

Overview & Scrutiny Committee



SCRUTINY PANEL Homelessness (Pre-Decision Scrutiny)

May 2017



NORTHAMPTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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Foreword

The objective of the Scrutiny Review was to review how the Borough Council and its partners prevent homelessness and to respond to those without homes in the borough.

Key Lines of Enquiry

- To gain an understanding of the work currently being undertaken by Northampton Borough Council (NBC), partnerships, statutory and voluntary organisations to address homelessness
- To assess the extent of homelessness and rough sleeping in the borough assess the initiatives currently in place to tackle homelessness
- To examine the Council's Severe Weather Provision
- To gain an understanding of the effect on the health, wellbeing and the safety of homelessness people, including rough sleepers
- To gain an understanding of the causes and barriers to support homelessness
- Identify any specific groups that are not accessing services

The review was a focussed piece of work that linked to the Council's corporate priorities and examined a range of information. The Scrutiny Panel looked at evidence from Local Authorities noted for best practice, heard from Authorities, organisations and groups regarding the assistance that they provide to homeless people and rough sleeper. Interviews with the Cabinet Members and senior staff from Northampton Borough Council and various external witnesses were held. Baseline information was received and desktop research carried out.

Homelessness is a growing problem, more and more people face the prospect of living in temporary accommodation or just sofa surfing with their friends or relatives. Homelessness is due to a number of factors, further details are provided within the report of the Scrutiny Panel.

Evidence received showed that being homeless is physically and mentally difficult and that homeless people are among the most vulnerable.

The Scrutiny Panel was made up from members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee: myself, Councillor Terrie Eales (Deputy Chair); Councillors Rufia Ashraf, Mohammed Aziz, Vicky Culbard, Janice Duffy, Elizabeth Gowen, Dennis Meredith, Sam Kilby-Shaw, together with another non-Executive Councillors Councillor Cathrine Russell. Pete Smith, Head of Partnerships, Homelesslink was co-opted to the Scrutiny Panel.

This review was carried out between May 2016 and March 2017.



Councillor Zoe Smith
Chair, Scrutiny Panel 3 – Homelessness (Pre Decision Scrutiny)

Acknowledgements to all those who took part in the Review:-

- Councillors Councillor Terrie Eales (Deputy Chair); Councillors Rufia Ashraf, Mohammed Aziz, Vicky Culbard, Janice Duffy, Elizabeth Gowen, Dennis Meredith, Sam Kilby-Shaw, together with another non-Executive Councillors Councillor Cathrine Russell. Pete Smith, Head of Partnerships, Homelesslink (Co-Optee) who sat with me on this in-depth Scrutiny Review
- Councillor Mike Hallam (at the time of the review was the Cabinet Member for Community Safety), Councillor Stephen Hibbert, Cabinet Member for Housing, Debbie Ferguson, Community Safety Manager, Julie Seddon, Chair of the CSP, Emma Forbes, Housing Options Manager, NBC, Mike Kay, Chief Executive and Shirley Davies, Executive Director, NPH, Detective Superintendent Steve Lingley, Northants Police, Inspector Rich Tompkins, RISE Team, Police Sergeant Julie Parsons, Anti-Social Behaviour Unit, Lesley Hagger, Director, Children's Services, Northamptonshire County Council, Robin Bates, Head of Revenues and Benefits, Matthew Steele, Revenues and Benefits, LGSS, Akeem Ali, Director of Public Health, NCC, Manager, Maple Access Centre, Robin Burgess, General Manager of the Hope Centre, Theresa Kelly, Manager, NAASH, John Rawlings, on behalf of the Chief Executive, HealthWatch Northants, for providing either written or oral evidence to a meeting of the Scrutiny Panel.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the Scrutiny Panel was to review how the Borough Council and its partners prevent homelessness and to respond to those without homes in the borough.

Key Lines of Enquiry

- To gain an understanding of the work currently being undertaken by Northampton Borough Council (NBC), partnerships, statutory and voluntary organisations to address homelessness
- To assess the extent of homelessness and rough sleeping in the borough assess the initiatives currently in place to tackle homelessness
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- To gain an understanding of the causes and barriers to support homelessness
- Identify any specific groups that are not accessing services

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee, at its work programming event in April 2016, agreed to include a review around how the Borough Council and its partners prevent homelessness. An in-depth review commenced in May 2016 and concluded in March 2017.

This review links to the Council's corporate priorities, particularly corporate priority 3 - Housing for Everyone - Helping those that need it to have a safe and secure home

Statutory Homeless - Households that meet specific criteria of priority need set out in legislation and to whom a homelessness duty has been accepted by a local authority. May not literally be living without a roof over their heads.

Rough Sleeping - about to bed down or bedded down in the open air (streets, tents, doorways, parks and bus shelters, etc.). Living in places that are not designed for habitation (stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, boats, stations, cars, etc.)

For counts and estimates, Officers do not include:

- People who are living in hostels or shelters
- Squatters, travellers or people who are living in campsites or other sites for recreational purposes or organised protest

CONCLUSIONS AND KEY FINDINGS

A significant amount of evidence was heard, details of which are contained in the report. After gathering evidence the Scrutiny Panel established that: -

Causes of homelessness

- 7.1.1 Evidence received highlighted Homelessness takes many forms and, although people who are sleeping rough on the streets or living in temporary accommodation are literally homeless, people do not need to be roofless to be classified as 'homeless'. Someone who is sofa surfing or living in unreasonable conditions, for example, may still be 'homeless', and someone who is likely to become homeless within the next 28 days may be treated as being 'threatened with homelessness'.
- 7.1.2 There are many reasons why people become homeless. In Northampton, the main causes of homelessness are as follows:
- Termination of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST) because the landlord wants to sell the property or let it to someone else who is able to pay a higher rent;
 - Relationship breakdown (violent / non-violent); and
 - Family or friends no longer able or willing to accommodate.
- 7.1.3 Other causes of homelessness include illness, bereavement, the loss of employment, a sudden reduction in income, harassment and unlawful eviction, tenancy breakdown, unmet support needs, mental health problems, substance misuse, leaving prison or hospital in an unplanned way, and difficulty in accessing private and social housing.
- 7.1.4 Homelessness can have a significant impact on people's health, wellbeing and personal safety by:
- Disrupting schooling, healthcare, employment and support networks;
 - Placing a strain on budgets (meals, transport, removals and storage);
 - Limiting space and privacy (affects relationships, friends and homework);
 - Causing a deterioration in physical and mental health;
 - Reducing self-esteem, confidence and personal hygiene;
 - Increasing isolation and the risk of physical assault; and
 - Increasing the misuse of alcohol and drugs.

- 7.1.5 The Scrutiny Panel emphasises that homelessness can happen to anyone and an individual does not have to be roofless to be homeless.
- 7.1.6 Homelessness can be damaging on people's health and wellbeing. Help and assistance is available from a number of Agencies. The Scrutiny Panel welcomed the work that is ongoing regarding the 'TOGETHER we change lives' strategy for ending the need for people to sleep rough in Northampton.
- 7.1.7 The Scrutiny Panel highlights the fact that, just because someone is sitting in a shop doorway with a sleeping bag doesn't necessarily mean they are homeless. Evidence received highlighted the fact that most of the people who are begging in Northampton are not homeless; most are living in supported housing or social rented housing, and some travel into Northampton from other areas. The Scrutiny Panel felt that if non rough sleeping beggars could be tackled, it would help rough sleepers.
- 7.1.8 The Government prescribes the way in which Rough Sleeper Counts and Estimates are carried out, and people who are staying in shelters, hostels and squats are not included in the figures.
- 7.1.9 The Scrutiny Panel was pleased to note that the Police have a good relationship with rough sleepers and the agencies that are helping rough sleepers to come off the streets.

Multi Agency working to support homelessness and rough sleeping

- 7.1.10 The evidence received highlights the good work that it being undertaken by Authorities and organisations and there is a need to ensure there is no duplication of efforts. Joint working and multi agency working is key in tackling, preventing and reducing homelessness and rough sleeping.
- 7.1.11 The Scrutiny Panel was pleased to hear that, in July 2016, the Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Board, together with partners, convened a Task and Finish Group in order to gain a clearer understanding of the activity that is being undertaken in Northamptonshire to support families and young people who are facing homelessness.
- 7.1.12 The Scrutiny Panel felt that there is a need for the Council to produce an advisory leaflet (that can be distributed to all agencies and services) which set sets out very clearly how the homelessness and housing advice

services are organised and managed in the borough and how people can access them. This will make it easier for customers, but also the groups that refer them.

Health and Wellbeing of homeless people, including rough sleepers

7.1.13 Rough sleepers can be very vulnerable and have complex needs. Many have (or have previously had) substance misuse issues, mental health problems and/or suffered a traumatic childhood.

7.1.14 The Scrutiny Panel welcomed the establishment of the Emergency Nightshelter and the fact that this winter's severe weather project (known as SWEP) will operate from the building (for men only).

7.1.15 Those experiencing homelessness of any kind have poorer access to health services and worse health outcomes.

7.1.16 As part of its evidence gathering, the Scrutiny Panel received preliminary details regarding the findings of the HealthWatch report. The Scrutiny Panel welcomed the HealthWatch report and the precis of the recommendations contained within it. The Scrutiny Panel recognised that a number of rough sleepers sleep during the day as they feel safer, but by doing this they can miss out on food, accessing support services and gaining assistance. The draft report consists of a number of recommendations:

- Assertive outreach workers should be appointed in order to avoid unnecessary duplication of services
- Surgeries should be theme based, like dental provision
- A community psychiatric nurse should be based in the Nightshelter.
- Alcohol and drugs support services for homeless people should be holistic. The homeless people who were interviewed confirmed that they want to be treated holistically.

Effects of homelessness

7.1.17 Evidence presented to the Scrutiny Review highlighted the effects of homelessness:

- Disruption of schooling, healthcare, employment and support networks
- Lack of space and privacy (affects relationships, homework and friends)
- Reduced self-esteem
- More financial strain (meals, transport, removals and storage)
- Physical / mental health
- Self-esteem, confidence and personal hygiene
- Isolation, risk of assault, loss of support networks
- May abuse alcohol and drugs
- May commit petty crime / anti-social behaviour
- Nowhere safe to store personal possessions

Temporary accommodation

7.1.18 The Scrutiny Panel was concerned that, sometimes, families that are placed in temporary accommodation outside of the borough. By placing families in temporary accommodation some distance from their children's schools, and expecting families to meet the transport costs, it puts additional financial burdens on the family. Although there is a severe shortage of temporary accommodation in Northampton, every effort needs to be made to ensure that anyone who is placed in temporary accommodation outside of the borough is brought back to Northampton as soon as possible.

7.1.19 The Council's temporary accommodation includes self-contained council housing, self-contained privately managed housing and Bed & Breakfast.

7.1.20 Evidence received detailed that on 11 January 2017, Cabinet approved the establishment of Guildhall Residential Lettings, an in-house social lettings agency. The social lettings agency will manage and let properties that are leased by the Council or owned by individuals and businesses. If landlords want to manage the property themselves, it can find them suitable tenants.

7.1.21 The Housing & Planning Act 2016 strengthens local authority powers to tackle criminal, rogue and irresponsible landlords with the introduction of Banning Orders, a tougher 'fit and proper person' test and Civil Penalties of up to £30,000, together with changes to Rent Repayment Orders. The Scrutiny Panel supported the establishment of the Guildhall Residential Lettings, an in-house social lettings agency.

7.1.22 Whilst undertaking site visits to temporary accommodation in the borough, the Scrutiny Panel was pleased to note the high quality accommodation that was offered. One bed and breakfast accommodation in particular provided free Wi-Fi which was felt to be an important facility to be offered.

Extent of homelessness and rough sleeping in the borough

7.1.23 Evidence received showed that as of July 2016, homelessness in Northants consisted of 705 homeless acceptances in 2015/16 (up 28% on 2014/15.) As of July 2016, homelessness in Northampton consisted of 321 homeless acceptances in 2015/16 (up 11% on 2014/15). This is consistent with the Government findings¹ that homelessness in England has increased since 2010. The 2015/16 financial year saw acceptances increase by a further 6% on 2014/15.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The above overall findings have formed the basis for the following recommendations: -

The purpose of this Scrutiny Panel was to review how the Borough Council and its partners prevent homelessness and to respond to those without homes in the borough.

Scrutiny Panel 3 recommends to Cabinet:

Multi Agency Working

8.1.1 The Council undertakes a comprehensive review of homelessness in the borough and develops a new 5 year Homelessness Strategy that is designed to substantially reduce the number of households that become homeless and the number of homeless families that are living in temporary accommodation.

8.1.2 The Council establishes a Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group to direct, co-ordinate and monitor the action that the Council and its partners take to tackle, prevent and reduce homelessness in the borough.

Improving access to homelessness services

¹ Department of Communities and Local Government – Statutory homelessness and prevention and relief, April to June 2016: England

- 8.1.3 The Council publishes an information leaflet, (electronic, paper base and in languages commonly known to be spoken by rough sleepers), for distribution to all Agencies, services and more widely available to members of the public, which sets out very clearly how its homelessness and housing advice services are organised – together with details of the services provided by other organisations and services – and how people can access them.
- 8.1.4 A comprehensive review of rough sleeping services is carried out to ensure that all services are operating efficiently and effectively, and that there is no unnecessary duplication of effort between the Nightshelter, the Hope Centre, Oasis House, NAASH and other services.
- 8.1.5 A Homeless Forum is established that engages with other statutory and non-statutory Agencies.
- 8.1.6 The Council carries out an annual review of rough sleeping in the borough that goes beyond the limitations of the Statutory requirements, for example personalised Development Plans are produced for each rough sleeper and that these continue to be implemented even after they have moved into permanent housing.
- 8.1.7 There is active and meaningful involvement of individuals who have lived experience or service users with the development and delivery of services, and the implementation process.
- 8.1.8 The Council considers its approach to assisting individuals with multiple and complex needs.

Improving access to health services

- 8.1.9 The existing arrangements for meeting the health needs of homeless people (including rough sleepers) are reviewed and strengthened – informed by a Health Needs Audit - to ensure that rough sleepers and people who are living in temporary accommodation are not only aware of, but are also helped to connect with, local support services.
- 8.1.10 Details of the medical advice and treatment available to people who are homeless and/or sleeping rough – at various locations, including Maple Access and Oasis House – are communicated to all organisations and

services in order that they can be shared with people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

Temporary accommodation

8.1.11 The Council develops an ambitious plan, using SMART outcomes, for minimising its use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation and out-of-borough temporary accommodation.

8.1.12 The Council works imaginatively and collaboratively with Northamptonshire County Council, and other Agencies and organisations, to provide more support for homeless families in temporary accommodation and mitigating any adverse effects on the families' finances and the children's schooling and healthcare.

8.1.13 All nightly-purchased temporary accommodation that is used by the Borough Council should provide free Wi-Fi facilities.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

8.1.14 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as part of its monitoring regime, reviews the impact of this report in six months' time.

8.1.15 It is recommended to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that when monitoring takes place, a previous service user is asked to attend the meeting to provide information.

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

Overview and Scrutiny

Report of Scrutiny Panel 3 – Homelessness (Pre Decision Scrutiny)

1 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of the Scrutiny Panel was to review how the Borough Council and its partners prevent homelessness and to respond to those without homes in the borough.

Key Lines of Enquiry

- To gain an understanding of the work currently being undertaken by Northampton Borough Council (NBC), partnerships, statutory and voluntary organisations to address homelessness
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- Identify any specific groups that are not accessing services

- 1.2 A copy of the scope of the review is attached at Appendix A.

2 Context and Background

- 2.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee, at its work programming event in April 2016, agreed to include a review around how the Borough Council and its partners prevent homelessness. An in-depth review commenced in May 2016 and concluded in March 2017.
- 2.3 This review links to the Council's corporate priorities, particularly corporate priority 3 - Housing for Everyone - Helping those that need it to have a safe and secure home
- 2.4 The Scrutiny Panel established that the following needed to be investigated and linked to the realisation of the Council's corporate priorities:

- Background data, including:
 - Presentation to set the scene: To identify the prevalence of the problem locally
 - Relevant national and local background research papers
 - Definitions – Homelessness and Rough Sleepers
 - Homelessness Legislation
 - Causes of Homelessness, including Rough Sleeping
 - Relevant Council Policies and Strategies
 - Statistics:
 - Rough sleeper data
 - Homelessness data
 - Relevant Legislation:
 - Welfare Reform Act 2012
 - Localism Act 2011
 - Homelessness Act 2002
 - The Health and Social Care Act 2012
 - Relevant published papers on homelessness and rough sleeping
- Best practice external to Northampton
- Internal expert advisors:
 - Cabinet Member for Housing, NBC
 - Housing Options and Advice Manager, NBC
 - Head of Revenues and Benefits, LGSS
 - Cabinet Member for Community Safety, NBC
 - Chair of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and the Community Safety Team
 - Case Managers, Anti-Social Behaviour Unit

- External expert advisors:
 - Head of Protecting Vulnerable Persons, Northamptonshire Police
 - Director of Public Health, Northamptonshire County Council
 - Manager, Hope Centre
 - Manager, Maple Access
 - Manager, NAASH
 - Drug and Alcohol Challenge Officer, the Bridge
 - Operations Manager, Midland Heart Housing Association
 - Service Manager, Salvation Army
 - Chief Executive, Central Northamptonshire CAB
 - Emmaus, Homelessness Charity
 - Shelter
 - Crisis
 - Healthwatch Northamptonshire

- Site visit to temporary accommodation(s) and Oasis House

2.5 Statutory Homelessness

2.5.1 Households that meet specific criteria of priority need set out in legislation and to whom a homelessness duty has been accepted by a local authority. May not literally be living without a roof over their heads.

2.6 Rough sleeping

Sleeping, about to bed down or bedded down in the open air (streets, tents, doorways, parks and bus shelters, etc.). Living in places that are not designed for habitation (stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, boats, stations, cars, etc.)

