

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
Scrutiny Panel 1 – Homelessness and Rough Sleepers

Your attendance is requested at a meeting to be held at The Jeffrey Room,
The Guildhall, St. Giles Square, Northampton, NN1 1DE on
8 November 2018 at 6pm

George Candler
Chief Executive

If you need any advice or information regarding this agenda please phone Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer, who will be able to assist with your enquiry. For further information regarding **Scrutiny Panel 1 - Homelessness and Rough Sleepers** please visit the website www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny

Members of the Panel

Chair	Councillor Cathrine Russell
Panel Members	Councillor Mohammed Azizur Rahman (Aziz) Councillor Sally Beardsworth Councillor Jane Birch Councillor Gareth Eales Councillor Zoe Smith
Co-opted Member	Ian Bates, Umbrella Fair

Calendar of meetings

Date	Room
24 January 2019 6:00 pm 14 March 8 April	All meetings to be held in the Jeffery Room at the Guildhall unless otherwise stated

Northampton Borough Scrutiny Panel 1 - Homelessness and Rough Sleepers

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		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 - 4	The Scrutiny Panel to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 6 September 2018.
5	Witness Evidence	5 - 7	The Scrutiny Panel to receive a response to its core questions from a variety of expert advisors
5 (a) 6:05pm	Detective Chief Inspector, within Public Protection, Northants Police		
5 (b) 6:30pm	Director of Public Health, NCC		
5 (c) 7:00pm	Director, NASS		
5 (d) 7:30 pm	Chair, NIFF		
6. 8:00pm	Written evidence		The Scrutiny Panel to receive written evidence from NACRO.
7. 8:10pm	Site Visits	8 - 16	The Chair to report back on the findings from recent site visits.
8. 8:20pm	Relevant Legislation	17 - 25	The Scrutiny Panel to receive a briefing note detailing relevant Legislation.
9. 8:30pm	Best Practice	26 - 45	Scrutiny Panel to receive a briefing note detailing best practice.
10 8:45PM	Background Information	46 - 53	Scrutiny Panel to receive a briefing note detailing background information.
11. 8:55pm	Briefing Note: Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy		The Scrutiny Panel to receive a briefing note on the Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy

Northampton Borough Scrutiny Panel 1 - Homelessness and Rough Sleepers

12. 9:00pm	Performance Management Scrutiny		The Scrutiny Panel to undertake performance management Scrutiny: HML01 Total number of households living in temporary accommodation HML07 Number of households that are prevented on becoming homeless
-----------------------------	--	--	--

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF SCRUTINY PANEL 1 - HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPERS

Thursday, 6 September 2018

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillor Cathrine Russell (Chair) , Councillor Zoe Smith (Deputy Chair), Councillor Sally Beardsworth

CO-OPTED MEMBER: Ian Bates

Witnesses Councillor Stephen Hibbert (Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing),
Councillor Anna King (Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Engagement),
Emma Forbes (Housing Options and Advice Manager)
Vicki Rockall, (Community Safety and Engagement Manager)
and Mr C (who has previously slept rough)

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

Member of the Public Dagmar King

Press James Averill, Democracy Reporter

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Birch, G Eales and Meredith.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING)

There were none.

3. DEPUTATIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESSES

There were none.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the meeting held on 5 July as a true and accurate record.

5. WITNESS EVIDENCE

At this point, Emma Forbes introduced 'Mr C' (not his real name) who has 'lived experience' of sleeping rough in Northampton and was keen to share his experience in order to inform the Scrutiny Panel's deliberations and recommendations.

Mr C spoke candidly about his experiences, saying that he used to have a good life but, as a result of his drug use, he had lost his job and his home. He had slept in the woods for about six months and, although he initially enjoyed the freedom of the woods, this soon changed and it started to have a major impact on his mental health.

Mr C was very supportive of the Nightshelter, describing it as a warm, safe, welcoming place where the staff are non-judgemental and the food is good. He has spent a lot of time sleeping rough and has used the Nightshelter twice since it opened.

At the end of his first stay in the Nightshelter, Mr C was helped to move on to supported housing where he stayed for 11 months before becoming homeless again and returning to the Shelter. During his second stay at the Nightshelter, he engaged more effectively with local services and sorted out his medication before being offered a place in Oasis House.

Mr C has been living in Oasis House for around four weeks and helps out at the Hope Centre, for which he is rewarded for his work.

The Scrutiny Panel asked Mr C a series of questions to which he responded as follows:

- He felt he had been failed by JCP (JobcentrePlus) at his health assessment and that, as a consequence, he lost his benefits and supported housing
- He felt there are plenty of places for homeless people to go during the day when the Nightshelter is closed, but they are probably not being promoted well enough. He said that, although there is always somewhere to go, longer opening hours would be useful but would require extra funding. It would be good, for example, if the Bridge Project was open every Sunday because, for homeless people, Sundays are lonely days.
- He felt that he was living on the streets for a reason and he explained that, while he was on the streets, he was sad and very lonely.
- He commended the Street Outreach Workers, saying that they do their utmost to engage with all rough sleepers, including those who do not want to engage.
- He said that, after moving on from the Nightshelter the first time, he was worried he might not receive enough support from the accommodation provider. He said he felt that the lack of support was the main reason why he lost that accommodation.
- He said he is continuing to work with his Key Worker at Oasis House and, as his medication is now stable, he is hopeful that he will be able to move on successfully from Oasis House when he is ready. In the long term, he wants to be a Key Worker.

The Scrutiny Panel thanked Mr C for sharing his thoughts and experiences. He stayed to observe the remainder of the meeting.

The Scrutiny Panel received a collective response from the Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing and the Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Engagement.

The Housing Options and Advice Manager and Community Safety Engagement Manager supported the Cabinet Members in their responses. The Housing Options and Advice Manager highlighted salient points in her comprehensive written response.

The Scrutiny Panel made comment, asked questions and heard:

- In response to a query, the Housing Options and Advice Manager said it is essential that all agencies and organisations work together, and share information, in order to achieve the outcomes that everyone has agreed.
- The Housing Options and Advice Manager confirmed that the Council would like to introduce 'Housing First' in Northampton.
- The Scrutiny Panel was provided with an example of how the Street Outreach Workers had managed to help an encampment of rough sleepers in a town centre churchyard to come off the streets. The last two people – a woman and a man – were persuaded to move into temporary accommodation and the Nightshelter, and the Council then cleared the churchyard of the bedding and rubbish left behind.
- The Community Safety Team and the Housing and Wellbeing Service work well together to support homeless people and rough sleepers.
- The Street Outreach Workers undertake regular weekly assessments of everyone who is staying in the Nightshelter.
- There is a need to understand the rationale behind other organisations' approach to people who are homeless or sleeping rough.

Dagmar King (a member of the public) addressed the Scrutiny Panel and raised concerns about a homeless man she had met who had been living on the streets since February 2018, saying that she was saddened that, after six months of waiting, he has still not been told whether or not he is able to move into the Nightshelter.

The Head of Housing and Wellbeing responded to Mrs King's concerns, saying that all Nightshelter referrals are assessed by him and the Housing Options and Advice Manager and that most decisions are made on the same day as the referral. He said that, even when extra enquiries are needed, nobody will wait more than a few days for a decision.

The Deputy Chair said she had a series of supplementary questions relevant to the Review and briefly ran over them. However, due to the constraints on time, it was agreed that she would forward these to the Scrutiny Officer who will arrange for Officers to prepare a written response that can be shared with the Scrutiny Panel.

The Head of Housing and Wellbeing provided a brief update on the Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy (published in August 2018) and said that he will prepare a short briefing paper for the next Scrutiny Panel meeting.

The Chair referred to the excellent site visits that had recently taken place; a full briefing note would be provided to the next meeting.

Councillors Hibbert and King were thanked for their address.

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

6. RELEVANT PUBLISHED PAPERS

The Scrutiny Panel noted a briefing note around relevant published papers.

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

At this point the Scrutiny Panel watched a TED talk regarding Housing First.

The meeting concluded at 7:55 pm



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

SCRUTINY PANEL 1 – HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPERS

The Scrutiny Panel is currently undertaking a review: Homelessness and Rough Sleepers

The purpose of the Review is

- To review the way in which the Council and its partners engage with rough sleepers¹, consider the best way in which 'Housing First'² can be used to reduce rough sleeping in the borough, and understand the nature and extent of 'hidden homelessness'³ and how it can best be addressed.

- 1 For the purpose of rough sleeping counts and estimates, '**rough sleepers**' are defined as people who are sleeping / bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments) or sleeping in buildings or other places that are not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, etc).
- 2 The '**Housing First**' approach was first developed in New York by the Pathways to Housing organisation in 1992 and has proved very successful in the USA, Canada and Europe. Unlike other supported housing models, individuals do not need to prove they are ready for independent housing, or progress through a series of accommodation and treatment services. There are no conditions placed on them, other than a willingness to maintain a tenancy agreement. Housing First is designed to provide long-term, open-ended support for their ongoing needs. Through the provision of intensive, flexible and person-centred support, 70-90% of Housing First residents are able to remain housed. Having a settled home improves health and wellbeing and reduces ineffective contact with costly public services.
- 3 '**Hidden homelessness**' is a term that is used to describe the people who become homeless but do not show up in official figures. This includes people who become homeless but find a temporary solution by sofa surfing (staying with family members or friends) or living in hostels, nightshelters, squats or other insecure accommodation.

CORE QUESTIONS:

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

- 1 Please provide details of what contact or involvement your organisation has with people who are homeless (sleeping rough or 'hidden') and the services and organisations that are able to address their needs.
- 2 Please provide details of your understanding of the causes and extent of rough sleeping in the borough.
- 3 Please provide details of your understanding of the impact that rough sleeping has on the safety, life expectancy and health of people who are sleeping rough, and the implications that rough sleeping have for safeguarding and community safety.
- 4 Please provide details of your understanding of the nature of the work that is currently being undertaken by Northampton Borough Council and local groups, services and organisations to engage with people who are sleeping rough in the borough.
- 5 Please provide details of your understanding of how effective Northampton Borough Council and local groups, services and organisations have been in engaging purposefully with people who are sleeping rough and helping them to come off the streets.
- 6 What changes would you like Northampton Borough Council and local groups, services and organisations to make in order to engage more effectively with people who are sleeping rough and to help them come off the streets, in a planned way, as quickly as possible?
- 7 In what ways do you think the 'Housing First' model can be used most effectively to reduce rough sleeping in the borough, and in what ways (if any) could your organisation work differently to ensure its success?
- 8 Please provide details of your understanding of the nature and extent of 'hidden homelessness' in the borough, including the profile of the people affected and what contact (if any) they have had with Northampton Borough Council, Northampton Partnership Homes and/or other local advice and support providers.
- 9 Please can you suggest ways in which services and organisations can connect with, and meaningfully engage with, harder to reach groups?
- 10 How are data, statistics and demographics gathered and used to meet the needs of men and women who are homeless?

