

**NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL/
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

HOMELESSESS TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Friday, 6 January 2006

PRESENT:

Councillor Lee Mason	-	NBC (Chair)
Councillor Marion Allen	-	NBC
Councillor Margaret Pritchard	-	NBC
Councillor Mark Bullock	-	NCC

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor Brendan Glynane	Chair of Overview and Scrutiny, NBC
Fran Rodgers	Corporate Manager, NBC
Madeline Spencer	NBC
Linda Brede	NBC
Geoff Stokes	NCC

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Maureen Hill (NCC), Nigel Stock (NCC) and Bob Lane (NCC).

2 Declarations of Interest

None.

3 Minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2005

The minutes of the above meeting were agreed.

4 Matters Arising

In response to Councillor Pritchard's request for an update on agreed protocols in relation to Housing and Vulnerable People with of the other Districts/Boroughs in the County, M Spencer advised that she would be meeting later today with N Stock, NCC, to discuss the ongoing issue further.

Regarding emergency accommodation and Acorn House, the Task and Finish Group heard that discussions were taking place with Mohameed Sabeel and the work was still ongoing.

4 Further Information regarding Homelessness

Linda Brede, Allocations Team Leader, was introduced to the Group. Linda was working with the teams based at Fish Street.

Fran Rodgers circulated the most up to date (July to September) statistics regarding the homelessness provision that the Authority has to return to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) on a quarterly basis. It was noted that NBC did have its figures up to December 2005. Reporting was done on a rolling basis.

Northampton had 1.4 households per 1,000 as accepted as being homeless and in priority need compared to 1.2 per 1,000 in the whole of England. Fran commented that Leicester City Council, a Beacon Authority, had .5 households per 1,000 as accepted as being homeless and in priority need. Leicester CC had embedded the homelessness prevention approach agenda. Milton Keynes took a similar approach to Leicester and had .9 households per 1,000.

Fran explained the statistics – supplementary table: Local Authorities' action under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 and 1996 Housing Acts: Third Quarter 2005 (July to September):-

Eligible homeless and in priority need, but intentionally:-

- Robust investigation and decision making – preventing homelessness so that individuals don't make applications and it was also about dealing with applications

Eligible homelessness but not homeless:-

- Quite a high figure for Northampton (52)
- Category includes people with short hold tenancies who have received notice to leave – NBC might be able to negotiate with the landlord.
- Often individuals do not get to the stage of being included in the statistics – negotiations are reached prior to this. For example, mediation service is offered to the pregnant teenager who has been asked to leave home by her parents
- Wellingborough is high in this category. All other Councils in the County appear to be better. Fran undertook to bring this up at the forthcoming Chief Housing Officers Group.

There were issues about rural homelessness.

Fran then referred to the Households accommodated by the authority at the end of September 2005 data:-

- Just over 101,000 households in temporary accommodation in England
- Approximately 3,000 in Northamptonshire

- 198 households living in temporary accommodation in Northampton town, a considerable improvement.
- Leicester had just 63 households in temporary accommodation – addressing the homelessness prevention approach agenda.
- Milton Keynes had 847, which appeared it was putting homeless households into temporary Local Authority stock – to change to a permanent tenancy would clear this figure.

The Group asked questions regarding the Homeless at Home awaiting accommodation category:-

- If individuals/households can stay in their present accommodation they are categorised as homeless at home. The Authority does not wait until the crisis point but does not act too early either; negotiations can often be carried out with the landlord.
- Alternatives could be explored such as alternatives in the private sector – rent assistance scheme
- Councillors referred to cases in the county regarding individuals with mental and physical disabilities who had been told nothing could be done until they were evicted.
- Northampton was unique by having its Housing and Money Advice Service. It also had a mediation service, which often produced successful outcomes.

Fran Rodgers confirmed that an analysis of how long households had been in temporary accommodation could be provided. The majority however, stayed for no longer than three months.

The Group then asked questions and made comments: -

- Whether a group of young people was Local Authority temporary accommodation. Discussions were due to take place with NCC to establish a pathways protocol in this respect. Young people should not have to go through the homeless application process.
- As young people become ready and independent NBC has re housed them and has some good success stories. **Report back to future meeting.**
- People with learning difficulties are often not on the homeless at home list, for example, their carer dies and they become homeless. It would be beneficial to have a similar process for vulnerable people.
- Requested details of the number of young disabled people and other vulnerable groups across the country.
- There was an over supply of sheltered accommodation (flatted) that could be adapted.
- Bed Block had been identified with NCC – individuals coming out of hospital, mental hospital etc., who had been institutionalised for a long time and needed a safe place to reside
- Individuals leaving St Crispin's Hospital would be helped through supporting housing and would not be classed as homeless

- Five individuals were living at Princess Marina hospital, which was due to close shortly, and they needed support. Negotiations were ongoing and were almost resolved.
- There were a number of available bungalows around the county run by the Health Authority but the Group felt that these should come under the ownership of Social Services.
- The monitoring of the data needs to improve, for example Indian Pakistani and Bangladeshi were reported as zero when we know that applications come from these groups.
- Corporate discussion to be held regarding the use of data, e.g., the census or NBC's own collected data.
- The Group requested a breakdown of homeless households accommodated by NBC, breakdown of families, young children, age etc.

Fran Rodgers reported that since the Authority had introduced the prevention of homelessness approach, the figures had improved. She gave her assurance that it was not about putting barriers in place, but providing alternative housing solutions.

