



OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY VIEWS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

TO CABINET - 11 SEPTEMBER 2019

Report Title	RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPERS
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Agenda Status: PUBLIC

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To present to Cabinet for consideration, the comments and recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the findings of the Scrutiny Review – Homelessness and Rough Sleepers.
- 1.2 All Overview and Scrutiny review reports are published on the Overview and Scrutiny page on the Council's Webpage and a copy of this report can be located: www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny - Previous Scrutiny Reviews.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends to Cabinet that:
 - 2.1.1 The Housing First model is introduced by the Council.
 - 2.1.2 Additional bed spaces are provided to meet the needs of homeless women in the borough.
 - 2.1.3 Housing solutions are found for homeless people (mainly East European) who are not eligible for benefits and are therefore unable to access settled housing.
 - 2.1.4 Northampton's Rough Sleepers' Strategy is refreshed (with the meaningful involvement of local Agencies) to reflect the current homelessness situation.
 - 2.1.5 A Plan is developed for strengthening equal relationships and partnership working between the Council, partners, organisations and the Voluntary Sector.
 - 2.1.6 A social media strategy is developed to ensure that the Council is able to provide members of the public with accurate information about homelessness, rough sleeping and what is being done to tackle it.

- 2.1.7 A multi-Agency publicity campaign (supported by an `alternative giving` scheme and information about how people can help homeless people) is developed to discourage members of the public from giving money to people who are begging.
- 2.1.8 A copy of this report is issued to all Councillors within the other sovereign Councils of the proposed West Northamptonshire Unitary Authority – Daventry District Council, Northamptonshire County Council and South Northants Council. The report is also shared with Councillors of the proposed North Northamptonshire Unitary Authority.
- 2.1.9 The Council considers updating its recruitment Policy to include a commitment to interview of all people who have *personal experience of rough sleeping*” if they meet the essential criteria in the person specification.
- 2.1.10 Mental health and psychology professionals are consulted on the new homelessness and rough sleeping strategy.
- 2.1.11 Whilst acknowledging data protection constraints, an integrated system, hosted by Housing and Wellbeing that can be used by all relevant Agencies, is explored by the proposed West Northamptonshire Unitary Authority.

3.1 Background and Issues

- 3.1.1 Following approval of its work programme for 2018/2019, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting in April 2018 commissioned Scrutiny Panel 1 to undertake the review – Homelessness and Rough Sleepers. An in-depth review commenced in May 2018 and concluded in May 2019.
- 3.1.2 A Scrutiny Panel was established comprising Councillor Cathrine Russell (Chair); Councillor Zoe Smith (Deputy Chair); Councillors Sally Beardsworth, Jane Birch, Gareth Eales, Ian Bates, Umbrella Faire, was co-opted to the review.
- 3.1.3 This review links to the Council’s corporate priorities, particularly corporate priority 2- Safer Communities (Making you feel safe and secure.)
- 3.1.4 The Scrutiny Panel established that the following needed to be investigated and linked to the realisation of the Council’s corporate priorities.

3.2 Evidence Collection

- 3.2.1. Evidence was collected from a variety of sources:

Presentation to set the scene

Rough sleeper engagement
Homelessness in Northampton
Housing First
Tackling Hidden Homelessness

- Relevant national and local background research papers
- Definitions – Rough Sleepers, homeless, and Hidden Homelessness
- Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

- Barriers to housing people and maintaining successful tenancies
- Relevant Council Policies and Strategies
- Statistics:

Rough sleeper data
Hidden homelessness data and information
Homeless data, including LGBT statistic

Relevant Legislation:

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
The Health and Social Care Act 2012

Relevant published papers on homelessness and rough sleeping, for example Central Government's paper – [Rough Sleeping \(England\) 2018](#), [Housing First - A Good Practice Briefing - Shelter](#)

HomelessLink paper https://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Annual%20Review%202017_0.pdf

Best practice external to Northampton
Case studies – hidden homeless and rough sleepers

Internal expert advisors:

- Cabinet Member for Housing, NBC
- Housing Options and Advice Manager, NBC
- Cabinet Member for Community Safety, NBC
- Chair of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and the Community Safety Team

External expert advisors:

- Head of Protecting Vulnerable Persons, Northamptonshire Police
- Director, NACRO
- Director, NAS
- Director of Public Health, Northamptonshire County Council
- Director, Adult Social Care, NCC (specifically in relation to ex-Offenders)
- Director, Housing First (England)
- Manager, Hope Centre
- Service Manager, Salvation Army
- Service Manager, Jesus Army
- Chief Executive, Central Northamptonshire CAB
- Homelessness Charities such as:
 - Shelter
 - Crisis
 - Joseph Rowntree Trust
 - Big Issue
- Health Watch Northamptonshire
- Director, Maple Access Centre

- Director, SAAFA
- Skype interview, or similar, link with American organisation regarding the Housing First initiative
- MPs – Michael Ellis, Andrea Leadsom, Andrew Lewer
- Community Co-Chairs, all Northampton Community Forums
- Representative of the Landlords Forum

Site visit(s) to the Hope Centre, Women’s Refuge, Oasis House; other organisations that support homeless people and rough sleepers, Emmaus Centre in Bedford. Representatives of the Panel to accompany the Out Reacher Workers and attend the Rough Sleepers count. Site visit to Re-Store Café. Representatives of the Scrutiny Panel visited Manchester