- 11 What do you think are the main reasons for hidden homelessness and why do you think people sofa surf and are without settled accommodation?
- 12 How effective do you think the Council is at informing people and organisations about its homelessness policies and procedures, and in what ways could it improve its communication?
- 13 Do you have any other information you are able to provide in relation to homelessness and rough sleeping?
- 14 Do you have any other recommendations for the Scrutiny Panel to consider including within its final report?



NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

SCRUTINY PANEL 3

HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPERS

8 NOVEMBER 2018

BRIEFING NOTE: SITE VISITS

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At its inaugural scoping meeting, Scrutiny Panel 3 (Homelessness and Rough Sleepers) agreed that it would undertake various site visits to inform its evidence base.
- 1.2 In setting its scope (terms of reference), the Scrutiny Panel suggested site visits to the following:
 - Hope Centre and Oasis House
 - Women's Refuse
 - Manchester
 - Accompanying the Outreach Workers on a Rough Sleepers' count
 - The Bridge Project
- 1.3 Detailed below are the findings from the various site visits.

2 SITE VISITS

2.1 Hope Centre and Oasis House

2.1.1 Councillor Cathrine Russell, Chair, Councillors Sally Beardsworth and Jane Birch, together with Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer, visited the Hope Centre and Oasis House on Tuesday, 7 August 2018.

2.1.2 There are a number of partners that contribute to Oasis House:

- Midland Heart
- Hope Day Centre
- NBC outreach
- NAASH
- Hope Enterprise 8

- 2.1.3 Maple Access Partnership is no longer available from Oasis House; clients have to attend its surgery.
- 2.1.4 The majority of clients to the Hope Centre have mental health issues; which increases dramatically once individuals become homeless. It was noted that there is a significant link between the use of cannabis and mental health. The life expectancy of a Rough Sleeper is 47.
- 2.1.5 The site visit observed the day centre. A number of clients were eating breakfast. Tea, coffee and squash is provided free of charge as are a number of pastries and other food. Should individuals require a cooked breakfast a small charge is required. There is also a small charge for cereals.
- 2.1.6 Lunch is also provided at the centre. There is a small cost for the lunch. Individuals can also use the showers.
- 2.1.7 Clothes are donated and individuals can buy items for a small cost (30 pence per item). There is a real need for underwear. This is provided free of charge.
- 2.1.8 Various groups and sessions are put on during the day such as foot care, cookery, art, life skills, gardening, sport, Internet café (free of charge for 90 minutes use).
- 2.1.9 The Hope Centre has good working relations with a number of organisations including:
- NAASH
 - CAN
 - Bridge
 - S2S
 - Re-Store
 - Growing Well (Blackthorn Good Neighbours)
 - Community Law
 - Doddridge Centre
 - Bellinge Community House
 - Deaf Connect
 - Free 2 Talk

- 2.1.10 The Site Visit observed the art room and some of the art work produced and being produced. Some excellent work was observed.
- 2.1.11 Around 100-120 individuals use the day centre daily, which is open six days a week, 8:30am to 1pm. The focus on Saturdays is around Rough Sleepers and Sofa Surfers. The Night Shelter is open at 9pm daily and therefore there is a gap of provision from 1pm to 9pm for the small number who stay there. However for the 100-110 people who don't use the night shelter, that gap is from when we close to when we open again. Clients have to be 18 years old or over and can be either male or female to use the Hope Centre or Oasis House.
- 2.1.12 Individuals can live at Oasis House in the short term, but individuals have stayed for up to three years. Oasis House is managed by Midland Heart and NAASH.
- 2.1.13 Councillors also visited Hope Enterprises. Hope Enterprises is a social enterprise and community interest company set up by Northampton's Hope Centre, a charity, with more than 40 years' experience working with the town's homeless.
- 2.1.14 Through giving training and work, at a fair rate of pay, in a supportive environment, Hope Enterprise helps people to re-join society.
- 2.1.15 Hope Enterprises has five elements: -
- Hope Catering - contract catering and buffets for business meetings, parties and events, alongside training in catering.
 - Hope Tools - a recycling and training social enterprise, refurbishing second-hand garden tools
 - Hope PAT Testing - routine safety checking for all electrical appliances
 - Hope Gardening – growing food and offering horticultural experience and therapeutic gardening
 - Hope foodclub – a social supermarket club where food and toiletries are available at discount prices to those on low incomes
- 2.1.16 The site visit observed refurbished tools that had been refurbished by Hope Tools. The site visit also observed a number of individuals taking part in the Aspire Course which has the purpose of providing skills to attendees for gaining employment, such as social skills and various qualifications.
- 2.1.17 The site visit spoke with a client to the Hope Centre – Miss A.

“Miss A had taken part in the Homeless Campaign Project that teaches attendees life skills. The Hope Centre had nominated Miss A to take part. As part of the Project Miss A had been to London and was scheduled to attend again in September, 2 days a week. As part of the project attendees go on field trips and visit museums. She is very proud to be able to help people that are homeless. Miss A was not on the streets for long and now lives in a hostel; she advised that she became homeless due to an error with benefits and felt that she had not at that time received any support. She had been evicted from her home that she had lived in since 1994. Miss A’s son is currently sofa surfing and her daughter lives in a separate hostel. The whole family has been dispersed. Community Law had been unable to assist Miss A when she was being evicted. Miss A felt that there is a lack of provision for people to have a shower and a good night’s sleep; she felt a number of smaller units, similar to Oasis House, across the town would be of real benefit.”

2.2 Women’s Refuge

2.2.1 Councillor Cathrine Russell, Chair, Councillors Sally Beardsworth and Jane Birch, together with Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer, visited a Women’s Refuge on Tuesday, 7 August 2018.

2.2.2 The refuge visited has space for five:

- 1 plus two beds
- 1 plus three beds
- 1 plus two beds
- A single room
- 1 plus two beds

2.2.3 The rooms are of a good size. The refuge is normally full.

2.2.4 The Support Worker at the refuge assists the women to apply for housing for example via the homeless/housing application route. Some women stay at the refuge for up to 12 months. A six month stay at the refuge is the norm. 24/7 support is provided at the refuge.

2.2.5 Often women who come to the refuge have often been “drawn to a bad boy.” There is the need for early prevention and women have quite often been living in poor conditions, have no hobbies, no social life and live their lives via social media. Their priorities are often the mobile phone, males and smoking. The cost to live in the Refuge is £15 per week to cover heating, water and washing. The Support Worker aims to help the women with their priorities. Life skills are taught so that they are ready to move on from the refuge.

- 2.2.6 The Site Visit felt that there is not enough bed space in accommodation in the town for homeless women. Women are able to stay at Oasis House but not at the Night Shelter. There are a lot of women who are “hidden homeless”.
- 2.2.7 There is a men’s refuge in Kettering . The majority of men have been subject to honour abuse. There is a need for more refuges across the country.
- 2.2.8 The site visit spoke with two women currently staying at the Refuge – Miss B and Miss C.

“Miss C came to the refuge from another area of the county in late July 2018. She had come from a low support refuge but needed more support. She had had an abusive partner. She had had her own flat and had lived there, with her young child, both working and attending college. She had to leave due to her abusive partner. He had also been manipulative. Due to the fact that she was an EU Citizen she was not entitled to benefits. The tenancy had been in her name and also her partner’s. Therefore, he was entitled to be in the flat also. Miss C expected her partner to change, but he hadn’t. Miss C began to drink heavily and had left her child with another resident in the low level support refuge for 1 and ½ days. The Police and Social Services had been called and her child is now in foster care. Miss C is working to regain custody of her child. Miss C gave background to her childhood that she had been treated differently to her siblings as her mum felt she was very like her father and had been controlling towards Miss C. Miss C had had a controlling parent and then a controlling partner. Miss C advised that she wants her own home with her child, a job and a normal life.”

“Miss B comes from a different county. She had been with her ex partner for two years and had starting taking drugs, socially to begin with and then it became an addiction. She was currently on a methadone programme. She had started to take drugs when a close friend had been found dead. Her ex partner was very controlling and violent. Miss B’s mother had taken her child from her when she began taking drugs. The ex partner would provide the drugs. Miss B confirmed that the Police had been called 13 times regarding her ex partner’s violence towards her and eventually they came out again when he was abusing her in the street and witnesses had called the Police. The ex partner was given a 28 day ban from making contact with her, but he still made contact. Due to the fact that Miss B has a property in another county she cannot go on the housing list in Northampton unless she gives up this property; Miss B advised that by doing this she would be making herself intentionally homeless. The Support Worker at the Refuge is assisting regarding housing

needs. Miss B wants to live with her son and be completely free from drugs.”

2.3 EMMAUS, CARLTON VILLAGE

- 2.3.1 Councillor Cathrine Russell, Chair, Councillor Sally Beardsworth, together with Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer, visited a Emmaus Village Carlton, on Monday 13 August 2018.
- 2.3.2 The site visit met with the Chief Community Officer and the Support Manager and had a tour of the site also.
- 2.3.3 Emmaus is an international charity with 300 communities worldwide; of which 29 are in the UK. The first Emmaus community in the UK is the one based in Cambridge. Emmaus Carlton Village, has 42 beds with 4 solidarity beds. All rooms have beds, wardrobe, bedside cabinet, TV and Wifi. Wifi is available throughout the site.
- 2.3.5 Emmaus Village Carlton, is a charity with a Board of Trustees who are very active. Since 2001 they have raised over £3.5 million for capital projects. Currently their turnover is almost £1.2 million.
- 2.3.6 Residents to Emmaus communities are known as companions; upon arrive they sign a licence agreement that they will be housed and will work in the Social Enterprise.
- 2.3.7 Emmaus Village Carlton, is the one of the largest Emmaus communities in the UK. There are three accommodation blocks, the majority have an en-suite. Companions have use of a shared laundry room, IT suite and communal lounge, dining room, gym and games room comprising pool table, darts and table tennis.
- 2.3.8 Companions to Emmaus Village Carlton, are either self-referred or referred by an Agency. Their needs are looked at to ascertain whether they can be supported. Carlton is a remote location and may not be suitable to all prospective companions. Individuals with complex mental health needs, and ongoing drink or alcohol addictions cannot be supported at Emmaus Village Carlton.
- 2.3.9 The community has one Support Manager and two Support Workers. The licence agreement requires companions to be clear of alcohol for the first 28 days to ascertain whether there is a dependency issue. Companions should be clear of illegal drugs or psychoactive substances at all times and will be randomly drugs tested to ensure this. There does not have to be geographical connections for individuals to be considered for staying at the community. The community can accommodate both men and women. Their stay is not time limited; it is a safe place for people to move on from. Ex-Offenders

with low need can be referred to Emmaus.

2.3.10 Emmaus Village Carlton, has a medical centre that it refers to. It is located around 15/20 minutes' walk away but support workers will often drive companions to the centre or pay for public transport.

2.3.11 Upon arrival companions sign off benefits, other than housing benefit. They receive an allowance of £42 a week. Money is also put aside for them in a holiday fund and a leaving fund.

