

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
HOMELESSNESS (ROUGH SLEEPERS) TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

Thursday, 4 January 2007

PRESENT:

Councillor Marion Allen Chair
Councillor Jamie Lane
Councillor Margaret Pritchard

Co Optee

Charlie Manning Services Manager (Rehab), NHT,
(Representing Eileen Kelly)

Fran Rodgers Corporate Manager, Housing and Residential
Operations

Madeline Spencer Housing Services Manager
Linda Brede Housing Needs Team Leader
Tracy Tiff Scrutiny Officer

Witnesses

Carole Jones Area Manager, CAN
Andy Kemp Contact and Assessment Worker, CAN

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from G Owen, Town Centre Manager, Sergeant M Phillips, Northants Police, and E Kelly, Director, Mental Health Service, co opted members.

2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 2 NOVEMBER 2006

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 November 2006 were agreed.

It was placed on record that Councillor Pritchard declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest, in her capacity as a Trustee of the Hope Centre, for the duration of this review.

3 TO APPROVE THE SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

Subject to the following amendments, the scope of the review was agreed (copy attached):-

To reduce/eliminate rough sleeping in Northampton

Inclusion of the following in Information Required:-

Information from the Maple Centre regarding health issues of rough sleepers.

Inclusion in Format of Information:-

Report back from Councillor Lane `sleeping rough`

Report back from Rough Sleeper meetings

Report back from Soup Runs from the Cathedral (Barrack Lane)

4 WITNESS EVIDENCE - CAN

Carole Jones, Area Manager, and Andy Kemp, Contact and Assessment Worker, CAN, addressed the Task and Finish Group.

The following core questions were answered:-

1 How do you define rough sleepers?

CAN define a rough sleeper as an individual bedded down in the hours of darkness. This also includes individuals sleeping in cars.

C Jones emphasised that other agencies have different definitions of rough sleepers.

CAN has made contact with 33 rough sleepers, during October and December 2006, during their `spot check` visits on the streets. 22 were bedded down at any one time. CAN make weekly visits, record the names of individual rough sleepers and check the records at the end of each month to ascertain how many contacts had been made with each individual during that period. The rough sleeper is asked whether they have somewhere to live. Individuals are engaged with and encouraged to obtain housing advice.

A Kemp gave an example of a case study. He had engaged with a male rough sleeper and had encouraged him to visit the drop in centre. The man did not come from this area but had travelled from London following a relationship break up. He was advised to return to London and A Kemp contacted an outreach worker based in the city. The man was offered accommodation within two days. If this contact had not been made it is possible that the man could have become a regular rough sleeper.

CAN housed nine individuals in the last quarter.

It was noted that street drinkers are often also rough sleepers and had been counted as so when bedded down on one of CANs counting exercises.

2 What do you think the Council's role in relation to rough sleepers

should be?

C Jones suggested that the Council's role should be that of co-ordination and awareness.

C Jones commented on the recent improvements, such as the inception of the rough sleepers working group. Contact is made and solutions found with direction and action planning. She expressed concern that it was possible that not all agencies were involved and that double counting was taking place and that all agencies should be counting in the same manner. She supported the introduction of NBC's database that should help eliminate double counting of rough sleepers.

The database would classify individuals such as rough sleepers or 'sofa surfers'. It would contain a contact name, alias, date of birth, mobile number (if applicable) and details of where individuals normal bed down. The database would then detail the scale of the picture and could enable NBC to bid for funding. Work on the database will commence shortly.

3 What is your role in relation to rough sleepers?

CAN provides an outreach contact service to rough sleepers on the street as well as the drop-in service. It assesses individuals, has links with other services and signposts individuals to the relevant agencies. CAN offers housing where appropriate. The organisation began as a counselling service.

CAN can house homeless individuals from the street into its accommodation. The organisation also has this flexibility with Acorn House.

4 What are the barriers and obstacles to providing services?

CAN provides accommodation for rough sleepers but there are waiting lists for counselling and treatment. It is often difficult to keep an individual in accommodation, whilst waiting for counselling and treatment, due to the time of the waiting lists, as they often have drug and mental health problems.

5 Have you identified any solutions?

Co-ordination and accessing services is required as is a joined up approach with all agencies to tackling homelessness. The following are key issues:

- Raising awareness
- Service provision
- Homelessness prevention

The Task and Finish Group asked supplementary questions and heard: -

- The waiting time for triage provision can be as long as three months. However, a much quicker appointment for counselling at CAN can be obtained.

