

**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  
14 March 2019 at 6pm

**George Candler**  
**Chief Executive**

If you need any advice or information regarding this agenda please phone Tracy Tiff 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](http://www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny)

**Members of the Panel**

Chair	Councillor Cathrine Russell
Panel Members	Councillor Sally Beardsworth Councillor Jane Birch Councillor Gareth Eales Councillor Zoe Smith
Co-opted Member	Ian Bates

**Calendar of meetings**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Room</b>
8 April 2019 6:00 pm	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. 6pm	<b>Apologies</b>		The Chair to note any apologies for absence.
2.	<b>Declarations of Interest</b>		Members to state any interests.
3.	<b>Deputations and Public Addresses</b>		<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 <a href="#">Public Address Protocol</a> and notify the Scrutiny Officer of your intention to speak.</p>
4.	<b>Minutes</b>	<b>1</b>	The Scrutiny Panel to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2019.
5.	<b>Witness Evidence</b>		The Scrutiny Panel to receive a response to its core questions from a variety of expert advisors.
5 (a) 6:05pm	<b>Chair, Northamptonshire Armed Forces Covenant</b>		
5 (b) 6:25pm	<b>MPs for Northampton</b>		
5 (c) 6:45pm	<b>Northants Landlords' Forum</b>		
5 (d) 7:05pm	<b>Lowdown Centre</b>		
5 (e) 7:25pm	<b>Northants Age Concern</b>		
5 (f) 7:45pm	<b>Spencer Bridge Foodbank</b>		
5 (g) 8:05pm	<b>Re-Store, Northampton</b>		
5 (h) 8:25pm	<b>Midland Heart</b>		
6. 8:45pm	<b>Written Evidence</b>		<p>The Scrutiny Panel to receive written evidence from a variety of expert advisors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shelter</li> <li>• CRISIS</li> <li>• Joseph Rowntree Trust</li> <li>• Big Issue</li> </ul>

## NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

### MINUTES OF SCRUTINY PANEL 1 - HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPERS

Thursday, 24 January 2019

**COUNCILLORS PRESENT:** Councillor Cathrine Russell (Chair), Councillor Zoe Smith (Deputy Chair); Councillors Sally Beardsworth, Jane Birch and Gareth Eales

**Witnesses** Robin Burgess, Chief Executive, Hope Centre  
Steve Jones, Northampton Jesus Fellowship

Councillor Danielle Stone

**Officers** Phil Harris, Head of Housing and Wellbeing  
Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer  
Kallie Jones, Single Homelessness Adviser (Observing)

**Members of the Public** Richard Johnson, Street Pastors  
Tara Scarth, Client Services Manager, Hope Centre

#### 1. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Ian Bates, Co Optee.

#### 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

#### 3. DEPUTATIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESSES

Councillor Danielle Stone and Richard Johnson addressed the Scrutiny Panel.

Councillor Stone circulated a written paper to the Panel and elaborated upon it. She made reference to the number of people sleeping in doorways and in the encampments in church yards, and said that government policy was to blame.

Councillor Stone said that the Council should do everything it can to tackle visible homelessness and invisible homelessness, and she expressed concern about the safety and wellbeing of female rough sleepers some of whom report being sexually assaulted on the streets.

The Scrutiny Panel asked questions of Councillor Stone and heard:

- In response to Councillor Stone's comment regarding abuse of women on streets, the Head of Housing and Wellbeing said it is essential such crimes are reported.
- The Panel was surprised by Councillor Stone's claim that women and children were sofa surfing and the Head of Housing and Wellbeing confirmed that he had not received any reports of this nature from Councillor Stone.
- Councillor Stone advised the Panel that some women with children are going into temporary accommodation but have not felt safe because they were sharing the temporary accommodation with people who were not known to them and felt vulnerable, so had left and gone to sleep on a friend's floor. The Head of Housing and Wellbeing confirmed that he had not received any reports of this nature from Councillor Stone and that there are currently no homeless families living in shared temporary accommodation.

Councillor Stone was thanked for her address.