2.3.12 Children can visit companions on the site. Relevant safeguarding checks take place.

2.3.13 The village has a stock of toiletries and companions can purchase these for 50p an item.

2.3.14 Companions undertake training whilst residing at the village including:

- Level 2 warehouse training
- Forklift training
- Bike repair
- Food hygiene

The aim is to provide a majority of training that is accredited. Emmaus Village Carlton also offers volunteering opportunities.

2.3.15 Companions receive three meals a day. Breakfast is provided for them, which they make themselves, consisting of toast and cereals. A mixed hot and cold lunch is provided along with a hot evening meal. A healthy diet is provided. The community has recently begun to grow its own vegetables. The community is also in dialogue with a bee keeper regarding a bee hive for the site.

2.3.16 Contact is maintained with companions that move on from the community. There have been 10 positive moves in the last 12 months. The aim of the charity is to give companions a purpose, confidence, self-respect, somewhere to live, and it was highlighted that this ethos really works.

2.3.17 People can donate to the community, such as furniture, clothes, toys, bikes, clocks etc. The community can collect furniture donations free of charge but there is a small charge for delivery.

2.3.18 The social enterprise is open to the public six days a week, being closed on Mondays.

2.4 MANCHESTER

- 2.4.1 The Deputy Chair will aim to visit Manchester over the next few months and report her findings to a future meeting.

2.5 BRIDGE PROJECTS

- 2.5.1 Councillors Cathrine Russell, Sally Beardsworth, Jane Birch and Ian Bates (Co-Optee_ visited the Bridge Project on 3 September 2018. They met with the Manager of the Project and various “Members”.
- 2.5.2 This resource is aimed at people who are attempting to or have overcome addictions around drugs and alcohol and who consider they could possibly be ready to look for a change in their lifestyle and hopefully find a job and if need be a permanent home.
- 2.5.3 The Site visit was shown around the facility by Vince Carroll who heads up the Bridge in Northampton. The Site Visit arrived at lunchtime and there were a number of “members” enjoying lunch and socialising with friends. The Manager explained that when they accept someone to come onto their programme, they are given a contract to which they commit to; which allows them to use the facilities at the Bridge; have 1:1 meetings with professional staff who are available, use the gym, and various other services such as aromatherapy and hair dressing. The Bridge provides hot meals every day to Members who are attending as well as an IT suite as well as opportunities for Members to relax in their Games Room, gym and well equipped Music Room.
- 2.5.4 Members are required to sign in using a swipe card and in this way their attendance is monitored which can sometimes indicate that a Member is having difficulty in maintaining regular trips to the Bridge and participating in sessions and group work.
- 2.5.5 Staff sometimes visit Members at home to assess whether or not there are difficulties and whether they need additional support.
- 2.5.6 The Site Visit felt that Vince’s commitment and understanding of the Members’ needs and complex situations is impressive and the concept which drives the Bridge has been applied to a number of different resources around the county. In Northamptonshire at any one time there can be up to 800 Members in the different resources which follow the Bridge Programme.
- 2.5.7 Members are in control and in charge of their programme at the Bridge and as long as they are prepared to co operate and work within basic principles of cleanliness, respect, honesty and leave their substance issues at home.

3 CONCLUSIONS

3.1 From the site visits undertaken, it was concluded that:

- The Hope Centre has good working relations with a number of organisations.
- The majority of clients to the Hope Centre have mental health issues.
- The Hope Centre is extremely well used but the Scrutiny Panel was concerned that there is a lack of provision for homeless people during the hours of 1pm and 9pm when the Night Shelter opens.
- The Scrutiny Panel, from its visit to a Women's Refuge, noted that often women who come to the refuge are "drawn to a bad boy". There is a real need for early prevention and the Scrutiny Panel welcomed the support and advice given to the women by the Support Workers.
- The Scrutiny Panel felt that there is not enough bed space in accommodation in the town for homeless women. From the evidence provided to it, the Scrutiny Panel felt that there are a lot of women who are "hidden homeless".
- There is a need for more Refuges, for both men and women, across the country as a whole.
- The Scrutiny Panel was pleased to be able to speak with both clients using the Hope Centre and two women currently staying in a Refuge.
- From its site visits, the Scrutiny Panel further concluded that there is a lack of supported temporary accommodation locally, similar to that offered by Emmaus.
- The Emmaus village is extremely well run and provided a welcoming environment. The aim of the village is to give companions self-respect, something to do, somewhere to live, and it was highlighted that this ethos really works.
- The Scrutiny Panel welcomed the work undertaken by the Bridge Project and noted the value that it provided to its Members.

4 RECOMMENDATION

4.1 That the information provided in this briefing note informs the evidence base of this Scrutiny Review.

Author: Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer, on behalf of Councillor Cathrine Russell, Chair, Scrutiny Panel 3 – Homelessness and Rough Sleepers

7 September 2018



NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

SCRUTINY PANEL 3

HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPERS

8 NOVEMBER 2018

BRIEFING NOTE: RELEVANT LEGISLATION

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At its inaugural scoping meeting, Scrutiny Panel 3 (Homelessness and Rough Sleepers) agreed that it would receive details of relevant legislation to inform its evidence base.
- 1.2 In setting its scope (terms of reference), the Scrutiny Panel suggested that relevant legislation includes:
 - Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
 - The Health and Social Care Act 2012
- 1.3 In addition, a summary of the homelessness legislation and the duties, powers and obligations on housing authorities and others towards people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness as provided by Central Government is provided for the Scrutiny Panel.

2 RELEVANT LEGISLATION

2.1 Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

- 2.1.1 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 became an Act on 27 April 2017. It adds two new duties to the original statutory rehousing duty:

Duty to prevent homelessness

Duty to relieve homelessness (further explained in paragraph 2.1.2)

- 2.1.2 Homelesslink has summarised the key measures in the Act that include:

- *“An extension of the period during which an authority should treat someone as threatened with homelessness from 28 to 56 days, and clarification of the action an authority should take when someone applies for assistance having been served with a section 8 (1) or section 21 (2)*

notice. These provisions represent a shift in focus to early intervention, and aim to encourage local housing authorities to act quickly and proactively, addressing some concerns that some previously only intervened at crisis point.

- *A new duty to prevent homelessness for all eligible applicants threatened with homelessness, regardless of priority need. This extends the help available to people not in priority need, with local housing authorities supporting them to either stay in their accommodation or help them find somewhere to live and should mean fewer households reach a crisis situation.*
- *A new duty to relieve homelessness for all eligible homeless applicants, regardless of priority need. This help could be, for example, the provision of a rent deposit or debt advice. Those who have a priority need will be provided with interim accommodation whilst the Local Housing Authority carries out the reasonable steps.*
- *A new duty on public services to notify a local authority if they come into contact with someone they think may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. It is hoped that this measure will ensure that a person's housing situation is considered when they come into contact with wider public services, and encourage public services to build strong relationships based on local need and circumstances.”*

2.1.3 A copy of the Act can be [located](#).

2.2 The Health and Social Care Act 2012

2.2.1 The LGA has summarised the Act:

The Act is in 12 parts: Part 1 sets out a framework which confers NHS functions directly on the organisations responsible for exercising those functions, while retaining a general duty on the SoS for Health (SoS) to promote a comprehensive health service. It also gives local government a new set of duties to protect and improve public health. Part 1 also establishes a new non-departmental public body, the NHS Commissioning Board (NHSCB), makes provision for the establishment of Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs), contains measures relating to the abolition of Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs) and Primary Care Trusts (PCTs), and amends the Mental Health Act 1983 and provisions relating to emergency preparedness and pharmaceutical services expenditure.

Part 2 *contains provisions relating to the public health service, including the abolition of the Health Protection Agency (HPA), functions in relation to biological substances and radiation protection, the repeal of the AIDS (Control) Act 1987, and co-operation with bodies exercising functions in relation to public health.*

Part 3 *sets out provisions for regulation of health and adult care services in England and defines the role of Monitor, the sector regulator.*

Part 4 amends Chapter 5 of Part 2 of the NHS Act 2006, which makes provision for NHS foundation trusts, removing various restrictions on foundation trusts and their authorisation, removing NHS trusts as a provider model (ie preventing foundation trusts from being returned to NHS trust status) and setting out Monitor's role in relation to arrangements in respect of failing trusts. It also sets out new arrangements for the governance, financing and accounting of foundation trusts.

Part 5 provides for the creation of a new national body, Healthwatch England (HWE), to be established as a statutory committee within the Care Quality Commission (CQC). It also makes provision about Local Healthwatch (LH) organisations in each local authority area. Part 5 also deals with the health scrutiny functions of local authorities and makes provision for the establishment of health and wellbeing boards (HWBs) in each upper tier local authority area, setting out their role. It also provides for foundation trusts and CCGs to be designated as Care Trusts and removes certain restrictions on those to whom the Health Service Ombudsman can report.

Part 6 amends the NHS Act in relation to medical, dental, ophthalmic and pharmaceutical services following the creation of the NHSCB, CCGs and the public health service.

Part 7 makes changes to the regulation of health and social care workers, abolishing the General Social Care Council (GSCC) and transferring some of its functions to the Health Professions Council (HPC). It also abolishes the Office of the Health Professions Adjudicator (OHPA).

Part 8 re-establishes the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) as a non-departmental public body and sets out aspects of its role.

Part 9 relates to the publication of information standards and the collection of information from providers of health and social care services.

Part 10 abolishes the Alcohol Education and Research Council, the Appointments Commission, the National Information Governance Board for Health and Social Care, the National Patient Safety Agency and the NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement.

Part 11 contains miscellaneous provisions, including duties for bodies to co-operate, arrangements with devolved authorities, supervised community treatment and transfer schemes.

Part 12 covers technical matters, including regulatory powers and commencement matters.

2.2.2 A copy of the full Act can be [located](#).

2.3 Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities

2.3.1 Central Government has provided a summary of the homelessness legislation and the duties, powers and obligations on housing authorities and others towards people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. It does not form part of the statutory code of guidance.

“The homelessness legislation

The primary homelessness legislation – that is, [Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996](#) – provides the statutory under-pinning for action to prevent homelessness and provide assistance to people threatened with or actually homeless.

In 2002, the government amended the homelessness legislation through the [Homelessness Act 2002](#) and the [Homelessness \(Priority Need for Accommodation\) \(England\) Order 2002](#) to:

1. *(a) ensure a more strategic approach to tackling and preventing homelessness, in particular by requiring a homelessness strategy for every housing authority district; and*
2. *(b) strengthen the assistance available to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness by extending the priority need categories to homeless 16 and 17 year olds; care leavers aged 18, 19 and 20; people who are vulnerable as a result of time spent in care, the armed forces, prison or custody, and people who are vulnerable because they have fled their home because of violence.*

The [Homelessness Reduction Act 2017](#) significantly reformed England’s homelessness legislation by placing duties on local authorities to intervene at earlier stages to prevent homelessness in their areas. It also requires housing authorities to provide homelessness services to all those affected, not just those who have ‘priority need’. These include:

- (a) an enhanced prevention duty extending the period a household is threatened with homelessness from 28 days to 56 days, meaning that housing authorities are required to work with people to prevent homelessness at an earlier stage; and*
- (b) a new duty for those who are already homeless so that housing authorities will support households for 56 days to relieve their homelessness by helping them to secure accommodation.*

Homelessness review and strategy

Under the [Homelessness Act 2002](#), all housing authorities must have in place a homelessness strategy based on a review of all forms of homelessness in their

district. The strategy must be renewed at least every 5 years. The social services authority must provide reasonable assistance.