4 Key Findings and Conclusions

4.1 After all of the evidence was collated the following conclusions were drawn:

- 4.1.1 The Scrutiny Panel realised that homelessness is a complex problem. There is a need for a targeted approach to entrenched rough sleepers. The Council has made a successful bid for rough sleeper funding which will expand the outreach service and employ one mental health worker to the team
- 4.1.2 Hidden homelessness is difficult to identify and quantify, 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.
- 4.1.3 It was emphasised that people coming out of prison need homes. Prisons have a Duty to Refer (under the Homeless Reduction Act) to housing service, and Northampton’s Housing Services is hoping to be able to make better links with prisons with the recruitment of the additional officer.
- 4.1.4 The Scrutiny Panel was pleased that the Night Shelter is making a real and lasting difference to the hundreds of people who have stayed there. However, it is not the only housing option available to people who are sleeping rough and it is unreasonable to expect the Night Shelter to meet everyone’s housing and support needs, irrespective of the risk they pose and their level of engagement.
- 4.1.5 There is a need for more bed spaces 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”.
- 4.1.6 The Scrutiny Panel noted that there is a men’s refuge in Kettering. The majority of men at this refuges have been subject to honour abuse. There is a need for more refuges for both men and women across the country.
- 4.1.7 The Scrutiny Panel was concerned about the psychological impact that rough sleeping has on individuals.

- 4.1.8 Evidence gathered demonstrated that getting agencies to work together in respect of homelessness and rough sleeping is essential.
- 4.1.9 There is a need for all Agencies to share data that they hold in respect of homeless people and rough sleepers. Post-Unitary, it would be useful for discussions to be held regarding the sharing of data to all agencies.
- 4.1.10 The Scrutiny Panel was concerned about homeless people who had no recourse to public funds and felt that investigations could be undertaken to ascertain if 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.
- 4.1.11 Rough sleepers have clear needs and often have barriers to re-housing, for example rent arrears, anti-social behaviour.
- 4.1.12 The Scrutiny Panel emphasised 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. Rough sleepers with mental health problems need to get treatment quickly.
- 4.1.13 There is a need to extend Oasis House. Currently there are 48 units at Oasis House. There is also a need for a night shelter that is able to accommodate women and men. The Scrutiny Panel noted that, although women have longer life span than men, this is reversed in rough sleeping situations.
- 4.1.14 The Scrutiny Panel suggested that in respect of preparing for independent living – there are units that are “step down” units that have their own utility meters, and are unfurnished, the purpose of these is for ex-rough sleepers to gain skills to succeed. There is a need for more step down services.
- 4.1.15 The Scrutiny Panel acknowledged that tackling entrenched rough sleepers is extremely challenging, especially where rough sleeping communities have become established. A multi-faceted approach is needed. Often communities are forming around drug use. It was felt that there may be charitable agencies that people are willing to engage with. All need to work together.
- 4.1.16 Housing First will work with complex customers and provide in-depth support. Midland Heart operates a small Housing First service. There have been successes in other counties with Housing First. The Scrutiny Panel is very keen for Housing First to be part of the solution in Northampton. There would however be so much to consider to make sure it works.
- 4.1.17 The Scrutiny Panel was pleased to note there are multiple pathways, for example, specialist domestic violence services.

4.1.18 The Scrutiny Panel realised that the rough sleepers count has such strict boundaries, NBC's is comprehensive 12am – 3 am. The winter shelter shows a wider picture – it also prevented them from rough sleeping for people who stayed a few nights and were then not seen again.

4.1.19 The Scrutiny Panel noted the need to recruit staff to manage temporary accommodation and 'free up' the social lettings agency staff to focus on private rented accommodation.

4.1.20 From the site visits undertaken, the Scrutiny Panel 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.
- 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.
- 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 work undertaken by the Bridge Project was welcomed and noted the value that it provided to its Members was realised.

4.1.21 The Scrutiny Panel felt that there needed to be a Social Media Strategy in place as it was realised that a lot of mis-information can be put on social media. Housing and Wellbeing, Northampton Borough Council, has an information page on the Council's Web Page.

4.1.22 The Scrutiny Panel agreed that 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.

5. Options

5.1 Cabinet will need to consider the possible options as part of its response to the recommendations.

6. Implications (including financial implications)

6.1 Policy

6.1.1 The work of Overview and Scrutiny plays a major part in the development of the Council's policy framework through its work programme.

6.1.2 The report and its recommendations have policy implications in relation to the Council's response to the recommendations regarding homelessness and rough sleepers. Cabinet's response will need to consider these issues in detail.

6.2 Resources and Risk

6.2.1 Cabinet will need to consider the resourcing issues for the recommendations made.

6.3 Legal

6.3.1 Legal issues will need to be considered as part of Cabinet's response to the recommendations.

6.4 Equality

6.4.1 Equality issues will need to be considered as part of Cabinet's response to the recommendations.

6.5 Consultees (Internal and External)

6.5.1 The Committee received evidence from a variety of sources as detailed in paragraph 3.2.1 of this report.

Background Papers

Overview and Scrutiny Committee report – Homelessness and Rough Sleepers (May 2019)

Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 10 June 2019

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