- CAN has good links with the Maple Centre and clients are seen here quickly, especially if they are using large quantities of drugs.
- On average it is between two weeks to a month before the individual is receiving treatment.
- There is a two-month waiting list from the GP surgery until the first counselling session. This can be a 'shaky' period for an individual coming off drugs.
- CAN does not have defined emergency accommodation. The individual needs to be assessed before they can be offered accommodation. Acorn House has 24/7 cover and CAN has an out of hours contact number. If CAN has previously engaged with an individual and they have already been assessed they can be housed as an emergency.
- CAN has housed individuals with dogs. However, when making this decision consideration must be given to other sharing the house. It is not a common trend in Northampton for rough sleepers to have dogs. Dogs are often a begging tool.
- NBC is currently reviewing its housing policies, including evictions. All evictions must now be signed off at Corporate Manager level. The Authority is looking at prevention rather than eviction.
- Central Government has investigated the number of rough sleepers and has set a target that numbers are reduced by two thirds. Four counts per year would give a more accurate and realistic figure of rough sleepers.
- Should housing tenants fall behind on rent payments, rather than just issue letters, telephone contact is now often made and if required the tenant is referred to debt counselling.
- CAN has come across some ex-service rough sleepers and it has good links with SAFFRA and other agencies who deal with ex-service men and women. Some individuals residing in CANs houses are ex-servicemen and they are receiving support.
- Acorn House was previously known as the night shelter. It provides bed spaces and emergency hostel accommodation.
- CANs work is beginning to link in with the work of DAT. A newly appointed senior officer at DAT has a great understanding of homelessness. A lot of good work is underway.
- Work with the homeless carried out in Northampton is now recognised nationally.
- NBC has undertaken some good work with the YMCA and has mediation links with the organisation. Some of the YMCA's single person accommodation is used as emergency accommodation and it has two crash pads. Crash pads give an individual time to either get them back home or into YMCA accommodation. It is important that the right accommodation is provided for young people. Employees of Connexions have been trained by CAN.
- It was suggested that more information regarding the link with schools be given to a future meeting.
- There is a need for all agencies to work together and have links.

The Chair thanked C Jones and A Kemp for their attendance and comprehensive address.

5 ROUGH SLEEPER 'HOTSPOTS'

The Scrutiny Officer advised that the Town Centre Neighbourhood Warden has confirmed that rough sleepers have a tendency to sleep in most of the businesses' front and rear doorways. They are all used at some point or another.

The Neighbourhood Warden for Castle Ward has noted that rough sleepers are present in the old Post Office building on the Barrack Road.

The Neighbourhood Warden for Abington/Weston advised that rough sleepers tend to be present in the following locations:-

- Christchurch North porch way
- Abington Park could be a potential area but no reports have been received by the Warden
- Wellingborough Road (but they have now moved on from here)

The Neighbourhood Warden for St Crispin commented that there are rough sleepers at:-

- Frog Island
- Becketts Park around the toilets
- Abington Square toilets
- St Edmunds Old Chuchyard
- Rear of 22-26 Kettering Road
- Shop fronts along the Wellingborough Road
- Generally in any old building

The Task and Finish Group commented:-

- Individuals sleeping in the toilets at Abington Square tended to be street drinkers
- Since the builders have been on site, there have been no more reports of individuals breaking in to the St Edmunds site and sleeping there
- The porch at Campbell house and the bus station are usual places for rough sleepers. Street drinkers frequent St Giles Church yard during summer nights
- The rear of Primark used to be a prime location for rough sleepers as did St Catherines Terrace

C Jones, CAN, confirmed that the rough sleeping hotspots identified by the neighbourhood wardens were known hotspots to CAN too.

The Chair suggested that a copy of the core questions to witnesses be emailed to C Porter, Neighbourhood Warden Team Leader, for completion to the next meeting.

AGREED: That a copy of the core questions to witnesses be emailed to C Porter,

Neighbourhood Warden Team Leader, for completion to the next meeting.

6 COUNCILLOR INVOLVEMENT IN THE ROUGH SLEEPER COUNT

The Task and Finish Group was advised that a 'hot spot' rough sleepers count would take place in February 2007, the date of which would be circulated. The annual count would take place during April. All members of the Group were keen to take part in the hotspot count.

Councillor Lane advised that he would 'sleep rough' on a Friday evening during February. Following advice regarding the safety of doing this on a Friday evening, he would liaise with C Jones, CAN, before going out.

