London Borough of Waltham Forest

HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION & RESPONSE

SCRUTINY PANEL

April 2013
Contents

Purpose......................................................................................................................................2

Recommendations.....................................................................................................................2

Panel Timeline & Methodology ..................................................................................................3

Background................................................................................................................................3

Local Evidence...........................................................................................................................6

Conclusions .............................................................................................................................10

Assumptions & Exclusions......................................................................................................10

Members & Scrutiny Support ..................................................................................................11

Acknowledgements................................................................................................................11

Appendices ..............................................................................................................................12
REPORT OF THE HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION & RESPONSE PANEL

1. PURPOSE

1.1 This report sets out the activities, deliberations and recommendations of the Homelessness Prevention & Response Services scrutiny panel.

1.2 The aim of the panel was to examine and challenge homelessness prevention services in the Borough with regard to the effectiveness of provision and the effectiveness of partnership working amongst the various agencies.

1.3 The complete terms of reference for the panel are set out in Appendix B.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The panel makes the following recommendations to the Portfolio Holder:

2.1 That LB Waltham Forest and Ascham Homes look to re-establish a specialised Outreach Service with workers skilled in alcohol/drug dependency as well as Mental Health. There is an opportunity perhaps to work with the already established Redbridge service to develop a joint offering for homelessness Outreach services.

2.2 That further work is undertaken to support homeless shelters and community day centre services that are in the process of gathering identification documentation on behalf of service users who need proof of identity to register for and access Health, GP, dental and community services. This could be done, in response to requests for information from service providers, by checking data held centrally on housing benefit and other benefit claims to see if proof of identity could be provided for the homeless individual.

2.3 Timely, full and complete information on referrals (in particular, from adult social services, especially where mental health or disability was an issue) should be provided at the earliest opportunity to all relevant housing providers (Registered Providers) and full disclosure of rough sleeper information – e.g. mental health, disability – should be given to shelters when a referral is made. The panel believes that the strengthening of information sharing practices, inter-agency working and the network of services (including sign posting of advocacy and advice services in the community, so people have access to and know about services that the Council has no statutory duty to provide) will yield significant long-term results in the campaign to reduce homelessness and rough sleeping. As a consequence, the panel asks the Housing Association Liaison Group (HALG) to compile a multi-agency contact sheet for housing associations and RSLs so they can contact named individuals/teams for clarification on housing case information, if they need to do so. To enable service providers to feedback and share best practice information across different agencies, the panel suggests that an annual networking event be held (hosted by LBWF/Ascham Homes). This would bring together the sector partners to share information, advocate on behalf of service users and raise awareness of challenges facing affected Waltham Forest residents.

The panel would also support the following actions and activities:

2.4 The further development of robust early intervention initiatives and assistance by the Council and providers to prevent those at risk of homelessness losing their accommodation in the first place. This could include the proactive engagement with tenants negatively affected by the Welfare Reforms; working with partners (e.g. NHS) to raise awareness; tailored messages to specific vulnerable groups; offering practical advice (e.g. money advice) and clear information on websites, newsletters and other means of resident communication.
2.5 Work to support people with complex problems to access housing and support to enable them to sustain tenancies.

2.6 A planning and property-led push to increase the supply of long-term affordable housing within the Borough, including perhaps reviewing the potential supply as a result of retrospective planning applications.

2.7 The creative work of the voluntary sector in developing new ways to engage and assist marginalised people and the homeless - food and clothes banks, night shelters, day centres and daytime drop in centres and other such facilities. The Borough should continue to look at the various ways it could encourage the sector to explore innovative ideas to engage and combat the issue in partnership with other stakeholders.

3. PANELTIMELINE & METHODOLOGY

3.1 The Homelessness Panel was agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee (OSMC) at its 3 October 2012 meeting in response to a proposal from the Chair of the Housing sub-committee.

3.2 Final membership was agreed 13th December 2012.

3.3 The first (set-up) meeting took place on 24 January 2013.

3.4 The deliberations of the panel were conducted over eight sessions, including three with key stakeholder witnesses in round table sessions and a site visit to relevant homelessness prevention services.

3.5 Input has been considered by the panel from several key stakeholders including the public, private, voluntary and community sectors.

3.6 Evidence sessions and panel meetings were held until 19 March 2013.

3.7 The panel report and recommendations were agreed by the panel Members in early April.

3.8 The draft panel recommendations were duly referred to the Portfolio Holder (11 April 2013) for review and response to the panel chair with a suggested timescale of two (2) months for inclusion in the final suite of documents.