For counts and estimates, Officers do not include:

- People who are living in hostels or shelters
- Squatters, travellers or people who are living in campsites or other sites for recreational purposes or organised protest

3 Evidence Collection and Desktop Research

3.1 Evidence was collected from a variety of sources:

3.2 Background reports

[Presentation to set the scene](#)

Statistics

Homelessness in Northants as at July 2016:

- 705 homelessness acceptances in 2015/16 (up 28% on 2014/15)
- Northampton had 45% of County's acceptances
- Kettering, Wellingboro and Corby had 40% of County's acceptances
- Increased most in Corby (219%) & Kettering (94%)

Homelessness in Northampton as at July 2016:

- 321 homelessness acceptances in 2015/16 (up 11% on 2014/15)
- Around three quarters of 'accepted' families are lone parents
- One third of the decisions made were that applicant was 'not homeless' or was 'intentionally homeless'
- During a borough -wide 'count' on 24/03/16, 21 rough sleepers were found
- Approximately half of the rough sleepers are East European

Homelessness statistics, month by month, in Northampton (April to August 2016):

Measure	Average 2015/16	April	May	June	July	August
Total number of households living in temporary accommodation	76	74	82	97	106	111
Number of households living in B&B accommodation	32	35	32	36	55	49
Number of households that are prevented from becoming homeless	42	86	73	112	61	82
Number of households that make a homelessness application	38	63	63	49	55	69
Number of households for whom a full homelessness duty is accepted	26	34	39	41	27	46

Published Papers and Reports

House of Commons - Statutory Homelessness in England (October 2016)

It is reported that the House of Commons Library briefing paper provides statistics on statutory homelessness in England and explains local authorities' duties to assist homeless households. The paper includes an overview of, and comment on, Government policy in this area.

The report states that Local authorities in England have a duty to secure accommodation for unintentionally homeless households who fall into a 'priority need' category. There is no duty to secure accommodation for all homeless people. For example, there is no statutory duty to secure housing for homeless single people and couples without children who are not deemed to be vulnerable for some reason. Official statistics on statutory homelessness are published quarterly by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in March, June, September and December. The Department also publishes annual statistics on Homelessness Prevention and Relief work.

It is noted in the report that the financial year 2010/11 saw a 10% increase in homelessness acceptances by local authorities, representing the first financial year increase since 2003/4. Homelessness acceptances continued to rise over the next three years but fell by 3% between 2012/13 and 2013/14. The 2014/15 financial year recorded a further increase, with acceptances 36% higher than in 2009/10 (but 60% below the peak in 2003/4). The 2015/16 financial year saw acceptances increase by a further 6% on 2014/15.

The report goes on to state that Organisations such as Shelter and Crisis argue that the official statistics do not give a full picture of homelessness in England. The figures exclude those who are homeless but who do not approach a local authority for assistance and those who do not meet the statutory criteria. Local authorities are increasingly adopting informal responses to tackling homelessness, which can result in households falling outside the official quarterly monitoring process. In December 2015 the UK Statistics Authority published [an assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics](#) in relation to DCLG's homelessness and rough sleeping statistics. The assessment found that the Homelessness Prevention and Relief statistics "do not currently meet the standard to be National Statistics."

Homelessness arising from parents/friends/relatives being no longer willing or able to provide accommodation remains significant, as does homelessness

arising from the breakdown of a violent relationship. However, the most frequently cited reason for loss of the last settled home is now the ending of an assured shorthold tenancy in the private rented sector. In the second quarter of 2016 this reason was behind 41% of all statutory homeless acceptances in London.

The report concludes that the increase in statutory homelessness since 2009/10 is attributed to a number of factors, of which the most important is identified as the continuing shortfall in levels of new house building relative to levels of household formation. Housing Benefit reforms are also viewed as a contributory factor, particularly in London.

Homeless Link – Young People and Homelessness (2015)

Each year, Homeless Link publishes a paper regarding young people and homelessness.

The latest report was published in 2015. The purpose of the report is to explore the reasons young people become homeless, the support available to them, and areas that need to be improved.

The report details key findings:

“Young people are now the most likely group to be living in poverty. Whilst youth unemployment is at its lowest level since the recession, this is still over three times the rate of the older adult working age population. Young people have been adversely impacted by changes to the welfare system, there are increasing challenges to accessing affordable and suitable housing, and there have been significant cuts to youth services in the past five years.

Based on the experiences young people shared with us, it is now more and more difficult for young people to access the temporary help they need if things go wrong. Nearly half of people living in homeless accommodation services are aged between 16 and 24 and without adequate support or early intervention, homelessness can go on to impact education, employment, health and wellbeing and is more likely to lead to homelessness in older age. Our fifth annual report on youth homelessness focuses on young people accessing both local authorities and voluntary sector providers. It explores who is becoming homeless and the reasons for this, and the provision of homelessness prevention and

support services available to you. It goes on to examine the accommodation options young people have at the point of crisis, and longer term move-on from homelessness services. The research is based on two surveys administered to providers of homelessness services and local authorities in September 2015, as well as fourteen interviews with young people living in homelessness services. Scale and profile of youth homelessness.

There is a contrast between the scale of youth homelessness reported by homelessness providers and local authorities. Providers report seeing more young people who are homeless (68% reported an increase) whereas local authorities report seeing fewer young people (20% of people presenting as homeless were under 25, compared to 31% last year). . These changes support evidence that from elsewhere which suggests that declines in official statutory homelessness may have been offset by increases in other forms of homelessness. One explanation is that fewer young people are approaching their local authority for support and are approaching providers, or that young people are being signposted to providers as part of their local authority's advice or prevention .

Parents or carers no longer willing to accommodate continues to be the leading cause of youth homelessness, a causal factor in nearly half of cases (47%) compared to 36% in 2014. A large proportion of young people in homelessness services are aged 18-21 and non-care leavers (44%), and would be potentially affected by the proposed changes to end automatic entitlement for housing support for those aged 18-21.. The proportion of young women in homelessness services was higher than previous years at 46%, compared to 40% in 2014. Despite being homeless, large proportions of young people (65%) are studying, employed or on a work/apprenticeship scheme, including 22% of young people in paid employment. The proportion of young people sleeping rough has decreased slightly –17% had ever slept rough compared to 19% in 2014 Joint working and provision of prevention services.

Compared to 2014, both local authorities and providers were more likely to report the use of a Positive Pathway –64% of local authorities and 78% of providers report there is a Positive Pathway in their area. This has increased from 49% and 48% respectively last year. . The proportion of cases where youth homelessness was prevented or relieved increased to

23%, up from 19% last year. . The availability of prevention tools remained steady for local authorities, but four in ten (42%) still report they do not have an adequate range of tools to prevent youth homelessness. There are signs of improvement in joint working between Housing and Children's Services - 64% report that joint working is 'very effective' or 'effective' which has increased from 58% in 2014. The Positive Pathway' is the result of research and consultations undertaken with charities, organisations and young people by St Basils in 2012 and updated in 2015.

Young people without recourse to public funds or without a local connection are finding it increasingly difficult to access support as they are more likely to be turned away by services. This year 57% of services turned away young people because they had no recourse to public funds (compared to 24% last year) and young people with no local connection were turned away by 40% of services (compared to 25% last year). . There is a lack of youth appropriate emergency accommodation in many areas – half of areas (49%) do not have Nightstop or a similar scheme, 43 % do not have a youth specific assessment centre or short stay supported accommodation. Local authorities are more likely to have provision of longer term supported housing options for young people compared to emergency accommodation. However there have been some reductions; 29% of areas report that hostels and foyers are either not available or there is less availability and 34% of local authorities report the same for shared housing with floating support.

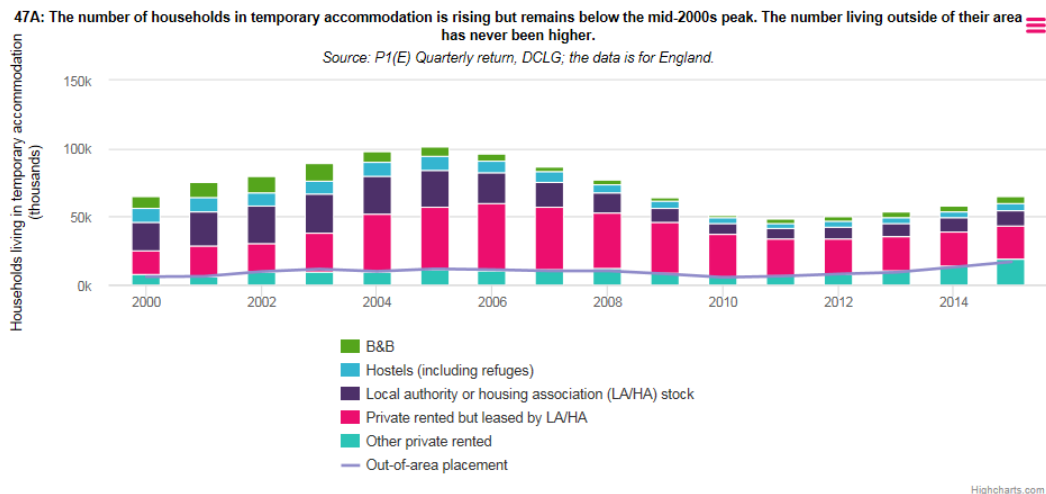
Bed and Breakfast usage for 16 and 17 year olds does not occur in 41% of local authorities. Yet 59% of local authorities still report rarely or occasionally using B&Bs for this age group. . Whilst slightly lower than last year, 55% of young people living in homelessness accommodation have complex needs and 34% have mental health issues (an increase from 23% in 2014). . Homelessness providers continue to provide a range of support services for young people. There has been an increase in the proportion of providers offering mediation services 73% compared to 41% in 2014. Homelessness providers report that on average young people spend 16 months in homelessness organisations before they move on, nearly double the length of time in 2014. The most common outcome for young people leaving homelessness providers is the private rented sector

(28%). Returning home to family or friends is now the least common outcome for young people leaving homelessness organisations –one in twenty (5%) providers reported this is the most common outcome compared to one in four last year.

Schemes to assist access to the private rented sector varied. Local authorities report that availability of shared accommodation options developed with private landlords and relationships developed with private landlords to let to young people has decreased. The availability of rent deposit or cashless bond schemes has stayed fairly constant (87% of local authorities have one). Sanctions, changes to the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) and reductions in Local Housing Allowance (LHA) continue to have a negative impact on young people’s ability to access accommodation; providers were more likely than local authorities to report young people are impacted ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a bit’ “

Joseph Rowntree Trust (JRT) – Temporary Accommodation details (2015)

In November 2015, JRT published a graph detailing the number of people living in temporary accommodation:



Albert Kennedy Trust

The Albert Kennedy Trust (AKT) reports that it supports young LGBT 16-25 year olds who are made homeless or living in a hostile environment.

In 2008 AKT undertook research examining mainstream providers approach to supporting LGBT young people, focusing on 12 national, regional and local housing and homelessness services.

A summary of the research report:

“Research shows that young LGBT people are at risk of discrimination which directly impacts on their life chances. Negative reactions to a young person’s sexual orientation or gender identity may result in homelessness or housing vulnerability, or may exacerbate an existing housing crisis.

Mainstream housing and support providers need to be equipped to work sensitively and effectively with those young LGBT people. More importantly, they should also be creating a welcoming environment where young LGBT people are willing to present themselves, express their needs and access support and advice in the first place. This is about ensuring services are accessible and fair, but also legally compliant.

It is evident that a number of mainstream housing and support providers are showing an awareness of LGBT equality and the need for inclusive services. The majority of organisations polled for this research had inclusive policies, included sexual orientation and, to a lesser extent, gender identity equality in their training and in some cases had even consulted with LGBT service users and staff. There are clearly pockets of good practice within the housing sector which should be celebrated and shared.

However, AKT’s experience suggests that this type of good practice is the exception rather than the rule. LGBT-specific services and projects are still needed. The number of young LGBT people accessing AKT’s services is increasing, yet across the UK such specialist services are rare. This is in part due to the lack of statistical evidence of the problem, and the failure to monitor LGBT issues at a national level.

The report has prompted AKT to develop in partnership with young people a quality mark ‘Making a Difference’ which comprises training, audit and the provision of resources which is now available to mainstream providers. “

In 2014/2015 AKT produced a report “LGBT – Youth Homelessness, A UK National scoping of cause, prevalence, response and outcome.

AKT reports that it examined the causes of youth LGBT homelessness as well as the longer term repercussions of family rejection.

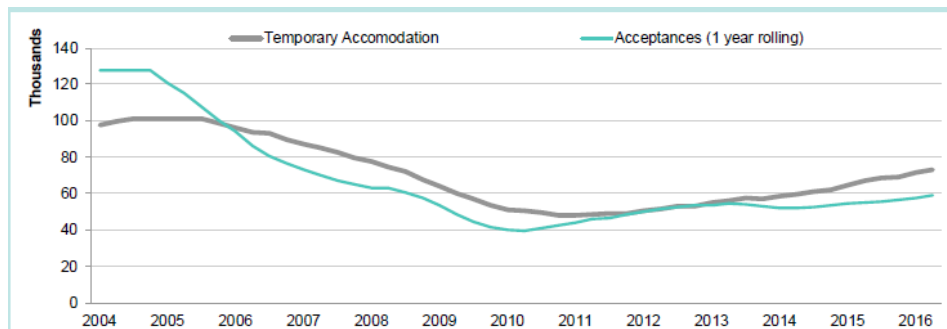
As a result of the study AKT reports that it made a number of recommendations to local and national government, housing providers and those working in the LGBT sector:

- the government to hold local authorities and housing providers accountable for the accurate and consistent collection, monitoring and application of sexual/gender identity data, using standardised assessments administered by trained staff.
- local authorities to conduct a thorough review of their housing options, policies and procedures to ensure services are appropriate for, and inclusive of, homeless LGBT young people.
- all housing Providers to provide training to staff to understand the unique needs of homeless LGBT youth.
- housing providers to provide staff with LGBT-specific training to ensure that practitioners understand the unique needs of this population of homeless young people.

Department of Communities and Local Government – Statutory homelessness and prevention and relief, April to June 2016: England

The reported purpose of the report is to provide information on the number of households that reported being homeless (or threatened with homelessness) to their local authority and were offered housing assistance.

- Local authorities accepted 15,170 households as being statutory homeless between 1 April and 30 June 2016, up 3% on the previous quarter and 10% on the same quarter of last year.
- These households that are owed a main homelessness duty to secure accommodation as a result of being unintentionally homeless and in priority need.
- The total number of households in temporary accommodation on 30 June 2016 was 73,120, up 9% on a year earlier, and up 52% on the low of 48,010 on 31 December 2010.



- Local authorities took action to prevent homelessness for 50,990 households in April to June 2016, up 4% from 48,820 in April to June 2015.
- A further 3,910 non-priority households were helped out of homelessness (relieved) by local authorities in April to June 2016, up 10% from 3,570 in April to June 2015.

HOMELESS REDUCTION BILL 2016-2017

Background to the Bill

Conservative backbench MP Bob Blackman introduced a Private Members' Bill aimed at reducing homelessness, based on a report commissioned by the charity Crisis. The aim of the Bill is to reform the homelessness duties placed on local authorities to ensure that at-threat households receive better help quicker.

The Bill was committed to a Public Bill Committee. The Public Bill Committee met on 30 November 2016. The Bill had had its Second Reading debate on 28 October 2016.

Bob Blackman MP welcomed the Government's support for his Bill and said:

"I welcome the government's decision to support my bill to reduce homelessness. Throughout my 24 years in local government prior to becoming an MP, I saw the devastation that can be caused by homelessness first hand, with too many people simply slipping through the net under the current arrangements.

By backing this bill, the government is demonstrating its commitment to an agenda of social justice and also shows that it is willing to listen. I look forward

to working with Ministers going forward in order to bring about this important change in legislation.”

Aims of the Bill

The reported aims of the Bill is to refocus English local authorities on efforts to prevent homeless. The Bill is seeking 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.
- A new duty on public services to notify a local authority if they come into contact with someone they think may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

It is reported that several provisions have financial implications for local authorities for which a money resolution will be required. The Government has stated that an impact assessment and new burdens assessment will be published in due course.

Government support

The Government supported the Bill's progress through Parliament on 24 October 2016. It is reported that Local authorities and their representative organisations had said that they could not support the draft Bill in the absence of an effective long-term national strategy.

The Local Government Association (LGA) said: *“There are further risks that, in areas where council resources are already particularly stretched, legislative change in isolation could affect their capacity to deliver good outcomes for groups of vulnerable people that they are successfully helping now.”* The most controversial clauses from the local authority perspective have been removed from the final version of the Bill and, as a result, the LGA is reportedly close to supporting the Bill. There is certainly widespread support in the sector for a preventative approach to homelessness backed by adequate funding.

The Chartered Institute for Housing (CIH) is reported to have said “*CIH is supporting the campaigning of Crisis and others for a change in the homelessness legislation in England. The campaign has now reached a crucial point with the Homelessness Reduction Bill, a private member’s bill, tabled by the Conservative MP Bob Blackman, due to be debated in parliament on 28 October. The Homelessness Reduction Bill will change the current law to make sure that councils have a duty to prevent and relieve homelessness irrespective of someone’s priority status, which is the way the current system works. The Bill would extend the time that households are considered at risk of homelessness from 28 to 56 days and would require councils to provide emergency accommodation to people who have nowhere safe to stay to emergency accommodation.*”

Pressure for change

The Government reports that although a statutory framework has been in place to provide a safety net for homeless people in England since the enactment of the *Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977*, there has never been a comprehensive duty to secure accommodation for all homeless people.