The strategy must set out the authority's plans for the prevention of homelessness and for securing that sufficient accommodation and support are or will be available for people who become homeless or who are at risk of becoming so.

Duty to refer

The [Homelessness Reduction Act 2017](#) introduced a duty on certain public authorities to refer service users who they think may be homeless or threatened with homelessness to a housing authority. The service user must give consent, and can choose which authority to be referred to. The housing authority should incorporate the duty to refer into their homelessness strategy and establish effective partnerships and working arrangements with agencies to facilitate appropriate referrals.

Duty to provide advisory services

The housing authority has a duty to provide advice and information about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness and the rights of homeless people or those at risk of homelessness, as well as the help that is available from the housing authority or others and how to access that help. The service should be designed with certain listed vulnerable groups in mind and authorities can provide it themselves or arrange for other agencies to do it on their behalf.

Applications and inquiries

Housing authorities must give proper consideration to all applications for housing assistance, and if they have reason to believe that an applicant may be homeless or threatened with homelessness, they must make inquiries to see whether they owe them any duty under [Part 7 of the 1996 Act](#). This assessment process is important in enabling housing authorities to identify the assistance which an applicant may need, either to prevent them from becoming homeless, or to help them to find another home. In each case, the authority will need to first decide whether the applicant is eligible for assistance and threatened with or actually homeless. Certain applicants who are 'persons from abroad' are not eligible for any assistance under Part 7 except free advice and information about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness.

Broadly speaking, a person is threatened with homelessness if they are likely to become homeless within 56 days. An applicant who has been served with valid notice under [section 21 of the Housing Act 1988](#) to end their assured shorthold tenancy is also threatened with homelessness, if the notice has expired or will expire within 56 days and is served in respect of the only accommodation that is available for them to occupy.

An applicant is to be considered homeless if they do not have accommodation that they have a legal right to occupy, which is accessible and physically available to them (and their household) and which it would be reasonable for them to continue to live in.

Assessments and personalised housing plans

Housing authorities have a duty to carry out an assessment in all cases where an eligible applicant is homeless or threatened with homelessness. This will identify what has caused the homelessness or threat of homelessness, the housing needs of the applicant and any support they need in order to be able to secure and retain accommodation. Following this assessment, the housing authority must work with the person to develop a personalised housing plan which will include actions (or 'reasonable steps') to be taken by the authority and the applicant to try and prevent or relieve homelessness.

Prevention duty

Housing authorities have a duty to take reasonable steps to help prevent any eligible person (regardless of priority need status, intentionality and whether they have a local connection) who is threatened with homelessness from becoming homeless. This means either helping them to stay in their current accommodation or helping them to find a new place to live before they become actually homeless. The prevention duty continues for 56 days unless it is brought to an end by an event such as accommodation being secured for the person, or by their becoming homeless.

Relief duty

If the applicant is already homeless, or becomes homeless despite activity during the prevention stage, the reasonable steps will be focused on helping the applicant to secure accommodation. This relief duty lasts for 56 days unless ended in another way. If the housing authority has reason to believe a homeless applicant may be eligible for assistance and have a priority need they must be provided with interim accommodation.

Main housing duty

If homelessness is not successfully prevented or relieved, a housing authority will owe the main housing duty to applicants who are eligible, have a priority need for accommodation and are not homeless intentionally. Certain categories of household, such as pregnant women, families with children, and households that are homeless due to an emergency such as a fire or flood, have priority need if homeless. Other groups may be assessed as having priority need because they are vulnerable as a result of old age, mental ill health, physical disability, having been in prison or care or as a result of becoming homeless due to domestic abuse.

Under the main housing duty, housing authorities must ensure that suitable accommodation is available for the applicant and their household until the duty is brought to an end, usually through the offer of a settled home. The duty can also be brought to an end for other reasons, such as the applicant turning down a suitable offer of temporary accommodation or because they are no longer eligible for assistance. A suitable offer of a settled home (whether accepted or refused by the applicant) which would bring the main housing duty to an end includes an offer of a suitable secure or introductory tenancy with a local authority, an offer of accommodation through a private registered provider (also known as a housing association) or the offer of a suitable tenancy for at least 12 months from a private landlord made by arrangement with the local authority.

Suitable accommodation

Housing authorities have various powers and duties to secure accommodation for homeless applicants, either on an interim basis, to prevent or relieve homelessness, to meet the main housing duty or as a settled home. Accommodation must always be 'suitable' and there are particular standards set when private rented accommodation is secured for households which have priority need.

Under the [Homelessness \(Suitability of Accommodation\) \(England\) Order 2003](#), bed and breakfast accommodation is not considered suitable for families with children and households that include a pregnant woman, except where there is no other accommodation available, and then only for a maximum of 6 weeks. The Secretary of State considers that bed and breakfast accommodation is unsuitable for 16 and 17 year olds.

Intentional homelessness

A person would be homeless intentionally where homelessness was the consequence of a deliberate action or omission by that person. A deliberate act might be a decision to leave the previous accommodation even though it would have been reasonable for the person (and everyone in the person's household) to continue to live there. A deliberate omission might be non-payment of rent that led to rent arrears and eviction despite the rent being affordable.

Where people have a priority need but are intentionally homeless the housing authority must provide advice and assistance to help them find accommodation for themselves and secure suitable accommodation for them for a period that will give them a reasonable chance of doing so.

If, despite this assistance, homelessness persists, any children in the household could be in need under the [Children Act 1989](#), and the family should be referred (with consent) to the children's social services authority.

Local connection and referrals to another authority

Broadly speaking, for the purpose of the homelessness legislation, people may have a local connection with a district because of residence, employment or family associations in the district, or because of special circumstances. (There are exceptions, for example, residence in a district while serving a prison sentence there does not establish a local connection.) Where applicants meet the criteria for the relief duty or for the main housing duty, and the authority considers that the applicant does not have a local connection with the district but does have one somewhere else, the housing authority dealing with the application can ask the housing authority in that other district to take responsibility for the case. However, applicants cannot be referred to another housing authority if they, or any member of their household, would be at risk of violence in the district of the other authority.

The definition of a 'local connection' for young people leaving care was amended by the [Homelessness Reduction Act 2017](#) so that a young homeless care leaver has a local connection to the area of the local authority that looked after them. Additional provision is made for care leavers who have been placed in accommodation, under [section 22A of the Children Act 1989](#), in a different district to that of the children's services authority that owes them leaving care duties. If they have lived in the other district for at least 2 years, including some time before they turned 16, they will also have a local connection with that district until they are 21.

Reviews and appeals

Housing authorities must provide written notifications to applicants when they reach certain decisions about their case, and the reasons behind any decisions that are against the applicant's interests. Applicants can ask the housing authority to review most aspects of their decisions, and, if still dissatisfied, can appeal to the county court on a point of law.

Housing authorities have the power to accommodate applicants pending a review or appeal to the county court. When an applicant who is being provided with interim accommodation requests a review of the suitability of accommodation offered to end the relief duty, the authority has a duty to continue to accommodate them pending a review."

3 RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 That the information provided in this briefing note informs the evidence base of this Scrutiny Review.

Author: Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer, on behalf of Councillor Cathrine Russell, Chair, Scrutiny Panel 3 – Homelessness and Rough Sleepers

17 July 2018



NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

SCRUTINY PANEL 3

HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPERS

8 NOVEMBER 2018

BRIEFING NOTE: BEST PRACTICE

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At its inaugural scoping meeting, Scrutiny Panel 3 (Homelessness and Rough Sleepers) agreed that it would receive details of best practice to inform its evidence base.
- 1.2 A number of organisations have identified best practice and Good Practice Guides have been published.

2 GOOD PRACTICE

2.1 *SHELTER - Homelessness: Early Identification and Prevention - A Good Practice Guide*

- 2.1.1 It is reported that this Good Practice Guide aims to assist local authorities and local agencies in their ability to identify people who are at risk of becoming homeless. The guide highlights current good practice examples of how to identify these vulnerable groups and individuals, and offer support to prevent homelessness occurring.
- 2.1.2 The Guide details a number of groups that are at a greater risk of homelessness and include:

- young people
- care leavers
- ex-offenders
- people with mental health problems
- refugees
- Gypsies and Travellers (housed and on sites)
- people with drug or alcohol addictions n people leaving hospital
- ex-members of the armed forces
-

2.1.3 The Guide includes examples of Good Practice:

Good practice example: Your Homes Newcastle

Newcastle City Council (NCC) has developed a Protocol for Preventing Repeat Homelessness and Evictions, which is an agreement between the Strategic Housing Service, social services and Your Homes Newcastle (YHN), who manage council homes on behalf of NCC.

The protocol enables staff at YHN to identify vulnerable tenants prior to the start of a tenancy. It sets out a procedure for assessing individual housing and support needs, and for working with vulnerable tenants and the relevant external support agencies to promote tenancy sustainment. The protocol illustrates the role each agency has in supporting vulnerable tenants and ways in which joint working can be implemented if problems occur.

The procedure is divided into three sections:

part one – action to be taken prior to the start of the tenancy

part two – action to be taken during the tenancy

part three – action to prevent eviction and the loss of accommodation.

The first step in part one of the procedure, the main element concerning prevention, involves identifying those applicants who may be vulnerable or at risk of homelessness. The protocol identifies the following groups of potentially vulnerable people:

households that the NCC has accepted a full duty to house as homeless in the previous two years

people with a social worker, community psychiatric nurse, mental health worker or drug/ alcohol support worker

people with a housing support worker or who are leaving housing funded by Supporting People

individuals with a probation officer or Youth Offending Team worker

refugees

people leaving hospital, prison, care or the armed forces n people with known drug or alcohol problems

people whose learning difficulties or physical or sensory impairment make them vulnerable

older people

anyone subject to multi-agency public protection arrangements.

During step one, support workers who are already involved with the individual are contacted for information that will assist in developing a support plan. Any existing housing or support plans should be shared.

Where an individual is not involved with an external agency, and it is believed that additional support might be required, their case will be referred to the in-house advice and support team.

Where there are concerns about a person's ability to maintain a tenancy, step two of the procedure is enacted. This means arranging a case meeting with the applicant, agencies involved with the applicant and other agencies who may be able to provide information and support. A support plan is created and an agreement put in place to determine the responsibilities of each agency, the timescale for support and a mechanism for maintaining contact.

The good practice principles set out in this protocol enable YHN staff to conduct a thorough assessment of individual needs and identify vulnerability prior to the tenancy commencing, minimising the chances of the tenancy breaking down. The next stage is to ensure that it is embedded in all practice areas and monitoring procedures. The protocol will be included in the Council's new allocations policy and management information system.

