

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
MINUTES OF SCRUTINY PANEL 1 -
HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPERS

Monday, 8 April 2019

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

Witnesses Chris Luke, Midland Heart

Officers Emma Forbes, Housing Options and Advice Manager
Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer

Members of the Public Thomas Appleyard
David Howard
Kallie Jones, Single Homelessness Officer, NBC – observing
Councillor Aziz, NBC – observing
Plus three other members of the public

Press James Averill, Democracy reporter

1. APOLOGIES

There were none.

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 24 January 2019 were signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record.

5. WITNESS EVIDENCE

(A) MIDLAND HEART

Chris Luke of Midland Heart referred to salient points in written responses. He highlighted causes of homelessness; commenting that it was more than just a housing problem, drug

misuse and mental health issues and there was a need a pathway to address this. There is a need for multiple interventions, without it people cannot sustain independence.

Midland Heart operates in Stafford, Birmingham, Dudley, Sandwell, Coventry and Northampton.

The Scrutiny Panel made comment, asked questions and heard:

- Rough sleepers have clear needs and often have barriers to re-housing, for example rent arrears, anti-social behaviour.
- Rough sleepers with mental health problems need to get treatment quickly.
- In response to a question why Oasis House should be extended; Chris Luke advised that people should be able to move onto independent living and sustain it. Currently there are 48 units at Oasis House and there is a need to extend it
- In response to a query about what mental health intervention takes place with rough sleepers, Chris Luke advised that access to mental health service is at point of crisis; there needs to be proactive access with all those involved in support and treatment. There is a need to find the cause of the crisis. It is crucial that intervention takes place as early as possible. All services need to play an active part.
- It is incredibly challenging regarding entrenched rough sleepers, there are communities of rough sleepers. A multi-faceted approach is needed. Often communities are forming around drug use.
- There may be charitable agencies that people are willing to engage with. All need to work together.
- Midland Heart operates a small Housing First service. There have been successes in other counties with Housing First.
- Housing First will work with complex customers. In-depth support.
- In response to a query about female homelessness, there are multiple pathways, for example, specialist domestic violence services; there is a Hub in Birmingham.
- There is a need for a female only hostel.
- It was noted that women have longer life span than men but this is reversed in rough sleeping situations.
- Preparing for independent living – units that are “step down” units – run off own meters, unfurnished – gain skills to succeed. There is a need for step down services.
- There is a need to tell people not to give money to those begging – there is a need to get the message out to the public. From public’s perspective, they see it as a housing issue.
- Midland Heart’s role in Northampton in future is to operate Oasis House, extend it and the available units; and to make positive moves to the right service for individual’s needs.
- The Scrutiny Panel heard that homelessness is a complex problem. The Council ran an all-weather winter shelter and extended the outreach service, there has been better engagement than ever before. Of the 46 nights that the winter shelter was open, 122 individuals used it, 112 for one night. It met the crisis gap for a number of people 2/3 of SI non-UK nationals that accessed the service. It also helped 11 individuals move on to secure accommodation, 13 to the night shelter. An identified

plan was produced for 20 individuals. Staff built up a rapport with those using the night shelter. Of the 112 people in winter shelter, 24 were women. Housing Services has been talking about a women only night shelter.

- SWEP took place for a 27 day period in the winter then Government funding was awarded for the winter shelter.
- There is a need for a target approach for entrenched rough sleepers.
- The Council has a successful bid for rough sleeper funding which will expand the outreach service and employ one mental health worker to the team.
- Housing First could play an important role in Northampton. There would however be so much to consider to make sure it works.
- The rough sleepers count has such strict boundaries, NBC's is comprehensive 12 – 3 am.
- The winter shelter shows a wider picture – it also prevented them from rough sleeping for people who stayed a few nights and then we didn't see them again we made no assumptions.
- Hidden homeless is difficult to identify, but Officers do have an idea of the types of people who needed to use the winter shelter. There is a need for wider support for females who are homeless.
- It was emphasised that people coming out of prison need homes. Prisons have a duty to refer to housing service, Housing Services are hoping to be able to make better links with prisons with the recruitment of the additional officer.

Chris Luke was thanked for his address.

AGREED: That the information provided informs the evidence base.

6. REIEW OF EVIDENCE RECEIVED TO DATE

The Scrutiny Panel considered a precis of the evidence it had received to date.

The Scrutiny Panel made comment:

- It was commented that successful gathering of evidence. A lot been done with extra out-reach too.
- There is a need for communication between Agencies and groups. It is really important to feed some of the discussions that are taking place into any unitary discussions. This was suggested as a potential recommendation of the final report.
- Public Health at NCC has a Rough Sleepers' Policy, Officers do a lot of work, for example immunisation for rough sleepers. They are actively working with a Policy to help rough sleepers. A potential recommendation of the final report was suggested: To send a copy of the final report to the Health & Wellbeing Committee

The precis of the evidence was noted.

The meeting concluded at 7:05 pm