

## HOMELESSNESS TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Friday 9 December 2005

PRESENT: Councillor Lee Mason - NBC (Chair)  
Councillor Margaret Pritchard - NBC  
Councillor Marion Allen - NBC

Also In Attendance:

Councillor Brendan Glynane - NBC  
Margaret Martin - Consortium  
Fran Rodger - Corporate Manager – NBC  
Madeline Spencer - NBC  
Nigel Stock - NCC  
Bob Lane - NCC

### 1. APOLOGIES.

None.

### 2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 NOVEMBER 2005.

The minutes of the above meeting were agreed.

### 3. MATTERS ARISING.

(A) PREVENTION OF HOMELESSNESS IN NORTHAMPTONSHIRE.  
APPENDIX TO THE MINUTES.

The Chair referred to the Appendix to the minutes and advised that it had been agreed that the Thematic Case Studies would be considered at meeting 3 and not meeting 2 as indicated.

(B) ADVICE FROM THE ODPM.

It was noted that a representative from the ODPM had been invited to attend the meeting on 17 February 2006. A report in relation to tackling homelessness had been produced and it was agreed that it be circulated with the agenda for the next meeting.

### 4. PRESENT BASELINE DATA.

(a) ANALYSIS OF DATA.

(b) ISSUES ARISING.

Nigel Stock advised that NCC had agreed protocols in relation to Housing and Vulnerable People with all of the other Districts/Borough in the County but not Northampton itself. Although the arrangements in place were working well the protocol had never been signed off. It was agreed that work continue in the future to words agreeing a protocol.

Fran Rodgers gave a presentation in relation to the NBC Homelessness Service.

### HOMELESSNESS APPLICATIONS:-

It was noted that:-

- Over the last 5 years the number of applications received by the Homelessness Section had remained fairly static at approximately 1000 per year. Further investigation was required as to why this number was not reducing.

- Also it was unclear why the number had dropped significantly in 2002.
- Since April 2006 NBC had recorded those who had applied but had been told they were not technically homeless.
- The Housing Register statistics included those in priority need that do not go through the homelessness route.
- There had been a significant drop in applications in October 2006 to 27 from 86 in September 2006.
- The projected figure for the current year had been revised to 800, a 20% reduction.
- The recent significant drop in applications was due to a different approach whereby people were not automatically given a homeless application form on request as had been happening but every effort was made to mediate with families, friends etc or to resolve the route of the problem i.e. Anti-Social Behaviour.
- Another contributory factor was the implementation of a Rent Deposit Scheme which had proved very popular. This assisted in getting people into private accommodation.
- Mediation was being undertaken as a pilot and it enabled a person to plan to leave within a realistic timescale.
- The aim was to build up a housing options toolkit.
- Applicants leaving prison were dealt with under a Probation Contract.

The Group then asked Questions and made comments:-

- A Rent Deposit Scheme had been tried previously how was it different this time? It was noted that the scheme was being used proactively and was targeted.
- Did NBC work with the Police in cases of domestic violence? NBC worked closely with the Police in such cases and there were two refuges available for emergencies. However a more sophisticated approach was needed so options could be offered.
- Did the figure include those that had applied and been found to be intentionally homeless. It was noted that the figures include all applications regardless of the outcome.
- Particularly in cases of domestic violence were measures taken to ensure a victim was not allocated a property close to the perpetrator. Fran Rodger confirmed that this was the case and advised that more action would be taken in the future in relation to Contract contravention.
- In cases involving 16/17 year olds and those involving domestic violence the response NCC received from NBC was good.

## HOMELESSNESS ACCEPTANCE.

It was noted that:-

- The ODPM target for the acceptance of application was 1.7 per 1,000 households so as NBC accepted 5.5 per 1,000 households they were accepting too many.
- The reason that the acceptance rate was so high was because applications were taken on face value and there was insufficient investigation.

The Group commented that:-

- It would be useful to look at the acceptance rates of similar Councils.
- The figures up to the end of December 2005 should be considered at the next meeting.

## WHY ARE HOUSEHOLDS BECOMING HOMELESS IN NORTHAMPTON:-

It was noted that:-

- The category "Parents no longer willing to accommodate" included applicants of all ages as people were staying with parents longer due to the lack of affordable housing.
- At Christmas the number of homeless due to parents/friends always dropped but increased again after the holiday.

The Group asked Questions and made comments:-

- The "other" category was too large suggesting that cases needed more investigations.
- A breakdown of the "Parents no longer willing to accommodate" category into under and over 18's would be useful.
- Were those leaving care given priority and support? Those leaving care were considered priority need and NCC were responsible for finding and funding accommodation for 16/17 year olds.
- Were those leaving care given support to sustain a tenancy? Social Services helped set up the accommodation.
- Young People could apply in their own right at 18 but could not actually start the application process until they were actually 18.
- The concerns of Social Services related to those who were 16/17 who were homeless but not leaving care, those over 18 that they were still responsible for and homeless families.
- Application could be made 28 days before a person was homeless which the Group felt was too late.

- The Housing Services needed to get to the position whereby they were not “fire-fighting” but could take a strategic approach and work on more preventative measures.

## EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION

It was noted:-

- 157 were in temporary accommodation at the end of November 2006.
- As at 9 December only 13 were in bed and breakfast and it was hoped no one would be by Christmas.