In the summer 2015 Crisis established an Independent Expert Panel to consider the strengths and weaknesses of the homelessness legislation in England. In [The Homelessness legislation: an independent review of the legal duties owed to homeless people](#) (April 2016) the Panel said that the current safety net has a particular impact on single homeless people who “have no right to accommodation or adequate help to prevent or relieve their homelessness, even if they are sleeping rough.” The Panel favoured changes to place more emphasis on preventative work within a statutory framework, particularly in relation to single people and childless couples.

Select Committee inquiry into homelessness

The CLG Committee launched an inquiry into homelessness in December 2015 in response to evidence that homelessness, particularly rough sleeping, was increasing. The Committee concluded that the service offered to homeless non-priority need applicants is “unacceptably variable.” The Committee is supporting the *Homelessness Reduction Bill* and has called for a “renewed cross-Departmental strategy” to tackle homelessness.

New approaches in Scotland and Wales

For the Scrutiny Panel’s information, both Scotland and Wales have legislated in recent years to address the longstanding lack of support for homeless

single people has added to the pressure for change in England. In Scotland, there is a statutory duty on local authorities to find permanent accommodation for all applicants who are unintentionally homeless or threatened with homelessness. In Wales, local authorities have a duty to prevent all those threatened with homelessness from becoming homeless. Statistics covering the first full year of implementing the new statutory provisions in Wales indicate some success in the prevention of homelessness.

Homelessness is increasing

The Government reports that statutory homelessness in England has increased since 2010. The financial year 2010/11 saw a 10% increase in statutory homelessness acceptances by local authorities, representing the first financial year increase since 2003/4. Homelessness acceptances continued to rise over the next three years but fell by 3% between 2012/13 and 2013/14. The 2014/15 financial year recorded a further increase, with acceptances 36% higher than in 2009/10 (but 60% below the peak in 2003/4). The 2015/16 financial year saw acceptances increase by a further 6% on 2014/15.

The Government goes on to state that the estimated number of rough sleepers in England has also increased each year since 2010. The autumn 2010 total was 1,768 while the autumn 2015 total was more than twice as high at 3,569. The number of rough sleepers increased by 30% between 2014 and 2015, the biggest year-on-year increase since 2011.

Why is homelessness increasing?

The Government reports that the rise in homelessness is due to:

- failure to ensure a sufficient supply of affordable housing.
- the termination of assured shorthold tenancies in the private rented sector,
- Housing Benefit restrictions introduced since 2010 which, it is argued, have made it difficult for claimants to secure housing at rents which Housing Benefit will cover.

Tackling Homelessness

On 17 October 2016 the Government announced a £40 million programme to provide an innovative approach to tackling homelessness. This includes:

- a new £10 million rough sleeping prevention fund to help individuals who might be struggling to get by from ending up on the street; it will also provide rapid and targeted interventions for new rough sleepers, such as helping them to access employment and education opportunities
- also announced were details of £20 million for local authorities to trial new initiatives, responding to the specific needs in their communities and focusing on prevention at an earlier stage; these areas will work with a wider group of at risk people to help families and individuals before they reach crisis point – including through new resident advice services and outreach work with landlords and private sector tenants
- a further £10 million Social Impact Bond programme has also been launched to help long-term rough sleepers who may be bouncing chaotically through the housing system – to address underlying issues such as poor mental health or substance abuse to help stop them from living on, and returning to, the streets

The Government goes on to state that it recognises that homelessness is not just a housing issue, and that for many people complex needs, such as mental health needs, provide a real barrier to improving their life chances. That is why the Government is working across government, including with the Department of Health, through the Ministerial Working Group on Homelessness.

3.3 Core questions

- 3.3.1 The Scrutiny Panel devised a series of core questions that it put to key witnesses over a cycle of meetings (Copy at Appendix B).
- 3.3.2 Key witnesses provided a response to these core questions at the meetings of the Scrutiny Panel held on 22 September 2016, 24 November and 26 January 2017.
- 3.3.3 Salient points of evidence:

Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Northampton Borough Council, Chair, CSP, and Community Safety Manager, Northampton Borough Council

- Rough sleepers are generally highly vulnerable individuals with very complex needs, more often than not also involved in street drinking and begging. Some rough sleepers do have, or have at some point, also had substance misuse problems, mental health problems, and may have suffered a traumatic childhood. It is also often found that there is

a history of homelessness. Therefore, when dealing with this group it is important to recognise that enforcement on its own is not the answer, and their wider health issues need to be taken into consideration. Due to their complex needs, and the chaotic lifestyle of most rough sleepers, a multi-agency case management approach is adopted in addressing individuals.

- The services, assistance and support that are available to people who are homeless, including rough sleepers.-
 - BC Homelessness Team (outreach, support and housing)
 - Street Community Multi-agency Group (holistic case management approach)
 - Oasis House (NAASH and Hope Centre, initial support re addiction and housing)
 - No Second Night Out project (NAASH, initial support re housing)
 - Maple Access Medical Centre (health support) – Bridge Project (intervention and support)
 - C2C Social Action (intervention, support & housing)
 - S2S (substance misuse agency - treatment)
 - Can (substance misuse agency – treatment & housing)
 - Women’s Aid (support and intervention)
- Due to the complex needs, and chaotic lifestyle of most rough sleepers, a multi-agency case management approach is adopted in addressing individuals. Due to increasing concerns about health, welfare and anti-social behaviour, a Multi-Agency Rough Sleepers, Street Drinkers & Beggars working group was established in 2011. Recently this meeting has been reviewed and retitled Street Community Working Group. The main aim is to address health, welfare and dependency issues and provide support to enable rough sleepers to leave the streets, finding suitable accommodation. Cases can be referred by any of the agencies involved. At the meetings cases are discussed with relevant officers, issues identified and a support plan developed which ranges from intervention through to enforcement, if required. It is important to note that agencies, in the first instance, will always try to engage and provide support to the individual to address their health issues, drug & alcohol dependency problems and housing needs. However, if it is abundantly clear that they will not engage, and they are causing issues

on the streets, the enforcement process will be followed. All cases are managed through the ECIN's case management system.

- Community Safety takes the lead on the Killing with Kindness campaign that is run 2 -3 times a year. This sees a multi-agency publicity campaign to raise awareness on begging and rough sleeping to discourage the public from giving directly to those begging, together with the provision of donation boxes at awareness raising events - proceeds are passed to local homelessness charities. The campaign also raises awareness around the complex needs of rough sleepers, beggars and street drinkers.
- Over the past 10 years we have seen a change in the demographic of rough sleepers, with an increase in people from Europe. The main difficulties experienced are that the majority are rough sleeping by choice and do not want to be housed. However, a number of them also have drug and alcohol issues. In some cases they do not have any recourse to public funds, and may also not be exercising their Treaty Rights. There are also some entrenched rough sleepers who do not want to, or find it very difficult to engage due to their long term drug/alcohol dependency issues and anti-social behaviour.
- Over the years there have been varying levels in engagement from agencies. However, the Street Community Working Group has seen a great improvement in joined up working between agencies, both statutory and voluntary over recent months. The introduction of the Outreach workers has also seen an increase in the engagement of rough sleepers with support agencies. There is however, always room for improvement in the approaches taken by agencies, and in providing a more co-ordinated approach
- Awareness of the services, assistance and support available to people who are homeless, including rough sleepers can be increased by:
 - Place more general information on NBC webpages. i.e. what rough sleeping is; how it can be reported; support services available etc.
 - Consider creating a reporting hotline or joining a national hotline such as 'Street Link' - this has been done in other areas, and enables members of the public to report rough sleeper's locations and concerns.
 - Continue to lead on the Killing with Kindness campaign to raise general awareness on rough sleeping, associated issues and support agencies.

- Action that is being taken to ensure that all agencies and members of the public know what to do if they know that someone is homeless or sleeping rough:
 - Implementations of Rough Sleepers Strategy
 - Multi-Agency seminars held
 - Outreach Workers have been promoted with frontline services
 - Multi-agency reviewed and refreshed

**Cabinet Member for Housing and Housing Options and Advice Manager,
Northampton Borough Council**

- Homelessness takes many forms and, although people who are sleeping rough on the streets or living in temporary accommodation are literally homeless, people do not need to be roofless to be classified as 'homeless'. Someone who is sofa surfing or living in unreasonable conditions may still be 'homeless', and someone who is likely to become homeless within the next 28 days may be treated as being 'threatened with homelessness'. There are many causes of homelessness. In Northampton, the main causes are:
 - Termination of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST) because the landlord wants to sell the property or let it to someone else who is able to pay a higher rent;
 - Relationship breakdown (violent / non-violent); and
 - Family or friends no longer able or willing to accommodate. Other causes of homelessness include illness, bereavement, the loss of employment, a sudden reduction in income, harassment and unlawful eviction, tenancy breakdown, unmet support needs, mental health problems, substance misuse, leaving prison or hospital in an unplanned way, and difficulty in accessing private and social housing. Homelessness can have a significant impact on people's health, wellbeing and safety:
 - Disrupting schooling, healthcare, employment and support networks;
 - Placing a strain on budgets (meals, transport, removals and storage);
 - Limiting space and privacy (affects relationships, friends and homework);
 - Causing a deterioration in physical and mental health;

- Reducing self-esteem, confidence and personal hygiene; • Increasing isolation and the risk of physical assault; and
 - Increasing the misuse of alcohol; and drugs
- The Council's Housing Options and Advice Team provides comprehensive advice and assistance to everyone who is homeless or threatened with homelessness. 2 It will work proactively and collaboratively with other services and organisations, as appropriate, to ensure that people receive the help and support that they need in order to avoid becoming homeless or to recover from a period of homelessness. The primary focus of the Council's Street Outreach Team – which works with a wide range of services and organisations – is to provide people who are sleeping rough with the necessary advice and assistance to leave the streets as quickly as possible. The Street Outreach Workers help people who are sleeping rough to access the support they need to address their health needs, alcohol and substance misuse issues, secure an income, and access volunteering, training, employment and suitable accommodation. Reconnection will also be an option where someone is stuck in an area that they do not want to be in and requires help in moving to another area where they will be able to benefit from being closer to their family, friends and support networks.
 - Multi Agency Rough Sleepers Strategy 'TOGETHER we change lives', the borough's ambitious, 3 year multi-agency strategy for ending the need for people to sleep rough in Northampton, was launched in July 2016 and was informed, developed and agreed after a Rough Sleepers Count in March 2016 and a series of workshops attended by more than 30 services and organisations. 'TOGETHER we change lives' sets out 10 strategic objectives that Northampton's multi-agency alliance will achieve by working together. Most of the objectives will be achieved within the next 12 months, with the following 2 years being used to ensure that the new ways of tackling, preventing and reducing homelessness is embedded across all services and organisations in Northampton. The 10 strategic objectives include setting up a temporary emergency night shelter, establishing a multi-disciplinary Street Services Team, working with hospitals, prisons, supported housing schemes and social landlords, developing individual multi agency support plans for individuals sleeping rough, and developing a comprehensive programme of volunteering, training and employment to improve people's life chances. Housing Allocations Policy. The Council is reviewing its Housing Allocations Policy, to ensure that it is fit for purpose and meets its strategic objectives in relation to the allocation of affordable housing. Consideration will be given to the ways in which the Housing Allocations Policy can be amended to support everyone's efforts to prevent homelessness, tackle severe overcrowding, safeguard children and vulnerable adults, facilitate move-on from hospital and

supported housing, and assist the future growth of Northampton. Countywide Housing Protocols for Young People The Council's Housing & Wellbeing Service took the lead in the development and implementation two Countywide Housing Protocols: a Housing Protocol (Homeless 16 & 17 Year Olds) and a Housing Protocol (Care Leavers). 3 The Housing Protocol (Homeless 16 & 17 Year Olds) is designed to ensure that, in Northamptonshire, everyone works together to provide a consistent and co-ordinated response to 16 and 17 year old young people (including teenage parents and pregnant teenagers) who present as homeless and are in need of accommodation or accommodation-related support. It seeks to prevent homelessness and promote and safeguard the wellbeing of 16 and 17 year olds. The Housing Protocol (Care Leavers) is designed to ensure that 'looked after' children are prepared for independent living, leave care when they are ready and move on to settled housing (which may include social rented housing) in a planned way. As well as setting out the roles and responsibilities of Children's Social Care, the Leaving Care Team, the seven local Housing Authorities and the social housing providers, the Housing Protocol (Care Leavers) describes the action that the young person needs to take to apply for social rented housing and what each Housing Authority will then do to ensure that the young person receives an offer of suitable housing when they are ready to leave care and are able to sustain their tenancy when they are rehoused.

- One of the priorities in this year's Housing and Wellbeing Service Plan is to carry out a review of the Council's use of temporary accommodation and reduce its use of Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation. It is hoped this will reduce the number of families and vulnerable people placed in B&B and keep them in Northampton, so as to minimise any disruption to their employment, schools and support networks. For those who are placed in temporary accommodation outside of the borough, every effort is made to ensure that appropriate support is provided and that they are transferred to temporary accommodation in Northampton as soon as possible.
- The Council is planning to undertake a comprehensive Homelessness Review and produce a new 3 year Multi Agency Homelessness Strategy in April 2017. Following publication of the Rough Sleepers Strategy, we are finalising the Action Plan that will set out how Northampton's multi agency alliance will achieve the 10 strategic priorities in the Strategy. 'Task and finish' groups are being established to ensure the successful and timely implementation of the Action Plan. Performance and progress against the 10 strategic priorities and the Action Plan will be monitored quarterly by a multi agency Rough Sleepers Strategy Steering Group and reported to the Council's Cabinet annually.
- In recent years, emergency shelter has been provided for people who are sleeping rough in Northampton when the temperature is forecast to be below

freezing for at least 3 consecutive nights. Shelter has been provided in the Hope Centre (part of Oasis House) and, during their stay, rough sleepers received a hot meal and drinks, and the chance to engage with services that can help them access support and accommodation. 4 As the Council is opening an emergency nightshelter in November 2016 – to end the need for people to sleep rough in Northampton – this winter’s severe weather project (known as SWEP) will operate from the new nightshelter.

- The Street Outreach Workers undertake several outreach sessions each week, where they will go out and look for people sleeping rough in known ‘hot spots’ and town centre locations. They will respond to intelligence provided by members of the public and other services and organisations. Recording every person they find ‘bedded down’, they will continue to work with them to get them off the streets as quickly as possible. Councils are required by Government to complete an annual count of rough sleepers in their area, and submit their findings. This can be done in the form of an actual count, or an estimate. Government prescribes who should and shouldn’t be counted. On 24 March 2016, the Council – assisted by 32 volunteers from a wide range of services and organisations – completed a comprehensive, borough-wide count. Between Midnight and 3.00am, a total of 21 people were found ‘bedded down’. It is believed that only 4 of these 21 people are now sleeping rough in Northampton. The next rough sleepers count is scheduled to take place in November 2016. It is hoped that, as a result of the work undertaken to date and the opening of the emergency nightshelter, less than 10 people – and as close to zero as possible – will be found ‘bedded down’ on the night of the count.
- Some people who are sleeping rough refuse to access local services or take up offers of advice, support and assistance. There are predominantly 2 groups: • Eastern European nationals who are not exercising their treaty rights, a group of which are refusing help and refusing to come off the streets. Reasons cited are mostly an unwillingness to pay rent. The Council is working closely with the Police and Immigration Service to tackle this issue. • Entrenched rough sleepers will often take a long time to gain trust in services before they will start to work with them. They often require a specially tailored, multi-agency solution to make the very difficult transition from the street into a home. As it will often take several attempts to get an entrenched rough sleeper off the streets, it is important that the person sleeping rough and the agencies involved persevere and do not regard unsuccessful attempts as failure. It is important, also, 5 that the person sleeping rough knows that the support will still be there for them when they are ready to try again.
- It would be helpful to have Countywide Protocols for victims of domestic abuse and for offenders, in order to ensure that people are able to move on

from refuges, prisons and probation hostels into settled accommodation in a planned way, avoiding a crisis. Despite Northamptonshire's Housing Protocols for homeless 16 and 17 year olds and care leavers, Children's Services do not always comply with their obligations under the Protocols, leaving the Council to deal with them on its own. The sharp increase in rents, together with lack of access to the private rented sector, is making it extremely difficult for the Council to prevent homelessness by helping people to remain in their existing accommodation or to move to alternative private rented accommodation that they can afford. This reduces the lack of options available to people and, in common with other parts of the country including Northamptonshire, it is contributing to a sharp increase in homelessness in Northampton. In order to prevent homelessness, reduce the Council's use of B&B, improve local housing conditions, increase choice and make it easier for people to access good quality, well managed private rented accommodation, the Council is in the process of setting up a not-for-profit Social Lettings Agency. Although there is still a lot of work to do to link services together, and to get them to work more effectively with one another in partnership, 'TOGETHER we change lives' has acted as a catalyst for change and led to a notable increase in flexibility and willingness to work collaboratively to get the best outcomes for people who are homeless.

- When implementing 'TOGETHER we change lives', Northampton's multi-agency alliance of services and organisations will work together to agree common messages that will be used in literature to promote the wide range of services that are available to end the need to sleep rough in Northampton. It has been agreed, also, that Northampton's multi-agency alliance will develop a comprehensive guide to local services and organisations that offer advice, support and assistance to homeless people, in order to help everyone understand what help is available and to encourage joined-up working and solutions.
- Through a series of workshops – attended by people representing more than 30 services and organisations operating in Northampton – the Council has been able to raise awareness of the work undertaken by the Street Outreach Workers and how people can get in touch to report someone who is homeless or sleeping rough. 6 The Council's website has contact details for the Street Outreach Team, and a link to 'Streetlink'. Streetlink is a web based service that aims to offer the public a means to act when they see someone sleeping rough, and it is the first step someone can take to ensure rough sleepers are connected to the local services and support that they need. The Council is also considering how social media can be used to enable agencies and members of the public to alert it to people who are in need of housing support.