Richard Johnson, Street Pastor, addressed the Scrutiny Panel commenting that, in his opinion, the town has a housing crisis, with homelessness rising to unprecedented levels and with a corresponding increase in rough sleeping. In his view, the housing crisis has been caused by the policies of Central Government – the lack of house building, cuts in welfare, the shared accommodation housing benefit rate for the under 35s, bedroom tax, a cap on benefits, no cap on rents. He added that landlords evict families for no reason other than putting up rents and converting properties into HMOs. Mr Johnson felt that there had been a huge loss of supported housing for mental health patients, ex-offenders and older people. He felt this was exacerbated by local conditions, particularly hidden homelessness. He queried the data and monitoring.

Mr Johnson concluded his address by commenting on the need for a more proactive approach. He asked for Northampton to revisit its Policy.

The Scrutiny Panel asked questions and heard:

- A recent ROC meeting had taken place with over 70 attendees.
- The Scrutiny Panel needs to look at the 2016 Rough Sleeping Strategy and put forward any recommendations for change.

Richard Johnson was thanked for his address.

#### **4. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2018 were signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record.

## **5. WITNESS EVIDENCE**

### **(A) HEAD OF PSYCHOLOGICAL THERAPIES, NMHT**

The Head of Psychological Therapies, NMHT, had sent his apologies and would attend the next meeting of the Scrutiny Panel.

### **(B) CHIEF EXECUTIVE, NORTHAMPTON HOPE CENTRE**

Robin Burgess, Chief Executive, Hope Centre, presented his written response to the core questions, as attached to the agenda, and elaborated upon it. He said that, in his opinion, there is a failure of partnership working, a breakdown of trust and no attempt to engage with the Hope Centre. Mr Burgess added that the town has a real problem with rough sleeping and that, in the last 15 months, 17 people had died. He referred to female rough sleepers being raped and sexually assaulted and said that, although homeless women often do not want to report these crimes, it is important that they do.

The Scrutiny Panel made comment, asked questions and heard:

- It was suggested that an independent body could be brought in to help improve communication between the various agencies.
- It was acknowledged that it can take years to overcome some of the barriers that rough sleepers face. Helping Eastern European rough sleepers is very difficult.
- The Scrutiny Panel commented on the need to stabilise and rehabilitate people in order that they can live normal lives. Counselling does help, but may come later.
- Mr Burgess said there needs to be change: true partnership and respect.
- Mr Burgess said he felt that there is a hardened approach in Northampton and the Council needs to adopt a more considerate attitude and view to homeless people.
- Mr Burgess confirmed that Hope does not do outreach work. It does not supply tents, sleeping bags or food on the streets. He said there are lots of outreach programmes running and, in his opinion, there was too many individuals involved.

Councillor Stephen Hibbert, Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing addressed the Scrutiny Committee, saying that he disagreed with many of the opinions expressed in the written response submitted to the core questions by the Hope Centre's Chief Executive.

He said that all agencies are seeking the same outcome – to help people off the streets – and went on to challenge the accuracy of a number of Mr Burgess' claims.

The Scrutiny Panel made comment, asked questions and heard:

- It was thought that there has been a breakdown in communication.

- The Chair commented that Greater Manchester's ethos is "about people rather than politics"

Mr Burgess was thanked for providing a response to the core questions, which will inform the evidence base of this Scrutiny Review.

**(C) DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH, NCC**

The written response of the Director of Public Health, NCC was noted. The response will inform the evidence base of this Scrutiny Review.

**(D) CHIEF EXECUTIVE, CENTRAL AND NORTHANTS CAB**

A response to the core questions of the Scrutiny Panel from Chief Executive, Central and Northants CAB was not received.

**(E) MANAGER, NORTHAMPTON SALVATION ARMY**

A response to the core questions of the Scrutiny Panel from the Manager, Salvation Army was not received.

**(F) MANAGER, NORTHAMPTON JESUS FELLOWSHIP**

Steven Jones, Manager, of Northampton Jesus Fellowship, Abington Centre addressed the Scrutiny Panel. He had been in post for 15 years. He commented that he was keen to be involved in partnership working to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping.

Mr Jones said it is vital for his organisation to know where to refer people. There is a need for agencies to share information about what they do and how they can help. Each has a lot of expertise. He explained that the Northampton Jesus Fellowship had sent representatives to the recent ROC discussions and believed that there is a lot of potential and a lot happening in the town but it is not joined up.