'The protocol has been designed to provide longer term, more meaningful homelessness prevention. It aims to foster better joint working within the local authority and create much needed organisational culture change.' Neil Munslow, Housing Services Manager, NCC'

Good practice example: West Berkshire Vulnerable People Protocol

West Berkshire Council's Vulnerable People Protocol (VPP) is a proactive approach to the identification, assessment and support of people who are, or who may become, vulnerable to losing their tenancies because of unmet support needs. It is a multi-agency protocol led by Sovereign Housing Association, West Berkshire Council (housing operations, social services and Housing Benefit teams) and Two Saints Housing Association.

The protocol and its associated training package for staff and service users presents tools and available services and resources in West Berkshire to ensure that vulnerable people receive timely information, advice and support. It uses a broad definition of vulnerability, recognising that it can occur at different stages in life, whether episodic and recurring, or ongoing and increasing over time. Indicators, or points at which vulnerability can occur, are listed as being:

hospitalisation and periods following discharge from hospital or other institutional care

periods of sustained illness at home

change from supported accommodation to independent living

evidence of neighbour harassment or abuse towards the individual or household n evidence of antisocial behaviour by the individual or household n

rent arrears or other debt problems n repeat homelessness

during and following substance abuse.

The VPP staff training pack takes these indicators further by including, for example, episodes of stress or mental ill health, chaotic lifestyles, loss of income and bereavement as points of vulnerability. The protocol therefore requires that consideration should be given to potential vulnerability at all points of contact with residents, and potential residents, within the district. These points of contact include:

applications for housing

home visits

ad hoc visits, eg because of rent arrears n programmes of tenancy

visits/audits n supported move to new housing n social/medical panels

key life-cycle events such as bereavement or relationship breakdown

issue of notice of eviction.

The training pack has been designed to enable frontline staff to understand potential vulnerability and learn how to respond to it, make an assessment, and review, evaluate and track the VPP. Once vulnerability and support needs have been identified, support may be provided by any agency involved, and will be determined by the pre-tenancy meeting, other contact between the partner agencies, or through a case conference. ‘

The key to preventing homelessness is timely information and support. The training for professionals should provide frontline staff with a range of skills, tools and information to this end.’

Jon Cox, Two Saints Housing Association

Good practice example: housing worker, Plymouth Children’s Service

The development of a specific homelessness prevention role, through the introduction of a housing worker within the Children’s Service in Plymouth, is based upon a similar model of early identification and homelessness prevention in Colchester.

The primary role of the housing worker will be to pick up housing casework from social workers and social work assistants who are concerned about the families with whom they are working, and intervene as early as possible.

The introduction of a housing worker within social services aims to generate greater knowledge and understanding of the roles of both social services and the housing department, and improve their communication with each other. An increased awareness among social workers of housing-related issues will ensure that timely referrals can be made to the housing worker, who will:

*refer families to the housing officer
provide money and budgeting advice to families
maximise income through benefits advice
work with the housing officer to resolve issues relating to rent arrears
assess family support needs
assist with applications for private housing.*

By introducing this specific role it is hoped that social workers, housing officers and the housing worker can work together to identify problems at the earliest opportunity. Early intervention (ie before housing or financial problems become too serious) will enable the housing worker to work effectively and efficiently with the Council's housing advisers, outreach workers, Welfare Benefits advisers, housing officers, Housing Benefit team and floating support staff to resolve problems, prevent family breakdown and homelessness, and promote tenancy sustainment through continuity of support."

Good practice example: tenancy tracker, Coast and Country Housing

Coast and Country Housing (C&CH) are able to provide an in-house Housing Benefit claim verification service. While advisers provide prospective tenants with assistance and support, tenants' benefit claims are able to be verified and dealt with within the organisation, making the process quicker and easier for the tenants. Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council covers a wide geographical area, which can be a barrier to people on low incomes attempting to make benefit claims. Thus the provision of local in-house Housing Benefit services removes some of the barriers that people face in making their claims.

All new tenancies are monitored through the tenancy tracker procedure. The purpose of this procedure is to provide effective management of the rent accounts of new tenants up to the first 13 weeks. This ensures that:

*new tenants have a means of paying rent that is suitable to their needs and circumstances
tenants who are experiencing difficulties are referred to advice and support agencies and floating support services where this is appropriate
Housing Benefit claims have been processed correctly and benefit is paid, and
rent payments are being made.*

Where difficulties with a Housing Benefit claim occur, the tenancy tracker procedure highlights this and provides a system for joint working between the account's advisers and housing advisers. C&CH has a small team that deals with benefit revisions and appeals, and provides representation and support for clients at independent appeal tribunals."

Good practice example: 'fix it' fund

Bournemouth Borough Council set up this fund in 2003. It has been used at the discretion of housing officers as a tool to prevent homelessness by giving a 'one-off' payment to the tenant. Examples include:

paying off arrears where it is not deemed to be the tenant's fault that they are in financial trouble, and where it would prove substantially more expensive to 'pick up' a family as homeless after eviction

paying off damage costs demanded by a landlord where it is deemed not to be the tenant's fault

paying landlords a proportion of 'rent in advance' payments, where it is deemed that the tenant cannot access sufficient funds elsewhere.

Good practice example: Southern Focus Trust Housing Advice Centre

Southern Focus Trust Housing Advice Centre (SFTHAC) provides independent advice on housing, benefits and debt in the Portsmouth Area. The centre has a Community Legal Service quality mark.

Portsmouth City Council has been concerned about the number of repeat homelessness cases they have dealt with from the private sector. In response they have funded 24 hours of casework per week from SFTHAC for private sector tenants and owner-occupiers who are at risk of eviction and homelessness, usually as a result of rent or mortgage arrears. SFTHAC provides a holistic service that includes benefits and debt counselling, as well as help with housing.

The Council has exclusive referral rights to four appointments per week, and by referring directly to SFTHAC it can be sure the service user is getting the appropriate assistance. SFTHAC keeps the Council informed of the progress in each case. It refers the client back to the Council if it is not possible to keep the client's home, which helps both the client and the Council ensure that a homelessness application is carried out quickly and efficiently. "

'[SFTHAC] knew my rights and managed to help me quickly.'

Service user - Shelter questionnaire. '

'[Without SFTHAC] I would have been more stressed, and would not have known what to do.'

Service user - Shelter questionnaire.

Good practice example: Bournemouth Housing Advice Service

Bournemouth Housing Advice Service (BHAS) was established in 2001. The service is delivered by Shelter in partnership with Bournemouth Borough Council and Bournemouth Housing Forum. The Council funds two workers who concentrate on preventative advice and helping people to keep their home. Referrals come from a variety of different sources – advice agencies, the local authority, friends and family, and self-referrals. The most common problems that people present with are rent arrears, Housing Benefit problems, disrepair and possession proceedings.

In 2003, the service launched the BHAS Network to ensure that service users can access appropriate advice from other agencies. Sixty-eight member agencies are listed in the BHAS Network Directory, which contains information and contact details about each member. Members include organisations such as Connexions and various support agencies. This directory is distributed to all network members to ensure that each member agency has a detailed knowledge of the services offered by other agencies and can initiate effective referrals.

All members are invited to attend wider network meetings. These meetings provide an opportunity to share successes and address the challenges that agencies dealing with housing advice face. The network aims to ensure that, regardless of which agency a service user approaches, they are given the right information or referred on to the right agency. All agencies in the network display a BHAS logo to highlight that housing advice is available.

BHAS also provides training sessions to network members. These sessions are well attended and cover a variety of topics, including homelessness and the rights of vulnerable people and helping with claims for Housing Benefit. The training helps member organisations to provide better direct advice and advocacy, and also to know when it is appropriate to make a referral.”

‘Last year 67 per cent of our clients were homeless or likely to become homeless within 28 days. This year the figure has reduced to 45 per cent, which means that we are more effective at reducing homelessness. This seems to be because more people know about our service, and people with housing issues are able to access our service at an earlier stage.’

Bournemouth Housing Advice Service Review, 2005.

‘We have attended various training days and all have been very relevant to our work and given us more confidence when dealing with housing enquiries.’

Network member.

Good practice example: advice centre for black and minority ethnic groups, Shelter Housing Advice and Support Centre, Stratford, London

This project aims to improve access to housing advice for black and ethnic minority groups by working with local communities. It is targeted at people living in the London Boroughs of Newham, Tower Hamlets and Hackney.

The Shelter project ensures that advice is available in locations such as community centres, as well as at the project base in Stratford. The service is heavily advertised through the local press and community organisations, as well as by services such as Connexions. Delivering advice in the community not only makes it easier to access, but also increases people's trust and confidence in the services being offered. The project employs multi-lingual housing advisers and can access a translation service for languages not offered directly.

The project offers drop-in appointments at the centre in Stratford, as well as providing outreach advice at locations such as community centres where there are crèches and other support services.

The aim of the project is that it will reach individuals from black and other minority ethnic groups long before they are threatened with homelessness. By providing advice that is timely, independent and culturally sensitive, the project hopes to make it easier for individuals to find and keep a decent home."

Good practice example: St Basils

"St Basils is a Birmingham-based organisation that offers a range of housing and support to local young people. One of its initiatives is the Schools Training and Mentoring Project (STaMP). As part of the project, sessions giving information about housing and homelessness from a local perspective are run in local secondary schools and other youth work settings. They are interactive and encourage young people to discuss issues and ask questions. Each session is co-facilitated by a peer educator. The peer educators are young people aged 16 to 25, mainly ex-service users of St Basils. They have experience of homelessness and are able to give a real-life account of their knowledge of housing need.

As the project has developed, it has been possible to put into place a peer-mentoring service. The mentors are peer educators who have become interested in extending their role. They are trained to an approved standard by St Basils, and offer one-to-one support to those young people who are judged to be most at risk from leaving home in an unplanned way. As well as

offering holistic support around issues such as mental health, sexual health and family relationships, they can offer informed advice about housing and homelessness issues. If necessary, they can refer families or individuals to St Basils' counselling, family mediation or housing advice services. Each mentor supports one or two service users, and a mentoring worker supports the mentors.

If a peer mentor feels that more specific housing advice or advocacy is needed, they can refer the individual to St Basils Links Housing Advice Service. This provides age-specific advice to young people in the Birmingham area and employs knowledgeable workers who are aware of the specific needs of their client group. The peer-mentoring scheme provides a bridge to the advice service, ensuring that some of the most hard-to-reach young people are given effective support.”

Good practice example: Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council Homelessness Prevention Floating Support Service

This service is funded through Supporting People and is run by the Regeneration, Housing and Neighbourhoods Department. The scheme is cross tenure, providing services for homeowners and private tenants, as well as people with RSLs. A team of three people provides advice and support for up to 30 individuals and families who are seen as being vulnerable to homelessness. The team has a rolling programme, so as a particular case ends it is able to give more in-depth support to new cases. Most tenants use the service for six months, but some use it for up to 18 months. Help offered includes:

liaising with landlords

signposting and assisting with debt-counselling and budgeting skills

liaising with mortgage companies, banks, Housing Benefit and the benefits agency in order to optimise income

facilitating dispute resolution and mediation

completing benefit forms

liaising with social services n resettlement activities.