AGREED: That the date and time of the hotspot rough sleeper count for February 2007 be emailed to the Group.

7 ASSISTANCE GIVEN FROM CHURCHES TO ROUGH SLEEPERS

The Scrutiny Officer presented a briefing note detailing that letters had issued to all the churches in the borough and a response had been received from four:-

Cathedral, Barrack Road

The Cathedral on Barrack Road carries out regular soup runs on Monday evenings. Soup, sandwiches and a chat are offered to rough sleepers. The soup runs began in October 2005.

Church on the Grange Estate

The Church on the Grange Estate is working in liaison with the Cathedral on Barrack Road. A representative of the Cathedral takes part in the Grange Estate Church soup runs. Flasks from the Cathedral are used. The two churches work together so that it is easier for the rough sleepers so that they know and accept the church representatives. The soup runs are carried out regularly on Wednesday evenings.

St Giles Vicarage, Spring Gardens – St Giles Church

The church does not offer a regular "service" to rough sleepers however they do come to his door on a regular basis to ask for food and drink or blankets or money. He gives them a sandwich and drink but has a policy of never giving money and points them to the Hope Centre if they want blankets or clothes. On average he has between two and four visits a week often from the same people. At the church centre there are occasional visits from people asking for help and again the same policy is adhered to. The church advises people not to give money but sometimes people do.

There are a variety of rough sleepers who have used the churchyard, (the rear of the Church centre or the rear of Primark opposite our church centre) and although the church encourages them to find help via the Hope Centre, the Night Shelter or

CAN some of them are regularly around.

The minister commented that many of the rough sleepers often have mental health or drug/drink abuse problems and the church would like to be able to help them rather than reject them but it is hard to know how best to get involved. As a Church it has tended to say that apart from a sandwich and drink, financial support is provided through the Hope Centre, YMCA and others to help them deal with the problems rather than trying to set up something itself. A good number of people from the church's large congregation at St Giles are involved in helping at the Hope Centre or YMCA and there is a good deal of compassion for the rough sleepers.

Salvation Army

The Salvation Army holds a Homeless "Drop In" every Wednesday. At present it has approximately 50 clients every week attending this Drop In. While there they can have a cooked breakfast, shower and if necessary receive clean clothes. During the rest of the week if the Salvation Army has homeless people call at its centre it offers Chip Shop Vouchers that can be spent at the local chip shop.

The Task and Finish Group commented:

- The vicar at St Giles Church should be made aware of where to signpost rough sleepers
- Contact should be made with the Commanding Officer at the Salvation Army to see whether the Group could attend one of its drop in sessions.
- D Wiseman, Tharthwarks Northampton, hosts regular evening sessions whereby churches attend to hear about different topics and initiatives. It was suggested that D Wiseman be invited to attend a meeting of this Task and Finish Group to answer the Group's core questions and to also filter back information to the organisation.

AGREED: (1) That the Commanding Officer of the Salvation Army be contacted to see whether the Group could attend one of its drop in sessions. The Commanding Officer would also be invited to attend a future meeting to provide a response to the Group's core questions.
(2) That D Wiseman be invited to attend a meeting of this Task and Finish Group to answer the Group's core questions and to also filter back information to the organisation.

8 SEVERE WEATHER WARNING LETTER

The Task and Finish Group noted a letter issued by the Department of Communities and Local Government advising that Local Authorities should ensure that there is cold weather provision for any rough sleepers in their area to ensure that they could be brought in from the street. The object should be to identify sufficient additional spaces to ensure that those most vulnerable, who are sleeping on the streets, are able to get some provision.

The Group commented:-

- Consideration should be given to issuing a press release detailing CAN's contact number and stating where supplies of blankets and/or sleeping bags can be obtained.
- **The final report could include a potential recommendation that a Protocol be devised that a specific premises be open for rough sleepers during severe weather conditions.**
- C Jones, CAN, confirmed that CAN was able to offer the Medical Centre as a provision for rough sleepers during severe weather conditions.

AGREED: (1) That the final report could include a potential recommendation that a Protocol be devised that a specific premises be open for rough sleepers during severe weather conditions.

(2) That consideration be given to issuing a press release detailing CAN's contact number and stating where supplies of blankets and/or sleeping bags can be obtained.