The Group commented that:-

- Acorn House (previous nightshelter) at one time had emergency family accommodation. It was agreed Madeline Spencer investigate this further.
- Anyone made homeless during office hours should report to the HMAc.
- There was a need to ensure that all agencies including the Police knew where to send people reporting homeless.
- CAN should be identifying and working with rough sleepers. It was important to help them as early as possible, before other problems developed, i.e. ill health.
- There was a need to accept that some people chose this lifestyle.

## TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION COSTS.

It was noted that:-

- Temporary Accommodation was a significant cost to NBC particularly as there was no budget for bed and breakfast which had cost £505,958.16 up to 31 November 2005. This had a detrimental effect on other services.
- In relation to the “end of assured shorthold tenancies” a significant factor was the lack of confidence in the Housing Benefit system by private landlords. However the situation was improving and a new system was being introduced on 19 December 2006.
- Was support given to those who rented privately to maintain their tenancies? The capacity to do this was not available at present but it may be possible to extend the Tenancy Support Scheme in the future.
- Previously NBC contacted Social Services when a young person was having problems maintaining their tenancy (ie rubbish, anti-social behaviour) but this had stopped recently. It would be good for this practice to be reinstated.

## THE LEGAL DUTIES

It was noted that:-

- The consideration by definition to be priority need were 16-17 year olds and households with children or pregnant women.
- Those considered vulnerable were not necessarily in priority need.
- Once “homelessness and priority need had been established” intentionality was considered. This included outstanding rent arrears and ASBOs.
- Emergency Accommodation was also a significant cost to Social Services.
- In 2005/2006 the ODPM contributed funding of £90,000 and the Probation Service contributed £25,000 – both amounts to fund specific projects.
- There was a need for discussions with CAN in relation to the future funding of the work with rough sleepers.
- There was a bid for £50,000 outstanding for work with BME homeless clients. However there was a need to understand the requirements of these clients and what housing was appropriate.

The group commented that:-

- It would be useful to have a breakdown of the statistics relating to BME Clients.
- The fact that CAN undertook the work with rough sleepers could give the public the impression they only dealt with clients with drug problems.
- It may be worth exploring a joint arrangement between NCC/NBC from translation services.

\* The final report should identify that there must be clear links between all of the agencies who potentially dealt with the homeless.\*

## OTHER AGENCIES INVOLVED IN HOMELESS IN THE TOWN.

The group commented that:

- It was important to clarify what other services the other agencies offered so the services could be used to their full potential.
- It would be useful to follow an individual through the process from the time they report as homeless.
- More information about the work of Homeless Link would be useful.

Nigel Stock explained the role of Social Services in homelessness, particularly in relation to young people.

It was noted that:-

- They were required to support young people leaving care. This part of the service was working effectively.
- There were fewer children in care and those that were tended to have the more difficult behavioural problems.
- The recent Housing Act strengthened Social Services involvement and the support they were required to provide to 16/17 year olds.
- There was a whole team at Social Services dedicated to the support of 16/17 year olds.
- The spending on homelessness was a huge expense to Social Services, the budgets for which were hugely overspent.
- From 18 September 2005 to 30 November 2005 10 young people 16/17 years old, who had not previously been in care, had presented as homeless. Six had been placed in short term bed and breakfast and four had been placed in Social Services accommodation.
- The Community Support Team supported 60-70 young people in their accommodation at any one time, most of who were claiming full Housing Benefit.
- Social Services currently financially supported 16 families in Bed and Breakfast. Ten of those had been found to be intentionally homeless which Social Services felt was not appropriate.
- Some of those provided with accommodation were of uncertain asylum status.
- In relation to intentional homelessness of 16/17 year olds the threshold was low and this was an area where joint working could be improved.
- It was of significant concern at NCC of the level of expenditure particularly as homelessness was not an NCC responsibility. Fran Rodgers advised that NBC faces the same problem and therefore it was important for NCC and NBC to work towards streamlining the process and to avoid duplication.

Nigel Stokes circulated the list of the cost of the temporary accommodation used by Social Services.

#### 4 (c) FURTHER DATA REQUIRED.

- The figures in relation to the numbers of people who made a homeless application but were told that they were not actually homeless.
- The figures in relation to the numbers on the Housing Register over the same five year period (2000/1 to 2004/5) so a comparison could be made with the number of homeless applications.

- The homeless application acceptance figures from comparable Local Authorities to compare the figure of 5.5 per 1000 households. Also comparable data from the highest performing authorities.
- A breakdown of the “parents no longer willing to accommodate” figure into those under and those over 18. Also the cases where those reporting as homeless had a child.
- A breakdown of those from BEM communities who were homeless.
- Information on the related services provided by the other agencies involved in homelessness work.
- The links between the other agencies and NBC.
- More information on the work of Homeless Link.
- The number of people kept in hospital because, due to mental or physical illness, they could not return to their homes.
- Evidence from voluntary agencies including CAB and Welfare Rights as to the number of cases they dealt with in relation to homelessness.
- Case study evidence from the two MPs.

## 5. OUTCOMES TO TAKE FORWARD.

It was agreed that at the next meeting on 6 January 2006 the group:-

- Receive the above information.
- Decide which case studies to consider at Meeting 3.
- Receive a presentation from Homeless Link with a view to learning about their work and the related services offered by the other agencies.

## 6. TO NOTE THE SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS.

It was noted that the next meeting would be on 6 January 2006.