- As part of its plans to establish a Social Lettings Agency, the Council is proposing to appoint an Empty Homes Officer who will work proactively to encourage the owners of empty properties to sell, lease or let their accommodation. It is hoped that the Empty Homes Officer will persuade many owners to lease their accommodation to the Social Lettings Agency or to allow the Social Lettings Agency to manage their accommodation on their behalf. In some instances, the Council will organise and pay for essential works for the owner on the understanding that the cost of those works will be reimbursed from future rent / lease payments. Although most of the work that the Empty Homes Officer undertakes will involve negotiation and persuasion, the Officer will also pursue enforced sales (where the Council is owed money) and compulsory purchase.

Head of Protecting Vulnerable People, Northants Police

- Police attend Rough Sleeper Strategy Workshops, support Outreach events and attend multi agency enforcement days. Police will also deal with various Anti-Social Behaviour issues that are sometimes associated with rough sleeping.
- A Beggars Strategy has been produced. If there is ASB the Police liaises with the Anti-Social Behaviour Unit.
- Police Officers will signpost people to appropriate services
- Some homeless people, albeit it a minority, do chose rough sleeping as a lifestyle choice. Some also suffer from mental health issues.
- Recent evidence shows good joint approach, especially with the NBC Outreach Workers. E-Cins is also available as a tool.
- There are a couple of very vulnerable rough sleepers who are proving difficult to place. They have mental health issues along with drug and alcohol dependency. The Police has a good relationship with the rough sleepers.
- The Police often act as intelligence gathers.
- The Police is instrumental in the Multi-Agency Strategy and the Council's vision for tackling rough sleepers is embraced by the Police.

Case Manager, Anti Social Behaviour Unit

- Homelessness is caused by a variety of factors, as is rough sleeping. Relationship breakdown, unemployment, the inability to manage debt, finances and responsibility are other factors in homelessness. It has increased as the cost of privately rented accommodation has risen. Mental ill-health is a very common factor in rough sleeping. Childhood neglect or abuse is common, as is a history of institutional care, and therefore some rough

sleepers distrust authority figures which makes it hard to engage them in services. Drug and alcohol misuse and offending behaviour are also common factors. Homelessness is quite extensive, with many people having no place to call home and so 'sofa-surfing' with friends, and the extent of that is very difficult to measure. Rough sleeping is easier to measure, although we may never have a completely accurate count of people sleeping rough, for example in squats, cars, communal areas, garages and so on, where it is harder to see them and count them. Rough sleeping is extremely poor for the health, wellbeing and safety of these vulnerable individuals. We see too many of them die young, often associated with drug and alcohol misuse. They can also be a risk to each other and to the community. We know of rough sleeping sex offenders, who enjoy the freedom of their independence and absence of supervision. Their victims are often those who are most vulnerable, are rough sleeping with mental health problems, and substance misuse problems, which make them unable to defend themselves or to be credible witnesses in prosecutions.

- The main service for rough sleepers in Northampton is the NBC Outreach Team directing clients to Oasis House and No Second Night Out. Neither provide emergency accommodation, so there is currently no 'night shelter' provision in Northampton. The NBC Housing and Wellbeing Team provides a wider level of support to homeless people who are eligible for support by meeting the strict criteria. This department is always keen to assist people to re-patriate to areas where they are eligible for support, whether nationally or internationally. Recently, the Outreach Team has started to help people into other accommodation facilities as well as Oasis House, and includes Emmaus facilities, a network of communal homes (none in Northants). This approach is much needed as Oasis House is not suitable for everybody, and other options are essential. 3 Some faith organisations and humanitarian organisations provide different types of assistance and support to the homeless, mostly around food provision and the provision of sleeping bags, blankets and tents. There are other housing providers such as CAN, Maplyn, Womens Aid, Eve (formerly Nene Valley) and C2C Social Action, which are for homeless people who actively engage with the relevant services and meet their particular criteria, level of risks and vulnerabilities. Bridge provides support and activities to service users, and Maple Access provides medical services.
- The Northampton Anti-social Behaviour Unit is a joint NBC and Police Unit which I manage, and which sits under the NBC management of Community Safety Manager Debbie Ferguson. The Unit set up the Rough Sleepers, Beggars and Street Drinkers Working Group several years ago, and has been trying to coordinate the multiagency responses to rough sleeping for several years. Our Unit does not have access to accommodation and does not have

outreach workers, so our success has been determined by the participation and support of other agencies and teams. We have recently refreshed this group, now called the Street Community Working Group, which I chair. We have been promoting the use of E-CINS which is a database on which we can all share information about rough sleepers, amongst the partners, which is essential to enable a joined up partnership response. We tackle the anti-social behaviour caused by this cohort, but always seek to tackle the causes and not just the symptoms, and rely on the local Police (mostly on the Central Sector) to provide the evidence needed for us to tackle the problems. Sometimes our enforcement powers can be used to directly tackle rough sleeping, for example by imposing legal requirements for offenders to work with the NBC team to tackle their homelessness, or with other support organisations.

- The Street Community Working Group which is chaired by the Case Manager is a partnership group, with some partners whose responsibility is to address their health and wellbeing. I base the list of people we discuss on risk, so it's on risk to themselves or to others, and safety is very much on our minds. All rough sleepers are automatically on our case list, because we consider rough sleeping to be a risk to the safety of them all.
- There has been an increase in Eastern Europeans who are sleeping rough in our town. It can be difficult to engage with these people due to language differences, but also because often they do not have any recourse to public funds, and may not be exercising their Treaty Rights. There are a few individuals who do not engage because they do not want to face the responsibilities required for engagement: people who refuse to pay rent, or who refuse to address their drug/alcohol addictions. Some struggle with social interactions particularly with authority figures, often because of traumatic childhood experiences.
- There are some significant gaps in services which need to be addressed: There are some rough sleepers who are not suitable for Oasis House because they are too vulnerable to live amongst the general population there, and who need supported accommodation. We have some especially vulnerable women with complex issues who are homeless, even sleeping rough, and their housing options are limited, because of the risks they would present to other residents. Homelessness is not a universal problem with a universal solution. Each individual has their own reasons for being homeless, and will have their own mix of risks, vulnerabilities, health and wellbeing problems, and each will have a different relational network and history of family breakdowns etc. The emergency night shelter may be unsuitable for some of the more vulnerable people who sleep rough. The provision of supported accommodation is essential. In summary the gaps in services are mostly for the following: For women: female victims of domestic abuse who

are excluded from existing housing options with complex needs and/or certain types of offending history. For men: men excluded from existing housing options, single men with no dependents; sex offenders; male victims of domestic abuse. For young people: those with parents who have addictions or MH problems; careleavers. Generally: people with dual diagnosis (e.g. mental ill-health and addictions); those who are suicidal or self-harm, those with mental health problems which do not fit the criteria for MH services' supported accommodation. Those with a history of arson. Emergency provision. People with no local connections anywhere. Need for better links between services: patients released from hospitals who are homeless; prison releases where this is often at short notice. Improvements have been seen and we need this to continue.

- Awareness of the services, assistance and support available to people who are homeless can be increased by: including rough sleepers? Improve web info, and make leaflets available.
- An option well worth considering is the Housing First model. More information is available :
http://england.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/145853/GP_Briefing_Housing_First.pdf

Director, Children's Services, Northamptonshire County Council

- In July 2016, Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Board, together with partners, convened a Task & Finish group in order to gain a clear understanding of activity being undertaken in the county to support families and young people facing homelessness
- Representatives from key partners include:
 - Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Board
 - Northamptonshire County Council – Children's Social Care and Early Help
 - Northampton Borough Council
 - Borough Council of Wellingborough
 - Northampton Women's Aid
- The Safeguarding Children Board Business Manager is a member of the Chief Housing Officers Group which meets bi-monthly. This ensures the NSCB are aware of key issues facing the county's housing departments. Data shows us that for 2015/16, 103 homeless families become homeless

‘intentionally’ (households containing a dependent child or someone who is pregnant) within the meaning of the homelessness legislation.

- This figure is broken down as follows:
 - Northampton – 57
 - Corby – 13
 - Daventry – 12
 - Kettering – 9
 - East Northamptonshire – 7
 - Wellingborough – 3
 - South Northamptonshire – 2
- A further breakdown of the analysis will be undertaken via the Chief Housing Officers Group to understand specific reasons for those becoming intentionally homeless and this will include the number and age of children in the household. The NSCB collects data on the number of initial contacts for 16-17 year olds reporting homelessness. The figure of Q1 2016/17 is 28 to 30th June 2016. A number of joint protocols are in place or being developed: A Housing Protocol for the assessment of 16 and 17 year old young people who present as homeless has been in place since November 2015 and whilst commonly used by partners. The Task & Finish group will review and update the Protocol by March 2017. Northamptonshire Housing Protocol for Care Leavers who are in need of housing and tenancy related support has been effective from 4th April 2016. A Joint Protocol between Northamptonshire County Council and Local Authority Housing Services to address the needs of intentionally homeless families with children is currently in draft format and is being driven by the Task & Finish group. A multi-agency case audit on young people facing homelessness is being undertaken on 23rd September 2016.
- Ongoing priorities for the Task & Finish group are:
 - To understand the data and the impact of homelessness on wellbeing.
 - To understand any deficits across the county.
 - To understand the scale of those facing homelessness with no recourse to public funds
- There is a lot of collaborative working and a lot of impetus to get the Protocol working well.

- A Homeless Family Protocol is being developed, along with a Pre Eviction Protocol and Care Leavers' Protocol. Good progress is being made
- Children's Services, NCC, and Housing and Wellbeing, NBC, are working closely regarding intentionally homeless families. There is a good working relationship. There is a multi-Agency approach. There is a need to look at preventative measures.
- Children cannot be allowed to sleep rough. If a young person is found to be sleeping rough, the appropriate action must be taken to make a referral through the MASH.
- Action is required to ensure that there are clear and robust procedures in place regarding families with no recourse to public funds.
- Legislation "Staying Put" is in place where a young person can stay in care, if in full time education until the end of the academic year that they are 18.
- New Legislation "Staying Close" means young people living in children's homes, and have to leave the accommodation at 18, will be placed in accommodation near to the children's home so that they can maintain links
- The majority of 18 year olds move into independent, supported accommodation. The accommodation has to be 100% suitable for the young person.
- The housing process is complex. It is a legal process that has to be followed. Individuals have to explain how they became homeless.
- Rough sleepers had increased by 20%
- The Night Shelter will open on 6 February 2017, 60 volunteers will be recruited and trained. A co-ordinator and an assistant for the Night Shelter have been recruited. Both have a wealth of experience in managing volunteers.
- The Night Shelter will be open every day until September 2018. There are different arrangements for women.
- People are placed in temporary accommodation outside the borough as there is genuinely no spaces within the borough.
- Rising private sector rents is a key reason for homelessness

Head of Revenues and Benefits, LGSS

Revenues and Benefits, as a service, supports the homeless agenda in a number of ways:

- There is a KPI specifically aimed at dealing with the most vulnerable people - 95% of all Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) are review within 14 days.
- The team reach out to NPH and other Housing Associations when there are additional funds encouraging them to get customers who may be struggling to apply.
- There is a fast track process to ensure claims that are subject to eviction are processed immediately
- The Housing & Wellbeing team have direct access to a Housing Benefit Team Leader. They review cases together discuss the issues and work through the best solution for the customer.
- The revenues and benefits service has a dedicated officer to liaise with 3rd sector partners and attend cross party meetings to better understand the wider picture and relay the Revenues & Benefits perspective. Specific meetings of note relevant to the review are:
 - a. Citizen Advice Bureau (CAB) & community Law Service (CLS) group
 - b. Northampton Agency Partnership (Multi agency forum)
 - c. Northampton Financial Inclusion Forum
- There is a regularly updated register of Stakeholders should communications or contact need to be made with specific bodies.
- LGSS chair a Welfare reform Steering group that involves key stakeholders from Northampton Borough Council, Northampton Partnership Homes, LGSS Revenue & Benefits and the Department for Work & Pensions. The group meet fortnightly to discuss upcoming reforms and their impact on individuals, services and finances working together to find mutually agreeable resolutions to the issues the reforms bring.
- When recovering monies owed rent and council tax and considered priority debts and debts are deferred where a customer can show they are already facing hardship that could lead to homelessness. CAB & CLS are able to propose payment plans for customers based on the work they have done with the customer and their understanding the financial circumstances, the customer only has to go through a debt management process once and due to close

liaison with these organisation Revenues and Benefits are happy to accept their recommendations.

- There are various considerations and concessions made when a customer has been identified as vulnerable; these are broadly used when a customer is looking like they may lose their home.
- The service has both a discretionary discount scheme and write off policy that can be utilised should all other methods have been considered and rejected.
- All the Council Tax paperwork has reference to debt and getting professional debt advice, this is replicated on the website and the team are also encouraged to deliver this message when they encounter someone who may benefit from this type of support.
- The team are also empowered to look at other solutions to help customers by checking potential benefit availability or finding out why they haven't moved from a house they can't afford, clearly this has to be done with some sensitivity but it helps to form a picture of the customer, their circumstance and any potential vulnerability.
- The policy to charge Council Tax on empty homes and the premium charge on homes that have been empty over two years would be seen as an incentive to encourage individuals to place their properties back on the housing market.

Director of Public Health, Northamptonshire County Council

- The Public Health team commissions the drugs and alcohol services and through this work has specific services to support homelessness.
Homelessness – Drugs and Alcohol projects:
 1. PHaSE project run by Bridge – 20 housing units for recovering clients of drug or alcohol addictions [partnered with ORBIT Housing]
 2. Outreach worker working with homeless and street drinkers [following blue light – Alcohol Concern principles] working from the Bridge 3.
Work with NBC on the homeless strategy
- Nature of Homelessness Types of homelessness Although the term 'homeless' is often applied in everyday language to people who sleep rough, the legal definition is much broader, encompassing anyone who has no home in the UK or anywhere else in the world available to occupy. This not only

includes people without a roof over their head but people whose accommodation is insecure; those facing eviction, living in temporary accommodation, squatting, people at risk of violence, those housed in property potentially damaging to their health, and those who cannot afford their current accommodation. The range of circumstances denoting homelessness means that there are several categories of homelessness, defined and measured in different ways. These are outlined below. Statutory homeless Households deemed to be homeless, eligible for support from their local council and in priority need. Single homeless Those who are homeless but do not meet the priority need criteria to be housed by their local authority under homelessness legislation. They may live in supported accommodation, e.g. hostels and semi-independent housing projects, sleep rough, sofa surf or live in squats. They may also be referred to as non-statutory homeless. Vulnerably housed People without accommodation, people in temporary, insecure or poor quality accommodation including overcrowding, or those who are threatened with homelessness. Street homeless People sleeping rough. Hidden homeless People not recorded in official statistics, who tend to reside in squats, on the floors or sofas of friends and families, or sleep rough in concealed locations. People experiencing homelessness may move in and out of these categories as their circumstances change and their needs change accordingly. The only people who by law are entitled to be provided with housing are the 'statutory homeless' who meet the criteria for 'priority need'⁵. In these circumstances, local authorities have a statutory duty to find accommodation for the applicant. When homelessness applications are declined Causes of homelessness Shelter divide the causes of homelessness under three distinct categories these are

1. Personal causes of homelessness

2. Structural causes of homelessness are social and economic in nature, and are often outside the control of the individual or family concerned.

These may include:

- unemployment
- poverty
- a lack of affordable housing
- housing policies
- the structure and administration of housing benefit
- wider policy developments, such as the closure of long-stay psychiatric hospitals. These problems require long-term policy

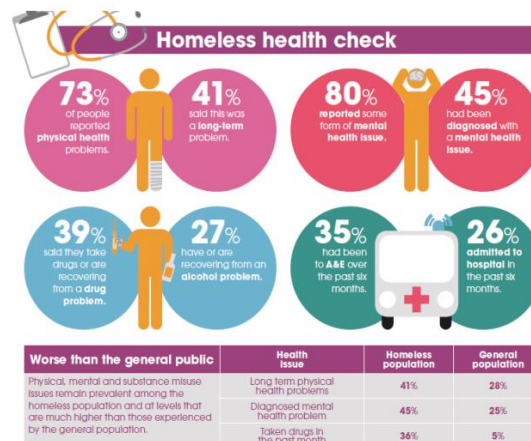
solutions such as changes in the housing benefit system, the building of more affordable homes, and ensuring that a wider cross-section of society benefits from the fruits of economic growth.

3. Reasons given by homeless people for being homeless. The three main reasons for having lost a last settled home, given by applicants for homelessness support from local councils are:

- parents, friends or relatives unwilling or unable to continue to accommodate them
- relationship breakdown, including domestic violence
- loss of an assured shorthold tenancy. However, these reasons are only the catalysts that trigger people into seeking assistance, and not the underlying issues that have caused the crisis to build up in the first place. For many people, there's no single event that results in sudden homelessness. Instead, homelessness is due to a number of unresolved problems building up over time. [1] Statutory homelessness statistics, CLG, 2008 Structural and individual factors are often interrelated; individual issues can arise from structural disadvantages such as poverty or lack of education. While personal factors, such as family and social relationships, can also be put under pressure by structural forces such as poverty. Extent of homelessness and rough sleeping
- A number of different personal and social factors can contribute towards people becoming homeless. These may include one or more of the following:
 - individual factors including lack of qualifications, lack of social support, debts - especially mortgage or rent arrears, poor physical and mental health, relationship breakdown, and getting involved in crime at an early age
 - family background including family breakdown and disputes, sexual and physical abuse in childhood or adolescence, having parents with drug or alcohol problems, and previous experience of family homelessness

- an institutional background including having been in care, the armed forces, or in prison. Tackling these problems is a complex business and normally requires support from public bodies, friends and family, combined with a lot of hard work from the individual or family in trouble. Public support might include intervention, advice, counselling, training or provision of alternative accommodation by a local authority where appropriate. However, in all instances Shelter believes these problems can be best resolved when the person or family in question has a decent and secure home.
- Public Health currently do not have enough intelligence and insight to determine the true extent of homelessness, however plan to do so through a homelessness needs assessment. Impact of homelessness on health, wellbeing Using information supplied by over 2,500 people, 'The unhealthy state of homelessness' report highlights the extent to which people who are homeless experience some of the worst health problems in society. The report uncovers the barriers many individuals face accessing treatment, as well as the impact of ill health on NHS A&E, hospital, mental health and substance misuse services. Homeless Link first published national data in it's 2010 Widespread ill-health report The new 2014 report makes clear that we are yet to see a real improvement in reducing the scale of health problems faced by those who have experienced homelessness. Those with experience of homelessness are also more likely to have unhealthy lifestyles, which can cause long term health problems or exacerbate existing issues. Analysis of the latest data found that 77% of homeless people smoke, 35% do not eat at least two meals a day and two-thirds consume more than the recommended amount of alcohol each time they drink. Despite 90% of those surveyed reporting they are registered with a GP, a significant number of homeless people report they are not receiving help with their health problems.