4. BACKGROUND

4.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires all local authorities to develop a homelessness strategy for their area. Each London borough therefore has a strategy which looks at preventing homelessness and providing accommodation and support for homeless people.

4.2 All housing authorities (councils with a housing function) are required to take a more strategic and multi-agency approach to tackling all forms of homelessness and to focus on prevention.

4.3 Authorities need to consider homelessness in the widest sense and refocus policies from an emergency response to supporting people in maintaining their current homes where possible.

4.4 Authorities have to ensure that everyone accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need is provided with suitable housing for a period to give them a reasonable opportunity to obtain accommodation.
4.5 Local authorities that transfer their housing stock still retain their obligations with regard to homelessness.

4.6 Local Authorities cannot contract out the duty to adopt a homelessness strategy.

4.7 Local authorities have a duty to give advice to homeless people and allow them to challenge decisions.

4.8 The No Second Night Out (NSNO) initiative was launched on 1 April 2011 as a pilot project aimed at ensuring that those who find themselves sleeping rough in central London for the first time need not spend a second night on the streets.

4.9 NSNO estimates that each week about 50 people are seen rough sleeping for the first time in London.

4.10 The Government has also pledged to roll out London’s No Second Night Out service across the country, which means that anyone facing losing their home and sleeping rough this winter will get the support they need and deserve.

4.11 The Government released its report Making Every Contact Count in August 2012. The strategy encourages better cross-service working between councils, charities, health services and the police to focus on earlier support for people likely to become homeless.

4.12 The Government is investing £400 million over 4 years to help local authorities prevent and tackle homelessness, including rough sleeping, with an additional £70 million investment last year.

4.13 In 2010, the Mayor of London also made a commitment to end rough sleeping, outlined in his draft London Housing Strategy, taking forward the vision of the national strategy to bring rough sleeping to an end by 2012.

4.14 It was claimed then that over three-quarters of London’s most entrenched rough sleepers had been helped off the streets since the Mayor set up the London Delivery Board a year earlier to tackle the problem.

4.15 Rough sleeping is on the rise and London in particular has seen a dramatic jump in the number of people on its streets.

4.16 An estimated total of 5,678 people slept rough in the capital at some point during 2011/12, according to figures from the Combined Homelessness and Information Network, an increase of 43 per cent on the previous year (3,975).

4.17 Government-endorsed figures from charity Broadway’s bi-monthly Combined Homeless and Information Network figures show the total number of rough sleepers in the capital increased by 26 per cent to 1,920 in September and October 2012 compared with the same period in 2011.

4.18 The European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) in their report On the Way Home? (December 2012) cited statistics from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) which show that the Autumn 2011 total of rough sleeping counts and estimates in England was 2,181. This is up 413 (23 per cent) from the Autumn 2010 total of 1,768.

4.19 There had been a sustained reduction in statutory homelessness levels from the early 2000s until 2009. This trend has now been reversed.

4.20 DCLG statistics show that the financial year 2009/10 saw an increase in homelessness acceptances by local authorities of 10%, representing the first increase since the year 2003/04.
4.21 During the 2011/12 financial year, there were 50,290 acceptances. This is an increase of 14 per cent from 44,160 in 2010/11.

4.22 The latest statistics released in December 2012 on homelessness applications in England were released. They showed that 13,890 applicants were accepted as owed a main homelessness duty between 1 July and 30 September 2012, 11 per cent higher than during the same quarter of 2011.

4.23 As a consequence, the numbers in temporary accommodation on 30 September 2012 were 8 per cent higher than at the same date in 2011.

4.24 In line with a target to halve the number of households in temporary accommodation by 2010, a downward trend began in 2004. However, the number of households in temporary accommodation is again on the rise. On 31st March 2012, it was 50,430 - 5 per cent higher than the same date last year. This was the third consecutive quarterly increase.

4.25 The Observer reported (27 January 2013) that homelessness is once again on the rise. In 2011, the number of people officially classed as homeless in England jumped by 14% – the biggest increase for almost a decade.

4.26 It stated that the number of "statutory homeless" households – those deemed to be in priority need by local authorities – peaked in England at 135,000 in 2004 and had fallen to 53,000 by 2009. Across England, 48,510 households were accepted as homeless by local authorities in that year, including 69,460 children.