Referrals come mainly from the housing needs department, but they also come from a variety of other sources: mental health teams, local housing associations, and the local criminal justice and learning disabilities teams are just a few examples. The service is available to households who are at risk of homelessness or who simply need some extra support, as well as those who have recently been homeless. The team ensures that their work is well publicised among local agencies so that appropriate referrals can be made. They also refer onto other agencies when they feel that they do not have the expertise needed, or that help from another source would be beneficial.

Once a referral has been made, a support worker will visit the household to discuss the level of support needed. If the individual or family is accepted onto the scheme, a tailor-made support plan will be drawn up. The plan is reviewed on a regular basis to take account of changing needs.

'If the client is unfamiliar with the area we would ... get them maps, ... onto a doctors list, ... a dentist, help them to apply to schools ... and absolutely anything else that could be needed.'

Support worker.

Good practice example: Julian Housing Support

“Julian Housing Support (JHS) is a supported housing charity based in Norfolk that works to prevent homelessness by providing services for people with mental health problems. It is jointly funded by Supporting People and health and social services. JHS works in partnership with Norfolk Social Services, Norfolk Primary Care Trust and the major housing providers in the county. It is through this partnership approach that JHS has been able to develop a wide range of housing choices and options for support.

JHS are alerted to individuals who are at risk of homelessness by a range of statutory and voluntary services. Referrals are accepted from mental health social workers, community mental health teams, primary care link workers and, in some circumstances, housing providers. The early identification and thorough assessment of housing-related problems and support needs, combined with multi-agency working, ensures that homelessness can be prevented long before people need to make a homelessness application.

JHS services include the following.

A floating support service in every district and for people in any tenure. Support can be short- or long-term, and more or less intensive, depending upon a person's needs.

A Hospital Housing Link scheme (attached to every psychiatric acute ward across the county), which provides housing and benefits advice, supporting over 400 people per year. Housing Link workers visit inpatients with housing problems and patients are supported either to keep their existing homes or to find alternative suitable accommodation before they are discharged from hospital.

An outreach service supporting people in their own homes. Outreach workers attend regular meetings with mental health workers and are involved in the care-planning process to decide on the housing and health assistance that their clients need.

An outreach service that is a flexible model of care offered to people who find it hard to access services because of their mental health problems.

A supported housing scheme and resettlement programme for clients who require additional support before moving onto independent living.

JHS has been described by organisations and service users as a dependable and responsive service that offers creative ways of helping people with mental health problems who are at risk of homelessness or inadequately housed. Their interventions have led to an increase in people's housing stability and an investment in their future. By helping to reduce some of the stresses related to maintaining a tenancy, deterioration in someone's mental health can be alleviated and loss of housing can be prevented. "

'I got ill and had to give up work... I couldn't afford the mortgage... I wouldn't have known what to do [without JHS] and my home would have been repossessed.'

JHS service user.

Good practice example: Shelter Inclusion Project

The Shelter Inclusion Project was set up in 2002. The project was designed to provide an alternative model to enforcement policies and residential schemes. It was developed by Shelter and Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council. The project has three key objectives:

*to reduce antisocial behaviour
to promote social inclusion and community stability
to prevent eviction and provide a route back into settled housing.*

The project works with families, couples and individuals, and its referral criteria require a 'history of antisocial behaviour'. Once people have been referred to the project they have access to a range of help and support, including:

*housing advice and advocacy
help with benefits and money management
support with addressing antisocial behaviour issues n practical assistance, eg with decorating n referral to other agencies
parenting advice and support
assistance with employment and training
direct specialist work with children and young people.*

Originally, many of the households referred to the project were subject to one or more enforcement actions linked to alleged antisocial behaviour. As work developed, cases started to be referred at an earlier stage. Initially, the majority of referrals came from the enforcement team at Rochdale Boroughwide Housing. Now more come from housing officers who refer before any enforcement action is taken.

Staff at the project feel it is much easier to work with early intervention cases because behaviour patterns are less entrenched and the situation has not reached a crisis point. In addition, because the antisocial behaviour is being picked up at an earlier stage, the community does not have to suffer the problem for as long as it might have done otherwise.

The Inclusion Project is now working with the Respect Task Force to deliver a Family Intervention Project. This project will work closely with eight to 10 families who are involved in high-level antisocial behaviour and are close to losing their homes. This means that the present project will be able to focus more closely on early intervention. “

[If it weren't for the Project] I think I'd still be where I was... as in debt wise... I don't think I'd have done as much as I have - I wouldn't have sorted my bills out... and would have ended up getting a load of fines and all that...'
Project user.

Good practice example: Newcastle City Council Hospital Discharge and Homelessness Prevention Protocol

The protocol was created by key agencies in Newcastle who work with people who might be homeless or at risk of homelessness and have been admitted to hospital. The Strategic Housing Service, which is part of the Regeneration Directorate, is leading on the development of the protocol. Its key aim is to ensure that all agencies coming into contact with people who are vulnerable to homelessness, or without accommodation on admission to hospital, help those people find appropriate housing and support before they leave hospital.

Certain key groups were identified as being at most risk of homelessness on discharge from hospital:

*people who were homeless prior to admission to hospital n people who were in an institution, such as prison
people staying in temporary accommodation
people who have arrived in Newcastle with nowhere to stay
people who had accommodation before admission to hospital but who either cannot or will not return to that accommodation
people who have accommodation that will need to be adapted following their hospital treatment.*

The protocol outlines key steps for all agencies to take to prevent homelessness. These are:

action to be taken to prevent a patient from becoming homeless on discharge from hospital, and the process to be followed on admission

*seeking help from other agencies in finding accommodation and arranging support
making information for patients and staff on display in hospital wards.*

Within each step are the key questions that staff must ask all patients, the people and agencies that should be contacted, and what to do outside of office hours. Specific guidance is provided for dealing with particularly vulnerable people, including street homeless people, people with mental health problems, patients under 18 years of age, asylum seekers and refugees, and people with drugs and/or alcohol problems.

A housing resource pack and guidance on sharing information accompany the protocol. This pack outlines the role and contact details of each of the key agencies involved. It provides further information on where to get benefits advice and lists the homelessness contacts in the region. The pack also provides guidance on helping people to obtain settled accommodation.

The introduction of a clear set of guidelines for the assessment of all patients' accommodation needs on admission to hospital has obvious benefits for patients and hospital and housing staff. “

'The development of the protocol through a working group has already helped... give people in the health service a better idea about who does what in the homelessness world.'

*Sheila Spencer, Policy Officer,
Newcastle Homelessness Prevention Project'*

Good practice example: West Yorkshire Offender Housing Protocol

The West Yorkshire Offender Housing Protocol is based on a framework developed in Tyne and Wear – the Housing and Returning Prisoners Protocol (HARP). In West Yorkshire, all five local authorities (Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield) have signed up to the protocol, which aims to provide a co-ordinated approach to the accommodation of offenders, those released from custody, and those under the supervision of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS).

It seeks to provide 'end-to-end' management of accommodation by addressing the housing needs of offenders at the following stages:

*before custody
at sentencing
on reception in prison
during custody, and
on release.*

The protocol provides a pathway to resettlement. It identifies the key responsibilities of the different agencies within that pathway and their organisational responsibilities. The protocol clearly outlines the steps that need to be taken at each stage and by whom. It promotes effective communication at all levels and commitment from all partner agencies to joint working. It involves clear information-sharing policies and decision-making processes. The protocol also seeks to address:

*local authorities' duties towards the prevention of homelessness
prison and probation commitment to effective resettlement (encompassed within the NOMS National Reducing Re-offending Delivery Plan)
how partner agencies contribute towards community safety objectives
the contribution of RSLs and the voluntary sector in housing and supporting offenders.*

Shelter has a cross-regional contract with the Prison Service to provide housing advice, increasing the links between offenders in custody and local housing and support providers. Effective partnerships across statutory, private and voluntary sector organisations are central to the protocol because the housing needs of prisoners can only be successfully met if services outside prison are fully engaged in the process.

This protocol acknowledges the links between accommodation and other support needs by integrating housing with other aspects of resettlement, including health, social networks, education and training. Housing is seen, therefore, as the foundation for other interventions and their effectiveness”

Good practice example: Bristol City Council Joint Protocol

This joint protocol outlines the statutory responsibilities of Bristol Social Services and Health (SS&H) and Neighbourhood and Housing Services (N&HS) in assessing and responding to the housing and support needs of young people who are:

‘in need’ or require protection
due to leave or have already left care, and
homeless or threatened with homelessness, vulnerable and have a priority need.

The protocol provides tools for assessment and action for both departments to take, promoting joint assessments and information sharing at all stages and defining timescales for actions. The protocol was widely promoted to staff from all sectors. It was launched in 2003 at a number of multi-agency roadshow events that involved SS&H, N&HS and representatives from the voluntary sector, youth housing and support providers.

The protocol and related workshops provided workers with the valuable opportunity to talk to each other, share their concerns and develop creative solutions to the housing problems faced by vulnerable young people.

This protocol worked well for a period of time; however, since its initial launch and promotion a number of changes have occurred. There has been a high turnover of staff in both the voluntary and statutory sectors, as well as structural changes within services in the area, which have led to difficulties in implementing the agreement. Bristol City Council has recognised these problems and will soon be leading on the revision, updating and promotion of a new version of the protocol.

`[The launch] brought various strands of social services, housing and the voluntary sector together in lively workshops... We hoped the joint assessment framework and child protection focus would drive us all (and our departments/organisations) to own the shared purpose that we could, after all, work together.'

Robin Spencer, NCH Bristol Housing Project.

Good practice example: a multi-agency protocol for young people, South Gloucestershire

“South Gloucestershire Council, Priority Youth Housing and Connexions have developed a protocol with other agencies to improve services for young vulnerable people who are homeless or in temporary accommodation. The framework has not been implemented yet; however the protocol is an ambitious one that outlines the roles, responsibilities and practices that should be undertaken by participating agencies in a variety of situations, so it should be useful for other agencies to look at.

The underlying principles behind the protocol are based on the prevention of homelessness, where possible, and effective communication between agencies and the young people concerned. The protocol covers homelessness prevention, accommodation and support services for:

*homeless 16- and 17-year-olds and care leavers aged 16 to 21
young people aged 18 to 25 who are vulnerable or have complex needs
young people in supported housing or bed and breakfast accommodation
young people who are at risk of eviction from temporary accommodation, when there is a risk that the local authority will decide that it has discharged its duty.*

Key to the success of the protocol is a joint assessment process involving a new Youth Housing Social Worker (YHSW), the housing department and Priority Youth Housing. The YHSW takes on the initial liaison role with the housing department and support agencies, and assesses the potential for the young person to return home. Where this is possible, the

YHSW will work towards a return home at an early stage.

There is also flexibility in allocating personal advisers for care leavers – this can either be someone from social services or an independent personal adviser from one of the other participating agencies, depending on the circumstances and the young person’s preference.