9 WESTMINSTER CITY COUNCIL - CURB 'SOUP KITCHENS'

The Task and Finish Group heard that Westminster City Council has been considering policies to reduce the number of rough sleepers that it has on its streets, including fining rough sleepers £500 and backing moves to give persistent beggars a criminal record. The Council believes that soup runs take away the motivation to come off the streets into hostels where they can get specialist care.

It is thought to have the most rough sleepers in the country and wants to move them into hostels.

Concerns around soup runs in Westminster City Council have been in existence for several years. The main concerns are that the over provision of handouts in Central London helps maintain a street lifestyle for individuals unwilling to be housed and draws people out of accommodation and back into street culture.

Since 2000, many attempts have been made by the Council to address this issue, including holding meetings with soup run providers and media campaigners to highlight concerns. Current numbers of soup runs in Westminster are estimated at around 65.

A copy of Westminster City Council's Soup Run Scoping and Mapping Report January 2005 was also circulated.

A copy of a document from the Dogs Trust was circulated for the Group's information about homelessness projects about accepting clients with dogs.

The Group commented:-

- Only 17% of the individuals using soup kitchens in Westminster were homeless. Some came out of accommodation to receive food.
- London Boroughs often have specific problems
- Soup kitchens are a useful mechanism to engage with individuals

- CAN carries out a staggered soup run on a Tuesday evening. Its soup run engages with the client and often assessments are carried out on the street. CAN's soup runs tend to be seasonal, from October to March.
- A Kemp confirmed that he had engaged with about five Polish men who were not getting enough work and were either living on the streets or in a squat. They used CAN's soup run and its services. CAN helped them find work and private rented accommodation.
- Soup runs are different in London to Northampton
- The Maple Centre offers starter packs to individuals coming off the streets.

10 FEEDBACK FROM SOUP RUN FROM THE CATHEDRAL (BARRACK ROAD)

Councillor Pritchard advised that she had accompanied the Cathedral (Barrack Road)'s soup run on the evening of Monday 18 December 2006, between 9.15pm and 10.30pm. She accompanied two ladies and a man.

They only engaged with two rough sleepers, neither of which appeared to have any problems and were friendly. One was on the steps of Campbell House and the other by Barrack Road Post Office, two others had not as yet returned from selling the big issue. The rough sleepers were offered tea, coffee, soup and sandwiches and provision was left for the two out selling the big issue.

The soup run also went to the back of Sheep Street, a known place for rough sleepers, but none were there on the evening of 18 December. They also visited the area where sex workers frequent but no rough sleepers were present, neither were there any rough sleepers in Gold Street. On this occasion they did not go to the rear of Primark.

11 DEFINE QUESTIONS FOR WITNESS EVIDENCE (PORTFOLIO HOLDER)

The Task and Finish Group defined the core questions to be put to the Portfolio Holder (Residential Operations):-

- 1 What is your definition of rough sleepers?
- 2 Please provide a breakdown of funding that has been allocated to Rough sleepers, such as:-
 - Emergency needs for vulnerable people
- 3 What Protocols are in place to ensure all agencies/ members of the public know what to do if they know the whereabouts of a rough sleeper.
- 4 How is the service level agreement with CAN monitored and how often?
- 5 What are the provisions for rough sleepers?
- 6 What happens if a rough sleeper has a dog?
- 7 What happens to rough sleepers who will not accept accommodation?

- 8 Is there enough emergency accommodation for rough sleepers? If so where is it?
- 9 What is the number of Bail Hostel spaces available?
- 10 What is the ethnic origins and immigration status, age, gender and sexuality of rough sleepers in the borough?
- 11 Please give details of the Local Area Agreement and the potential for addressing rough sleepers.

The Portfolio Holder (Residential Operations) would attend the next meeting of the Homelessness (Rough Sleepers) Task and Finish Group.

AGREED: That a copy of the above questions would be issued to the Portfolio Holder (Residential Operations) in advance of the next meeting.

12 OFFICER'S REPORTS - BASELINE DATA

(A) NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL FUNDING TO VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

The Task and Finish Group was informed that Northampton Borough Council (NBC) provided funding of £10,000 to the Hope Centre for 2006/07. £6,500 was for rent and £3,500 for administration costs.

NBC gave a one-off grant of £10,000 to the Hope Centre in 2004. This was for the Centre to develop a five-year business plan. This work is in progress.

It was suggested that the Corporate Manager investigates whether funding to voluntary organisations can contribute to the Council's performance in certain areas.

AGREED: That the Corporate Manager investigates whether funding to voluntary organisations can contribute to the Council's performance in certain areas.

