address requests.</p> <p>The public can speak on any agenda item for a maximum of three minutes per speaker per item. You are not required to register your intention to speak in advance but should arrive at the meeting a few minutes early, complete a Public Address Protocol and notify the Scrutiny Officer of your intention to speak.</p>
4.	Minutes	1 - 3	The Scrutiny Panel to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2016.
5.	Witness Evidence		The Scrutiny Panel to receive a response to its core questions from key expert advisors.
5 (a) 6:05pm	Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Chair, CSP, Community Safety Manager	4 - 8	
5 (b) 6:30pm	Cabinet Member for Housing and Housing Options and Advice Manager, NBC	9 - 15	
5 (c) 6:55pm	Head of Protecting Vulnerable People, Northants Police	16 - 17	
5 (d) 7:15pm	Case Manager, Anti Social Behaviour Unit	18 - 22	
5 (e) 7:35pm	Director, Children's Services, Northamptonshire County Council	23 - 24	
5 (f) 8:00pm	Head of Revenues and Benefits, LGSS	25 - 27	

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF SCRUTINY PANEL 3 - HOMELESSNESS (PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY)

Thursday, 21 July 2016

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillor Terrie Eales (Deputy Chair, in the Chair); Councillors Rufia Ashraf, Mohammed Aziz, Vicky Culbard, Janice Duffy and Elizabeth Gowen

CO-OPTED MEMBER: Pete Smith, Head of Partnerships, Homeless Link

OFFICERS Phil Harris, Head of Housing and Wellbeing
Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer

1. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Zoe Smith, Chair. Councillor Terrie Eales, Deputy Chair, was in the Chair for the meeting. Apologies for absence were also received from Councillor Sally Beardsworth.

The Chair welcomed Pete Smith (Head of Partnerships at Homeless Link), in his capacity as a Co-opted member of the Scrutiny Panel, to the meeting. Pete provided the meeting with details of Homeless Link and the role it plays in tackling homelessness, supporting local authorities and service providers, and promoting good practice.

2. DEPUTATIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESSES

There were none.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING)

There were none.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the meeting held on 26 May 2016 as a true and accurate record.

5. PRESENTATION TO SET THE SCENE

Phil Harris, Head of Housing and Wellbeing, provided the Scrutiny Panel with a presentation that set the scene and included:

- Definitions – Homelessness and Rough Sleepers
- Homelessness Legislation
- Causes and effects of Homelessness, including Rough Sleeping
- Relevant Council Policies and Strategies

- Statistics: Rough Sleeper / Homelessness data

The Scrutiny Panel asked questions, heard and made comment:

- At the next meeting, members of the Scrutiny Panel will be provided with a short guide to the homelessness legislation.
- Local Housing Allowance (which is used to calculate claimants' Housing Benefit) is, on average, about £100 per month less than the market rent.
- In answer to a question about the Council's use of out-of-borough temporary accommodation, the Scrutiny Panel heard that there is a shortage of temporary accommodation in Northampton but every effort is made to ensure that anyone who is placed outside of the borough is brought back to Northampton as soon as possible.
- The Council's temporary accommodation includes self-contained council housing, self-contained privately managed housing and Bed & Breakfast.
- For households containing a dependent child or someone who is pregnant, local authorities should only use Bed & Breakfast in an emergency and, even then, for a period that does not exceed six weeks.
- If a family is deemed to be 'intentionally homeless', they will normally be provided with temporary accommodation for 28 days from the date of the Council's decision. If they are unhappy with the decision, they can request a review of the decision and, if they are still dissatisfied with the decision, they have the right to appeal to the County Court on a point of law. In all such cases, the Council notifies the MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) at an early stage, in order that the MASH can work the family.
- The Scrutiny Panel discussed various examples of people who are categorised as intentionally homeless.
- The Government prescribes the way in which Rough Sleeper Counts and Estimates are carried out, and those staying in shelters, hostels and squats are not included.
- Severe Weather Projects become operational when it is forecast that the temperature will fall to below zero for at least three consecutive nights.
- Pete Smith advised the Scrutiny Panel that Homeless Link previously offered advice to DCLG when it put together its Toolkit
- Pete Smith suggested there are key themes for the work of the Panel:
 - Allocations Policy – how it can support the prevention of homelessness
 - Social Lettings Agency
 - Support for people placed in temporary accommodation outside the borough
 - Corporate Parenting (it would be useful for Children's Services to be called as a witness to answer the core questions of the Panel)
 - Homelessness Strategy

- Data and Statistics – Comparison of Northampton against towns and cities of a similar size and demographics
- Rough Sleepers - An understanding of what is available to address their needs
- The Panel could listen to the views of people who are homeless or have previously been homeless

AGREED: That the information provided informs the evidence base of this Scrutiny Panel.

6. CORE QUESTIONS

The Scrutiny Panel agreed its list of core questions that it would put to the expert advisors; a copy is attached to the minutes.

7. SITE VISIT

The Scrutiny Panel considered proposals for various site visits to inform its review. It was suggested that the Scrutiny Panel would meet with homeless people too as their views and comments would be valuable to the evidence gathering of this review. The Scrutiny Panel could meet with a sample of homeless people at Salvation Army or Emmaus. It was noted that Emmaus is included within the list of expert advisors to this Scrutiny Review

The Scrutiny Officer would undertake desktop research and report findings to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Panel.

