



OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY VIEWS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

TO CABINET 21 JUNE 2017

Report Title	RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – HOMELESSNESS (PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY)
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Agenda Status: PUBLIC

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To present to Cabinet for consideration, the comments and recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the findings of the Scrutiny Review – Homelessness (Pre-Decision Scrutiny.)
- 1.2 Members of Cabinet have been issued with a copy of the full report. All Overview and Scrutiny review reports are published on the Overview and Scrutiny page on the Council's Webpage and a copy of this report can be located: www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny - Previous Scrutiny Reviews.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends to Cabinet that:

Multi Agency Working

- 2.1.1 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.
- 2.1.2 The Council establishes a Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group to direct, coordinate 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

- 2.1.3 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.
- 2.1.4 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 Night shelter, the Hope Centre, Oasis House, NAASH and other services.
- 2.1.5 A Homeless Forum is established that engages with other statutory and non-statutory Agencies.
- 2.1.6 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.
- 2.1.7 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.
- 2.1.8 The Council considers its approach to assisting individuals with multiple and complex needs.

Improving access to health services

- 2.1.9 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.
- 2.1.10 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

- 2.1.11 The Council develops an ambitious plan, using SMART outcomes, for minimising its use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation and out-of-borough temporary accommodation.
- 2.1.12 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.
- 2.1.13 All nightly-purchased temporary accommodation that is used by the Borough Council should provide free Wi-Fi facilities.

3. Background and Issues

- 3.1 The purpose of the pre-decision 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
- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 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
- 3.4 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

4 Key Findings and Conclusions

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

Causes of homelessness

- 4.1.1 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'.
- 4.1.2 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.
- 4.1.3 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.
- 4.1.4 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.

- 4.1.5 The Scrutiny Panel emphasises that homelessness can happen to anyone and an individual does not have to be roofless to be homeless.
- 4.1.6 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.
- 4.1.7 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.
- 4.1.8 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.
- 4.1.9 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

- 4.1.10 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.
- 4.1.11 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.
- 4.1.12 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

- 4.1.13 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.
- 4.1.14 The Scrutiny Panel welcomed the establishment of the Emergency Night shelter and the fact that this winter's severe weather project (known as SWEP) will operate from the building (for men only).
- 4.1.15 Those experiencing homelessness of any kind have poorer access to health services and worse health outcomes.
- 4.1.16 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

- 4.1.17 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

- 4.1.18 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.
- 4.1.19 The Council's temporary accommodation includes self-contained council housing, self-contained privately managed housing and Bed & Breakfast.
- 4.1.20 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.
- 4.1.21 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.
- 4.1.22 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

- 4.1.23 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.

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

5. Options

- 5.1 Cabinet will need to consider the possible options as part of its response to the recommendations.

6. Implications (including financial implications)

6.1 Policy

- 6.1.1 The work of Overview and Scrutiny plays a major part in the development of the Council's policy framework through its work programme.

- 6.1.2 The report and its recommendations have policy implications in relation to the Council's response to homelessness. Cabinet's response will need to consider these issues in detail.

6.2 Resources and Risk

- 6.2.1 Cabinet will need to consider the resourcing issues for the recommendations made.

6.3 Legal

- 6.3.1 Legal issues will need to be considered as part of Cabinet's response to the recommendations.

6.4 Equality

- 6.4.1 Equality issues will need to be considered as part of Cabinet's response to the recommendations.

6.5 Consultees (Internal and External)

- 6.5.1 The Committee received evidence from a variety of sources as detailed in paragraph 3.4 of this report.

7. Background Papers

- Overview and Scrutiny Committee report – Homelessness (Pre-Decision Scrutiny)
- Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 8 May 2017

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