4.27 The number of people helped by the charity Shelter's housing advice helpline, who are either homeless or at risk of losing their home, has increased by 80% in the past three years, while 1.4 million people in Britain are falling behind with their rent or mortgage payments, according to a recent YouGov poll.

4.28 Meanwhile figures released by Shelter in December 2012 concluded one in every 115 households are at risk of homelessness across England, with 198,470 households threatened with losing their home in the 12 months to September 2012.

4.29 Shelter also found there was a correlation between unemployment and eviction risk as the local authorities with the most possession claims also had the highest rates of unemployment.

4.30 Britain is not alone in this worrying trend, FEANTSA found that homelessness had increased over the past five years in 15 out of 21 EU member states.

4.31 The European Federation of National Organisations Working With the Homeless (FEANTSA) report links the increasing prevalence of homelessness in part to the continuing economic crisis affecting the continent, but also to the failure of individual states’ own policies and ‘longer-standing structural problems’

4.32 Similarly, for the UK, the FEANTSA report reasons that the impact of the financial and economic crisis has led to the reversal in the downward trend of rough sleeping and homeless households in temporary accommodation under statutory homeless legislation.

4.33 This is widely considered by stakeholders to reflect the impact of the crisis and resultant cuts to local authority budgets, benefits and other areas.

4.34 According to the Department for Work and Pensions, at least half a million households will be affected in London following the Welfare and Benefit Reform changes due in April 2013.
4.35 Due to the uncertainty surrounding the overall impact of the reforms, the DWP has commissioned research into the overall impact of the reforms including evaluation of the impact on homelessness levels which is due to report finally in early 2014.

5. LOCAL EVIDENCE

Following are key points made in discussions throughout the duration of the panel.

Services evidence session

5.1 In a report to Housing Scrutiny sub-committee (12 March 2013) on Housing Provision and Support Services for the Vulnerable it was advised that supported housing provision for homeless people in Waltham Forest forms 24% of the overall supply – 16% homeless families and 8% single homeless people.

5.2 Members noted that, under the terms of the management agreement with Ascham Homes (the Council’s ALMO), the homeless service was delivered as part of their Housing Solutions Service.

5.3 The two sides of homelessness were highlighted – statutory duty and rough sleeping. These are not mutually exclusive. There is a statutory duty to provide advice and information to everyone in the district. However there is only a statutory duty to secure accommodation for people who are eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need. This may include rough sleepers, but will not include all. Statutory homelessness is where the Council has a duty and this is taken up by the Housing Solutions Service.

5.4 It was reported that the number of households placed by Waltham Forest in temporary accommodation as at the 31st December 2012 was 1251. This includes people placed outside the borough, but does not include people placed in the borough by other local authorities.

5.5 The panel noted that on transfer to Ascham Homes, the Service had over 760 homeless applications pending assessment of which 351 were living in temporary accommodation. By the 31st December 2012, this had been cut to under 300 and 117 respectively.

5.6 The clearing of the backlog has meant that homeless acceptances have risen dramatically over the course of the year, although the rise started in 2010 when access to the private rented sector for housing solutions declined. From a position of accepting approximately 300 homeless households for housing in 2009-10, this doubled to 600 in 2011-12 and is likely to be close to 1000 in 2013-14.

5.7 Members heard that the pending restructure of the Housing Solutions Service is designed to create better control of homelessness demand through prevention.

5.8 The Housing Demand Team will support the homelessness prevention activities to ensure that all applications or approaches are dealt with in the most appropriate way to achieve greater homelessness prevention and lower homeless acceptance rates.

5.9 Members noted that the drive toward prevention and options is aimed at ensuring fewer emergencies and a focus on planned responses.

5.10 Members were told that Ascham Homes would provide a specialist single vulnerable homelessness prevention Pathways Team to steer young people through difficulties. Waltham Forest is the most successful sub-regional partner at housing the local single homeless people client group through the partnership sub-regional project.

5.11 Shelter reported that Waltham Forest was 10th highest in England overall in terms of with mortgage and landlord possession claims in 2011/12 with 1 in 52 homes (total 1840).
5.12 Members were told that the authority will only secure housing for those who are eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need as defined by the Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, otherwise advice and assistance will be offered, which can include referrals to hostel accommodation. The East London Housing Partnership has funding for single homeless rough sleepers (local only).

5.13 Members were advised that Branches is a hostel in Waltham Forest for single homeless people/rough sleepers. Branches offers a three-tiered approach – they “graduate” through the system as they are assimilated back. Branches and the church outlets hold their own lists and keep them open for all areas not just those with a local connection. [NB it isn’t the only hostel that takes rough sleepers/former rough sleepers – Wardley Lodge (Single Homeless Project) also covers this client group. Both are Supporting People (SP) funded.]

5.14 The panel was told that, in order to control and manage the provision for rough sleepers to ensure availability, tighter “local connection” clauses would probably need to be imposed on providers.

5.15 Redbridge offer a homeless Outreach service and currently Waltham Forest offer provision via QALB services. It was noted that rough sleepers are often unwilling to engage with the statutory homeless function.

5.16 The panel heard that Westminster and Kensington take a far tougher stance on rough sleeping, but also have stricter conditions with providers of shelter and advice to ensure that people will have access to this service.

5.17 Members noted that Under Paragraph 13 Schedule 3 of the Nationality, Immigration & Asylum Act 2002, housing authorities are under a duty to inform the Home Office of illegal immigrants if they present as homeless.

5.18 The Council has direct access to 3 hostels catering for survivors of domestic violence and funds additional provision via SP funding.

5.19 Vulnerable resident outreach surgeries have been curtailed owing to lack of demand and suitability for the cohort.

Providers evidence session

5.20 The panel heard that a lot of work was being done by all RPs in preparation for the Welfare Reforms – the so-called “Bedroom Tax” and the cap being the key challenges likely to impact on homelessness. Local Authorities are working with RPs to highlight potential risk cases.

5.21 RPs were working with CABs and tenants on debt and financial management – e.g. Credit Union memberships and open days, hardship funds, maximising benefits, tenancy sustainability, etc.

5.22 It was noted that the biggest challenges centred on how the reforms will impact upon the Council duty to the homeless – grey areas around whether someone is intentionally homeless if they get into arrears as a result of ignoring the changes.

5.23 The panel was advised that where possible RPs are looking to incentivise the downsizing option.

5.24 The panel noted that difficulties are being witnessed around an understanding of the definitions – e.g. what constitutes a bedroom, exclusions, etc.
5.25 Members heard that there was evidence to suggest that people were going to try and bear the losses and Registered Providers were concerned and looking to intervene before these people hit problems.

5.26 The panel was advised that NELFT works with Ascham Homes for their clients (about 50) to get them into sustainable and appropriate accommodation where necessary.

5.27 The panel were told that the NELFT ACCESS TEAM was the first point of contact for ascertaining “open” mental health cases.

5.28 The homeless Tasking and Targeting group, hosted by Waltham Forest, is a multi-disciplinary group with links to Street Rescue, SNTs, hostels, outreach teams, faith groups and other statutory and voluntary organisations is for people who are already street sleeping – it is not early intervention.

5.29 Members noted that the weekly focus group meeting led by Ascham Homes deals with preventing people becoming homeless.

5.30 Members were advised that MPS intervention is generally a last resort and more along the lines of ASB. Offences would be dealt with under the Vagrancy and Public Order Acts. Penalties in cases that go to court like this would not be harsh. Individual cases handled by the SNT and longer term issues in partnership with LBWF. Centrally the MPS has a steering group led by the Commander.

5.31 12 London boroughs do have significant problems (e.g. Westminster) – relatively speaking not a great deal of demand in Waltham Forest.

5.32 ASBRAC deals with high risk ASB cases. It is cross-agency and well attended by partners and services.

5.33 It was noted that the MPS support RPs well on ASB issues.

5.34 Members were told that support must be strategic once a person is in the system and often the robustness of the intervention is dependent upon the relationship with the particular case worker.

5.35 The panel noted that it was important that all agencies share information to tackle the homelessness issue. It was generally acknowledged that partners could strengthen information sharing practices.

5.36 The panel was advised that the evictions process was an issue - very reactive and no action is taken until it is litigated.

5.37 Members noted concerns as to whether the Council would be liable for the difference if TA proved more than capped benefit. Council tenancies are the cheapest in the Borough so anyone who gets into difficulty at this level will create an issue.

5.38 The panel was told that the Council will be pursuing a motion to actively look at Selective Licensing in WF. Residents of low-quality HMOs are reluctant to report overcrowding/poor conditions because of perceived threat to tenure. There is a confidential route to report poor conditions through Housing Solutions and Environmental Health. A pilot area will be designated and will spread out from there based on success.

5.39 The panel heard that adult social services and evictions (especially where mental health was an issue) in particular were important areas to have early, full and complete information on referrals. Named contacts in adult services were requested.

5.40 Shelters requested full disclosure of rough sleeper info – e.g. mental health, disability – this is not currently the case.
5.41 Cases were noted by the panel of misplacements – e.g. mobility cases housed on third floor, gang members in opposition territories.

5.42 The panel suggested that HALG to put together a multi-agency contact sheet for housing case information sharing.

5.43 Members and witnesses agreed that information should be shared in full and issues identified at the earliest opportunity to ensure strategic solutions with the result that clients will be offered a more appropriate solution when they are nominated by the LA.

5.44 Members were told that currently the lack of full information creates hold ups, log jams and creates extra work re-housing. It was noted that issues may have to be resolved around Freedom of Information.

5.45 Members were concerned about rough sleeper access to key health services – e.g. GPs, sexual health, dental.

5.46 It was noted that GP engagement at the moment within the new structures was in transition and tricky.

Voluntary & Community Sector evidence session

5.47 Members heard that Branches have the aim of re-settling everyone that is referred to them by Ascham Homes or London Street Rescue or those that turn up on their doorstep. They have 27 beds available and are always at full capacity, so they often refer people to other shelters across the borough.

5.48 Members were advised that Branches had found it challenging in the past to work with Public Health services, but this relationship had improved with a single point of contact.

5.49 The panel heard that Branches aim to ensure that all of their residents are registered with a GP but there are often challenges because residents often don’t have identity documentation in order. Christian Kitchen also helps people to access GP services.

5.50 Branches meets with Ascham Homes every 3 months.

5.51 The No Second Night Out initiative (NSNO) has been very effective and people sleeping rough are identified and assessed within 3 hours.

5.52 Members heard that NSNO has been a success because there has been a single point of reference/service offer. Rough sleepers are routed to the service which best suits their needs. All info on rough sleepers is recorded on a system called CHAIN and this info is shared to track rough sleepers.

5.53 Christian Kitchen is having to re-locate from the car park at Mission Grove after 20 years due to complaints received by the LA from residents living in the area. The LA is assisting in finding an alternative location for the Soup van.

5.54 The panel was advised that the average stay for FCENS Guests was 28 days with a longest stay registered of 79 days.

5.55 Members heard that the reason most quoted for loss of home was job loss and lack of recourse to public funds.

5.56 FCENS also reported that reasons for preventing access to accommodation included no deposit, no income, unable to prove residency and no valid ID.

5.57 Members were told that the biggest barrier preventing access to job market was not speaking English and a lack of skills.
5.58 Members were advised by Homeless Link that the “estimates” of people rough sleeping in WF is very high and there were some concerns were expressed around the way in which figures and estimates on the number of rough sleepers is collected. Now that people are being assessed and their details added to CHAIN – a more accurate picture is emerging.

5.59 The CHAIN report from April 2011-March 2012 indicated that Waltham Forest had 46 rough sleeping clients over the period, five (5) of which had been multiple sightings.

5.60 Members were told that the Church shelters provide support to rough sleepers that other agencies often cannot help. The organisation works with rough sleepers to get their ID and documentation in order so they can access health and housing services.

**Site Visit**

5.61 On site, Members were told that Ascham Homes process 200 homeless household applications on average per month. Ninety (90) new placements on average are made each month into Temporary Accommodation.

5.62 Members noted that the bulk of homelessness results from two sources – Private Sector evictions and parental evictions – solving these two issues would solve a lot of the homelessness issue. It was noted that clients, just because they are homeless are unlikely to be allocated social housing – and that message needs to be reinforced.

5.63 Members heard that Welfare and Benefit changes are expected to increase the Private Sector evictions figures. Ascham Homes expect the changes to negatively impact on the ability of a number of residents to remain in their existing homes and therefore expect a continued rise in homeless applications.

**6. CONCLUSION**

6.1 As a local authority we had agreed some time ago that one of our main corporate priorities was to protect the vulnerable in our community.

6.2 The panel is concerned that the current climate of recession, austerity and welfare reform will only increase the burden on homelessness prevention services in the future.

6.3 The panel have agreed that the key elements necessary to tackle homelessness moving forward will be good inter-agency working, intelligent information sharing and a network of relevant and effective services.

6.4 The panel supports current strategies of early intervention and innovative engagement initiatives to combat homelessness and the risk of homelessness.

6.5 The panel hopes that their deliberations have contributed to the discussion around possible solutions to the issue and their recommendations add value to the current provision for our vulnerable residents, either currently homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

6.6 A further assessment of the recommendations will be programmed into the work programme for the Housing sub-committee to review the progress.

**7. ASSUMPTIONS & EXCLUSIONS**

7.1 The Portfolio Holder or any other bodies are not obliged to accept any recommendations however, in the event the Portfolio Holder does not accept any recommendation, it is requested to advise the panel of the reasons for rejection in the formal response within
the requested timescale. Other nominated bodies are requested to observe a similar
courtesy.

7.2 These recommendations are made by the panel in the knowledge that they are subject to
the full evaluation and acceptance of the implications of those suggested options by the
relevant service charged with leading on the potential outcomes.

7.3 Relevant services are permitted to offer their considered response with regard to their
evaluation of the feasibility and implications of the suggested options. They are however
requested to do so within the requested two month timescale.

8. MEMBERS & SCRUTINY SUPPORT

8.1 The Panel comprised three Councillors:
   Councillor Saima Mahmood (Labour) – Panel Lead / Chair
   Councillor Mahmood Hussain (Liberal Democrat)
   Councillor Alan Siggers (Conservative)

8.2 Anthony J Lane from the Scrutiny Unit managed the activities and supported the panel.

9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

   Panel Members gratefully acknowledge the contribution of witnesses who attended and
offered valuable guidance and information over the course of the panel.

9.1 Witnesses:
   Francis Hatega (Ascham Homes);
   Helen Richards (Ascham Homes)
   Jean Smyth (Ascham Homes)
   Sharon Stewart (Ascham Homes)
   Michael Williams (Ascham Homes)
   Martin Wierzbicki (Ascham Homes)
   Joyce Saunds (Branches)
   Tony Thomas (Branches)
   Michaela Jervis (CBHA)
   Harton Bailey (Christian Action)
   Norman Coe (Christian Kitchen)
   Yomi Maja (Circle 33)
   Nickie Wilson (Circle 33)
   Robert Lindsay (East Homes);
   Shernell Durrant (Forest Churches Emergency Night Shelters - FCENS)
   Castriona Carney (Homeless Link)
   Chantall Sinclair (ISHA)
   Liz Cunningham (L&Q)
Chris Newton (L&Q)
Shane Whitehead (LBWF)
Joan Murphy (LBWF)
CI Danny O’Connor (Metropolitan Police Service)
Chris Bright (NELFT)
Gareth Mercer (Thames Reach)

9.2 Other Written Submissions:
   Barbara Gillings (Forest Churches Emergency Night Shelter – FCENS)
   Lesley Barrett (NELFT)
   Rita Chadha (Ramfel)

10. APPENDICES:
   Appendix A: References
   Appendix B: Panel Terms of Reference
   Appendix C: List of Abbreviations
Appendix A – References

This is a selection of references related to homelessness and are suggested as relevant reading for those interested in further detailed research – by reverse chronology:

A place To Call Your Home; Homeless Link; February 2013

Annual Report for the Outer Boroughs - 1st April 2011- 31st March 2012; CHAIN & Broadway; February 2013

Managing the impact of Housing Benefit Reform; National Audit Office; Dec 2012

On the Way Home?; FEANTSA; Dec 2012

Making it Matter: Improving the Health of Young Homeless People; DePaul UK; Apr 2012

Homelessness & Temporary Accommodation; LBWF (N Thornton); Nov 2011

Homelessness Strategy 2009-2013; Halton Borough Council; 2009

Homelessness Prevention: A guide to good practice; Shelter (Cullen, S, Byrne S, Hayes P); Apr 2007

Homelessness Code of Guidance for Councils; DCLG; July 2006

Scrutiny of Homelessness Policy & Strategy; LGiU (Sillett, J) / Shelter; June 2006

Housing Act 1996, Part 7; HM Government Publication; 1996
Appendix B – Terms of Reference

Objective

Review the homelessness services in the Borough with regard to:

- The effectiveness of services that are provided in relation to understanding the growing problem with beds in sheds, people rough sleeping in the forest and living in garages and the recent increase in traditional rough sleeping in the borough and developing appropriate responses.
- The effectiveness of partnership working, including linkages into sub regional and pan-London initiatives which have been established to tackle these issues.
- National policy, guidance and performance indicators/service standards, such as the homelessness Gold Standard and the 10 local Challenges, as well as with initiatives such as the No Second Night Out.
- The level of resources required to sustain and develop the service in relation to the issues outlined above.

Deliverables & Anticipated Benefits

The Panel will be expected to produce a final report with specific recommendations for the review of Overview & Scrutiny Management Committee. Out of this report it is hoped will come solid recommendations to add value and drive service improvement, by offering “critical friend” challenge to the current service delivery.

Method

Possible areas for evidence gathering could include:

- Assessment of Council and external resources available.
- Examination of available survey/s in the Borough and other sources.
- Comparison with other authorities.
- Site visits to possible examples of innovation and good practice.
- Critical assessment by users and community groups.
- Conducting public hearings with appropriate Council Members, officers and external witnesses.
- A literature review of available information and qualitative research.
- Drawing upon relevant independent research and publicly available guidance.
- Publication of the Panel’s findings in a report to the Management Committee.

Member Role & Involvement

The Panel receives its direction from the Management Committee and is authorised to:

- meet as necessary to conduct their review, take evidence and make visits (if applicable);
- meet with Council officers and external agencies to take evidence;
- consider submissions, reports and briefings relevant to their inquiry;
- seek such other information and reports they feel would be of assistance;
- meet, collaborate, draft and agree their report, their conclusions & such recommendations as they may wish to make.
- Submit the final report for the review of the Management Committee.

Resources Required

- Member's time and commitment.
- Local authority officer time for witness sessions.
- Scrutiny Officer time to offer research and guidance.
- Reimbursement etc for any external witness time and costs (if necessary).
- Payment for independent advice.
- Cost of Panel publicity, surveys, consultation or associated expenses.

**Timescale**

The terms of reference must be agreed prior to commencement of the work of the Panel by the sponsoring body – in this case the Overview & Scrutiny Management Committee.

A relatively short time scale of 6-8 weeks from kick off date, determined from the date of the first meeting. Allowances must be made for periods around Christmas, Ramadan, August holidays and other usual calendar breaks.

The aim is for a draft report to ideally go to the first available sub-committee meeting for review and then the final report to the next available Management Committee. If the schedule is not conducive to this order then the report may be circulated to the sub-committee for comment and then after a suitable period (say a week) submitted to the next available Overview & Scrutiny Management Committee.

**Suggested Timeline of Activities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Pre-Set Up</td>
<td>Agreement of Terms of Reference</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Appointment of Panel Members</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Set Up Meeting</td>
<td>to establish calendar, evidence sessions, structure, stakeholder mapping</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>and establishing witness list.</td>
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<td>Evidence Session</td>
<td>LBWF services and Cabinet Member</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Evidence Session</td>
<td>External Witnesses / Community &amp; Voluntary Groups / Users</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Evidence Session</td>
<td>Housing Providers and Expert Witnesses</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Site Visit / Prelim Meeting</td>
<td>Site Visit – homeless shelter or other suggestion</td>
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<td>Preliminary meeting to deliberate over recommendations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Evidence Session</td>
<td>Witness Recall – Members may wish to ask for further witnesses or recall</td>
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<td>some who may have given evidence earlier.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Draft Report Meeting</td>
<td>Members meet to discuss report structure and recommendations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Final/ Close Meeting</td>
<td>Finalise and agree draft report</td>
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<td>Close Panel</td>
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**Post Panel Activities:**

- 1 month - Housing sub-committee review
- 1 month - Report submitted to O&S Management Committee
- 12 months – Housing sub-committee review

**Exclusions & Assumptions**

Cabinet must give reasons why recommendations are not accepted, but Scrutiny has no power to oblige external partners to do so. Though not obliged to follow recommendations, partners are requested as a courtesy to offer a reason for rejection.

Members are requested to ensure to make their references reasonable and have due regard to the necessary implications of their recommendations around safeguarding, health, financial, legal, human resources and climate change. It is understood that a full assessment of the implications will be offered when responding parties explore the feasibility of those recommendations agreed by the Management Committee and referred for action.
Appendix C - List of Abbreviations

AH – Ascham Homes
ALMO - Arms Length Management Organisation
ASB – Anti-Social Behaviour
ASBRAC – ASB Risk Assessment Conference
CAB – