

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

SCRUTINY PANEL 3 - HOMELESSNESS (PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY)

Thursday, 24 November 2016

PRESENT: Councillor Zoe Smith (Chair); Councillor Terrie Eales (Deputy Chair);
Councillors Rufia Ashraf, Aziz, Vicky Culbard, Janice Duffy, Elizabeth
Gowen, Dennis Meredith and Cathrine Russell

WITNESS Robin Burgess, Hope Centre

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

**MEMBER
OF THE
PUBLIC** June Murphy, observing

1. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Sam Shaw.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING)

There were none.

3. DEPUTATIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESSES

There were none.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2016 were signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record.

5. WITNESS EVIDENCE

5.A DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH

The Scrutiny Panel considered the written report of the Director of Public Health.

The Scrutiny Panel referred to the diagram contained within the papers noting that these figures only relate to areas where a homeless house needs audit had been undertaken. It does not reflect single, homeless clients.

The Scrutiny Panel requested that the Scrutiny Officer contacts the Director of Public Health for clarification on the wording naivety contained within page 17 of the reports.

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

5.B MANAGER, MAPLE ACCESS CENTRE

The Scrutiny Panel noted the report from the Maple Access Centre, in particular the comments raised regarding concerns about access to housing for certain vulnerable groups, such as those released from prison. The Scrutiny Panel heard of an initiative "Making every adult matter" that is a coalition of Clinks, Homeless Link and Mind, formed to improve policy and services for people facing multiple needs. It was suggested that further information should be provided to a future meeting.

The Scrutiny Panel queried some of the responses, in particular, the Maple Access Centre's apparent lack of knowledge of Northampton's Multi Agency Rough Sleepers Strategy.

It was suggested therefore that it would be useful for a member of the team of the Maple Access Centre to be invited to attend the next meeting.

AGREED: (1) That a member of the team of the Maple Access Centre is invited to attend the next meeting.

(2) That further details on the initiative "Making Every Adult Matter" is presented to the next meeting.

5.C MANAGER, THE HOPE CENTRE

Robin Burgess, General Manager of the Hope Centre, submitted his written report to the Scrutiny Panel, highlighting the salient points.

Robin Burgess added:

- Of the 100 people a day that come to the Hope Centre, approximately 20 say that they have slept rough. There is a need to understand the difference between not-housed (including so-called sofa surfers) and rough sleepers.
- Sometimes the only way that rough sleepers can keep warm is by drinking a lot of alcohol; some do this.
- The Hope Centre provides a range of services including food, shelter, clothing, haircuts, and foot care.
- A national funded project is in operation that trains clients.
- The Hope Centre works closely with the Maple Access Centre.

The Scrutiny Panel asked questions, made comment and heard:

- In response to a query regarding the dissemination of information to rough sleepers, Robin Burgess advised an Outreach Service is provided by NBC. These officers are the prime link to the Street Community, as are the Community Wardens and the Police.
- It was highlighted that just because an individual is sitting in a shop doorway it doesn't necessarily mean they are always homeless. Robin Burgess gave the Scrutiny Panel an example of beggars and street drinkers who presented as 'homeless' but were already living in suitable accommodation.
- Phil Harris confirmed that the Outreach Workers regularly come into contact with Rough Sleepers, many of which are known to staff at Oasis House. When intelligence is received it is always acted upon.
- The "Killing with kindness" campaign was referred to.
- In response to a question regarding whether Beggars and Rough Sleepers are aware of where they can obtain help and support; Phil Harris confirmed that most are and are usually known to the Outreach Service, Hope Centre, and Maple Access etc.
- The Scrutiny Panel suggested it would be useful for the Panel to receive a copy of an information sheet that details where vulnerable people can receive advice and support. The Scrutiny Officer confirmed that such a document had been investigated by a previous Scrutiny Review and she would forward details to this Scrutiny Panel.
- The Scrutiny Panel suggested a potential recommendation for inclusion within its final report "There is further liaison with organisations such as the Hope Centre, Night Shelter to ensure there is no duplication of efforts."
- The public perception of Rough Sleepers and homelessness was acknowledged.
- Housing an individual is just part of the solution, organisations such as the Hope

Centre provide assistance and support.

- It is crucial that vulnerable people are housed with supportive housing.

Robin Burgess was thanked for his information address.

AGREED: (1) That the information provided is noted.
(2) That the Scrutiny Officer forwards to the Panel details of the information sheet about supportive services for vulnerable people.

5.D OPERATIONS MANAGER, MIDLAND HEART HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Due to unforeseen circumstances the Operations Manager, Midland Heart Housing Association was unable to attend the meeting. It was requested that she is invited to attend the next meeting.

5.E MANAGER, NAASH

The Scrutiny Panel noted the written response to its core questions from NAASH.

In response to a query regarding the Severe Weather Project, Phil Harris confirmed that it only operates when the temperature is forecast to be below freezing for at least three consecutive nights. Assuming that the building is ready on time, it is hoped that the Severe Weather Project will operate from the Night Shelter this year.

In answer to a question regarding conditions such as flooding, Phil Harris confirmed that, in the event of extreme weather conditions, the Severe Weather Project would be considered. He also explained that, if a person become homeless due to a fire or flood, they would automatically be deemed to be in priority need.

It was suggested that a potential recommendation of the final report could be around publishing the link to this service with a brief introductory paragraph about what it provides.

It was confirmed that Housing and Wellbeing Services communicates with a range of services, including faith groups, details of the help that is available. A further potential recommendation of the final report was suggested "The information about the services that are available for homeless people is reviewed regarding how it is promoted and distributed."

AGREED: That the information provided is noted.

6. BACKGROUND DATA

The Scrutiny Panel noted the background papers. It was noted that some of the papers were published a number of years ago. It was suggested that it would be useful for the Panel to receive a briefing paper on the Homelessness Reduction Bill at its next meeting. The Scrutiny Officer undertook to produce this, in liaison with the Co-Opted Member to the Panel.

The Scrutiny Panel enquired about the Social Lettings Agency and the work that the Council is doing with private sector landlords. The Head of Housing and Wellbeing undertook to produce a briefing note for the next meeting.

AGREED: (1) That the information provided informs the evidence base of this Scrutiny Review.
(2) That briefings on the Homelessness Reduction Bill and the Social Lettings Agency are presented to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Panel.

7. SITE VISITS

The Scrutiny Panel considered site visits to inform its evidence base:

- AGREED:
- (1) Councillors Zoe Smith, Terrie Eales, Vicky Culbard and Janice Duffy, together with Officers, visit the Hope Centre on 12 December 2016.
 - (2) Councillors Zoe Smith and Terrie Eales, together with Officers, visit a variety of temporary accommodation on 14 December 2016.

The meeting concluded at 7:37 pm