The Northampton Jesus Fellowship is open Monday to Friday. It has a drop-in ("Step Up") for two hours every morning. Between 70 - 80 people visit the organisation on Sundays. Attendance has increased significantly during the past year and is now around twice what it was a year ago. Mr Jones felt that Universal Credit has had an impact and there is now a large representation from Eastern Europe.

Mr Jones advised the Scrutiny Panel that the Northampton Jesus Fellowship has an excellent relationship with the Council's Street Outreach Workers who visit the building regularly. Although he will always signpost homeless people to the Guildhall for advice on housing, he does sometimes wonder whether the person gets there. He is very keen on the idea of the Street Outreach Workers having an 'Advice Desk' at the Northampton Jesus Fellowship in order to provide on-the-spot advice.

Mr Jones explained that some of the people who visit the Northampton Jesus Fellowship have lost their ID, are sleeping in tents and trying to maintain a job from a tent. There is a need to work with them to make private rent affordable without a big deposit; there is a

need for discussions with private landlords. Mr Jones felt that Housing First is an interesting approach.

The Scrutiny Panel made comment, asked questions and heard:

- It was suggested that it would be useful for a booklet, or similar, to be produced, listing the agencies that people could be signposted to. This was agreed as a potential recommendation of the final report.
- It was also suggested that the Street Outreach Workers are asked to attend the Northampton Jesus Fellowship to speak with clients.

Mr Jones was thanked for his address; the information would inform the evidence base of this Scrutiny Review.

### **(G) CHAIRS AND CO CHAIRS OF THE VARIOUS NORTHAMPTON COMMUNITY FORUMS**

A response to the core questions of the Scrutiny Panel from the Chairs and Co Chairs of the various Northampton Community Forums was not received.

## **6. WRITTEN EVIDENCE**

### **(A) HOMELESSLINK**

A response to the core questions of the Scrutiny Panel from HomelessLink was not received.

### **(B) NORTHANTS HEALTHWATCH**

The written response from Northants HealthWatch was noted, the details would inform the evidence base of this Scrutiny Review.

## **7. SITE VISIT**

The Chair advised that she, along with the Deputy Chair and NBC's Housing Options & Advice Manager had undertaken a site visit to Great Manchester which covers ten local authority areas. They had met with the Strategic Lead for Homelessness.

The Authority has a number of community facilities, including a Winter Shelter and Community Centre. Everyone receives the same service. There is good partnership working with voluntary agencies. The necessary resources are provided.

The Deputy Chair said she had observed that everyone was proud in what they did but still knew more could be done. Data is inputted onto one system and is shared by all agencies. There is good engagement with the voluntary sector. The Winter Shelter in Manchester has proper beds and the homeless people who stay there are awarded Housing Benefit which is paid direct to the Shelter.

It was suggested that a potential recommendation of the final report could be that post unitary, discussions are held regarding the sharing of data to all agencies.

The update on the site visit to Manchester was noted.

At this point the Head of Housing and Wellbeing gave the Scrutiny Panel an update on SWEP and the Winter Shelter. Over 50 people had volunteered so far in 2019 and it had been staffed by an NBC Officer. The Winter Shelter had opened on 17 January 2019 and had closed on the morning of 24 January 2019. During this 7 day period, 58 people had used the facility. Patterns of use will be recorded and monitored.

Mr Harris advised that more volunteers were needed and it was hoped that the Winter Shelter might operate as an all-weather Winter Shelter from February until 31 March 2019.

Statistics for the use of the SWEP centre were given and Mr Harris confirmed that these would be published on the Council's website.

A potential recommendation of the final report was suggested – public donations could be used to fund rent for three months for those homeless people (mainly East European) who are not eligible for benefits but would be considered by NAASH if the rent was guaranteed.

The meeting concluded at 7:43 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 sleepers<sup>1</sup>, consider the best way in which 'Housing First'<sup>2</sup> can be used to reduce rough sleeping in the borough, and understand the nature and extent of 'hidden homelessness'<sup>3</sup> 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?