

**NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

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

**27 FEBRUARY 2007**

**Present:**

Councillor M Allen	Chair
Councillor J Lane	
Councillor M Pritchard	
C Manning	Northamptonshire Health Care Trust (NHT) – Provider of mental health services (Co-Optee)
Sergeant M Phillips	Northants Police, (Co-Optee)
G Owen	Town Centre Manager, (Co-Optee)
Fran Rodgers	Corporate Manager
Linda Brede	Housing Needs Team Leader
Tracy Tiff	Scrutiny Officer

**Witnesses**

Councillor Y Miah	Portfolio Holder (Residential Operations)
C Jekyll	DAT
Major A Coupe	Salvation Army
Major R Cushing	Salvation Army
PCSO N Kutscher	Northants Police
Rev D Wiseman	Faithworks

**1 Apologies**

An apology for absence was received from Madeline Spencer.

**2 Minutes of the meeting held on 4 January 2007**

Subject to the correct spelling of Faithworks, the minutes of the meeting held on 4 January 2007 were agreed as a true record.

**3 Witness Evidence**

**(A) D Wiseman**

Reverend D Wiseman, Faithworks, addressed the Task and Finish Group commenting that he is the treasurer for Faithworks, an organisation that helps faith establishments engage with the community. He is also part of the diocese of Peterborough.

He had asked the town centre clergy for their experiences of rough sleepers:

St Giles and Christ Church regularly came across rough sleepers; however, Christ Church had not noted any rough sleepers during February. St Giles has rough sleepers

asking for assistance, two to three times and month, and at least one sleeping in the churchyard. The Holy Sepulchre Church has ongoing issues with rough sleepers in its churchyard and they often tend to 'spill out' into the neighbouring vicarage.

Churches have varying attitudes towards rough sleepers and do not always assist, sometimes seeing them as a problem that needs alleviating.

Faithworks tries to pick up local issues and has homelessness and rough sleepers as future agenda items.

Reverend Wiseman was thanked for his address.

## **(B) Portfolio Holder (Residential Operations)**

Councillor Miah, Portfolio Holder for Residential Operations, provided a response to the Group's core questions: -

### **1 What is your definition of rough sleepers?**

Prolonged, over a period of time, individuals sleeping in the streets, doorways, derelict buildings etc. Individuals residing in hostels and staying with friends is also defined as rough sleeping, but it is essentially sleeping out in often unsafe and appalling conditions with no alternative.

### **2 Please provide a breakdown of funding that has been allocated to Rough sleepers, such as: -**

- **Emergency needs for vulnerable people**

The Council received funding of £99,00 per year from the Government in 2004 for: -

2004/2005  
2005/2006  
2006/2007

Funding ceases on 31 March 2007 but further funds will hopefully be made available. Early indications are favourable.

NBC pays £13,750 per quarter to County of Northampton on Addiction (CAN) for two out reach workers and £5,000 to YMCA, which funds its drop in centre.

### **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?**

NBC has a service level agreement (SLA) with CAN but not with any other organisations or agencies.

### **4 How is the service level agreement with CAN monitored and how often?**

It is very important that the service level agreement is monitored so that it can be justified how funding has been spent. It is monitored on a quarterly basis and reports are submitted to the Department of Communities and Local Government.

### **5 What are the provisions for rough sleepers?**

Acorn House, Ash Street, is the nearest provision to a direct service and has 31 beds.

Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) deals with young rough sleepers and they have a waiting list of 16, plus 40 (sofa surfers) on the waiting list for an assessment. YMCA needs more beds.

## **6 What happens if a rough sleeper has a dog?**

Very few rough sleepers have dogs. When individuals do have a dog, CAN will try to place them and their dog.

## **7 What happens to rough sleepers who will not accept accommodation?**

An individual cannot be forced to accept accommodation but they will be closely monitored by CAN. There are links to the Maple Access Centre and other Agencies will be made aware of the situation. The Council has a sub Committee that meets on a monthly basis and looks at such issues. Often if individuals have been sleeping rough for some time they find it hard to adapt to domesticity and may well for example, continue to sleep on the floor of a house rather than in a bed. CAN outreach workers will keep a watchful eye on such individuals.