Diagram 1 below illustrates health problems experience by those who are homeless:



- In summary those experiencing homelessness of any sort have poorer access to health services and worse health outcomes.
- Public Health is planning to complete a Health needs assessment for homeless in 2017/18, this should contribute to the insight and intelligence required to inform future commissioning intentions for homelessness.
- A needs assessment would help to identify gaps. Further intelligence and insight could be provided through the providers of the service
- The Making Every Contact Count (MECC) is a programme to raise awareness and opportunistically delivery of consistent and concise healthy lifestyle information. Enabling individuals to engage in conversations about their health. People working with the homeless could be included as a group to train informing the wider workforce

Manager, Maple Access Centre

- The perception of the Maple Access Centre is that there is inadequate housing provision and also housing support in Northampton, with over-rigorous exclusion of the patients of Maple Access requesting housing.
- Homelessness and the threat of it destabilises patients with existing mental health problems and increased the workload of the Maple Access Centre
- There is lack of liaison between prisons and the Council, often patients are released from prison without anywhere to live, or these housing is reallocated where they were sentenced.
- Homelessness increases physical health problems too. Patients attend A&E more for example.

- Patients who are mentally unwell and are rough sleeping are vulnerable and at risk of physical and sexual assault on the streets.
- Medical and psychological therapeutic treatments have limited success until a patient is adequately housed.
- Support, services and assistance that is available to homeless, including rough sleepers:
 - Oasis House, Hope Centre, No Second Night Out, Jesus Fellowship, Salvation Army, Maple Access GP Service.
- The homeless service is difficult to access. Homelessness and rough sleeping can only be reduced by the provision of housing.
- The Maple Access Centre is open access and on the day appointments for patients to address physical and mental health problems at the surgery. There are 3 x weekly sessions at Oasis House with a Mental Health Nurse and Clinical Support Co-Ordinator, outreach visits, mental health team and support worker, weekly clinic with GP with Special Interest in complex mental health needs and substance misuse.
- The Maple Access Centre records homelessness as no fixed abode (NFA) and as of 24 November 2016, this was 218 patients registered in this way. This figure underestimates the extent of homelessness as many patients are “sofa surfing” and have “care of” addresses.
- Patients with severe psychological problems or addictions are often barred from services as their behaviour can be very challenging and anti-social.
- Homeless people are vulnerable and need advocacy via sympathetic and accessible outreach workers.
- In the opinion of staff at the Maple Access Centre, homelessness has increased since the DWP Benefit Reforms. Some patients are incorrectly completing medical assessments and losing their benefits.
- There is awareness of services, assistance and support available to people who are homeless but there is a lack of services and inadequate support to cope with the volume of homelessness in Northampton.
- Members of the public and agencies are frustrated, little is done for homeless people.

General Manager, Hope Centre

- The Hope Centre does not cover homelessness amongst those with statutory entitlement.
- Homelessness is complex and there is no single group of people with common characteristics who are homeless in fixed circumstances. Their

circumstances are often fluid. It is most important that homelessness is not conflated in the minds of either policy makers nor the public with rough sleeping as these are different things. The Hope Centre estimates that at any one time, based on the numbers attending the centre, that there are up to 200 people who are single or couples without children who are homeless in the broadest sense at any one time.

- Homeless people vary from a core of regular rough sleepers – perhaps up to 35, with a further group of up to that 200 total who whilst generally not street homeless, may include some who will sleep rough from time to time, as circumstances arise. In the main this wider group are sofa surfers, staying with others, but between such places and after rows etc some people will sleep rough for short periods, sometimes just for a night. Therefore although on a specific night the numbers may be no more than 15-20 counted, this masks a much larger number of people who are functionally homeless in the sense of not having anywhere permanent to live, nor the means to get housing, who will dip in and out of street homelessness.
- Causes are similarly wide. Street homelessness is often associated with problems like mental ill-health and substance misuse and up to 80% of all street homeless are substance misusers, sometimes with very significant problems. However the degree to which the one causes the other are variable, with the life on the street always accentuating previous, less entrenched substance use, to the degree it is not easy to generalise. However amongst longer term street or sofa surfer homeless, substance misuse and mental health issues are hugely prevalent.
- About 20% of the Hope Centre service users are Eastern European and they have a similar pattern of demography and behaviour, but are nearly all men.
- Many of these bouts of substance misuse are in turn brought on by relationship breakdown, by redundancy or unemployment, which start a spiral towards homelessness, especially in men who make up $\frac{3}{4}$ of the 200 total (a quarter of whom are under 25). Other factors include the bedroom tax, as parents have nowhere to put up children; the unavailability of social or affordable housing, landlord practices (evictions to raise the rent, unwillingness to keep people in housing who have lost their jobs or let to them in the first place), and the stagnation of wages against housing costs. Many of these causes are rooted in successive policies of government of all types who have failed to take a strategic approach to housing which fails to make available enough affordable housing with support. Support is crucial and Hope does not support a simplistic Housing First approach which implies that support is not needed for the client group described above. People need support to stay and survive in tenancies.

- The effect of homelessness in the broad sense I have described above is well known; homeless people have poor mental and substance health, poor physical health, malnutrition, poor teeth, poor eyesight (both by inattention, substance misuse and diet) poor foot health, lice and poor health from smoking. Whatever their state when they became homeless, without help these problems magnify and entrench them in homelessness, along with offending too, and for some women, sex work. Their confidence to seek work and keep work is massively eroded making their chances of getting it or keeping it slimmer.
- Hope does not supply housing nor offer supported housing. Other providers offer this, such as NAASH, Mayday, CAN (Richmond Fellowship) etc. There are also various religious organisations that provide street outreach to people on the street and also a couple of other centres that offer food, like the Jesus Centre. The Maple Access clinic offers mental health and some substance misuse help specifically for the client group
- Hope offers two areas of support: a day centre and support to get training and work.
- **The day centre:** Each year the Hope Centre sees over 1000 individuals within its day centre, on average seeing about 100+ people each day. They are largely single adults and couples: staff do not work with young people under 18 in the day centre although about a quarter of its service users are 18-25. Not all are homeless; many have been housed but come to us for continuing support, which helps prevent future homelessness, alongside work to get people housed.
- Each month the Hope Centre provides around 1400 meals, 3,500 cups of tea and coffee, 700 hours of computer access, 350 hot showers and around 300 items of clothing (all provided with donated food and clothing).
- Daily activity and educational workshops are run, which help staff to engage in different ways with its clients, such as Cookery sessions, Art and Creative Writing classes, gardening at the community gardens, as well as practical support such as free access weekly to a Chiropodist and hairdressing. We are based in Oasis House, within short walking distance of the town centre and nearby railway station. This is a purpose built centre, opened in May 2012 with the aim of providing a co-ordinated support service to help the homeless and disadvantaged in Northampton. We work with a number of other agencies e.g. Northampton Borough Council, Midland Heart, NAASH, Maple Services (local authority, social housing provider, supported accommodation provider and GP surgery respectively) all based within the building to ensure we can provide 'wrap-around' care service to its clients.

- Each day, staff provide support to around 100 vulnerable and disadvantaged people. These individuals come to us destitute and broken, individuals who for a range of reasons are leading chaotic lives, characterised by offending, homelessness, drug abuse and long term unemployment. We work with hundreds of people each year who have learning difficulties but who have never been assessed or received the support they need.
- As a day service, the Hope Centre makes a huge impact in terms of addressing the immediate needs of its service users – The Hope Centre can provide hot showers, a decent meal, and access to a dentist, podiatry, befriending and encouragement. By working with people at risk of more serious street homelessness, and overcoming their problems, staff act to prevent homelessness and minimise harm. Staff help people access accommodation and support them through into getting and settling into a home, such as classes on how to buy food and cook a meal. Although not funded to do so, our staff and volunteers help people to maintain those tenancies with support through our day centre, and skills, confidence and work related activity.
- **Training and Work:** Whilst our day care support is incredibly important and necessary, staff work hard to enable service users to achieve a long term and sustained recovery and escape acute poverty and homelessness. The Hope Centre has adopted a simple slogan to say what the Hope Centre does : offering a hand-up, not a hand-out.
- Staff help the clients to access support for the complex health related issues, particularly drugs, alcohol, gambling and mental health, that prevent them getting work. This comes through developing referral links to substance misuse services, but also through accessing funding to provide some of these services itself. However, the Hope Centre does not see itself as a therapeutic service providing a high degree of counselling and therapy. Rather, the Centre deploys counselling skills to motivate people to access such services elsewhere, and through providing activities, offer 'therapy' in a looser sense through diversionary and relaxing activities, including its gardening projects and reflexology; and more practical support to help people get jobs, focused on improving their confidence and skills.
- The most effective means of moving out of destitution is through employment, and the Hope Centre sees itself as playing an increasing role within this sector, building on its pedigree as a social enterprise and its Big Lottery funding.
- The Big Lottery grant provides the Hope Centre with five years of funding to develop a pathways to independence project, identifying people who could benefit from work to help them get work ready, finding them training,

volunteering, work experience or actual jobs, and then supporting them within those jobs to avoid failure. Staff work closely with local businesses to support this project and to provide opportunities, and through its related social enterprise, staff are able to directly provide work to clients as part of their rehabilitation.

- **Pathways to Independence Project.**

- This is a transformational programme, funded by the Big Lottery over five years, which seeks to support individuals with complex and multiple needs on a path towards recovery, economic and social independence and resilience.
- Individuals begin the programme receiving low-level support to deal with their immediate needs – a hot shower, a change of clothes, a cup of a tea and a chat with a befriending volunteer. The aim at this stage is to engage and build trust, encouraging individuals to keep visiting the centre and develop the confidence to participate in activities.
- Those who are ready to participate in more formal support will be provided with weekly keyworker sessions, where their needs and goals will be assessed and a support plan developed with them. It is through these sessions that their support will be directed, with the keyworker making appropriate referrals to external specialist provision and facilitating the individual's inclusion on its wellbeing and learning programmes where they will receive the support they need to address issues relating to mental health, addiction and personal care alongside confidence building and soft skills development through activities such as arts and craft, creative writing, IT and sports.
- As each individual progresses, they will be supported to undertake more structured and work focused personal development activities. These will include volunteering in its programmes and for those ready to take up the challenge, undertaking training with its social enterprise, Hope Enterprises, or with other supportive local businesses.
- The ultimate aim of its programme is to have enabled its service users to have moved closer to or into employment. Staff know that this will be easier for some than others, and for some people, moving into a regular volunteering role is more achievable and desirable. Success will look and feel different for each individual, and they will experience many intermediate outcomes before they move into the destination of their choice.
- The Hope Centre operates a related social enterprise which gives skills, training and work to people leaving its services and also those from other services who are looking for training. This provides two trades: catering and

tool repair. In catering people receive up to Level 2 catering training (City and Guilds). In tool repair people are placed for a four week block where they learn to repair, recycle and sell garden tools. In a year the Centre has trained up to 100 people.

- In the past the SWEP protocol has meant that in successive nights of extremely cold weather the day centre opens at night to provide immediate, basic care for very short periods. The Hope Centre is not sure how this will be affected by the new night shelter. It has not been discussed.
- The rough sleeper count is a snapshot of people visible on that night but it fails to identify the larger numbers of people who are effectively homeless .
- The Hope Centre works closely and co-operatively with all other charities working in this field, with substance misuse agencies and with the Maple Access GP service.
- There is a shortage of suitable hostel provision and staff believe the Centre could be funded to do more work with street drinkers who are homeless from substance misuse funding. More detoxes need to be available and rehabilitation.
- There is a need to do more with young people at risk of becoming part of the 200 group above prior to the point they enter this, which the Hope Centre would be interested in working on. The same is true of offenders in custody. Prison and Probation services link very badly with services outside, an historic, national problem that has never been solved.
- More can be done to prevent tenancies breaking down. Hope staff provide support for some people in this category but could do more if funded. Some supported housing provision could be improved to reduce breakdowns and renewed homelessness. These services are not well integrated- for example the Hope Centre has training places available, which would help people stabilise in new tenancies and in treatment, for example but get few referrals from such services.
- It needs to be ensured that the general public is made aware through more campaigns when it is appropriate and how to help this client group..
- Homeless people do not need education about available services. The client grapevine flawlessly lets people know what is available
- Of the 100 people a day that come to the Hope Centre, approximately 30 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.
- 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.
- Just because an individual is sitting in a shop doorway it doesn't necessarily mean they are always homeless. 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.
- 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.

Manager, NAASH

- Homelessness has many causes some we have encountered are: a change to benefits with sanctions, PRS landlords selling houses, relationship breakdowns due to addictions, lack of PRS, customers with Complex needs unable to maintain a tenancy, crack house closures, accrued rent arrears.
- Large amounts of EUs sleeping rough with no recourse, no specific support to access documents, support back to work (as what used to happen).
- Rough sleepers from other areas sleep in the borough as there is no provision in their own LA for non priority homeless or substance misuse services. Northampton has these services.
- Organisational concern that rough sleeping has become underground, although not visual in town centre many sleeping where not seen / outside of town centre.
- Rough sleeping has a negative effect on both physical and mental health. If customers are not picked up in a timely manner their wellbeing deteriorates and they can also become used to rough sleeping and therefore difficult to engage and house. The longer someone rough sleeps the worse any addiction gets and also high percentage gain another addiction. Rough sleeping is very unsafe for anyone numerous rough sleepers have been assaulted, abused and bullied. The longer someone rough sleeps the more complex their needs become
- NAASH provides the support within Oasis House and subsidises this service to ensure a high level of support is provided to each customer. NAASH works

as an advocate for the customers and partnership works with the landlord to sustain their tenancies and address any issues which have prevented them from maintaining a tenancy previously.

- NAASH manages a no second night out service which has 11 beds in a manned project and an additional 51 units of accommodation within Northampton, to whom 2 tenancy sustainment officers are allocated to the units. NAASH recently leased 14 properties from a private landlord who was going to sell them and evict the tenants. NAASH took on the tenants along with the properties. These customers have a mix of issues including substance misuse, mental health, no access to LA housing register, rent arrears, workers with no deposits for PRS, couples who cannot access other supported housing projects, customers with no recourse can be taken in for a fixed period to enable them to find work, those evicted from other NAASH projects (where the risk is manageable)
- NAASH initially subsidise the rents for workers on low income and assist them to access affordable long term housing, NAASH has a budget to undertake community events to benefit both the community and give customers a sense of purpose. Gardening and clearing projects have been undertaken in local church grounds regularly,
- NAASH currently NAASH works closely with the Police to reduce ASB and street drinking from its customers, S2S to engage those with an addiction, The Bridge Substance Misuse Programme to enable customers to fill their time productively, The Police / probation to refrain customers from street drinking, offending, private rented landlords to provide additional properties where needed, NPH to access long term housing for those eligible
- NAASH regularly moves customers around the services to prevent eviction and ensure appropriate placements are completed.
- NAASH has also worked to house customers on release from prison where they had accessed services before their sentencing.
- NAASH uses their ability to move people around their services to ensure a timely placement is offered. NAASH works in partnership with a local GP surgery, who provides both mental health and physical support on site at Oasis House for all NAASH customers to use. This GP surgery also supports NAASH staff within their work, this enables NAASH staff to refer in at an early opportunity for concerns around someone mental health, physical health or substance misuse.
- NAASH has contact within the PRS and supports landlords who in turn provide some accommodation to the customer group NAASH deals with. NAASH is working with PRS landlords to encourage more to work in partnership and hopefully provide additional accommodation / move on from the hostels.

- NAASH is proactive around exclusions with its customers living within its No second night out project to prevent evictions. This enables customers to keep their tenancy but gives flexibility to staff to prevent anyone in an unmanageable state from entering the manned project.
- Anyone who has been in NAAH services are made aware that they can always access for advice at any point.
- There is a gap where someone has complex needs as hostel environments' are not conducive to their support needs.
- More outreach during the day and night and clear information given on what is provided where. Information posters at strategic points in the borough
- NAASH is an active part of Killing with Kindness held yearly in the town centre. NAASH undertake public education around this alongside the Police and NBC

Chief Executive, HealthWatch Northants

- There had been a lot of pressure on HealthWatch recently. He went on to advise that a draft report was currently available and when in final format it would be sent to the Scrutiny Panel for its information.
- As part of its evidence gathering, HealthWatch spoke with 25 homeless people of which 9 were from Northampton. They also spoke with five support Agencies and the Hope Centre. A lot of positive comments were received.
- The draft report recognises the value of the Hope Centre, access to Mental Health and other signposting. It was felt that provision in Northampton was very good, in fact a lot better than elsewhere in the county.
- A number of rough sleepers sleep during the day as they feel safer, but by doing this they can miss out on food. Mental health is an issue. 70% of all clients sleep rough. Alcohol use is a barrier to accessing mental health support.
- The draft report consists of a number of recommendations around:
 - The appointment of assertive outreach workers to avoid the duplication of provision of service
 - Surgeries should be on a theme basis, for example, dental provision model
 - A community psychiatric nurse is based in the Night Shelter.
 - Alcohol and drugs support services for homeless people is holistic. Homeless people interviewed confirmed they want to be treated holistically.

4 Desktop Research

4.1 Desktop research was undertaken regarding organisations and Local Authorities noted for their best practice procedures in tackling homelessness.

SHELTER - Homelessness: Early Identification and Prevention - A Good Practice Guide (2007)

4.1.1 SHELTER reports that its guide aims to assist local authorities and local agencies in their ability to identify people who are at risk of becoming homeless. The guide highlights current good practice examples of how to identify these vulnerable groups and individuals, and offer support to prevent homelessness occurring.

4.1.2 It is reported in the Guide that there are a number of groups that research, over many years, has identified as being at a greater risk of homelessness than the general population. These include:

- Young people
- Care leavers
- Ex-offenders
- People with mental health problems
- Refugees
- Gypsies and Travellers (housed and on sites)
- People with drug or alcohol addictions
- People leaving hospital
- Ex-members of the Armed Forces

4.1.3 The Guide also provides details of good practice undertaken by Local Authorities.

Homeless Link – Transatlantic Practice Exchange (2014)

4.1.4 Homeless Link published a report in 2014 that details reports from 10 frontline professionals on an international exchange of knowledge and practice.

4.1.5 The report details that exchange took place between May and July 2014 with participants spending up to two weeks on placement with their hosts and other local organisations.

4.1.6 The report states that the nature of public services is changing and the perception of and the public value that they create is being challenged. Welfare Reform, funding changes, increased localism and changing demographics have produced significant challenges to the way things are done.

DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT – MAKING EVERY CONTACT COUNT (2012)

4.1.7 It is reported that the aim of the report is to make sure every contact local agencies make with vulnerable people and families really count:

- Tackle troubled childhoods and adolescence – through interventions to turn around the lives of the most troubled families, and by promoting innovative approaches to youth homelessness
- Improve health – including improving outcomes for homeless people with dual drugs/alcohol and mental health needs
- Reduce involvement in crime – Support to Police and Crime Commissioners, improving offender access to private rented accommodation
- Improve skills, employment and financial advice – new housing demonstration projects helping claimants budget and manage rent payments
- Pioneer social funding for homelessness

The report details ten challenges for Local Authorities.

4.1.8 Full details of the desktop research undertaken are provided at Appendix C.

5 Site Visits

5.1 The Chair of the Scrutiny Panel, together with members of the Scrutiny Panel, Housing Officers and the Scrutiny Officer.

5.2.1 Site visits were scheduled :

- Two representatives of the Panel to visit the Hope Centre based at Oasis House
- Representatives of the Scrutiny Panel to visit a variety of temporary accommodation around the borough

5.2.2 HOPE CENTRE

5.2.1 Councillors and Officers visited the Hope Centre on Monday, 12 December 2016 between the hours of 10am and 11:30am. .

5.2.2 Councillors visited the day centre and observed a number of clients eating breakfast. Porridge is provided free of charge, as are cups of tea. Should individuals require a cooked breakfast a small charge is made. There is also a small charge for cereals.

5.2.3 Lunch is also provided at the centre. There is a small cost for the lunch. Individuals can also use the showers.

5.2.4 Clothes are donated and individuals can buy items for a small cost. There is a real need for underwear.

5.2.5 Various groups and sessions are put on during the day such as foot care, cookery, art, life skills, sport, Internet café (free of charge for 90 minutes use).

5.2.6 Councillors also visited Hope Enterprises. Hope Enterprises is a social enterprise and community interest company set up by Northampton's Hope Centre, a charity, with more than 40 years' experience working with the town's homeless, poor and excluded.

5.2.7 Through giving training and work, at a fair rate of pay, in a supportive environment, we help people to re-join society and stand on their own two feet

5.2.8 Hope Enterprises has three elements: -

Hope Catering - contract catering and buffets for business meetings, parties and events.

Hope Tools - a recycling and training social enterprise, refurbishing second-hand garden tools

Hope PAT Testing - routine safety checking for all electrical appliances

5.2.9 Councillors had sight of the refurbished tools that had been refurbished by Hope Tools. Staff work alongside Hope Centre clients to recycle and refurbish tools and build products for gardens.

5.3 TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

5.3.1 On Wednesday, 14 December 2016 between the hours of 2pm and 4pm, Councillors, along with Officers, visited a variety of temporary accommodation.

5.3.2 The site visit started with a visit to one of the units at County Chambers in the town centre. Councillors met with a woman who was temporarily living here. The flat was airy and spacious. It had one bedroom with two single beds and bed settee in the lounge area. She had been at the flat since August 2016 and had recently bid successfully for a property. Councillors were informed that on one occasion the woman had observed a rough sleeper sleeping inside the doorway of the shop next to the temporary accommodation. The Management Team at County Chambers are aware and are monitoring the situation, individuals temporarily residing at County Chambers have been advised to ensure that the main access door is kept closed.

5.3.3 The site visit then went to an 8 bed and breakfast property in Abington. The proprietor will only take couples and families. The property is spacious. Three of the rooms have the provision of an en-suite and there are also two shared bathrooms and a kitchen that can be used. Free Wi-Fi is provided.

5.3.4 The site visit went on to a recently acquired temporary accommodation flat in Blackthorn. It had been recently decorated and furnished. The flat has one bedroom, with two single beds. The lounge area has a sofa along with a dining table and chairs. The kitchen had been recently refurbished which consisted of Electric Cooker, Washing Machine and Fridge, the bathroom consisted of a bath, over bath shower, toilet and wash basin.

5.3.5 The site visit concluded by driving to another location observing a couple of houses that are designated temporary accommodation, from the outside.

6 Community Impact Assessment

6.1 This Scrutiny Review investigated how the Borough Council and its partners prevent homelessness and respond to those without homes in the borough.

6.2 The Scrutiny Panel, in having regard to the general equality duty, was mindful of the protected characteristics when undertaking this scrutiny activity; so that any recommendations that it made could identify disproportionate and unintended potential positive and negative impacts on any particular sector of the community, including any potential mitigation required. This was borne in mind as the Scrutiny Panel progressed with the review and evidence is gathered.

6.3 In order that the Scrutiny Panel obtained a wide range of views, a number of key witnesses provided evidence as detailed in section 3 of this report.

6.4 Any recommendations regarding homelessness would consider impact and potential mitigation as appropriate and relevant across all protected characteristics. Impact assessments are integral to any reports including actions plans.

6.5 Details of the Community Impact Assessment undertaken can be located on the Overview and Scrutiny [webpage](#).

7 Conclusions and Key Findings

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

Causes of homelessness

7.1.1 Evidence received highlighted Homelessness takes many forms and, although people who are sleeping rough on the streets or living in temporary accommodation are literally homeless, people do not need to be roofless to be classified as 'homeless'. Someone who is sofa surfing or living in unreasonable conditions, for example, may still be 'homeless', and someone who is likely to become homeless within the next 28 days may be treated as being 'threatened with homelessness'.

- 7.1.2 There are many reasons why people become homeless. In Northampton, the main causes of homelessness are as follows:
- Termination of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST) because the landlord wants to sell the property or let it to someone else who is able to pay a higher rent;
 - Relationship breakdown (violent / non-violent); and
 - Family or friends no longer able or willing to accommodate.
- 7.1.3 Other causes of homelessness include illness, bereavement, the loss of employment, a sudden reduction in income, harassment and unlawful eviction, tenancy breakdown, unmet support needs, mental health problems, substance misuse, leaving prison or hospital in an unplanned way, and difficulty in accessing private and social housing.
- 7.1.4 Homelessness can have a significant impact on people's health, wellbeing and personal safety by:
- Disrupting schooling, healthcare, employment and support networks;
 - Placing a strain on budgets (meals, transport, removals and storage);
 - Limiting space and privacy (affects relationships, friends and homework);
 - Causing a deterioration in physical and mental health;
 - Reducing self-esteem, confidence and personal hygiene;
 - Increasing isolation and the risk of physical assault; and
 - Increasing the misuse of alcohol and drugs.
- 7.1.5 The Scrutiny Panel emphasises that homelessness can happen to anyone and an individual does not have to be roofless to be homeless.
- 7.1.6 Homelessness can be damaging on people's health and wellbeing. Help and assistance is available from a number of Agencies. The Scrutiny Panel welcomed the work that is ongoing regarding the 'TOGETHER we change lives' strategy for ending the need for people to sleep rough in Northampton.
- 7.1.7 The Scrutiny Panel highlights the fact that, just because someone is sitting in a shop doorway with a sleeping bag doesn't necessarily mean they are homeless. Evidence received highlighted the fact that most of the people who are begging in Northampton are not homeless; most are living in supported

housing or social rented housing, and some travel into Northampton from other areas. The Scrutiny Panel felt that if non rough sleeping beggars could be tackled, it would help rough sleepers.

7.1.8 The Government prescribes the way in which Rough Sleeper Counts and Estimates are carried out, and people who are staying in shelters, hostels and squats are not included in the figures.

7.1.9 The Scrutiny Panel was pleased to note that the Police have a good relationship with rough sleepers and the agencies that are helping rough sleepers to come off the streets.

Multi Agency working to support homelessness and rough sleeping

7.1.10 The evidence received highlights the good work that is being undertaken by Authorities and organisations and there is a need to ensure there is no duplication of efforts. Joint working and multi agency working is key in tackling, preventing and reducing homelessness and rough sleeping.

7.1.11 The Scrutiny Panel was pleased to hear that, in July 2016, the Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Board, together with partners, convened a Task and Finish Group in order to gain a clearer understanding of the activity that is being undertaken in Northamptonshire to support families and young people who are facing homelessness.

7.1.12 The Scrutiny Panel felt that there is a need for the Council to produce an advisory leaflet (that can be distributed to all agencies and services) which sets out very clearly how the homelessness and housing advice services are organised and managed in the borough and how people can access them. This will make it easier for customers, but also the groups that refer them.

Health and Wellbeing of homeless people, including rough sleepers

7.1.13 Rough sleepers can be very vulnerable and have complex needs. Many have (or have previously had) substance misuse issues, mental health problems and/or suffered a traumatic childhood.

7.1.14 The Scrutiny Panel welcomed the establishment of the Emergency Nightshelter and the fact that this winter's severe weather project (known as SWEPE) will operate from the building (for men only).

7.1.15 Those experiencing homelessness of any kind have poorer access to health services and worse health outcomes.

7.1.16 As part of its evidence gathering, the Scrutiny Panel received preliminary details regarding the findings of the HealthWatch report. The Scrutiny Panel welcomed the HealthWatch report and the precis of the recommendations contained within it. The Scrutiny Panel recognised that a number of rough sleepers sleep during the day as they feel safer, but by doing this they can miss out on food, accessing support services and gaining assistance. The draft report consists of a number of recommendations:

- Assertive outreach workers should be appointed in order to avoid unnecessary duplication of services
- Surgeries should be theme based, like dental provision
- A community psychiatric nurse should be based in the Nightshelter.
- Alcohol and drugs support services for homeless people should be holistic. The homeless people who were interviewed confirmed that they want to be treated holistically.

Effects of homelessness

7.1.17 Evidence presented to the Scrutiny Review highlighted the effects of homelessness:

- Disruption of schooling, healthcare, employment and support networks
- Lack of space and privacy (affects relationships, homework and friends)
- Reduced self-esteem
- More financial strain (meals, transport, removals and storage)
- Physical / mental health
- Self-esteem, confidence and personal hygiene

- Isolation, risk of assault, loss of support networks
- May abuse alcohol and drugs
- May commit petty crime / anti-social behaviour
- Nowhere safe to store personal possessions

Temporary accommodation

7.1.18 The Scrutiny Panel was concerned that, sometimes, families that are placed in temporary accommodation outside of the borough. By placing families in temporary accommodation some distance from their children's schools, and expecting families to meet the transport costs, it puts additional financial burdens on the family. Although there is a severe shortage of temporary accommodation in Northampton, every effort needs to be made to ensure that anyone who is placed in temporary accommodation outside of the borough is brought back to Northampton as soon as possible.

7.1.19 The Council's temporary accommodation includes self-contained council housing, self-contained privately managed housing and Bed & Breakfast.

7.1.20 Evidence received detailed that on 11 January 2017, Cabinet approved the establishment of Guildhall Residential Lettings, an in-house social lettings agency. The social lettings agency will manage and let properties that are leased by the Council or owned by individuals and businesses. If landlords want to manage the property themselves, it can find them suitable tenants.

7.1.21 The Housing & Planning Act 2016 strengthens local authority powers to tackle criminal, rogue and irresponsible landlords with the introduction of Banning Orders, a tougher 'fit and proper person' test and Civil Penalties of up to £30,000, together with changes to Rent Repayment Orders. The Scrutiny Panel supported the establishment of the Guildhall Residential Lettings, an in-house social lettings agency.

7.1.22 Whilst undertaking site visits to temporary accommodation in the borough, the Scrutiny Panel was pleased to note the high quality accommodation that was offered. One bed and breakfast accommodation in particular provided free Wi-Fi which was felt to be an important facility to be offered.

Extent of homelessness and rough sleeping in the borough

7.1.23 Evidence received showed that as of July 2016, homelessness in Northants consisted of 705 homeless acceptances in 2015/16 (up 28% on 2014/15.) As

of July 2016, homelessness in Northampton consisted of 321 homelessness acceptances in 2015/16 (up 11% on 2014/15). This is consistent with the Government findings¹ that homelessness in England has increased since 2010. The 2015/16 financial year saw acceptances increase by a further 6% on 2014/15.

8 Recommendations

- 8.1 The purpose of the Scrutiny Panel was to review how the Borough Council and its partners prevent homelessness and respond to those without homes in the borough. Scrutiny Panel 3 therefore recommends to Cabinet that:

Multi Agency Working

- 8.1.1 The Council undertakes a comprehensive review of homelessness in the borough and develops a new 5 year Homelessness Strategy that is designed to substantially reduce the number of households that become homeless and the number of homeless families that are living in temporary accommodation.
- 8.1.2 The Council establishes a Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group to direct, co-ordinate and monitor the action that the Council and its partners take to tackle, prevent and reduce homelessness in the borough.

Improving access to homelessness services

- 8.1.3 The Council publishes an information leaflet, (electronic, paper base and in languages commonly known to be spoken by rough sleepers), for distribution to all Agencies, services and more widely available to members of the public, which sets out very clearly how its homelessness and housing advice services are organised – together with details of the services provided by other organisations and services – and how people can access them.
- 8.1.4 A comprehensive review of rough sleeping services is carried out to ensure that all services are operating efficiently and effectively, and that there is no unnecessary duplication of effort between the Nightshelter, the Hope Centre, Oasis House, NAASH and other services.

¹ Department of Communities and Local Government – Statutory homelessness and prevention and relief, April to June 2016: England

- 8.1.5 A Homeless Forum is established that engages with other statutory and non-statutory Agencies.
- 8.1.6 The Council carries out an annual review of rough sleeping in the borough that goes beyond the limitations of the Statutory requirements, for example personalised Development Plans are produced for each rough sleeper and that these continue to be implemented even after they have moved into permanent housing.
- 8.1.7 There is active and meaningful involvement of individuals who have lived experience or service users with the development and delivery of services, and the implementation process.
- 8.1.8 The Council considers its approach to assisting individuals with multiple and complex needs.

Improving access to health services

- 8.1.9 The existing arrangements for meeting the health needs of homeless people (including rough sleepers) are reviewed and strengthened – informed by a Health Needs Audit - to ensure that rough sleepers and people who are living in temporary accommodation are not only aware of, but are also helped to connect with, local support services.
- 8.1.10 Details of the medical advice and treatment available to people who are homeless and/or sleeping rough – at various locations, including Maple Access and Oasis House – are communicated to all organisations and services in order that they can be shared with people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

Temporary accommodation

- 8.1.11 The Council develops an ambitious plan, using SMART outcomes, for minimising its use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation and out-of-borough temporary accommodation.
- 8.1.12 The Council works imaginatively and collaboratively with Northamptonshire County Council, and other Agencies and organisations, to provide more

support for homeless families in temporary accommodation and mitigating any adverse effects on the families' finances and the children's schooling and healthcare.

8.1.13 All nightly-purchased temporary accommodation that is used by the Borough Council should provide free Wi-Fi facilities.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

8.1.14 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as part of its monitoring regime, reviews the impact of this report in six months' time.

8.1.15 It is recommended to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that when monitoring takes place, a previous service user is asked to attend the meeting to provide information.

Appendices



Appendix A

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

SCRUTINY PANEL 3 - HOMELESSNESS (PRE DECISION SCRUTINY)

1. Purpose/Objectives of the Review

- Pre-Decision Scrutiny: To review how the Borough Council and its partners prevent homelessness and respond to those without homes in the borough

Key Lines of Enquiry

- To gain an understanding of the work currently being undertaken by Northampton Borough Council (NBC), partnerships, statutory and voluntary organisations to address homelessness
- To assess the extent of homelessness and rough sleeping in the borough assess the initiatives currently in place to tackle homelessness
- To examine the Council's Severe Weather Provision
- To gain an understanding of the effect on the health, wellbeing and the safety of homelessness people, including rough sleepers
- To gain an understanding of the causes and barriers to support homelessness
- Identify any specific groups that are not accessing services

2. Outcomes Required

- To reduce homelessness in the borough of Northampton
- An understanding of the local authority homelessness role and the services provided in Northampton
- A review of existing homelessness services in Northampton, in order to assess their quality and effectiveness and identify any significant gaps in service

3. Information Required

- Background data
- Background reports
- Best practice data
- Desktop research
- Evidence from expert internal witnesses
- Evidence from expert external witnesses
- Site visits (if applicable)

4. Format of Information

- Background data, including:
 - Presentation to set the scene: To identify the prevalence of the problem locally
 - Relevant national and local background research papers
 - Definitions – Homelessness and Rough Sleepers
 - Homelessness Legislation
 - Causes of Homelessness, including Rough Sleeping
 - Relevant Council Policies and Strategies
 - Statistics:
 - Rough sleeper data
 - Homelessness data
 - Relevant Legislation:
 - Welfare Reform Act 2012
 - Localism Act 2011
 - Homelessness Act 2002
 - The Health and Social Care Act 2012
 - Relevant published papers on homelessness and rough sleeping
- Best practice external to Northampton
- Internal expert advisors:
 - Cabinet Member for Housing, NBC

- Housing Options and Advice Manager, NBC
 - Head of Revenues and Benefits, LGSS
 - Cabinet Member for Community Safety, NBC
 - Chair of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and the Community Safety Team
 - Case Managers, Anti-Social Behaviour Unit
- External expert advisors:
 - Head of Protecting Vulnerable Persons, Northamptonshire Police
 - Director of Public Health, Northamptonshire County Council
 - Manager, Hope Centre
 - Manager, Maple Access
 - Manager, NAASH
 - Drug and Alcohol Challenge Officer, the Bridge
 - Operations Manager, Midland Heart Housing Association
 - Service Manager, Salvation Army
 - Chief Executive, Central Northamptonshire CAB
 - Emmaus, Homelessness Charity
 - Shelter
 - Crisis
 - Healthwatch Northamptonshire
 - Site visit to temporary accommodation(s) and Oasis House

5. Methods Used to Gather Information

- Minutes of meetings
- Desktop research
- Site visits
- Officer reports
- Presentations
- Examples of best practice
- Witness Evidence:-
 - Key witnesses as detailed in section 4 of this scope

6. Co-Options to the Review

- Senior Officers, Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) and Homeless Link to be approached suggesting that they are co-opted to this Review for its life.

7. Community Impact Screening Assessment

- A Community Impact Screening Assessment to be undertaken on the scope of the Review

8. Evidence gathering Timetable

May 2016 – March 2017

- | | |
|-------------------|-------------------------|
| • 26 May 2016 | - Scoping meeting |
| • 21 July | - Evidence gathering |
| • 22 September | - Evidence gathering |
| • 24 November | - Evidence gathering |
| • 26 January 2017 | - Evidence gathering |
| • 30 March | - Approval final report |

Various site visits will be programmed during this period, if required.

Meetings to commence at 6.00 pm

9. Responsible Officers

Lead Officer	Phil Harris, Head of Housing and Wellbeing
Co-ordinator	Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer

10. Resources and Budgets

Phil Harris, Head of Housing and Wellbeing, to provide internal advice.

11. Final report presented by:

Completed by March 2017. Presented by the Chair of the Panel to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and then to Cabinet.

12. Monitoring procedure:

Review the impact of the report after six months (approximately November/December 2017)

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY



Appendix B

SCRUTINY PANEL 3 – HOMELESSNESS
(PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY)

CORE QUESTIONS – EXPERT ADVISORS

The Scrutiny Panel is currently undertaking a review: Pre-Decision Scrutiny: To review how the Borough Council and its partners prevent homelessness and respond to those without homes in the borough

Key Lines of Enquiry

- To gain an understanding of the work currently being undertaken by Northampton Borough Council (NBC), partnerships, statutory and voluntary organisations to address homelessness
- To assess the extent of homelessness and rough sleeping in the borough assess the initiatives currently in place to tackle homelessness
- To examine the Council's Severe Weather Provision
- To gain an understanding of the effect on the health, wellbeing and the safety of homelessness people, including rough sleepers
- To gain an understanding of the causes and barriers to support homelessness
- Identify any specific groups that are not accessing services

The expected outcomes of this Scrutiny Review are:

- To reduce homelessness in the borough of Northampton
- An understanding of the local authority homelessness role and the services provided in Northampton
- A review of existing homelessness services in Northampton, in order to assess their quality and effectiveness and identify any significant gaps in service

CORE QUESTIONS:

A series of key questions have been put together to inform the evidence base of the Scrutiny Panel:

1. Please describe your understanding of the nature, causes and extent of homelessness and rough sleeping, and the impact that homelessness has on the health, wellbeing and safety of homeless people.
2. Please describe the services, assistance and support that are available to people who are homeless, including rough sleepers.
3. Please provide details of the contribution that your organisation is making (through its work and the initiatives in which it is involved) to tackle, prevent and reduce homelessness and rough sleeping in the borough.
4. Please provide details of the action that your organisation is taking to improve the health, wellbeing and safety of homeless people.
5. Please provide details of the local Homelessness Strategy and Rough Sleepers Strategy and how their implementation is being monitored and assessed.
6. Please provide details of the arrangements that have been put in place to provide rough sleepers with emergency shelter during severe weather.
7. Please provide us with any statistics and data you hold in relation to the number of people / households that are homeless, and details of the methodology you have used to count the number of people sleeping rough.
8. Are you aware of any specific groups that are not accessing local services and, if you are, please can you provide details and describe the reasons why some homeless people are difficult to engage and support?
9. Are there any significant gaps in service and do the services link together well enough?
10. How can we increase awareness of the services, assistance and support available to people who are homeless, including rough sleepers?
11. What action is being taken to ensure that all agencies and members of the public know what to do if they know that someone is homeless or sleeping rough?
12. Do you have any other information you are able to provide in relation to homelessness and rough sleeping?
13. What is the Council doing to bring empty homes back into use in Northampton\? **(question for internal witnesses).**



NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

SCRUTINY PANEL 3 – HOMELESSNESS

BRIEFING NOTE: DESKTOP RESEARCH – BEST PRACTICE

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 At its inaugural meeting, Scrutiny Panel 3 (Homelessness) agreed that it would receive details of best practice initiatives regarding homelessness prevention.

1.2 Detailed below are some examples.

2 SHELTER - Homelessness: Early Identification and Prevention - A Good Practice Guide (2007)

2.1 SHELTER reports that its guide aims to assist local authorities and local agencies in their ability to identify people who are at risk of becoming homeless. The guide highlights current good practice examples of how to identify these vulnerable groups and individuals, and offer support to prevent homelessness occurring.

2.2 It is reported in the Guide that there are a number of groups that research, over many years, has identified as being at a greater risk of homelessness than the general population. These include:

- Young people
- Care leavers
- Ex-offenders
- People with mental health problems
- Refugees
- Gypsies and Travellers (housed and on sites)
- People with drug or alcohol addictions
- People leaving hospital
- Ex-members of the Armed Forces

2.3 Case studies are provided in the Guide, an example below:

'Mrs A came to me in tears one day because she had received an eviction notice. She could neither read nor write properly, but felt too ashamed to tell the staff at the housing office. They had sent her letters about her arrears (which were due to a misunderstanding over Housing Benefit), but she couldn't understand them. She happened to have invited a neighbour in for a cup of tea on the day she got the eviction notice, and the neighbour read it to her. To be fair to them, the housing staff couldn't have been more helpful when they understood the problem, but it caused a lot of trouble, and Mrs A nearly lost her home. She's a widow with no close family and health problems, and I just think that when she carried on not replying to letters they could have sent someone out to see her.'

Voluntary agency advice worker – Shelter interview.

- 2.4 The Guide also provides details of good practice undertaken by Local Authorities, example as extracted from the Guide below:

Good practice example: Your Homes Newcastle

Newcastle City Council (NCC) has developed a Protocol for Preventing Repeat Homelessness and Evictions, which is an agreement between the Strategic Housing Service, social services and Your Homes Newcastle (YHN), who manage council homes on behalf of NCC.

The protocol enables staff at YHN to identify vulnerable tenants prior to the start of a tenancy. It sets out a procedure for assessing individual housing and support needs, and for working with vulnerable tenants and the relevant external support agencies to promote tenancy sustainment. The protocol illustrates the role each agency has in supporting vulnerable tenants and ways in which joint working can be implemented if problems occur.

The procedure is divided into three sections:

- part one – action to be taken prior to the start of the tenancy
- part two – action to be taken during the tenancy
- part three – action to prevent eviction and the loss of accommodation.

The first step in part one of the procedure, the main element concerning prevention, involves identifying those applicants who may be vulnerable or at risk of homelessness. The protocol identifies the following groups of potentially vulnerable people:

- households that the NCC has accepted a full duty to house as homeless in the previous two years
- people with a social worker, community psychiatric nurse, mental health worker or drug/alcohol support worker
- people with a housing support worker or who are leaving housing funded by Supporting People
- individuals with a probation officer or Youth Offending Team worker
- refugees
- people leaving hospital, prison, care or the armed forces

- people with known drug or alcohol problems
- people whose learning difficulties or physical or sensory impairment make them vulnerable
- older people
- anyone subject to multi-agency public protection arrangements.

During step one, support workers who are already involved with the individual are contacted for information that will assist in developing a support plan. Any existing housing or support plans should be shared. Where an individual is not involved with an external agency, and it is believed that additional support might be required, their case will be referred to the in-house advice and support team.

Where there are concerns about a person's ability to maintain a tenancy, step two of the procedure is enacted. This means arranging a case meeting with the applicant, agencies involved with the applicant and other agencies who may be able to provide information and support. A support plan is created and an agreement put in place to determine the responsibilities of each agency, the timescale for support and a mechanism for maintaining contact.

The good practice principles set out in this protocol enable YHN staff to conduct a thorough assessment of individual needs and identify vulnerability prior to the tenancy commencing, minimising the chances of the tenancy breaking down. The next stage is to ensure that it is embedded in all practice areas and monitoring procedures. The protocol will be included in the Council's new allocations policy and management information system.

'The protocol has been designed to provide longer term, more meaningful homelessness prevention. It aims to foster better joint working within the local authority and create much needed organisational culture change.'

Neil Munslow, Housing Services Manager, NCC.

Good practice example: West Berkshire Vulnerable People Protocol

West Berkshire Council's Vulnerable People Protocol (VPP) is a proactive approach to the identification, assessment and support of people who are, or who may become, vulnerable to losing their tenancies because of unmet support needs. It is a multi-agency protocol led by Sovereign Housing Association, West Berkshire Council (housing operations, social services and Housing Benefit teams) and Two Saints Housing Association.

The protocol and its associated training package for staff and service users presents tools and available services and resources in West Berkshire to ensure that vulnerable people receive timely information, advice and support. It uses a broad definition of vulnerability, recognising that it can occur at different stages in life, whether episodic and recurring, or ongoing and increasing over time. Indicators, or points at which vulnerability can occur, are listed as being:

- hospitalisation and periods following discharge from hospital or other institutional care
- periods of sustained illness at home
- change from supported accommodation to independent living
- evidence of neighbour harassment or abuse towards the individual or household
- evidence of antisocial behaviour by the individual or household
- rent arrears or other debt problems
- repeat homelessness
- during and following substance abuse.

The VPP staff training pack takes these indicators further by including, for example, episodes of stress or mental ill health, chaotic lifestyles, loss of income and bereavement as points of vulnerability. The protocol therefore requires that consideration should be given to potential vulnerability at all points of contact with residents, and potential residents, within the district. These points of contact include:

- applications for housing
- home visits
- ad hoc visits, eg because of rent arrears
- programmes of tenancy visits/audits
- supported move to new housing
- social/medical panels
- key life-cycle events such as bereavement or relationship breakdown
- issue of notice of eviction.

The training pack has been designed to enable frontline staff to understand potential vulnerability and learn how to respond to it, make an assessment, and review, evaluate and track the VPP. Once vulnerability and support needs have been identified, support may be provided by any agency involved, and will be determined by the pre-tenancy meeting, other contact between the partner agencies, or through a case conference.

'The key to preventing homelessness is timely information and support. The training for professionals should provide frontline staff with a range of skills, tools and information to this end.'

Jon Cox, Two Saints Housing Association.

Good practice example: housing worker, Plymouth Children's Service

The development of a specific homelessness prevention role, through the introduction of a housing worker within the Children's Service in Plymouth, is based upon a similar model of early identification and homelessness prevention in Colchester.

The primary role of the housing worker will be to pick up housing casework from social workers and social work assistants who are concerned about the families with whom they are working, and intervene as early as possible.

The introduction of a housing worker within social services aims to generate greater knowledge and understanding of the roles of both social services and the housing department, and improve their communication with each other. An increased awareness among social workers of housing-related issues will ensure that timely referrals can be made to the housing worker, who will:

- refer families to the housing officer
- provide money and budgeting advice to families
- maximise income through benefits advice
- work with the housing officer to resolve issues relating to rent arrears
- assess family support needs
- assist with applications for private housing.

By introducing this specific role it is hoped that social workers, housing officers and the housing worker can work together to identify problems at the earliest opportunity. Early intervention (ie before housing or financial problems become too serious) will enable the housing worker to work effectively and efficiently with the Council's housing advisers, outreach workers, Welfare Benefits advisers, housing officers, Housing Benefit team and floating support staff to resolve problems, prevent family breakdown and homelessness, and promote tenancy sustainment through continuity of support.

Good practice example: tenancy tracker, Coast and Country Housing

Coast and Country Housing (C&CH) are able to provide an in-house Housing Benefit claim verification service. While advisers provide prospective tenants with assistance and support, tenants' benefit claims are able to be verified and dealt with within the organisation, making the process quicker and easier for the tenants. Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council covers a wide geographical area, which can be a barrier to people on low incomes attempting to make benefit claims. Thus the provision of local in-house Housing Benefit services removes some of the barriers that people face in making their claims.

All new tenancies are monitored through the tenancy tracker procedure. The purpose of this procedure is to provide effective management of the rent accounts of new tenants up to the first

13 weeks. This ensures that:

- new tenants have a means of paying rent that is suitable to their needs and circumstances
- tenants who are experiencing difficulties are referred to advice and support agencies and floating support services where this is appropriate
- Housing Benefit claims have been processed correctly and benefit is paid, and
- rent payments are being made.

Where difficulties with a Housing Benefit claim occur, the tenancy tracker procedure highlights this and provides a system for joint working between the account's advisers and housing advisers. C&CH has a small team that deals with benefit revisions and appeals, and provides representation and support for clients at independent appeal tribunals.

Good practice example: 'fix it' fund

Bournemouth Borough Council set up this fund in 2003. It has been used at the discretion of housing officers as a tool to prevent homelessness by giving a 'one-off' payment to the tenant. Examples include:

- paying off arrears where it is not deemed to be the tenant's fault that they are in financial trouble, and where it would prove substantially more expensive to 'pick up' a family as homeless after eviction
- paying off damage costs demanded by a landlord where it is deemed not to be the tenant's fault
- paying landlords a proportion of 'rent in advance' payments, where it is deemed that the tenant cannot access sufficient funds elsewhere.

Good practice example: Southern Focus Trust Housing Advice Centre

Southern Focus Trust Housing Advice Centre (SFTHAC) provides independent advice on housing, benefits and debt in the Portsmouth Area. The centre has a Community Legal Service quality mark.

Portsmouth City Council has been concerned about the number of repeat homelessness cases they have dealt with from the private sector. In response they have funded 24 hours of casework per week from SFTHAC for private sector tenants and owner-occupiers who are at risk of eviction and homelessness, usually as a result of rent or mortgage arrears. SFTHAC provides a holistic service that includes benefits and debt counselling, as well as help with housing.

The Council has exclusive referral rights to four appointments per week, and by referring directly to

SFTHAC it can be sure the service user is getting the appropriate assistance. SFTHAC keeps the Council informed of the progress in each case. It refers the client back to the Council if it is not possible to keep the client's home, which helps both the client and the Council ensure that a homelessness application is carried out quickly and efficiently.

'[SFTHAC] knew my rights and managed to help me quickly.'

Service user – Shelter questionnaire.

'[Without SFTHAC] I would have been more stressed, and would not have known what to do.'

Service user – Shelter questionnaire.

Good practice example: Bournemouth Housing Advice Service

Bournemouth Housing Advice Service (BHAS) was established in 2001. The service is delivered by Shelter in partnership with Bournemouth Borough Council and Bournemouth Housing Forum. The Council funds two workers who concentrate on preventative advice and helping people to keep their home. Referrals come from a variety of different sources – advice agencies, the local authority, friends and family, and self-referrals. The most common problems that people present with are rent arrears, Housing Benefit problems, disrepair and possession proceedings.

In 2003, the service launched the BHAS Network to ensure that service users can access appropriate advice from other agencies. Sixty-eight member agencies are listed in the BHAS Network Directory, which contains information and contact details about each member. Members include organisations such as Connexions and various support agencies. This directory is distributed to all network members to ensure that each member agency has a detailed knowledge of the services offered by other agencies and can initiate effective referrals.

All members are invited to attend wider network meetings. These meetings provide an opportunity to share successes and address the challenges that agencies dealing with housing advice face. The network aims to ensure that, regardless of which agency a service user approaches, they are given

the right information or referred on to the right agency. All agencies in the network display a BHAS logo to highlight that housing advice is available.

BHAS also provides training sessions to network members. These sessions are well attended and cover a variety of topics, including homelessness and the rights of vulnerable people and helping with claims for Housing Benefit. The training helps member organisations to provide better direct advice and advocacy, and also to know when it is appropriate to make a referral.

‘Last year 67 per cent of our clients were homeless or likely to become homeless within 28 days. This year the figure has reduced to 45 per cent, which means that we are more effective at reducing homelessness. This seems to be because more people know about our service, and people with housing issues are able to access our service at an earlier stage.’

Bournemouth Housing Advice Service Review, 2005.

‘We have attended various training days and all have been very relevant to our work and given us more confidence when dealing with housing enquiries.’

Network member.

Good practice example: advice centre for black and minority ethnic groups, Shelter Housing Advice and Support Centre, Stratford, London

This project aims to improve access to housing advice for black and ethnic minority groups by working with local communities. It is targeted at people living in the London Boroughs of Newham, Tower Hamlets and Hackney.

The Shelter project ensures that advice is available in locations such as community centres, as well as at the project base in Stratford. The service is heavily advertised through the local press and community organisations, as well as by services such as Connexions. Delivering advice in the

community not only makes it easier to access, but also increases people’s trust and confidence in the services being offered. The project employs multi-lingual housing advisers and can access a translation service for languages not offered directly.

The project offers drop-in appointments at the centre in Stratford, as well as providing outreach advice at locations such as community centres where there are crèches and other support services.

The aim of the project is that it will reach individuals from black and other minority ethnic groups long before they are threatened with homelessness. By providing advice that is timely, independent and culturally sensitive, the project hopes to make it easier for individuals to find and keep a decent home.

Good practice example: St Basils

St Basils is a Birmingham-based organisation that offers a range of housing and support to local young people. One of its initiatives is the Schools Training and Mentoring Project (STaMP). As part of the project, sessions giving information about housing and homelessness from a local perspective are run in local secondary schools and other youth work settings. They are interactive and encourage young people to discuss issues and ask questions. Each session is co-facilitated by a peer educator. The peer educators are young people aged 16 to 25, mainly ex-service users of St Basils. They have experience of homelessness and are able to give a real-life account of their knowledge of housing need.

As the project has developed, it has been possible to put into place a peer-mentoring service. The mentors are peer educators who have become interested in extending their role. They are trained to an approved standard by St Basils, and offer one-to-one support to those young people who are

judged to be most at risk from leaving home in an unplanned way. As well as offering holistic support around issues such as mental health, sexual health and family relationships, they can offer informed advice about housing and homelessness issues. If necessary, they can refer families or individuals to St Basils' counselling, family mediation or housing advice services. Each mentor supports one or two service users, and a mentoring worker supports the mentors.

If a peer mentor feels that more specific housing advice or advocacy is needed, they can refer the individual to St Basils Links Housing Advice Service. This provides age-specific advice to young people in the Birmingham area and employs knowledgeable workers who are aware of the specific needs of their client group. The peer-mentoring scheme provides a bridge to the advice service, ensuring that some of the most hard-to-reach young people are given effective support.

Good practice example: Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council Homelessness Prevention Floating Support Service

This service is funded through Supporting People and is run by the Regeneration, Housing and Neighbourhoods Department. The scheme is cross tenure, providing services for homeowners and private tenants, as well as people with RSLs. A team of three people provides advice and support for up to 30 individuals and families who are seen as being vulnerable to homelessness. The team has a rolling programme, so as a particular case ends it is able to give more in-depth support to new cases. Most tenants use the service for six months, but some use it for up to 18 months. Help offered includes:

- liaising with landlords
- signposting and assisting with debt-counselling and budgeting skills
- liaising with mortgage companies, banks, Housing Benefit and the benefits agency in order to optimise income
- facilitating dispute resolution and mediation
- completing benefit forms
- liaising with social services
- resettlement activities.

Referrals come mainly from the housing needs department, but they also come from a variety of other sources: mental health teams, local housing associations, and the local criminal justice and learning disabilities teams are just a few examples. The service is available to households who are at risk of homelessness or who simply need some extra support, as well as those who have recently been homeless. The team ensures that their work is well publicised among local agencies so that appropriate referrals can be made. They also refer onto other agencies when they feel that they do not have the expertise needed, or that help from another source would be beneficial.

Once a referral has been made, a support worker will visit the household to discuss the level of support needed. If the individual or family is accepted onto the scheme, a tailor-made support plan will be drawn up. The plan is reviewed on a regular basis to take account of changing needs.

'If the client is unfamiliar with the area we would ... get them maps, ... onto a doctors list, ... a dentist, help them to apply to schools ... and absolutely anything else that could be needed.'

Support worker.

**Good practice example:
Julian Housing Support**

Julian Housing Support (JHS) is a supported housing charity based in Norfolk that works to prevent homelessness by providing services for people with mental health problems. It is jointly funded by Supporting People and health and social services. JHS works in partnership with Norfolk Social Services, Norfolk Primary Care Trust and the major housing providers in the county. It is through this partnership approach that JHS has been able to develop a wide range of housing choices and options for support.

JHS are alerted to individuals who are at risk of homelessness by a range of statutory and voluntary services. Referrals are accepted from mental health social workers, community mental health teams, primary care link workers and, in some circumstances, housing providers. The early identification and thorough assessment of housing-related problems and support needs, combined with multi-agency working, ensures that homelessness can be prevented long before people need to make a homelessness application.

JHS services include the following.

- A floating support service in every district and for people in any tenure. Support can be short- or long-term, and more or less intensive, depending upon a person's needs.
- A Hospital Housing Link scheme (attached to every psychiatric acute ward across the county), which provides housing and benefits advice, supporting over 400 people per year. Housing Link workers visit inpatients with housing

problems and patients are supported either to keep their existing homes or to find alternative suitable accommodation before they are discharged from hospital.

- An outreach service supporting people in their own homes. Outreach workers attend regular meetings with mental health workers and are involved in the care-planning process to decide on the housing and health assistance that their clients need.
- An outreach service that is a flexible model of care offered to people who find it hard to access services because of their mental health problems.
- A supported housing scheme and resettlement programme for clients who require additional support before moving onto independent living.

JHS has been described by organisations and service users as a dependable and responsive service that offers creative ways of helping people with mental health problems who are at risk of homelessness or inadequately housed. Their interventions have led to an increase in people's housing stability and an investment in their future. By helping to reduce some of the stresses related to maintaining a tenancy, deterioration in someone's mental health can be alleviated and loss of housing can be prevented.

'I got ill and had to give up work... I

couldn't afford the mortgage... I wouldn't have known what to do [without JHS] and my home would have been repossessed.'

JHS service user.

Good practice example: Shelter Inclusion Project

The Shelter Inclusion Project was set up in 2002. The project was designed to provide an alternative model to enforcement policies and residential schemes. It was developed by Shelter and Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council. The project has three key objectives:

- to reduce antisocial behaviour
- to promote social inclusion and community stability
- to prevent eviction and provide a route back into settled housing.

The project works with families, couples and individuals, and its referral criteria require a 'history of antisocial behaviour'. Once people have been referred to the project they have access to a range of help and support, including:

- housing advice and advocacy
- help with benefits and money management
- support with addressing antisocial behaviour issues
- practical assistance, eg with decorating
- referral to other agencies
- parenting advice and support
- assistance with employment and training
- direct specialist work with children and young people.

Originally, many of the households referred to the project were subject to one or more enforcement actions linked to alleged antisocial behaviour. As work developed, cases started to be referred at an earlier stage. Initially, the majority of referrals came from the enforcement team at Rochdale Boroughwide Housing. Now more come from housing officers who refer before any enforcement action is taken.

Staff at the project feel it is much easier to work with early intervention cases because behaviour patterns are less entrenched and the situation has not reached a crisis point. In addition, because the antisocial behaviour is being picked up at an earlier stage, the community does not have to suffer the problem for as long as it might have done otherwise.

The Inclusion Project is now working with the Respect Task Force to deliver a Family Intervention Project. This project will work closely with eight to 10 families who are involved in high-level antisocial behaviour and are close to losing their homes. This means that the present project will be able to focus more closely on early intervention.

'[If it weren't for the Project] I think I'd still be where I was... as in debt wise... I don't think I'd have done as much as I have – I wouldn't have sorted my bills out... and would have ended up getting a load of fines and all that...'

Project user.

Good practice example: Newcastle City Council Hospital Discharge and Homelessness Prevention Protocol

The protocol was created by key agencies in Newcastle who work with people who might be homeless or at risk of homelessness and have been admitted to hospital. The Strategic Housing Service, which is part of the Regeneration Directorate, is leading on the development of the protocol. Its key aim is to ensure that all agencies coming into contact with people who are vulnerable to homelessness, or without accommodation on admission to hospital, help those people find appropriate housing and support before they leave hospital.

Certain key groups were identified as being at most risk of homelessness on discharge from hospital:

- people who were homeless prior to admission to hospital
- people who were in an institution, such as prison
- people staying in temporary accommodation
- people who have arrived in Newcastle with nowhere to stay
- people who had accommodation before admission to hospital but who either cannot or will not return to that accommodation
- people who have accommodation that will need to be adapted following their hospital treatment.

The protocol outlines key steps for all agencies to take to prevent homelessness. These are:

- action to be taken to prevent a patient from becoming homeless on discharge from hospital, and the process to be followed on admission

- seeking help from other agencies in finding accommodation and arranging support
- making information for patients and staff on display in hospital wards.

Within each step are the key questions that staff must ask all patients, the people and agencies that should be contacted, and what to do outside of office hours. Specific guidance is provided for dealing with particularly vulnerable people, including street homeless people, people with mental health problems, patients under 18 years of age, asylum seekers and refugees, and people with drugs and/or alcohol problems.

A housing resource pack and guidance on sharing information accompany the protocol. This pack outlines the role and contact details of each of the key agencies involved. It provides further information on where to get benefits advice and lists the homelessness contacts in the region. The pack also provides guidance on helping people to obtain settled accommodation.

The introduction of a clear set of guidelines for the assessment of all patients' accommodation needs on admission to hospital has obvious benefits for patients and hospital and housing staff.

'The development of the protocol through a working group has already helped... give people in the health service a better idea about who does what in the homelessness world.'

**Sheila Spencer, Policy Officer,
Newcastle Homelessness Prevention Project.**

Good practice example: West Yorkshire Offender Housing Protocol

The West Yorkshire Offender Housing Protocol is based on a framework developed in Tyne and Wear – the Housing and Returning Prisoners Protocol (HARP). In West Yorkshire, all five local authorities (Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield) have signed up to the protocol, which aims to provide a co-ordinated approach to the accommodation of offenders, those released from custody, and those under the supervision of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS).

It seeks to provide ‘end-to-end’ management of accommodation by addressing the housing needs of offenders at the following stages:

- before custody
- at sentencing
- on reception in prison
- during custody, and
- on release.

The protocol provides a pathway to resettlement. It identifies the key responsibilities of the different agencies within that pathway and their organisational responsibilities. The protocol clearly outlines the steps that need to be taken at each stage and by whom. It promotes effective communication at all levels and commitment from all partner agencies to joint working. It involves clear information-sharing

policies and decision-making processes.

The protocol also seeks to address:

- local authorities’ duties towards the prevention of homelessness
- prison and probation commitment to effective resettlement (encompassed within the NOMS National Reducing Re-offending Delivery Plan)
- how partner agencies contribute towards community safety objectives
- the contribution of RSLs and the voluntary sector in housing and supporting offenders.

Shelter has a cross-regional contract with the Prison Service to provide housing advice, increasing the links between offenders in custody and local housing and support providers. Effective partnerships across statutory, private and voluntary sector organisations are central to the protocol because the housing needs of prisoners can only be successfully met if services outside prison are fully engaged in the process.

This protocol acknowledges the links between accommodation and other support needs by integrating housing with other aspects of resettlement, including health, social networks, education and training. Housing is seen, therefore, as the foundation for other interventions and their effectiveness.

Good practice example: Bristol City Council Joint Protocol

This joint protocol outlines the statutory responsibilities of Bristol Social Services and Health (SS&H) and Neighbourhood and Housing Services (N&HS) in assessing and responding to the housing and support needs of young people who are:

- ‘in need’ or require protection
- due to leave or have already left care, and
- homeless or threatened with homelessness, vulnerable and have a priority need.

The protocol provides tools for assessment and action for both departments to take, promoting joint assessments and information sharing at all stages and defining timescales for actions. The protocol was widely promoted to staff from all sectors. It was launched in 2003 at a number of multi-agency roadshow events that involved SS&H, N&HS and representatives from the voluntary sector, youth housing and support providers.

The protocol and related workshops provided workers with the valuable opportunity to talk to each other, share their concerns and develop

creative solutions to the housing problems faced by vulnerable young people.

This protocol worked well for a period of time; however, since its initial launch and promotion a number of changes have occurred. There has been a high turnover of staff in both the voluntary and statutory sectors, as well as structural changes within services in the area, which have led to difficulties in implementing the agreement. Bristol City Council has recognised these problems and will soon be leading on the revision, updating and promotion of a new version of the protocol.

‘[The launch] brought various strands of social services, housing and the voluntary sector together in lively workshops... We hoped the joint assessment framework and child protection focus would drive us all (and our departments/organisations) to own the shared purpose that we could, after all, work together.’

Robin Spencer, NCH Bristol Housing Project.

Good practice example: a multi-agency protocol for young people, South Gloucestershire

South Gloucestershire Council, Priority Youth Housing and Connexions have developed a protocol with other agencies to improve services for young vulnerable people who are homeless or in temporary accommodation. The framework has not been implemented yet; however the protocol is an ambitious one that outlines the roles, responsibilities and practices that should be undertaken by participating agencies in a variety of situations, so it should be useful for other agencies to look at.

The underlying principles behind the protocol are based on the prevention of homelessness, where possible, and effective communication between agencies and the young people concerned. The protocol covers homelessness prevention, accommodation and support services for:

- homeless 16- and 17-year-olds and care leavers aged 16 to 21
- young people aged 18 to 25 who are vulnerable or have complex needs
- young people in supported housing or bed and breakfast accommodation
- young people who are at risk of eviction from temporary accommodation, when there is a risk that the local authority will decide that it has discharged its duty.

Key to the success of the protocol is a joint

assessment process involving a new Youth Housing

Social Worker (YHSW), the housing department and Priority Youth Housing. The YHSW takes on the initial liaison role with the housing department and support agencies, and assesses the potential for the young person to return home. Where this is possible, the YHSW will work towards a return home at an early stage.

There is also flexibility in allocating personal advisers for care leavers – this can either be someone from social services or an independent personal adviser from one of the other participating agencies, depending on the circumstances and the young person's preference.

The protocol includes guidance on how to make supported housing work and supporting young people in bed and breakfast accommodation. The guidance recommends visits in the first 24 hours, involving specialist workers as necessary, early warnings from accommodation providers if things are going wrong, and follow-up visits to talk to both the individual and the workers about the situation.

There is also a procedure for intervening when young people are at risk of losing their temporary accommodation and their right to more secure housing from the Council. This involves early communications from the housing department to staff in other agencies when there are problems, and a multi-agency review of the case before the Council decides that they need to evict the individual. The spirit of the protocol, however, is to avoid this situation arising in the first place, by ensuring early communication between agencies

and effective intervention when necessary.

- 2.5 A copy of the full document can be located:
http://england.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/193134/Homelessness_early_identification_prevention.pdf

3 Homeless Link – Transatlantic Practice Exchange (2014)

- 3.1 Homeless Link published a report in 2014 that details reports from 10 frontline professionals on an international exchange of knowledge and practice.
- 3.2 The report details that exchange took place between May and July 2014 with participants spending up to two weeks on placement with their hosts and other local organisations.
- 3.3 The report states that the nature of public services is changing and the perception of and the public value that they create is being challenged. Welfare Reform, funding changes, increased localism and changing demographics have produced significant challenges to the way things are done. The report goes on to state that the Transatlantic Practice Exchange was designed against this backdrop to provide a space for new thinking about the ways that we deliver services. In 2014 five front line

staff from England travelled to USA to learn about the different ways of delivering services to particular groups. The structure of the placements enabled participants to develop an understanding of the context in which these services operate, giving them a unique insight into how things can be done differently – and also why they are done differently.

3.4 The report goes on to state there are two overarching themes in the reports from the UK participants:

- The need for therapeutic interventions
- Challenging the short-term nature of support in the UK

3.5 The report comments that the USA has a serious homeless problem with a sizable system to address it. It has improved its approaches to homelessness and developed a number of effective practices, including:

- Permanent supportive housing
- Housing First
- Rapid re-housing
- Critical Time interventions
- Systems are data driven

3.6 It is reported that the exchange was extraordinarily productive, with a number of observations, including:

- The advantages of a more comprehensive set of social benefits in the UK. In the USA programs often have to piece together housing, services and income on a case-by-case basis.
- A greater focus on youth homelessness in the UK than in the USA.

3.7 Case studies detailed in the report include:

- Trauma-informed care (New York)
- Housing First for people with dual diagnosis (Seattle)
- Permanent Supporting Housing (New York)
- Stabilisation: helping people come home for good (Boston)
- Permanent Supportive Housing for people over 50 (Boston)
- Hospital Discharge Strategies (Brighton, UK)
- Chronicle Excluded Adults: the MEAM Approach (Cambridge, UK)
- No Second Night Out (London, UK)
- Psychologically Informed Environments (London, UK)
- Youth Homelessness: Nightstops and Reconnect (London, UK)

3.8 A copy of the full report can be located:

<http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Homeless%20Link%20-%20Transatlantic%20Practice%20Exchange%202014.pdf>

4 DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT – MAKING EVERY CONTACT COUNT (2012)

4.1 It is reported that the aim of the report is to make sure every contact local agencies make with vulnerable people and families really count:

- Tackle troubled childhoods and adolescence – through interventions to turn around the lives of the most troubled families, and by promoting innovative approaches to youth homelessness
- Improve health – including improving outcomes for homeless people with dual drugs/alcohol and mental health needs
- Reduce involvement in crime – Support to Police and Crime Commissioners, improving offender access to private rented accommodation
- Improve skills, employment and financial advice – new housing demonstration projects helping claimants budget and manage rent payments
 - Pioneer social funding for homelessness

4.2 The report details ten challenges for Local Authorities:

- adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services
- actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs
- offer a Housing Options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients
- adopt a *No Second Night Out* model or an effective local alternative
- have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support
- develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords
- actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme
- have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs
- not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation
- not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks

4.3 A copy of the full report can be located:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7597/2200459.pdf

5 OTHER BEST PRACTICE GUIDES

- 5.1 There are a number of Best Practice Guides regarding homelessness preventative and assistance but these are over ten years old, therefore the links to such Guides are detailed below for the Scrutiny Panel's information:

SHELTER – Mediation for Young Homeless People (2004)
https://england.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0012/40143/Mediation_for_Young_Homeless_People.pdf

G15 – Tackling Homelessness (2004) http://g15london.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/g15_homelessness_offer_full_report.pdf

Author: Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer, on behalf of Councillor Zoe Smith
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21 October 2016