It was **AGREED:** that:

- (1) The Scrutiny Officer would arrange for the Scrutiny Panel to visit Oasis House, meet with homeless people willing to provide information to the Scrutiny review and if possible, a sample of temporary accommodation in the Borough. Dates would be communicated to the Scrutiny Panel.
- (2) That the findings from the site visits are reported to a future meeting.
- (3) That the findings from the desktop research exercise are reported to a future meeting.

8. COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The Scrutiny Panel approved the Community Impact Assessment for this Review. The document would be published on the Scrutiny Webpage.

The meeting concluded at 8:00 pm

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY



SCRUTINY PANEL 3 – HOMELESSNESS

(PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY)

CORE QUESTIONS – EXPERT ADVISORS

The Scrutiny Panel is currently undertaking a review: Pre-Decision Scrutiny: To review how the Borough Council and its partners prevent homelessness and respond to those without homes in the borough

Key Lines of Enquiry

- To gain an understanding of the work currently being undertaken by Northampton Borough Council (NBC), partnerships, statutory and voluntary organisations to address homelessness
- To assess the extent of homelessness and rough sleeping in the borough assess the initiatives currently in place to tackle homelessness
- To examine the Council's Severe Weather Provision
- To gain an understanding of the effect on the health, wellbeing and the safety of homelessness people, including rough sleepers
- To gain an understanding of the causes and barriers to support homelessness
- Identify any specific groups that are not accessing services

The expected outcomes of this Scrutiny Review are:

- To reduce homelessness in the borough of Northampton
- An understanding of the local authority homelessness role and the services provided in Northampton
- A review of existing homelessness services in Northampton, in order to assess their quality and effectiveness and identify any significant gaps in service

CORE QUESTIONS:

A series of key questions have been put together to inform the evidence base of the Scrutiny Panel:

1. Please describe your understanding of the nature, causes and extent of homelessness and rough sleeping, and the impact that homelessness has on the health, wellbeing and safety of homeless people.

Rough sleepers are generally highly vulnerable individuals with very complex needs, more often than not also involved in street drinking and begging. Some rough sleepers do have, or have at some point, also had substance misuse problems, mental health problems, and may have suffered a traumatic childhood. It is also often found that there is a history of homelessness. Therefore, when dealing with this group it is important to recognise that enforcement on its own is not the answer, and their wider health issues need to be taken into consideration. Due to their complex needs, and the chaotic lifestyle of most rough sleepers, a multi-agency case management approach is adopted in addressing individuals.

2. Please describe the services, assistance and support that are available to people who are homeless, including rough sleepers.

- **NBC Homelessness Team (outreach, support and housing)**
- **Street Community Multi-agency Group (holistic case management approach)**
- **Oasis House (NAASH and Hope Centre, initial support re addiction and housing)**
- **No Second Night Out project (NAASH, initial support re housing)**
- **Maple Access Medical Centre (health support)**
- **Bridge Project (intervention and support)**
- **C2C Social Action (intervention, support & housing)**
- **S2S (substance misuse agency - treatment) -**
- **Can (substance misuse agency – treatment & housing)**
- **Women’s Aid (support and intervention)**

3. Please provide details of the contribution that your organisation is making (through its work and the initiatives in which it is involved) to tackle, prevent and reduce homelessness and rough sleeping in the borough.

Community Safety, NBC lead on the Street Community Multi-Agency meetings. Due to the complex needs, and chaotic lifestyle of most rough sleepers, a multi-agency case management approach is adopted in addressing individuals. Cases can be referred by any of the agencies involved. At the meeting cases are discussed with relevant officers, issues identified and a support plan developed which ranges from intervention through to enforcement, if required. It is important to note that agencies, in the first instance, will always try to

engage and provide support to the individual. All case management is run through the ECIN's case management system.

Community Safety also takes the lead on the Killing with Kindness campaign that is run 2 -3 times a year. This sees a multi-agency publicity campaign to raise awareness on begging and rough sleeping to discourage the public from giving directly to those begging, together with the provision of donation boxes at awareness raising events - proceeds are passed to local homelessness charities. The campaign also raises awareness around the complex needs of rough sleepers, beggars and street drinkers.

4. Please provide details of the action that your organisation is taking to improve the health, wellbeing and safety of homeless people.

Due to the complex needs, and chaotic lifestyle of most rough sleepers, a multi-agency case management approach is adopted in addressing individuals. Due to increasing concerns about health, welfare and anti-social behaviour, a Rough Sleepers, Street Drinkers & Beggars working group was established in 2011. Recently this meeting has been reviewed and retitled Street Community Working Group. The main aim is to address health, welfare and dependency issues and provide support to enable rough sleepers to leave the streets, finding suitable accommodation

Cases can be referred by any of the agencies involved. At the meetings cases are discussed with relevant officers, issues identified and a support plan developed which ranges from intervention through to enforcement, if required. It is important to note that agencies, in the first instance, will always try to engage and provide support to the individual to address their health issues, drug & alcohol dependency problems and housing needs. However, if it is abundantly clear that they will not engage, and they are causing issues on the streets, the enforcement process will be followed.

5. Please provide details of the local Homelessness Strategy and Rough Sleepers Strategy and how their implementation is being monitored and assessed.

This will be provided by Head of Housing & Wellbeing

6. Please provide details of the arrangements that have been put in place to provide rough sleepers with emergency shelter during severe weather.

This will be provided by Head of Housing & Wellbeing

7. Please provide us with any statistics and data you hold in relation to the number of people / households that are homeless, and details of the methodology you have used to count the number of people sleeping rough.

This will be provided by Head of Housing & Wellbeing

8. Are you aware of any specific groups that are not accessing local services and, if you are, please can you provide details and describe the reasons why some homeless people are difficult to engage and support?

Rough sleepers are generally highly vulnerable individuals with very complex needs, and this in itself can make it hard to engage with them. Some rough sleepers do have, or have at some point, also had substance misuse problems, mental health problems, and may have suffered a traumatic childhood.

Over the past 10 years we have seen a change in the demographic of rough sleepers, with an increase in people from Europe. The main difficulties experienced are that the majority are rough sleeping by choice and do not want to be housed. However, a number of them also have drug and alcohol issues. In some cases they do not have any re-course to public funds, and may also not be exercising their Treaty Rights.

There are also some entrenched rough sleepers who do not want to, or find it very difficult to engage due to their long term drug/alcohol dependency issues and anti-social behaviour.

9. Are there any significant gaps in service and do the services link together well enough?

Over the years there have been varying levels in engagement from agencies. However, the Street Community Working Group has seen a great improvement in joined up working between agencies, both statutory and voluntary over recent months. The introduction of the Outreach workers has also seen an increase in the engagement of rough sleepers with support agencies.

There is however, always room for improvement in the approaches taken by agencies, and in providing a more co-ordinated approach

10. How can we increase awareness of the services, assistance and support available to people who are homeless, including rough sleepers?

- **Place more general information on NBC webpages. i.e. what rough sleeping is; how it can be reported; support services available etc.**
- **Consider creating a reporting hotline or joining a national hotline such as 'Street Link' - this has been done in other areas, and enables members of the public to report rough sleeper's locations and concerns.**
- **Continue to lead on the Killing with Kindness campaign to raise general awareness on rough sleeping, associated issues and support agencies.**

11. What action is being taken to ensure that all agencies and members of the public know what to do if they know that someone is homeless or sleeping rough?

- **Implementations of Rough Sleepers Strategy**
- **Multi-Agency seminars held**
- **Outreach Workers have been promoted with frontline services**
- **Multi-agency reviewed and refreshed**

12. Do you have any other information you are able to provide in relation to homelessness and rough sleeping?

13. What is the Council doing to bring empty homes back into use in Northampton?
(question for internal witnesses).

CORE QUESTIONS:

A series of key questions have been put together to inform the evidence base of the Scrutiny Panel:

1. Please describe your understanding of the nature, causes and extent of homelessness and rough sleeping, and the impact that homelessness has on the health, wellbeing and safety of homeless people.

Homelessness takes many forms and, although people who are sleeping rough on the streets or living in temporary accommodation are literally homeless, people do not need to be roofless to be classified as 'homeless'.

Someone who is sofa surfing or living in unreasonable conditions may still be 'homeless', and someone who is likely to become homeless within the next 28 days may be treated as being 'threatened with homelessness'.

There are many causes of homelessness. In Northampton, the main causes are:

- Termination of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST) because the landlord wants to sell the property or let it to someone else who is able to pay a higher rent;
- Relationship breakdown (violent / non-violent); and
- Family or friends no longer able or willing to accommodate.

Other causes of homelessness include illness, bereavement, the loss of employment, a sudden reduction in income, harassment and unlawful eviction, tenancy breakdown, unmet support needs, mental health problems, substance misuse, leaving prison or hospital in an unplanned way, and difficulty in accessing private and social housing.

Homelessness can have a significant impact on people's health, wellbeing and safety:

- Disrupting schooling, healthcare, employment and support networks;
- Placing a strain on budgets (meals, transport, removals and storage);
- Limiting space and privacy (affects relationships, friends and homework);
- Causing a deterioration in physical and mental health;
- Reducing self-esteem, confidence and personal hygiene;
- Increasing isolation and the risk of physical assault; and
- Increasing the misuse of alcohol; and drugs

Please see **Appendix 1** (attached) for statistics / data relating to homelessness.

2. Please describe the services, assistance and support that are available to people who are homeless, including rough sleepers.

The Council's Housing Options and Advice Team provides comprehensive advice and assistance to everyone who is homeless or threatened with homelessness.

It will work proactively and collaboratively with other services and organisations, as appropriate, to ensure that people receive the help and support that they need in order to avoid becoming homeless or to recover from a period of homelessness.

The primary focus of the Council's Street Outreach Team – which works with a wide range of services and organisations – is to provide people who are sleeping rough with the necessary advice and assistance to leave the streets as quickly as possible.

The Street Outreach Workers help people who are sleeping rough to access the support they need to address their health needs, alcohol and substance misuse issues, secure an income, and access volunteering, training, employment and suitable accommodation.

Reconnection will also be an option where someone is stuck in an area that they do not want to be in and requires help in moving to another area where they will be able to benefit from being closer to their family, friends and support networks.

3. Please provide details of the contribution that your organisation is making (through its work and the initiatives in which it is involved) to tackle, prevent and reduce homelessness and rough sleeping in the borough.

Multi Agency Rough Sleepers Strategy

'**TOGETHER we change lives**', the borough's ambitious, 3 year multi-agency strategy for ending the need for people to sleep rough in Northampton, was launched in July 2016 and was informed, developed and agreed after a Rough Sleepers Count in March 2016 and a series of workshops attended by more than 30 services and organisations.

'**TOGETHER we change lives**' sets out 10 strategic objectives that Northampton's multi-agency alliance will achieve by working together. Most of the objectives will be achieved within the next 12 months, with the following 2 years being used to ensure that the new ways of tackling, preventing and reducing homelessness is embedded across all services and organisations in Northampton.

The 10 strategic objectives include setting up a temporary emergency night shelter, establishing a multi-disciplinary Street Services Team, working with hospitals, prisons, supported housing schemes and social landlords, developing individual multi agency support plans for individuals sleeping rough, and developing a comprehensive programme of volunteering, training and employment to improve people's life chances.

Housing Allocations Policy

The Council is reviewing its Housing Allocations Policy, to ensure that it is fit for purpose and meets its strategic objectives in relation to the allocation of affordable housing.

Consideration will be given to the ways in which the Housing Allocations Policy can be amended to support everyone's efforts to prevent homelessness, tackle severe overcrowding, safeguard children and vulnerable adults, facilitate move-on from hospital and supported housing, and assist the future growth of Northampton.

Countywide Housing Protocols for Young People

The Council's Housing & Wellbeing Service took the lead in the development and implementation two Countywide Housing Protocols: a Housing Protocol (Homeless 16 & 17 Year Olds) and a Housing Protocol (Care Leavers).

The Housing Protocol (Homeless 16 & 17 Year Olds) is designed to ensure that, in Northamptonshire, everyone works together to provide a consistent and co-ordinated response to 16 and 17 year old young people (including teenage parents and pregnant teenagers) who present as homeless and are in need of accommodation or accommodation-related support. It seeks to prevent homelessness and promote and safeguard the wellbeing of 16 and 17 year olds.

The Housing Protocol (Care Leavers) is designed to ensure that 'looked after' children are prepared for independent living, leave care when they are ready and move on to settled housing (which may include social rented housing) in a planned way.

As well as setting out the roles and responsibilities of Children's Social Care, the Leaving Care Team, the seven local Housing Authorities and the social housing providers, the Housing Protocol (Care Leavers) describes the action that the young person needs to take to apply for social rented housing and what each Housing Authority will then do to ensure that the young person receives an offer of suitable housing when they are ready to leave care and are able to sustain their tenancy when they are rehoused.

4. Please provide details of the action that your organisation is taking to improve the health, wellbeing and safety of homeless people.

One of the priorities in this year's Housing and Wellbeing Service Plan is to carry out a review of the Council's use of temporary accommodation and reduce its use of Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation. It is hoped this will reduce the number of families and vulnerable people placed in B&B and keep them in Northampton, so as to minimise any disruption to their employment, schools and support networks.

For those who are placed in temporary accommodation outside of the borough, every effort is made to ensure that appropriate support is provided and that they are transferred to temporary accommodation in Northampton as soon as possible.

5. Please provide details of the local Homelessness Strategy and Rough Sleepers Strategy and how their implementation is being monitored and assessed.

The Council is planning to undertake a comprehensive Homelessness Review and produce a new 3 year Multi Agency Homelessness Strategy in April 2017.

Following publication of the Rough Sleepers Strategy, we are finalising the Action Plan that will set out how Northampton's multi agency alliance will achieve the 10 strategic priorities in the Strategy. 'Task and finish' groups are being established to ensure the successful and timely implementation of the Action Plan.

Performance and progress against the 10 strategic priorities and the Action Plan will be monitored quarterly by a multi agency Rough Sleepers Strategy Steering Group and reported to the Council's Cabinet annually.

6. Please provide details of the arrangements that have been put in place to provide rough sleepers with emergency shelter during severe weather.

In recent years, emergency shelter has been provided for people who are sleeping rough in Northampton when the temperature is forecast to be below freezing for at least 3 consecutive nights. Shelter has been provided in the Hope Centre (part of Oasis House) and, during their stay, rough sleepers received a hot meal and drinks, and the chance to engage with services that can help them access support and accommodation.

As the Council is opening an emergency nightshelter in November 2016 – to end the need for people to sleep rough in Northampton – this winter’s severe weather project (known as SWEF) will operate from the new nightshelter.

7. Please provide us with any statistics and data you hold in relation to the number of people / households that are homeless, and details of the methodology you have used to count the number of people sleeping rough.

Please see **Appendix 1** (attached) for statistics / data relating to homelessness.

The Street Outreach Workers undertake several outreach sessions each week, where they will go out and look for people sleeping rough in known ‘hot spots’ and town centre locations. They will respond to intelligence provided by members of the public and other services and organisations. Recording every person they find ‘bedded down’, they will continue to work with them to get them off the streets as quickly as possible.

Councils are required by Government to complete an annual count of rough sleepers in their area, and submit their findings. This can be done in the form of an actual count, or an estimate. Government prescribes who should and shouldn’t be counted.

On 24 March 2016, the Council – assisted by 32 volunteers from a wide range of services and organisations – completed a comprehensive, borough-wide count. Between Midnight and 3.00am, a total of 21 people were found ‘bedded down’. It is believed that only 4 of these 21 people are now sleeping rough in Northampton.

The next rough sleepers count is scheduled to take place in November 2016. It is hoped that, as a result of the work undertaken to date and the opening of the emergency nightshelter, less than 10 people – and as close to zero as possible – will be found ‘bedded down’ on the night of the count.

8. Are you aware of any specific groups that are not accessing local services and, if you are, please can you provide details and describe the reasons why some homeless people are difficult to engage and support?

Some people who are sleeping rough refuse to access local services or take up offers of advice, support and assistance.

There are predominantly 2 groups:

- **Eastern European nationals who are not exercising their treaty rights**, a group of which are refusing help and refusing to come off the streets. Reasons cited are mostly an unwillingness to pay rent. The Council is working closely with the Police and Immigration Service to tackle this issue.
- **Entrenched rough sleepers** will often take a long time to gain trust in services before they will start to work with them. They often require a specially tailored, multi agency solution to make the very difficult transition from the street into a home.

As it will often take several attempts to get an entrenched rough sleeper off the streets, it is important that the person sleeping rough and the agencies involved persevere and do not regard unsuccessful attempts as failure. It is important, also,

that the person sleeping rough knows that the support will still be there for them when they are ready to try again.

9. Are there any significant gaps in service and do the services link together well enough?

It would be helpful to have Countywide Protocols for victims of domestic abuse and for offenders, in order to ensure that people are able to move on from refuges, prisons and probation hostels into settled accommodation in a planned way, avoiding a crisis.

Despite Northamptonshire's Housing Protocols for homeless 16 and 17 year olds and care leavers, Children's Services do not always comply with their obligations under the Protocols, leaving the Council to deal with them on its own.

The sharp increase in rents, together with lack of access to the private rented sector, is making it extremely difficult for the Council to prevent homelessness by helping people to remain in their existing accommodation or to move to alternative private rented accommodation that they can afford. This reduces the lack of options available to people and, in common with other parts of the country including Northamptonshire, it is contributing to a sharp increase in homelessness in Northampton.

In order to prevent homelessness, reduce the Council's use of B&B, improve local housing conditions, increase choice and make it easier for people to access good quality, well managed private rented accommodation, the Council is in the process of setting up a not-for-profit Social Lettings Agency.

Although there is still a lot of work to do to link services together, and to get them to work more effectively with one another in partnership, '**TOGETHER we change lives**' has acted as a catalyst for change and led to a notable increase in flexibility and willingness to work collaboratively to get the best outcomes for people who are homeless.

10. How can we increase awareness of the services, assistance and support available to people who are homeless, including rough sleepers?

When implementing '**TOGETHER we change lives**', Northampton's multi-agency alliance of services and organisations will work together to agree common messages that will be used in literature to promote the wide range of services that are available to end the need to sleep rough in Northampton.

It has been agreed, also, that Northampton's multi-agency alliance will develop a comprehensive guide to local services and organisations that offer advice, support and assistance to homeless people, in order to help everyone understand what help is available and to encourage joined-up working and solutions.

11. What action is being taken to ensure that all agencies and members of the public know what to do if they know that someone is homeless or sleeping rough?

Through a series of workshops – attended by people representing more than 30 services and organisations operating in Northampton – the Council has been able to raise awareness of the work undertaken by the Street Outreach Workers and how people can get in touch to report someone who is homeless or sleeping rough.

The Council's website has contact details for the Street Outreach Team, and a link to 'Streetlink'. Streetlink is a web based service that aims to offer the public a means to act when they see someone sleeping rough, and it is the first step someone can take to ensure rough sleepers are connected to the local services and support that they need.

The Council is also considering how social media can be used to enable agencies and members of the public to alert it to people who are in need of housing support.

12. Do you have any other information you are able to provide in relation to homelessness and rough sleeping?

N/A

13. What is the Council doing to bring empty homes back into use in Northampton? (question for internal witnesses).

As part of its plans to establish a Social Lettings Agency, the Council is proposing to appoint an Empty Homes Officer who will work proactively to encourage the owners of empty properties to sell, lease or let their accommodation.

It is hoped that the Empty Homes Officer will persuade many owners to lease their accommodation to the Social Lettings Agency or to allow the Social Lettings Agency to manage their accommodation on their behalf. In some instances, the Council will organise and pay for essential works for the owner on the understanding that the cost of those works will be reimbursed from future rent / lease payments.

Although most of the work that the Empty Homes Officer undertakes will involve negotiation and persuasion, the Officer will also pursue enforced sales (where the Council is owed money) and compulsory purchase.

Appendix 1 –Homelessness Statistics

Measure	Average 2015/16	April	May	June	July	August
Total number of households living in temporary accommodation	76	74	82	97	106	111
Number of households living in B&B accommodation	32	35	32	36	55	49
Number of households that are prevented from becoming homeless	42	86	73	112	61	82
Number of households that make a homelessness application	38	63	63	49	55	69
Number of households for whom a full homelessness duty is accepted	26	34	39	41	27	46

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY



SCRUTINY PANEL 3 – HOMELESSNESS

CORE QUESTIONS – Northamptonshire Police

CORE QUESTIONS:

1. Please describe your understanding of the nature, causes and extent of homelessness and rough sleeping, and the impact that homelessness has on the health, wellbeing and safety of homeless people.

Not an appropriate question for Police to answer as links into political opinions.

2. Please describe the services, assistance and support that are available to people who are homeless, including rough sleepers.

Officers will signpost people to appropriate services.

3. Please provide details of the contribution that your organisation is making (through its work and the initiatives in which it is involved) to tackle, prevent and reduce homelessness and rough sleeping in the borough.

Police attend Rough Sleeper Strategy Workshops, support Outreach events and attend multi agency enforcement days. Police will also deal with various Anti-Social Behaviour issues that are sometimes associated with rough sleeping.

4. Please provide details of the action that your organisation is taking to improve the health, wellbeing and safety of homeless people.

Police Officers will signpost people to appropriate services.

5. Please provide details of the local Homelessness Strategy and Rough Sleepers Strategy and how their implementation is being monitored and assessed.

Strategy is written by NBC.

6. Please provide details of the arrangements that have been put in place to provide rough sleepers with emergency shelter during severe weather.

Provided by NBC.

7. Please provide us with any statistics and data you hold in relation to the number of people / households that are homeless, and details of the methodology you have used to count the number of people sleeping rough.

Specific statistics not held by Police, although Officers are supplied to support multi agency initiatives and counts.

8. Are you aware of any specific groups that are not accessing local services and, if you are, please can you provide details and describe the reasons why some homeless people are difficult to engage and support?

Some homeless people, albeit it a minority, do chose rough sleeping as a lifestyle choice. Some also suffer from mental health issues.

9. Are there any significant gaps in service and do the services link together well enough?

Recent evidence of good joint approach, especially with the NBC Outreach Workers. E-Cins is also available as a tool.

10. How can we increase awareness of the services, assistance and support available to people who are homeless, including rough sleepers?

Not an issue for Police to comment on.

11. What action is being taken to ensure that all agencies and members of the public know what to do if they know that someone is homeless or sleeping rough?

Police Officers will signpost people to appropriate services.

12. Do you have any other information you are able to provide in relation to homelessness and rough sleeping?

No further information.

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY



SCRUTINY PANEL 3 – HOMELESSNESS (PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY)

CORE QUESTIONS – EXPERT ADVISORS

ASB Manager

The Scrutiny Panel is currently undertaking a review: Pre-Decision Scrutiny: To review how the Borough Council and its partners prevent homelessness and respond to those without homes in the borough

Key Lines of Enquiry

- To gain an understanding of the work currently being undertaken by Northampton Borough Council (NBC), partnerships, statutory and voluntary organisations to address homelessness
- To assess the extent of homelessness and rough sleeping in the borough assess the initiatives currently in place to tackle homelessness
- To examine the Council's Severe Weather Provision
- To gain an understanding of the effect on the health, wellbeing and the safety of homelessness people, including rough sleepers
- To gain an understanding of the causes and barriers to support homelessness
- Identify any specific groups that are not accessing services

The expected outcomes of this Scrutiny Review are:

- To reduce homelessness in the borough of Northampton
- An understanding of the local authority homelessness role and the services provided in Northampton
- A review of existing homelessness services in Northampton, in order to assess their quality and effectiveness and identify any significant gaps in service

CORE QUESTIONS:

A series of key questions have been put together to inform the evidence base of the Scrutiny Panel:

1. Please describe your understanding of the nature, causes and extent of homelessness and rough sleeping, and the impact that homelessness has on the health, wellbeing and safety of homeless people.

This is a complex problem, and one I will try to address, though it will very much be my personal opinions, and I cannot speak on behalf of Northamptonshire Police, or the ASB Unit. Homelessness is caused by a variety of factors, as is rough sleeping. Relationship breakdown, unemployment, the inability to manage debt, finances and responsibility are other factors in homelessness. It has increased as the cost of privately rented accommodation has risen. Mental ill-health is a very common factor in rough sleeping. Childhood neglect or abuse is common, as is a history of institutional care, and therefore some rough sleepers distrust authority figures which makes it hard to engage them in services. Drug and alcohol misuse and offending behaviour are also common factors.

Homelessness is quite extensive, with many people having no place to call home and so 'sofa-surfing' with friends, and the extent of that is very difficult to measure. Rough sleeping is easier to measure, although we may never have a completely accurate count of people sleeping rough, for example in squats, cars, communal areas, garages and so on, where it is harder to see them and count them.

Rough sleeping is extremely poor for the health, wellbeing and safety of these vulnerable individuals. We see too many of them die young, often associated with drug and alcohol misuse. They can also be a risk to each other and to the community. We know of rough sleeping sex offenders, who enjoy the freedom of their independence and absence of supervision. Their victims are often those who are most vulnerable, are rough sleeping with mental health problems, and substance misuse problems, which make them unable to defend themselves or to be credible witnesses in prosecutions.

2. Please describe the services, assistance and support that are available to people who are homeless, including rough sleepers.

The main service for rough sleepers in Northampton is the NBC Outreach Team directing clients to Oasis House and No Second Night Out. Neither provide emergency accommodation, so there is currently no 'night shelter' provision in Northampton.

The NBC Housing and Wellbeing Team provides a wider level of support to homeless people who are eligible for support by meeting the strict criteria. This dept is always keen to assist people to re-patriate to areas where they are eligible for support, whether nationally or internationally.

Recently, the Outreach Team has started to help people into other accommodation facilities as well as Oasis House, and includes Emmaus facilities, a network of communal homes (none in Northants). This approach is much needed as Oasis House is not suitable for everybody, and other options are essential.

Some faith organisations and humanitarian organisations provide different types of assistance and support to the homeless, mostly around food provision and the provision of sleeping bags, blankets and tents.

There are other housing providers such as CAN, Maplyn, Womens Aid, Eve (formerly Nene Valley) and C2C Social Action, which are for homeless people who actively engage with the relevant services and meet their particular criteria, level of risks and vulnerabilities.

Bridge provides support and activities to service users, and Maple Access provides medical services.

3. Please provide details of the contribution that your organisation is making (through its work and the initiatives in which it is involved) to tackle, prevent and reduce homelessness and rough sleeping in the borough.

The Northampton Anti-social Behaviour Unit is a joint NBC and Police Unit which I manage, and which sits under the NBC management of Community Safety Manager Debbie Ferguson. The Unit set up the Rough Sleepers, Beggars and Street Drinkers Working Group several years ago, and has been trying to coordinate the multi-agency responses to rough sleeping for several years. Our Unit does not have access to accommodation and does not have outreach workers, so our success has been determined by the participation and support of other agencies and teams. We have recently refreshed this group, now called the Street Community Working Group, which I chair. We have been promoting the use of E-CINS which is a database on which we can all share information about rough sleepers, amongst the partners, which is essential to enable a joined up partnership response.

We tackle the anti-social behaviour caused by this cohort, but always seek to tackle the causes and not just the symptoms, and rely on the local Police (mostly on the Central Sector) to provide the evidence needed for us to tackle the problems. Sometimes our enforcement powers can be used to directly tackle rough sleeping, for example by imposing legal requirements for offenders to work with the NBC team to tackle their homelessness, or with other support organisations.

4. Please provide details of the action that your organisation is taking to improve the health, wellbeing and safety of homeless people.

Our Street Community Working Group which I chair is a partnership group, with some partners whose responsibility is to address their health and wellbeing. I base the list of people we discuss on risk, so it's on risk to themselves or to others, and safety is very much on our minds. All rough sleepers are automatically on our case list, because we consider rough sleeping to be a risk to the safety of them all.

5. Please provide details of the local Homelessness Strategy and Rough Sleepers Strategy and how their implementation is being monitored and assessed.

Phil Harris can provide this.

6. Please provide details of the arrangements that have been put in place to provide rough sleepers with emergency shelter during severe weather.

The SWEP provisions are put into place. NBC can provide details.

7. Please provide us with any statistics and data you hold in relation to the number of people / households that are homeless, and details of the methodology you have used to count the number of people sleeping rough.

NBC Outreach Team can provide the latest numbers of rough sleepers. I am unable to give statistics on homelessness.

8. Are you aware of any specific groups that are not accessing local services and, if you are, please can you provide details and describe the reasons why some homeless people are difficult to engage and support?

There has been an increase in Eastern Europeans who are sleeping rough in our town. It can be difficult to engage with these people due to language differences, but also because often they do not have any recourse to public funds, and may not be exercising their Treaty Rights.

There are a few individuals who do not engage because they do not want to face the responsibilities required for engagement: people who refuse to pay rent, or who refuse to address their drug/alcohol addictions. Some struggle with social interactions particularly with authority figures, often because of traumatic childhood experiences.

9. Are there any significant gaps in service and do the services link together well enough?

There are some significant gaps in services which need to be addressed:

There are some rough sleepers who are not suitable for Oasis House because they are too vulnerable to live amongst the general population there, and who need supported accommodation. We have some especially vulnerable women with complex issues who are homeless, even sleeping rough, and their housing options are limited, because of the risks they would present to other residents.

Homelessness is not a universal problem with a universal solution. Each individual has their own reasons for being homeless, and will have their own mix of risks, vulnerabilities, health and wellbeing problems, and each will have a different relational network and history of family breakdowns etc. The emergency night shelter may be unsuitable for some of the more vulnerable people who sleep rough. The provision of supported accommodation is essential.

In summary the gaps in services are mostly for the following:

For women: female victims of domestic abuse who are excluded from existing housing options with complex needs and/or certain types of offending history.

For men: men excluded from existing housing options, single men with no dependents; sex offenders; male victims of domestic abuse.

For young people: those with parents who have addictions or MH problems; care-leavers.

Generally: people with dual diagnosis (e.g. mental ill-health and addictions); those who are suicidal or self-harm, those with mental health problems which do not fit the criteria for MH services' supported accommodation. Those with a history of arson. Emergency provision. People with no local connections anywhere.

Need for better links between services: patients released from hospitals who are homeless; prison releases where this is often at short notice. Improvements have been seen and we need this to continue.

10. How can we increase awareness of the services, assistance and support available to people who are homeless, including rough sleepers?

Improve web info, and make leaflets available.

11. What action is being taken to ensure that all agencies and members of the public know what to do if they know that someone is homeless or sleeping rough?

Strategy, workshops and media input

12. Do you have any other information you are able to provide in relation to homelessness and rough sleeping?

An option well worth considering is the Housing First model. More information is available here:

http://england.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/145853/GP_Briefing_Housing_First.pdf

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY



SCRUTINY PANEL 3 – HOMELESSNESS

(PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY)

CORE QUESTIONS – EXPERT ADVISORS - Director, Children’s Services, NCC

In July 2016, Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Board, together with partners, convened a Task & Finish group in order to gain a clear understanding of activity being undertaken in the county to support families and young people facing homelessness

- Representatives from key partners include:
- Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Board
- Northamptonshire County Council – Children’s Social Care and Early Help
- Northampton Borough Council
- Borough Council of Wellingborough
- Northampton Women’s Aid

The Safeguarding Children Board Business Manager is a member of the Chief Housing Officers Group which meets bi-monthly. This ensures the NSCB are aware of key issues facing the county’s housing departments.

Data shows us that for 2015/16, 103 homeless families become homeless ‘intentionally’ (households containing a dependent child or someone who is pregnant) within the meaning of the homelessness legislation. This figure is broken down as follows:

- Northampton – 57
- Corby – 13
- Daventry – 12

- Kettering – 9
- East Northamptonshire – 7
- Wellingborough – 3
- South Northamptonshire – 2

A further breakdown of the analysis will be undertaken via the Chief Housing Officers Group to understand specific reasons for those becoming intentionally homeless and this will include the number and age of children in the household.

The NSCB collects data on the number of initial contacts for 16-17 year olds reporting homelessness. The figure of Q1 2016/17 is 28 to 30th June 2016.

A number of joint protocols are in place or being developed:

A Housing Protocol for the assessment of 16 and 17 year old young people who present as homeless has been in place since November 2015 and whilst commonly used by partners. The Task & Finish group will review and update the Protocol by March 2017.

Northamptonshire Housing Protocol for Care Leavers who are in need of housing and tenancy related support has been effective from 4th April 2016.

A Joint Protocol between Northamptonshire County Council and Local Authority Housing Services to address the needs of intentionally homeless families with children is currently in draft format and is being driven by the Task & Finish group.

A multi-agency case audit on young people facing homelessness is being undertaken on 23rd September 2016.

Ongoing priorities for the Task & Finish group are:

- To understand the data and the impact of homelessness on wellbeing.
- To understand any deficits across the county.
- To understand the scale of those facing homelessness with no recourse to public funds

Overview & Scrutiny – Homelessness (LGSS revenues & benefits)

Purpose of Report

To highlight to the committee the involvement that the LGSS Revenue and Benefit Department has in supporting colleagues in dealing with homelessness & homeless prevention.

Key Activities

Revenues and Benefits as a service support the homeless agenda in a number of ways:

1. There is a KPI specifically aimed at dealing with the most vulnerable people - 95% of all Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) are review within 14 days.
2. The team reach out to NPH and other Housing Associations when there are additional funds encouraging them to get customers who may be struggling to apply.
3. There is a fast track process to ensure claims that are subject to eviction are processed immediately
4. The Housing & Wellbeing team have direct access to a Housing Benefit Team Leader. They review cases together discuss the issues and work through the best solution for the customer.
5. The revenues and benefits service has a dedicated officer to liaise with 3rd sector partners and attend cross party meetings to better understand the wider picture and relay the Revenues & Benefits perspective. Specific meetings of note relevant to the review are:
 - a. Citizen Advice Bureau (CAB) & community Law Service (CLS) group
 - b. Northampton Agency Partnership (Multi agency forum)
 - c. Northampton Financial Inclusion Forum
6. There is a regularly updated register of Stakeholders (copy below) should communications or contact need to be made with specific bodies.
7. LGSS chair a Welfare reform Steering group that involves key stakeholders from Northampton Borough Council, Northampton Partnership Homes, LGSS Revenue & Benefits and the Department for Work & Pensions. The group meet fortnightly to discuss upcoming reforms and their impact on individuals, services and finances working together to find mutually agreeable resolutions to the issues the reforms bring.
8. When recovering monies owed rent and council tax and considered priority debts and debts are deferred where a customer can show they are already facing hardship that could lead to homelessness.
9. CAB & CLS are able to propose payment plans for customers based on the work they have done with the customer and their understanding the financial circumstances, the customer only has to go through a debt management process once and due to close liaison with these organisation we are happy to accept their recommendations.

10. There are various considerations and concessions made when a customer has been identified as vulnerable; these are broadly used when a customer is looking like they may lose their home.
11. The service has both a discretionary discount scheme and write off policy that can be utilised should all other methods have been considered and rejected.
12. All the Council Tax paperwork has reference to debt and getting professional debt advice, this is replicated on the website and the team are also encouraged to deliver this message when they encounter someone who may benefit from this type of support.
13. The team are also empowered to look at other solutions to help customers by checking potential benefit availability or finding out why they haven't moved from a house they can't afford, clearly this has to be done with some sensitivity but it helps to form a picture of the customer, their circumstance and any potential vulnerability.
14. The policy to charge Council Tax on empty homes and the premium charge on homes that have been empty over two years would be seen as an incentive to encourage individuals to place their properties back on the housing market.

Stakeholders



LGSS stakeholders
Feb 16.doc

Core Questions

I have not specifically referred to each core question (appendix a) as Revenues & Benefits does not keep data on homelessness, the core business is dealing with customers who are in homes paying rent &/or council tax. The department is aware of the impact that debt can have on home stability and as detailed above has a number of mechanisms to identify, help or refer customers to advice and support.

Alongside this we have shown how we support those with direct involvement in homelessness issues to mitigate and where possible prevent a homeless situation.

Appendix a

1. Please describe your understanding of the nature, causes and extent of homelessness and rough sleeping, and the impact that homelessness has on the health, wellbeing and safety of homeless people.
2. Please describe the services, assistance and support that are available to people who are homeless, including rough sleepers.
3. Please provide details of the contribution that your organisation is making (through its work and the initiatives in which it is involved) to tackle, prevent and reduce homelessness and rough sleeping in the borough.
4. Please provide details of the action that your organisation is taking to improve the health, wellbeing and safety of homeless people.
5. Please provide details of the local Homelessness Strategy and Rough Sleepers Strategy and how their implementation is being monitored and assessed.
6. Please provide details of the arrangements that have been put in place to provide rough sleepers with emergency shelter during severe weather.
7. Please provide us with any statistics and data you hold in relation to the number of people / households that are homeless, and details of the methodology you have used to count the number of people sleeping rough.
8. Are you aware of any specific groups that are not accessing local services and, if you are, please can you provide details and describe the reasons why some homeless people are difficult to engage and support?
9. Are there any significant gaps in service and do the services link together well enough?
10. How can we increase awareness of the services, assistance and support available to people who are homeless, including rough sleepers?
11. What action is being taken to ensure that all agencies and members of the public know what to do if they know that someone is homeless or sleeping rough?
12. Do you have any other information you are able to provide in relation to homelessness and rough sleeping?
13. What is the Council doing to bring empty homes back into use in Northampton