## **8 Is there enough emergency accommodation for rough sleepers? If so where is it?**

An extra 8-10 beds are required in Northampton. A bid is currently being formulated, through Supporting People, to extend the current provision. It is felt that some individuals are not ready to move into Acorn House and there is the need for a 'half way house', in order that individuals confidence levels can be raised in the system.

## **9 What is the number of Bail Hostel spaces available?**

23 bail spaces are available at Bridgewood Hostel but this is full.

## **10 What are the ethnic origins and immigration status, age, gender and sexuality of rough sleepers in the borough?**

There is not a robust system in place presently to obtain these statistics. However, a system is being investigated.

## **11 Please give details of the Local Area Agreement and the potential for addressing rough sleepers.**

The Local Area Agreement (LAA) in respect of housing needs is a town wide issue and there is a need to understand changing society, for example, more single people and ex-prisoners being released into society. These issues need to be included into a bigger debate.

Rough sleeping will never completely be eradicated and this needs to be built into future plans.

The Task and Finish Group asked questions and heard: -

- CAN will engage with rough sleepers and carry out an assessment.
- Some rough sleepers are just moving through the town and some are local.
- Often CAN will help an individual move back to their home town and receive further support there

**The Chair suggested that the final report needs to include a conclusion that the Council needs to be more interactive and understand the work/role of other Agencies and that all Agencies be linked.**

Councillor Miah was thanked for his address.

## (C) SALVATION ARMY

Major A Coupe and Major R Cushing, Salvation Army, provided a response to the Group's questions. Further details were also provided.

1 **What is your definition of rough sleepers?**

- Essentially someone who does not have their own residence.
  - Bed & Breakfast Accommodation
  - Hostel Resident
  - Sleeping at a friends
  - Street Sleeper

2 **A breakdown of funding that has been allocated to Rough sleepers, such as was provided:-**

- Emergency needs for vulnerable people
- Breakdown costs for Homeless Drop In

Officers Salary (4 hours per week)	£20.00 per week	<b>TOTALS COST</b>	£108.00 per week
Officers Salary (4 hours per week)	£20.00 per week		
Employees Salary (4 hours per week)	£23.00 per week		
Food Costs	£15.00 per week		
Chip Shop Vouchers	£6.00 per week		
Electricity & Gas Costs	£9 per week		
General Maintenance Costs	£15.00 per week		

At present these costs are met by the local Salvation Army. As the programme has grown beyond our expectations we are now trying to find sources of funding to meet this need.

3 **Details of Protocols that are in place to ensure all agencies/ members of the public know what to do if they know the whereabouts of a rough sleeper were provided.**

- The Salvation Army does not advertise its service.
- It has grown through word of mouth from one client to another.
- The local Council booklet does say that the Salvation Army offers Chip Shop Vouchers, Clothing and Bedding.

4 **What are the provisions for rough sleepers?**

The following is provided:-

- Cooked Breakfast
- Shower
- Clean Clothes

- New Underwear

It is hoped that the following will be offered in the near future.

- Washing machine and tumble drying facilities
- Internet access

**5 What happens if a rough sleeper has a dog?**

- The client is asked to leave the Dog outside while they come in and have some food. Dogs have been fed in the past too

**6 What happens to rough sleepers who will not accept accommodation?**

- If a rough sleeper asks us to look for accommodation for them, they would first ask them if they are prepared to leave Northampton. If they are the Salvation Army would try and get them a bed at a Salvation Army Hostel in Birmingham, Coventry or Nottingham.

**8 Is there enough emergency accommodation for rough sleepers? If so where is it?**

- There is a severe lack of accommodation in Northampton. I look for accommodation in Birmingham, Coventry or Nottingham.

**9 What is the ethnic origins and immigration status, age, gender and sexuality of rough sleepers in the borough?**

- Attached are the results of a survey that the Salvation Army carried over the past three weeks.
- There were 53 responses.
- Also attached are attendance figures since the Salvation Army started to keep records in November 2005 (Annexe to the minutes)

The Task and Finish Group asked questions and heard:-

- Salvation Army hostels can be found in the South, the nearest being Reading or London
- In response to a question regarding the possibility of the Salvation Army funding a hostel in Northampton, it would be dependant upon what had been identified for capital funding. If the Salvation Army was to manage a homeless hostel it would look to do this on the principles of Supporting People. The Salvation Army's Research and Development Team would be keen to meet with the Council to discuss this
- In Nottingham a one stop shop approach is being introduced and this type of approach is supported by the Salvation Army. Northampton DAT interacts closely with Nottingham DAT

**The Chair commented that the Group had noted that the Salvation Army might be interested in a partnership funding of a hostel.**

Major Coupe and Major Cushing were thanked for their address.

**(D) DAAT (Drug and Alcohol Action Team)**

C Jekyll, Adult Treatment Lead, Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT), advised that DAT is a partnership body of major governing partners in the county. He then provided a response to the Group's core questions:

### **1 How do you define rough sleeping?**

DAAT reports to the National Drug Treatment Monitoring Unit, who asks for individuals' accommodation status, such as no fixed abode, temporary accommodation, hostel accommodation, 'sofa surfers'.

### **2 What do you think the Council's role in relation to rough sleepers? should be?**

The Council's role should be to develop a Strategy to deal with rough sleepers. The Council's Homelessness Forum is undertaking positive work.

The Council should also co-ordinate other organisations on the Rough Sleepers Forum, especially where rough sleeping impacts on mental health and well being.

C Jekyll confirmed that DAAT encourages joint working with the Council and Supporting People, reaffirming work that is already being undertaken.

### **3 What is your role in relation to rough sleepers?**

DAAT has commissioned work, in conjunction with Supporting People, to engaging organisations that are not necessarily involved in drug support, into initiatives such as:

- Open access
- Structured treatment
- Various types of prescribing options

There is a need for more communication to bring organisations together.

### **4 What are the barriers and obstacles to providing services?**

The lack of availability of affordable, sustainable accommodation is a barrier. DAAT has submitted a bid to the Department of Health, for the provision of more structured accommodation. It is envisaged that the individual would then move into privately rented accommodation following the end of the treatment. Accommodation for individuals in structured treatment, on rigid regimes on a daily basis, would be of assistance. It would help stop them dropping out of treatment.

### **5 Have you identified any solutions?**

There is the need for a multi-Agency Partnership to have a nucleus sub treatment centre and non-drug specific wrap around care – Joint treatment and care.

DAAT is looking into key working for individuals, which would include a support worker, a drug worker and a counsellor regarding issues around the individual's housing provision.

### **6 Do you have any other comments?**

DAAT is positive about the steps forward made by Northampton Borough Council. It acknowledges that it is a long process with barriers. The more organisations meet and tackle the issues head on, the more likely solutions are to be found.

The Task and Finish Group asked questions and heard: -

- Regarding the type of accommodation that the bid to Department of Health would be used for includes a hostel, although DAT is not keen to use a hostel. It would prefer to look for dispersed properties.

- Individuals can be self-referred or referred by, for example, a GP, to DAAT. The waiting list for treatment is around 3 weeks but most individuals are seen within a week.
- DAAT deals with all Northamptonshire Local Authorities.
- The situation with rough sleepers and drug problems is similar from town to town.

C Jekyll was thanked for his address.

## **(E) POLICE COMMUNITY SUPPORT OFFICER (PCSO)**

N Kutscher, PCSO for the town centre and St Crispin's, provided a response to the Group's core questions: -

### **1 How do you define rough sleeping?**

Rough sleeping is in contravention of three laws: -

- Vagrancy Act 1824
- Public Order Act 1994
- Ecclesiastical Act 1860

Under the Vagrancy Act 1824 it is a crime to be homeless and beg for money. During this period in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century there was an influx of immigrants from Scotland and ex soldiers.

70% of rough sleepers tend to be from the older generation and are genuine homeless individuals. The younger generation is often more aggressive.

In accordance with the Ecclesiastical Act 1860, St Giles Churchyard is a major concern regarding the number of rough sleepers there. Individuals do not just beg there are often drug related events and intimidating passers through. There are also often health and safety issues.

When individuals leave the armed forces they are not entitled to a house and it is their responsibility to find a job.

### **2 What do you think the Council's role in relation to rough sleepers should be?**

The Council's role should be to encourage rough sleepers to engage with CAN.

### **3 What is your role in relation to rough sleepers?**

My role is one of policing and public safety. Rough sleepers that have been released from prison is a big issue. They often find it difficult to engage, and their social and thinking skills are very poor. There are many on the Wellingborough Road and around the town centre.

### **4 What are the barriers and obstacles to providing services?**

Housing rough sleepers is not necessarily the end of the problem. There are often other issues such as illegal drug taking and prostitution.

### **5 Have you identified any solutions?**

The individual may not engage with the Police again.

There is no provision for dogs at Campbell Square Police Station; however, Corby Police Station has four kennels.

Sergeant Phillips added that the Police's role is different to that of other Agencies. The Police receive complaints about rough sleepers and has to deal with these but it does refer rough sleepers to the relevant Agencies. The team has strong links with CAN. The Police try not to put rough sleepers in the cells. Sergeant Phillips commented that a one-stop shop would be excellent.

The Task and Finish Group asked questions and heard: -

- The Police has dealt with two generations who are homeless, e.g. father and son.
- Lots more Romanians are now homeless
- There is a need for staged support to house individuals, for example, a homeless person with an Anti Social Behaviour Order (ASBO)

PCSO Kutscher was thanked for his address.

## **(F) SHELTER**

G Everitt, Shelter, provided a written response to the Group's core questions which was noted.

## **(G) Neighbourhood Warden**

The Neighbourhood Warden Team Leader provided a written response to the Group's core questions which was noted.

## **4 ROUGH SLEEPERS COUNT**

Councillor J Lane advised that he had joined the Annual Rough Sleepers Count on the night of 21 February 2007. The Count met at 12.30am. Councillor Lane commented that in the daytime more individuals who are perceived to be rough sleepers are present than actual rough sleepers at night. Rough Sleepers tend to bed down at around 2.30am.

When the Count went out at 1.30am it saw no rough sleepers but when they went out again later, the rough sleepers had begun to bed down. The Count went through the town centre area, Abington Park, South Bridge and Barrack Road. The encampment at the railway arches, was seen and one rough sleeper counted in a door stair well. Councillor Lane emphasised that it was raining and it was not long after the murder in Ash Street.

One individual was counted sleeping on a bus in the bus station. Access into the bus station and the buses is easy as both are open. However, a security guard did ask the Count for details of what it was doing.

The Count concluded around 4am and had counted four individuals plus one sleeping on the bus.

Counts will take place regularly on a quarterly basis.

## **5 TOWN CENTRE MANAGER'S REPORT**

G Owen, Town Centre Manager, referred to his previously circulated report emphasising the key issues.

The Task and Finish Group made comment, asked questions and heard:



- Retailers commented on the regular sight of rough sleepers around the town centre
- Regarding the area under the spiral staircase in the Grosvenor Centre where it was perceived to be housing a rough sleeper, the Grosvenor Centre Manager had written to NBC in this respect but had not received a response. However, the Town Centre Manager had had the area cleaned and cleared. A request had been put in to Asset Management for the installation of wiring and G Owen undertook to follow this up.

**The Chair suggested that the Town Centre Partnership ask the members of the Partnership if they are willing to donate funds to help alleviate the problem with rough sleepers in the town centre and the Grosvenor Centre.**

## **6 NHT's PROTOCOLS FOR INDIVIDUALS LEAVING THE SERVICE**

C Manning, NHT, advised of the Service's Protocols for individuals leaving the Service.

He emphasised that where appropriate, service users should be discharged to primary care promptly as part of their recovery process. A Care Programme Approach (CPA) Review will be held with everyone involved in the individual's care before the service user is discharged from Northants Mental Health Service and Learning Disability Service. He added however, that some individuals are never included in the Service, often, because their need is not high enough or they have been referred to the wrong Agency – the Mental Health Service will in such instances refer them correctly.

C Manning gave details of the Inpatient Discharge Process. A copy of the flowchart was circulated.

Northants Mental Health Trust is involved in a number of initiatives regarding Supporting People. It aims to keep patients for as short as time as therapeutically possible.

Northants Mental Health Trust supports individuals in their own homes and provides supervision to individuals to help them sustain their homes.

C Manning stressed that it is difficult to effectively intervene with individuals who are homeless and have mental health problems.

L Brede, Housing Needs Team Leader, advised that the housing application process now includes checks for mental health needs.

It was noted that there is no Protocol in place for the discharge of patients from St Andrews Hospital.

C Manning was thanked for his address.

## **7 REPORT BACK FROM MEETINGS WITH ROUGH SLEEPERS**

Councillor Allen advised that she had recently attended one of the Salvation Army's Rough Sleepers' Drop In Sessions. The Salvation Army made it nice and welcoming for rough sleepers and the Major had approximately 5-6 helpers. A notice on the wall stating that due to financial pressures the Salvation Army could only offer one cooked breakfast per client. Extra tea and toasts may however be available.

Around 24 rough sleepers came to the Drop In Session whilst Councillor Allen was present and just three were female. One prolific offender had commented that he felt trapped, he was unable to find work and in turn unable to find a home and felt let down by the system, especially as training had not been provided in prison.

One rough sleeper had recently been bereaved. Their partner had committed suicide. The individual was receiving help from the Maple Centre.

One rough sleeper had commented that their homelessness was due to a problem with housing benefit and accommodation. The person had had difficulty understanding the system.

A couple of rough sleepers seemed to have and portrayed a strong stance of desolation.

One rough sleeper had commented that he was addicted to illegal drugs. He was proud to have recently come off heroine but could not manage each day without `Crack`.

Rough sleepers often went from Drop In Centre to Drop In Centre for hot meals and drinks. After this session he would be visiting the Jesus Centre for a cup of tea.

A major point was that rough sleepers are not necessarily around the town centre but are often sleeping out in the surrounding housing estates.

The Drop In Centre was very valued by the rough sleepers in attendance.

Councillor Pritchard reminded the Group that she had attended the Barrack Road Cathedral's Soup run during December 2006, details of which were provided to the January 2007 meeting.

## **8 REPORT BACK FROM ROUGH SLEEPERS' WORKING GROUP**

L Brede advised the Group of issues that the Rough Sleepers' Working Group was investigating;

- Need for further hostels
- Rough Sleeper Database
- Housing Needs Advice

The main agenda items are around rough sleeping issues and individual cases.

The next meeting will be held on 28 February 2007 at 2pm and an invitation to attend was extended to the Task and Finish Group.

## **9 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The Group received a press article on the reporting of rough sleeping from Local Authorities and desktop research undertaken by the Scrutiny Officer.

Councillor Pritchard advised that Reverend Wiseman, Faithworks, was keen to set up street Pastors who are volunteers that would travel the streets on a voluntary basis during the hours of 10am and 6pm liaising with rough sleepers and signpost them to the relevant Agencies. 15 individuals had expressed an interest and would join a 12-week training programme.

The Group asked that the `green booklet` that identifies the different Agencies responsible for rough sleeping issues be circulated to the Group. L Brede undertook to circulate copies.

## **10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting was noted as 19 March 2007 commencing at 6.15pm.

The meeting concluded at 20.50 hours