

REGENERATION AND HOUSING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

HOMELESSNESS REVIEW

NOVEMBER 2016 TO JANUARY 2017

FOREWORD

At a meeting of the Regeneration and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel in November 2016, the Panel was provided with a report which gave an overview of Homelessness across the Borough.

As a result of the information received, the Panel agreed to look further at support mechanisms in place to address the issue.

I am therefore delighted to present the findings of this recent scrutiny review which includes recommendations made by the Panel.

The Panel would like to thank everyone who contributed to the review including Councillors, Local Authority officers, partners, stakeholders and individuals who gave up their time to support the work of this group and who are very much appreciated.

Members look forward to receiving the response to our findings and recommendations made.



Councillor Paul Wray
Chair of the
Regeneration and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The following recommendations were made by the Regeneration and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel following a review undertaken between November 2016 and January 2017 into Homelessness. The reasons for the recommendations are set out below and additional information is provided throughout the report.
2. The Panel's recommendations are therefore that consideration is given to the following: -
 - i. That the Homelessness Strategy be added to the Panel's work plan in 2017/18.

REASON: The Local Authority has a duty to publish a Homelessness Strategy and consult other local or public authorities, or voluntary organisations before adopting or modifying the Strategy. The Local Authority has a valid Strategy in place until 2018/19 but its revision will not be undertaken until there is more clarification from the Homeless Reduction Bill. The main thrust of the Bill is to refocus English local authorities efforts to prevent homeless and seeks to amend Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996. Its measures include:

- An extension of the period during which an authority should treat someone as threatened with homelessness from 28 to 56 days.
 - Clarification of the action an authority should take when someone applies for assistance having been served with a section 8 or section 21 notice of intention to seek possession from an assured shorthold tenancy.
 - A new duty to prevent homelessness for all eligible applicants threatened with homelessness.
 - A new duty to relieve homelessness for all eligible homeless applicants.
- ii. That an update on the successful funding bid from Central Government be provided to the Panel during 2017/18.

REASON: The Panel was pleased to receive notification that £400,000 had been secured from the funding bid to Central Government to address homelessness and rough sleeping in the region. Members wished to receive an update on the proposals, including:

- How the reduction and flow of new rough sleepers to the street, through more targeted prevention activity, is being achieved.

- Ensure that people have a safe place to stay while services work with them to resolve the homelessness crisis.

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- Help new rough sleepers off the street and into independence, through more rapid crisis interventions and support to access and sustain move-on accommodation.

iii. That support be given to the Principle of Housing First and an update be provided to the Panel in 2017/18.

REASON: At the Homelessness Summit, Housing First was addressed by Helen Keats, former DCLG national advisor outlining best practice. The Panel was aware of the difficulties associated with addressing people who were homeless with chaotic lifestyles, and if the provision of the housing first model was found by the local authority to be the most strategic, effective and have positive outcomes, then it be supported.

FOCUS OF THE REVIEW

3. The remit of the review was to address challenges, gaps and consider how the system is working with the mechanisms in place to address Homelessness.

METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

4. The Regeneration and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel agreed that a review should be undertaken through a series of informal meetings addressing:
 - Key issues homeless people face
 - Effectiveness of Wrap-around services
 - Key challenges for the Local Authority and St Leger Homes of Doncaster

MEMBERSHIP

5. Membership of the Regeneration and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel is as follows: -

Councillor Paul Wray – Chair
Councillor Sue Knowles
Councillor Sandra Holland
Councillor James Hart
Councillor Clive Stone

Councillor Majid Khan – Vice Chair
Councillor Eva Hughes
Councillor John Healy
Councillor Alan Smith

TIMESCALE AND MEETINGS

6. It was agreed by the Regeneration and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel that the review would be undertaken over two meetings on:

28th November, 2016; and
18th January, 2017

CONTRIBUTORS

7. During the review, the following individuals have kindly provided their time and expertise to enable Members to receive a broad range of information: -

Susan Jordan, Chief Executive St Leger Homes of Doncaster
Steve Waddington, Director of Housing, St Leger Homes of Doncaster
Councillor Jane Nightingale, Cabinet Member for Housing
Adam Goldsmith, Head of Service (Local Investment Planning) Regeneration and Housing

BACKGROUND

8. The Panel considered information that set the scene for discussion. Members learnt that there was nationally a significant increase in number of homeless people and Doncaster was no different. There was also an increasing number of people with complex needs for example, with drug and alcohol abuse, who find it incredibly difficult to work with support services and vice versa.
9. Areas Members addressed:
10. The Legal Framework and duties Placed on Local Authorities;
 - The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 placed a duty on local housing authorities to secure permanent accommodation for unintentionally homeless people and households in priority needs. Duties toward homeless people are now contained in the Housing Act 1996. Authorities are under a general duty to ensure that advice and information about homelessness and preventing homelessness, is available to everyone in their district free of charge.
 - The Local Authority has a duty to carry out a review of homelessness and publish a homelessness strategy. Doncaster currently has a valid strategy in place until 2018/19 but due to changes in legislation the production of the new strategy was paused at the time of the review.
11. Duties to carry out Inquiries on people presenting themselves as homeless and should seek to establish:
 - Whether an applicant is eligible for assistance (this is related to the applicant's immigration status).
 - Whether the applicant is homeless or threatened with homelessness.
 - Whether or not they or someone in their household is in priority need – with domestic violence being categorised as “any other vulnerability” with cases addressed on an individual basis ensuring the long term future is considered.
 - Whether or not they are intentionally homeless - There was a need to understanding an individual's circumstances eg. choosing not to pay rent, not able to afford to pay the rent or mortgage. Mortgage companies welcomed discussions with people who are struggling with repayments, to try and resolve the position.
 - Does the Local Authority have an interim duty to provide accommodation.

12. The Doncaster Context

13. Breakdown of homeless in Doncaster and rough sleeping

14. To address helping people who have found themselves with real complex issues for example, dependencies, family breakdown or mental health, was exceptionally difficult. When homeless people present themselves to the authority or partners, their main focus is immediate accommodation and somewhere safe to go. These individuals need as much help and intervention as possible to ensure they actively function and live independently, but, without support then a person's change in behaviour will fail.

15. Reason for Homelessness

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Family Licence Termination (parental exclusions)	4	20	9
Family Licence Termination (other)	10	10	14
Relationship breakdown (violent)	18	36	29
Relationship breakdown (other)	6	11	3
Mortgage arrears repossessions	1	17	5
Rent arrears	3	5	2
Loss of Assured Short hold Tenancy	10	25	43
Loss of other rented accommodation incl. NASS	5	10	9
Other inc left institution or care, emergency, return from abroad, sleeping rough, hostel violence/harrassment	11	39	17
Total	68	173	131

16. Reasons for Priority Need Acceptance

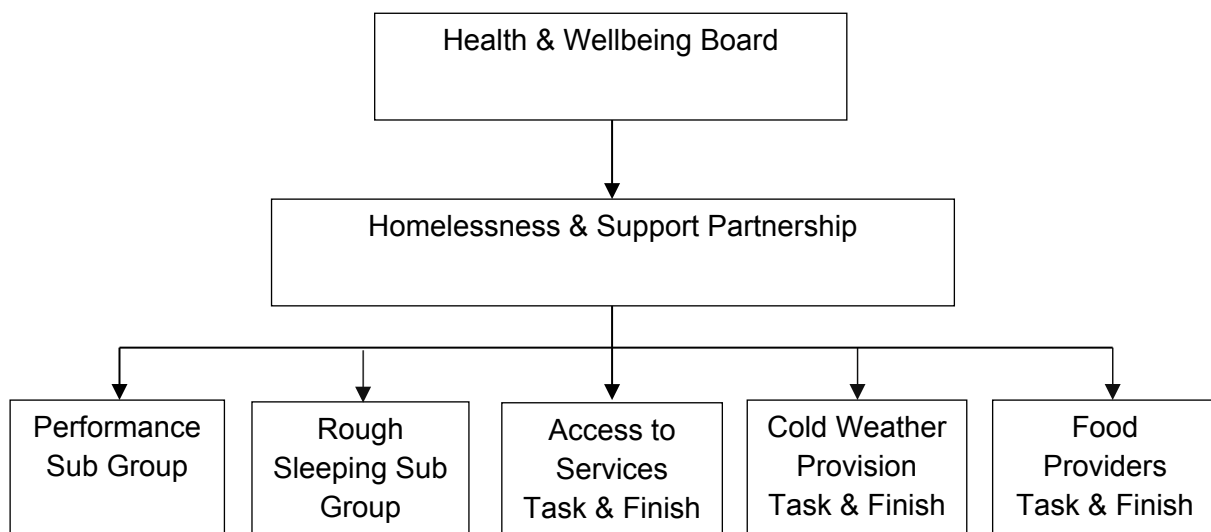
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Households with children or pregnant	49	110	95
16/17 year olds/vulnerable young people	1	2	1
Old age	6	9	1
Households with physical illness or disability	11	22	18
Households with mental health illness	8	14	13
Domestic abuse	7	7	6
Asylum seekers	0	0	0
Emergency/other	1	3	4
Total	83	167	138

17. The Homeless and Support Partnership - was at the time of the review addressing its terms of reference to ensure systems could respond to current behaviours. There is already a lot of good provision in communities but gaps required identifying and changes to the system made, to ensure all services sit together and work smoothly. Clear pathways and personal support plans required developing for each homeless individual with support removed or added, as required, to ensure is person as receiving maximum backing and encouragement.