The Group then discussed the number of acceptances of homelessness applications. It was noted that if you receive less applications, acceptances would be lower. For the third quarter (October, November and December), for Northampton only, NBC has looked at prevention initiatives and looked more closely at applications. The acceptance rate was approximately 50%.

Regarding allocation/nominations for October/November/December 2005, approximately 1000 council properties per annum were nominated, 300 to RSLs and homelessness acceptances was 500. Homelessness applications created a huge pressure on allocations. For example, when Beaumont/Claremont Court was refurbished, 140 individuals had to be rehoused.

Madeline Spencer advised that it would not be beneficial to include category Other into the data report as it had been identified that the Authority had problems with its accuracy of reporting which needed to be addressed.

Madeline was pleased to report that total in temporary accommodation as at 30 September 2005 had fallen from 198 to 133 and the number in bed and breakfast as at the same date had fallen from 52 to 6.

The Group was informed that Fran Rodgers had put a request in to SMT for a homelessness prevention budget, without which, it would be difficult to move forward. The Authority had given the ODPM its assurances that it would re-invest its savings into homelessness.

The Group then discussed the comparison of homelessness applications to the number on the housing register. In 2001/02 a Government Initiative – Rent Assistance Scheme was introduced (number on the housing register was at 4356); SRB funding was also available in that year, as was affordable

housing, such as Simpson Barrack. There was a big increase on the housing register from 2002/03 (5042) to 2003/04 (7055), but the increase in housing prices could have been an influencing factor.

The Group asked questions and made comment:

- If an individual had been on the housing register for some time? They were issued with an automated letter on the anniversary of their application asking if they wished to remain on the register, continuous annual letters were issued.
- 6681 individuals were currently on the register. 1300 allocations each year, leaving the majority with no offer. Discussions need to be held with people on the register regarding realistic aspirations, using the rent assistance scheme etc., to help take people off the list.
- The Housing Needs Survey was carried out in 2002. There are continual links in with the Housing Strategy. Housing Strategy should address demand, what is affordable etc., should be fed in to give a figure how much affordable housing the Authority needs.
- Housing must be appealing as well as affordable. Schemes such as Homebuy are being developed for those who cannot afford to buy outright.
- Growth Agenda is the biggest opportunity to get this right, support network etc. The bigger picture often more than just bricks and mortar.
- There was a need to recognise children's homes in respect of the Growth Agenda.
- An understanding of demographics was needed to show the importance of fine tuned housing needs.

Councillor Glynane suggested that the Portfolio Holder be requested to drive forward the importance of fine tuned housing needs and ask that it be high on WNDC's Growth Agenda.

AGREED: That the Portfolio Holder be requested to drive forward importance of fine tuned housing needs and ask that it be high on WNDC's Growth Agenda.

5 Outcomes to take forward

Case Studies

Fran Rodgers circulated a draft letter to all Councillors (including local MPs) asking for submission of case scenarios which they felt the Task and Finish Group would benefit in receiving.

The next meeting would discuss case studies. It was noted that case studies would be anonymous and would be referred to as Mr or Mrs X.

The Group suggested that an individual who had been through the Homelessness process be invited to attend the next meeting to explain the process from the customer's point of view. Madeline Spencer would select an

individual who would be willing to attend and whom the process would not intimidate.

The Group suggested examples of case scenarios that it would be interested in receiving, commenting: -

- Councillors could present cases on behalf of applicants
- Beneficial to observe a Housing Officer dealing with homelessness
- Need to look for emerging patterns in the homelessness process, track some real cases through the system
- Need to make it real – receive fundamental people's experiences
- The letter inviting case scenarios should also be sent to the Sunflower Centre (example domestic violence), LGB Alliance, MIND, NCC – Nigel Parkes (example individuals with special needs evicted from private housing). Acorn Housing and CAN (example ex-rough sleeper, someone coming out of prison/probation) SAFRA (example individual leaving service), Gharana Housing (now Presentation Housing) (example of language barriers for Ethnic Minorities), Welfare Rights (example Asylum Seekers and Refugees)
- Case studies regarding young people leaving care would be useful
- As would, cases in respect of 20 and 21 year olds
- Case scenario of a relationship breakdown
- Case scenario of someone who has been in temporary accommodation for a long time. For example Brer Court
- Case study of young pregnant teenager – homeless at home category
- Case Study from the local MPs
- There was a need for delicate reporting of the case studies received

The above suggested case scenarios would be included in the letter to Councillors, Local MPs and organisations as detailed above. Councillor Mason and Fran Rodgers would then identify six case studies for the next meeting.

Councillors Allen and Pritchard volunteered to observe a Housing Officer (shadowing) in accordance with the homelessness process and report back their findings to the next meeting.

AGREED: (1) That Councillor Mason and Fran Rodgers identify six case studies for the next meeting.
(2) That Councillors Allen and Pritchard observe a Housing Officer in accordance with the homelessness process and report back their findings to the next meeting.
(3) That the letter to Councillors, Local MPs and organisations would ask for two case studies per organisation.

Mohammed Sabeel, East Midlands Regional Manager, HomelessLink, would attend the next meeting.

6 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held on Friday 27 January commencing at 10.00 am in the Jeffery Room at the Guildhall.

The agenda would comprise:

- 1 Discussion with Mohammed Sabeel, East Midlands Regional Manager, HomelessLink.
- 2 Pathways Protocol –Update
- 3 Housing Officer Shadowing – Report Back
- 4 Case Studies

The meeting concluded at 12:05pm