The protocol includes guidance on how to make supported housing work and supporting young people in bed and breakfast accommodation. The guidance recommends visits in the first 24 hours, involving specialist workers as necessary, early warnings from accommodation providers if things are going wrong, and follow-up visits to talk to both the individual and the workers about the situation.

There is also a procedure for intervening when young people are at risk of losing their temporary accommodation and their right to more secure housing from the Council. This involves early communications from the housing department to staff in other agencies when there are problems, and a multi-agency review of the case before the Council decides that they need to evict the individual. The spirit of the protocol, however, is to avoid this situation arising in the first place, by ensuring early communication between agencies and effective intervention when necessary.”

2.1.4 A copy of the full report can be [located](#).

2.2 LGA – Council Innovation and Learning in – Housing Our Homeless Households (2017)

2.2.1 The Executive Summary of the report details:

CURRENT CHALLENGES FOR COUNCILS IN ACCOMMODATING HOMELESS HOUSEHOLDS

This report responds to rising concern amongst local authorities about the increasing homelessness pressures being faced across the country. Many councils are finding it difficult to provide suitable accommodation for families facing homelessness at a cost that is sustainable.

Councils want to end homelessness by preventing it happening in the first place. The number of households in temporary accommodation has been rising consistently since the economic crisis.

There are around 77, 240 households in temporary accommodation, including 120, 540 children.

This is a 25 per cent increase in London (now 54,280 families), and 52 per cent increase outside of London (now 22,950) since 2014.

The picture for local government is difficult and changing fast. Some councils are losing millions of pounds per year on temporary accommodation, many others are facing challenges in needing to find more accommodation to meet rising homelessness demand.

Concurrently, homelessness prevention by local authorities into the private rented sector has dropped by 40%, whilst the number of homelessness acceptances caused by the loss of an assured shorthold tenancy in the private rented sector has quadrupled from 4,580 in 2009 to 18,750 in 2016. This position is likely to become more challenging if the current freeze on Local Housing Allowance levels is maintained, and will be exacerbated by the lowering of the Overall Benefit Cap, and the introduction of the shared accommodation rate to social and affordable housing.

POSITIVE TRENDS

Homelessness funding has been sustained and increased over the last several years, and this has received a further boost from the introduction of the new flexible homelessness support grant, which replaces the former management fee included in housing benefit for temporary accommodation.

Flexible homelessness support grant is both more flexible and more generous than the previous arrangement, and presents a real opportunity for councils to innovate and to reduce reliance on temporary accommodation within the serious constraints provided by the fundamental lack of affordability of accommodation in many areas.

The Homelessness Reduction Act, which is expected to be implemented from 2018, will also drive councils to intervene earlier to prevent homelessness and should mean that single people in particular will get more help than previously. However, this will not address affordability either, and there is therefore a risk in some areas that it will add to councils' administrative burden without actually leading to many more homes for the people who need them.

The Government's Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer fund, and associated funds supporting interventions around rough sleeping, to the value of £50 million in total over two years, are also positive developments and should drive innovation in future homelessness practice.

LOCAL AUTHORITY PRACTICE

We talked to 11 local authorities in some detail about their work in the area as well as to some of the

London sub-regions and a number of other organisations including the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), London Councils, Greater London Authority (GLA), National Housing Federation (NHF), Shelter and others.

The result is a rich and wide ranging journey through local authority practice, which is supported wherever possible by documentary information in order to help other councils who may wish to replicate or adapt some of the work in their own areas.

After detailing the overall approach taken by a number of councils doing interesting work, the report then moves on to a series of topic guides, covering areas as diverse as drawing up a private sector lease to setting up a multi-million pound local authority property company.

We worked with a range of different councils including London boroughs with very high homelessness demand but also with some more rural authorities with much smaller operational scale, but who are nevertheless doing great things that similar authorities, and some cases much larger authorities, could learn from.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is much that local authorities can do and are doing which can make a real difference. There are several examples in this report of councils reducing temporary accommodation against the rising trend, massively reducing the use of B&B accommodation and saving themselves millions of pounds in the process.

Some of the areas of work where councils may find they have scope to do more, and which are explored in some detail, include:

- working better and smarter with private sector landlords and agents, with a developing and responsive service offer*
- working with households at risk of homelessness at an earlier stage to prevent homelessness and to address the other issues like debt and barriers to employment which reduce resilience against a housing crisis*
- providing effective resettlement and tenancy sustainment services to homeless households placed in the private rented sector (PRS)*
- making effective use of the Localism Act powers to end a homelessness duty in the private rented sector*
- working with other authorities to maximise the market power of councils to procure accommodation at a reasonable price*
- working with a micro focus to avoid B&B placements and end them quickly when they occur*
- converting buildings to temporary accommodation and developing new build hostels and LHA rent PRS accommodation*
- investing in the purchase of accommodation by the council or their partners to benefit from housing*

capital growth and long term controlled rents

- *planning ahead to understand medium term supply and demand trends and making provision to meet those demands*
- *making creative use of allocations policies to maximise homelessness prevention*
- *investigating innovative construction techniques such as re-deployable modular housing*
- *working creatively with partners inside and outside the local authority.*

It is important to note, however, that whilst these activities may make a real difference, they can only help up to a point if the fundamental position continues to worsen. The long term affordability of accommodation for households on low incomes is a fundamental problem which must be addressed at a national level if we are not to see more homelessness and an increasing polarisation between areas where households on low incomes can no longer afford to live, and the areas where they are concentrated.

The challenges faced in accommodating homelessness households have reached a point where a concerted effort by both national and local government is needed if a serious impact is to be made.

In order to create a climate where local authorities have a better chance to succeed, there are important measures that government could take without fundamentally compromising its reform agenda, and without a massive increase in spending.

We recommend the following measures, which government could take relatively quickly and relatively inexpensively compared to the scale of the challenge: Central government could consider:

- *Using its balance sheet to make cheaper finance available to local authorities and their partners seeking to acquire homes for the use of homeless households at scale.*
- *Exempting temporary accommodation from the overall benefit cap so that there is at least somewhere that families who are unable to work can live while councils work with them to get into employment without costing councils large amounts of money. The alternative is to send these families to areas where their employment prospects are going to be much lower, against the stated aims of the overall benefit cap policy.*
- *Adapt Universal Credit to ensure that housing related benefits are paid promptly for households in temporary accommodation and for households placed in the PRS by local authorities, and to reduce the likelihood that homeless households be placed in overcrowded accommodation.*
- *Providing financial incentives to private sector landlords willing to let to households nominated by a local authority.*
- *Ensuring that LHA does not fall further behind rental inflation by ending the current LHA freeze, and as a minimum pegging LHA to consumer price inflation (CPI) in the future.*

- *Overturing the decision to apply the shared accommodation rate of LHA to single people under 35 in social housing and temporary accommodation, so that those in greatest need can be accommodated.*
- *Ensuring that supported accommodation to accommodate homeless households is protected as a priority in the current DCLG and DWP Supported Accommodation Review. Twenty thousand homelessness preventions and reliefs per year are made into supported housing, and it is crucial that this is able to continue.*
- *Making it clear that minimum revenue provision requirements should not apply when councils are purchasing residential property which will appreciate in value over time.*
 - *Working with mortgage lenders to end the prohibition in many Buy-to-let mortgages of letting properties to households in receipt of housing benefit or Universal Credit, as this currently actually prohibits those landlords from working with local authorities to prevent homelessness.”*

2.2.2 A copy of the full report can be [located](#).

3 RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 That the information provided in this briefing note informs the evidence base of this Scrutiny Review.

Author: Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer, on behalf of Councillor Cathrine Russell, Chair, Scrutiny Panel 3 – Homelessness and Rough Sleepers

17 July 2018



NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

SCRUTINY PANEL 3

HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPERS

8 NOVEMBER 2018

BRIEFING NOTE: BACKGROUND DATA

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At its inaugural scoping meeting, Scrutiny Panel 3 (Homelessness and Rough Sleepers) agreed that it would receive details of background research reports to inform its evidence base.
- 1.2 There are a number of published academic, Governmental and think-tank journals that explore the causes and effects of homelessness and rough sleeping which will be presented to the Scrutiny Panel over a series of meetings for its information.
- 1.3 Details of research papers were presented to the meeting of the Panel at its September meeting.
- 1.4 The research papers for consideration by the Scrutiny Panel at its meeting on 8 November 2018 are:
 - House of Commons Library – Briefing Paper (23 February 2018) Rough Sleeping (England)
 - Crisis – Ending Rough Sleeping: What Works? An international evidence review
 - CJS – Housing First – Housing Led Solutions to Rough Sleeping and Homelessness (March 2017)

1.5 House of Commons Library – Briefing Paper (23 February 2018) Rough Sleeping (England)

1.5.1 The Summary of the Briefing Note details:

“Local authorities' duties

Local authorities in England do not have a duty to secure accommodation for all homeless people. Those who approach an authority for help who are deemed to be homeless but not in priority need, may find themselves sleeping rough. Rough sleepers are one of the most vulnerable groups in society; studies have found strong correlations between homelessness and a multiplicity, and increased severity, of both physical and mental health conditions. Rough sleepers are over 9 times more likely to commit suicide than the general population; on average rough sleepers die at age 47 (age 43 for women).

Government initiatives

Successive Governments have put in place initiatives to tackle rough sleeping. The [Rough Sleepers Initiative](#) operated between 1990 and 1999 until it was replaced by Labour’s Homelessness Action Programme. Over the years some ambitious targets have been set; for example, Labour set a target in 1999 to achieve a two thirds reduction in rough sleeping by 2002. [No One Left Out](#) (Labour, 2008) set a target of ending rough sleeping “once and for all” by 2012. Crisis commissioned the Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York to conduct a review of single homelessness in the UK between 2000 and 2010. The study, [A review of single homelessness in the UK](#), (2011) provides an overview of the history, causes and policy responses to single homelessness, and assesses how successful these policies have been in tackling the issue. The study suggested some policy responses for the next decade. The Conservative Government elected in 2015 continued with the approach initiated under the Coalition. This [No Second Night Out](#) approach was piloted in London. A key aim was to ensure that no-one new to the streets sleeps out for a second night. A [Ministerial Working Group](#) was established to prevent and reduce homelessness.

*The current Government was elected with a manifesto commitment to “**halve rough sleeping over the course of the parliament and eliminate it altogether by 2027**” by setting up a new homelessness reduction taskforce to focus on prevention and affordable housing and by piloting a Housing First approach to tackle rough sleeping. The Government also supported Bob Blackman’s Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which will place additional duties on local authorities in England to prevent and relieve homeless for all eligible applicants from April 2018.*

Rough sleeping is still increasing

Despite these considerable efforts, the official rough sleeper counts have risen in each year since new methodology was introduced in

autumn 2010. The most recent statistics published on 25 January 2018 recorded a 169% increase in the number of people sleeping rough in England since 2010. Existing programmes have recorded successes in helping individuals to exit rough sleeping, but the flow on to the streets continues. The UK Statistics Authority declared DCLG's Rough Sleeping statistics to not to meet the standard to be regarded as National Statistics in December 2015.

Rough sleeping is at its most severe in London. The latest financial year report from the Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) database, [CHAIN Street to Home Annual Report 2016-17](#), shows that a total of 8,108 rough sleepers were contacted by outreach workers or building-based teams in London during 2016/17.

Factors identified as contributing to the ongoing flow of new rough sleepers to the streets include: welfare reforms, particularly reductions in entitlement to Housing Benefit/Local Housing Allowance; reduced investment by local authorities in homeless services; and flows of non-UK nationals who are unable to access benefits.

Organisations working in the sector have called for an effective safety net and a long-term homelessness strategy backed by investment to deliver it. Some organisations support legislation to extend the priority need categories to cover all homeless people, an approach already adopted in Scotland. In December 2017, the Public Accounts Committee published a [report](#) which criticised the Government's approach to rising homelessness:

The Department for Communities and Local Government's attitude to reducing homelessness has been unacceptably complacent. The limited action that it has taken has lacked the urgency that is so badly needed and its "light touch" approach to working with the local authorities tackling homelessness has clearly failed.

The Department is placing great reliance on the new Homelessness Reduction Act to provide the solution to homelessness.

While this new legislation will no doubt help, it cannot be successful unless it is matched by a renewed focus across government on tackling the twin issues of both the supply and affordability of decent housing, which underlie the causes of homelessness."

1.5.2 A copy of the full Report can be [located](#).

1.6 Crisis – Ending Rough Sleeping: What Works? An international evidence review

1.6.1 The Summary of the Report states:

“Ending rough sleeping: what works? An international evidence review (2017)

This study demonstrates what works to end homelessness for rough sleepers through an international evidence review. The ongoing need for people to sleep rough on the streets of the UK is indicative of an unacceptable societal failure and recent homelessness projections suggest that the scale of the issue is worsening. Ending rough sleeping is an increasing policy priority across the UK. Crisis commissioned Cardiff University and Heriot-Watt University to undertake an international evidence review of what works to end rough sleeping.

Key findings:

Through analysis of over 500 published studies and interviews with eleven homelessness experts around the world, the review found that current approaches to address rough sleeping are not as effective as they might (and need) to be. The development of an improved approach to ending homelessness must of course incorporate the views of rough sleepers and those who work with them, and take into account homelessness prevention, but the learning from this evidence review can play a key role in shaping a new approach. It suggests five key principles should underpin this approach:

- 1. Recognise heterogeneity – of individual rough sleepers’ housing and support needs and their different entitlements to publicly funded support. Local housing markets and rough sleeper population profiles will also vary across the UK.*
- 2. Take swift action – to prevent or quickly end street homelessness, through interventions such as No Second Night Out (NSNO), thereby reducing the number of rough sleepers who develop complex needs and potentially become entrenched.*
- 3. Employ assertive outreach leading to a suitable accommodation offer – by actively identifying and reaching out to rough sleepers and offering suitable accommodation.*
- 4. Be housing-led – offering swift access to settled housing including the use of Housing First*
- 5. Offer person-centred support and choice – via a client-centred approach based on cross-sector collaboration and commissioning. Personalised Budgets are a good example of this.*

In the UK there is both an opportunity and a need for change in the way rough sleepers are assisted. The findings presented from this review

should be used alongside the wider body of work being undertaken by Crisis with rough sleepers and those who work with them, to shape an improved approach and end rough sleeping. Moreover, we hope this synthesis will provide a reference point for policy makers, practitioners and researchers working with rough sleepers across the globe.”

1.6.2 A copy of the full report can be [located](#)

1.7 CJS – Housing First – Housing Led Solutions to Rough Sleeping and Homelessness (March 2017)

1.7.1 It is reported that the Centre for Social Justice, that was established in 2004 is an independent think-tank that studies the root causes of Britain’s social problems and addresses them by recommending practical, workable policy interventions. The CSJ’s vision is to give people in the UK who are experiencing the worst multiple disadvantages and injustices every possible opportunity to reach their full potential.

1.7.2 The Executive Summary of its report “Housing First – Housing Led Solutions to Rough Sleeping and Homelessness (March 2017)”:

“Homelessness is a devastating experience. It can trigger and exacerbate problems, from substance misuse to mental health conditions, and destabilise families and support networks. And the effects can last a lifetime; children who experience homelessness are much more likely to experience homelessness as adults. This cycle must be broken. But over the last six years, the number of people experiencing homelessness in England has risen significantly. The number of households approaching their council for homelessness assistance has grown considerably. And at the sharpest end rough sleeping has increased by over 130% since 2010 to over 4,000 on any given night. Throughout the course of a year, CSJ analysis has found that around 34,500 people might sleep rough in England. As well as the significant personal harm caused to individuals, the Government has estimated that the cost to the state is up to £1bn every year.

Both statutory and non-statutory responses to homelessness are too often predicated on crisis, with less focus on prevention interventions. For many people with complex needs they often fail to qualify for statutory assistance, but are turned away from hostel accommodation because their needs are too high. Falling between the gaps of statutory and non-statutory provision they can find themselves with nowhere else to turn. Furthermore, a lack of access to affordable housing is both a key driver of homelessness and undermines efforts to ensure that when people find themselves in this situation they are quickly able to secure stable housing and get back on their feet.

Opportunity for change

While the rising number of people experiencing homelessness, especially rough sleeping, is of significant concern, and has provided an impetus for this report, it is still well within our capability to resolve this issue. The Government has already made a strong commitment to do this, which is

warmly welcomed by the CSJ. This report provides a detailed plan on how this ambition can be achieved.

With strong political will and robust evaluation of the services we deliver, there is great potential to ensure that local authorities and government departments work in a smarter, more efficient way to end homelessness. This report will emphasise the need to move towards a housing led approach to ending homelessness, with a specific focus on scaling up Housing First provision for people with multiple and complex needs. The Government has a significant and realisable opportunity to end homelessness for this group. The move towards Housing First sits alongside broader recommendations in this report looking at preventing homelessness from occurring in the first place and addressing broader structural issues relating to affordable housing.

Key recommendations

1 Problem: *Rough sleepers and people experiencing chronic homelessness often fall through the cracks of services. People who experience chronic homelessness will often not qualify as vulnerable enough for an offer of settled accommodation under the homelessness legislation, despite having high support needs such as mental health problems and addiction issues. Furthermore, a significant number of hostel providers report refusing people access to accommodation because their needs are too high.*

Many of these people, slipping through the gap between statutory and non-statutory provision, are forced to sleep rough. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) counted over 4000 rough sleepers on a single night last year.

Although the London CHAIN rough sleeper database recorded much higher numbers in the capital throughout the course of the year (8,096). For those who do gain access to temporary hostel accommodation, they are often required to address issues such as substance misuse in a relatively chaotic and unstable environment before they can access permanent housing.

Recommendation: *The Government should create a new funding pot of at least £110 million per year to deliver a National Housing First Programme to end rough sleeping and chronic homelessness for people with the most complex needs. This programme will be cost neutral over the course of a parliament.*

There is overwhelming international evidence to support the use of Housing First as a housing solution for people who have multiple and complex needs. Housing First provides stable, independent homes alongside coordinated wrap-around, personalised support to homeless people. Widely adopted across North America and Western Europe, Housing First has formed a central component of successful, national homelessness strategies. Reduced national spending, high tenancy sustainment rates and improved health and wellbeing outcomes provide a compelling argument for scaling up this approach in England.

Problem: A lack of effective prevention work.

Both statutory and non-statutory responses to homelessness are too often predicated on crisis and geared towards providing an emergency response. The homelessness legislation provides an all or nothing system of assistance, with certain groups receiving an offer of permanent accommodation when they lose their home, but very little provision for preventative interventions for most single people. As a result, important opportunities are missed to help prevent homelessness and avoid much costlier emergency responses.

Recommendation: *The Government should amend the homelessness legislation to place a greater focus on prevention work. The homelessness legislation in England should be amended to create new prevention and relief duties (following the new Welsh model). Unlike the current statutory assistance, these new duties would expand entitlements to a greater number of people. Moreover, the period that someone would be considered to be threatened with homelessness should be extended from 28 to 56 days. Based on the Welsh experience, this would help reduce the numbers of people for whom local authorities are required to make an offer of permanent accommodation and house in expensive temporary accommodation.*

Recommendation: *The Government should set up a Prime Ministerial Taskforce to embed housing and homelessness strategies across government departments to better prevent and end homelessness. Preventing homelessness requires a cross-government approach. Homelessness policy sits within DCLG, but is heavily influenced by a number of other departments (including, for example, the Treasury, Department for Work and Pensions, the Department of Health, the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Education) which are often much more likely to be in contact with someone when they are at risk of, but have not yet become homeless. The Taskforce should have the very clear objective of developing and embedding housing and homelessness prevention strategies across these departments. A Prime Ministerial Taskforce would provide the level of authority and accountability required to be effective. This report outlines specific interventions that various departments should take to prevent homelessness for groups of people at risk of homelessness, including care leavers and prison leavers.*

Recommendation: *DCLG should support and help facilitate the expansion of a CHAIN style database to other parts of England. This should focus particularly on cities with growing numbers of rough sleepers where street outreach teams operate.*

Problem: A lack of access to affordable housing undermines efforts to tackle homelessness.

While the private rented sector is now playing a much more significant role in housing for those on the lowest incomes, the loss of a private rented home is the leading cause of homelessness. Private landlords are becoming increasingly more reluctant to let to tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit and those who have experienced homelessness, therefore limiting access to affordable housing. Furthermore, social landlords are imposing stricter affordability criteria on tenants, which often

serves as a barrier to those on the lowest incomes.

Recommendation: *The Government should boost investment in low cost rental accommodation. This would help provide affordable housing for households on very low incomes, reducing their risk of homelessness and ensuring that when episodes of homelessness do occur, they are brief and non-recurrent.*

Recommendation: *While the CSJ strongly supports the Government's welfare reform agenda, there are adjustments that could be made to help improve and increase the supply of housing for people who are homeless. This report sets out how a further set of exemptions from the Shared Accommodation Rate, a more personalised response to benefit conditionality for people who are homeless or are at risk of homelessness, and better access to Alternative Payment Arrangements for people moving onto Universal Credit could help prevent people from losing accommodation. These measures would encourage landlords to let to tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, further boosting affordable housing supply for people who have experienced homelessness.*

Recommendation: *The Government should support social lettings agencies to improve access into the private rented sector and ensure that people can be rapidly rehoused if they face homelessness.*

Social lettings agencies should support people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness to create and sustain tenancies in the private rented sector. These letting agencies have shown clear value for money, helping people rapidly exit homelessness and achieving high tenancy sustainment levels."

1.7.3 A copy of the full report can be [located](#).

2 Recommendations

2.1 That the information provided in this briefing note informs the evidence base of this Scrutiny Review.

Author: Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer, on behalf of Councillor Cathrine Russell, Chair, Scrutiny Panel 3 – Homelessness and Rough Sleepers

17 July 2018