18. Five specific sub/task and finish groups are being established by the Partnership:

- Performance
- Access to Services (including Single / Joint Assessment)
- Cold Weather Provision
- Rough Sleeping
- Food Providers

19. The following table shows the proposed governance structure for the Partnership.



20. It is envisaged that the sub groups will be a permanent part of the governance structure and the task groups will be time limited and brought together as and when necessary to reflect a specific issue.

21. Work around the cold weather provision had already started prior to the refresh of the Partnership leading up to the winter period. As a result of this work a new protocol has been produced.

22. Rough sleeping count

23. A snapshot count was undertaken across the Borough, with the verified number collated at 2am. The Local Authority was not required to undertake a verified count each year. There were a lot of hidden homeless people, for example, those sofa surfing and not everyone in the town centre who was begging or behaving in an unsociable manner was homeless. Members challenged Doncaster's homeless figures compared to South Yorkshire, but it was noted that circumstances could be different every night. One of the challenges Doncaster faced is, it has a lot of services to offer that other Authorities don't, so those sleeping rough may not have an historic connection with Doncaster but travel here for support.

24. Rough sleeping grant funding

25. Doncaster has been successful in the South Yorkshire bid joining up with Sheffield, Barnsley and Rotherham receiving the maximum amount of £400,000 over a 2 year period. This will fund a Co-ordination Manager and a team of three navigators to help those new to the streets or experiencing hidden forms of homelessness to get the emergency accommodation and support they need.

26. The three navigators will target those at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping.

27. The Co-ordination Manager's role will involve partners in the voluntary, statutory and health services to provide outreach at the right time in the right place.

28. The funding will also contribute to the development of a "sit up" service to ensure that places of safety are available and this will link into a multi-agency response to address individual needs, focusing particularly on mental health, substance misuse and offending. The "sit up" service will give professionals time to undertake comprehensive assessments of need and agree with the service user, support required.

29. Initial developments of the service were scheduled for January and February, 2017, including how the service be commissioned.

30. It is intended that South Yorkshire partners will develop a plan to:

- Reduce the flow of new rough sleepers to the street, through more targeted prevention activity.
- Ensure that people have a safe place to stay while services work with them to resolve the homelessness crisis.
- Help new rough sleepers off the street and into independence, through more rapid crisis interventions and support to access and sustain move-on accommodation.

31. Ex-prisoners – leaving Doncaster's prisons should generally be resettled in their home town but some people wish to remain in Doncaster. Funding for the ex-prisoners, "Out of the Gate" service has been removed, where historically people were collected from the prison gates and taken to accommodation. Whereas it is now each individuals responsibility to make their own arrangements. Returning to family and friends could be difficult, in these circumstances as issues at home may have led to a person initially committing a crime.
32. Distrust of Establishment - Some people may not wish to engage with services and could lead to a distrust of the establishment, particularly if they had been failed in any way in the past.
33. Food Providers (Update from the Cabinet Member for Housing) – In October 2016, work began to engage with four volunteer food providers in Doncaster Market Place. It was noted that the providers were feeding many people who had fallen on hard times, not just homeless people. The purpose of the engagement was to build a positive relationship with both food providers and the people using the kitchens to address a number of concerns that existed in and around the market. The food kitchens are an important source of help to vulnerable people, but they were also enabling more unseemly behaviour to manifest in the town centre.
34. Progress was quickly made to relocate the food providers from the Market Place to an indoor location in partnership with Changing Lives, a national charity providing support for vulnerable people and families. Changing Lives offered, free of charge, an indoor location for the food kitchens in their new premises scheduled to open in Princes Street in February 2017. Interim indoor locations have been provided by the United Reformed Church, Hallgate and St James Church on St Sepulchre Gate West.
35. Having premises for food providers to work from also gives the opportunity to provide an outreach service and begin the process of wrapping around support for people with complex needs. The food providers meet regularly with statutory agencies and are developing the service they provide to work alongside agencies. Working in this was identified that some individuals find it very difficult to navigate their way around the wide range services, often resulting in further dis-engagement and falling further behind in their personal circumstances.
36. A multi-agency outreach and triage team (from the communities area team, St Leger Homes, adult social care, Aspire drug and alcohol service and Riverside housing support) was therefore established to support people in a more systematic way and focus on individuals with complex needs in the town centre. The triage team can actively seek out homeless and destitute individuals ensuring people can tell their story only once and receive help and support to change their circumstances for the better.

37. Temporary Accommodation available in Doncaster/length of stay – one of the current challenges faced is collating information on the percentage take up, with some providers full and others not. With regard to the length of stay in temporary accommodation some people were staying in the system too long and can, in some circumstances, be upwards of 2 years. It was stressed that a settlement pathway should be put in place for a 10 month period on average. There needed to be a good understanding of people's needs to ensure a solid independent life.

38. Homelessness Summit/Housing First

39. Helen Keats DCLG national advisor attended the Homelessness summit outlining best practice to assist people who were homeless with chaotic lifestyles. It was outlined that accommodation was the anchor to turning a difficult lifestyle around, with added services provided.

40. There was a need for commitment from the service user to engage voluntarily with support offered. If not, door knocking would be used to encourage the person to be involved with the programme. This could take time and evidence showed that ultimately this high supportive mechanism worked. This process was intensive upfront, but with regards to costs this pathway proved to be cheaper over time. If people are not given intensive support costs to all partners including health service and the Police, could result in being much higher.

41. One of the clear frustrations was if someone was adamant, unwilling to engage with professionals and partners and continued to choose a chaotic lifestyle, could lead to links with the person being lost.

42. Street Doctors Surgery – this was provided in Doncaster in November 2016 enabling easy access people who would not generally or voluntarily go to see a doctor. When people engage with this service there is the opportunity to provide effective treatment and also cost save long term by providing positive support. On occasions this service has saved lives.

43. Ex-servicemen – sometimes local authorities are presented with people who are homeless following exit from the services. They become institutionalised and can find it difficult living a life without regime and structure. People in this category are prioritised and the figures are recorded.

44. Tent City (update by the Cabinet Member for Housing)

45. Tent city is an encampment of rough sleepers with the intention of highlighting a perceived lack of action by councils/agencies to tackle homelessness. It is a national campaign that has seen tented encampments established in several towns and cities across the country.

46. The organisers of Tent City had two objectives:

- i. Raising awareness and whether this is acceptable
- ii. Provide safe haven rather than sleep rough on the street

46. The encampment was established by project organisers on Saturday 19 November 2016. Initially, only five tents were pitched and over the period of two/three weeks this number grew to over 30. The local authority did not support the idea of a tented site as an effective way of tackling homelessness or resolving the challenge of being able to engage with people who have a range of complicated problems. However, it does recognise the issue of homelessness must be addressed. It undertook an approach to engage with the project organisers and use the newly established outreach and triage to assess and help those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

47. The number of people who were occupying the tents was difficult to establish because people did come and go but there were between 45 and 50 people who had some association with the gathering. It was evident that not everyone was homeless but the team worked with all people present. The outreach team did engage with 86 people across the town centre who presented as homeless.

- 86 - people engaged
- 72 - people assessed
- 14 - people did not take up offer of assessment
- 61 - people assessed received an offer of accommodation
- 46 - accepted accommodation
- 15 - refused the offer of accommodation
- 11 - people not homeless
- 2 – people required repatriation to their own country

48. Assessments found that the majority of people were already known to Services with some already provided with accommodation but asked to leave due to unacceptable behaviour eg. taking drugs or being aggressive.

49. Meetings with the organisers of Tent City had identified that Doncaster was already providing what the people were protesting for.

49. Engagement was difficult at first with an initial reluctance of the project organisers to engage and a fair degree of unsubstantiated criticism of services. This quickly changed and developed into a very positive relationship between services and project organisers. The result was joint working to assess people who are notoriously difficult to engage and with a deep aversion to authority.

50. The accommodation offered ranged from hostels, temporary accommodation, shared accommodation or own tenancy.

51. Part of the engagement with the project organisers included creating an exit strategy to voluntarily disband tent city. The organisers were advised that if the encampment wasn't voluntarily disbanded the Local Authority would consider legal options available to remove the occupiers from site. All tents were voluntarily removed by 17th December before there was a need for an Eviction Order to come into force.