At this point the Chair referred to data that John Olsen had provided to the previous Homelessness Task and Finish Group that had detailed information of individuals that could potentially become homeless. She suggested that there was a need to know about the Mental Health Services systems that ensure that individuals do not leave this provision homeless. It was suggested that this information be provided to the next meeting.

M Spencer advised of a pilot currently taking place with Supporting People and undertook to provide information to the next meeting.

AGREED: (1) That C Manning provides information to the next meeting regarding the Mental Health Services Systems for those leaving the provision.

(2) That M Spencer provides information regarding a pilot with Supporting People to the next meeting.

13 SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

T Tiff advised that she had held a meeting with G Owen earlier that day and he had offered to provide information on the following to the next meeting: -

- Comments from a variety of town centre organisations regarding rough sleepers
- Security of the bus station
- CCTV and rough sleepers

AGREED: That the above items be included on the agenda for the next meeting.

The schedule of meetings was noted:-

Thursday 8 February 2007	Jeffery Room
Tuesday 27 February	Council Chamber
Monday 19 March	Jeffery Room

The meeting concluded at 8:25 pm

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

HOMELESSNESS (ROUGH SLEEPERS) TASK AND FINISH GROUP

1. Purpose/Objectives of the Review

To further develop the multi agency approach to rough sleepers.

To reduce/eliminate rough sleeping in Northampton.

2. Outcomes Required

To develop an awareness and ownership of the issues of rough sleeping with all relevant partner agencies.

To understand the impact it has on policy and resources.

To recommend the development of a Rough Sleepers Strategy or Action Plan.

To agree a common definition of rough sleeping.

To agree the resources required and to assess value for money.

3. Information Required

- The relevant Council Strategies including affordable housing and the Homelessness Strategy
- The Council's Rough Sleepers' Strategy/Policy
- Best practice Strategies/Policies
- Ethnic origins and immigration status of rough sleepers
- Number of hostel spaces available
- Voluntary sector funding
- Details of the annual Rough Sleeping Count
- Details of the Local Area Agreement and the potential for addressing rough sleeping
- Help provided by local churches to rough sleepers
- Information from Maple Centre regarding health issues of rough sleepers

4. Format of Information

- Baseline Data
- Details of budget allocation
- Officer Reports/Presentations

- Rough Sleepers Quarterly Count
- Report back from Councillor Lane `sleeping rough`
- Report back from Rough Sleepers Meetings
- Report back from Soup Runs from the Cathedral (Barrack Road)
- Evidence from stakeholders:-
 - Portfolio Holder (Residential Operations)
 - Prison/Probation Service
 - Welfare Rights
 - Sample of town centre businesses
 - National bodies for rough sleepers such as Homelesslink
 - Rough Sleepers expert from the Department for Communities and Local Government
 - Local Churches
 - CAN
 - Neighbourhood Wardens/PCSO's
 - YMCA
 - Connexions
 - DAT

5. Methods Used to Gather Information

- Minutes of meetings
- Witness Evidence
- Desktop Research/web based
- Attending the quarterly rough sleepers count during November/December 2006
- Attending various meetings of the Homelessness (Rough Sleepers) Action Group
- Views of rough sleepers – hosting a `drop in` session
- Attend one of the Monday evening sessions, from the Cathedral in Barrack Road, offering soup to rough sleepers
- Contact the churches in the town to see what help that they offer to rough sleepers

6. Co-Options to the Review Committee

- Police Representative of the Community Safety Partnership
- Geoff Owens, Town Centre Manager, Town Centre Management.
- Eileen Kelly, Director, Mental Health Service

7. Evidence gathering Timetable

November 2006 to March 2007

2 November 2006

Scoping the review

November – December	Visits:- Quarterly rough sleepers count Cathedral (Barrack Road) – Offering soup to Rough Sleepers’
4 January 2007	Evidence Gathering
8 February	Evidence Gathering
27 February	Evidence Gathering
19 March	Finalise Chair’s report

8. Responsible Officers

Lead Officer Fran Rodgers
Co-ordinator Tracy Tiff

9. Resources and Budgets

M Spencer, Housing Services Manager, and L Brede, Housing Needs Team Leader, to provide support and advice.

10 Final report resented by:

Completed by 19 March 2007. Presented by the Chair of the Task and Finish Group to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and then to Cabinet.

11 Monitoring procedure:

Review the impact of the report after six months (September/October 2007)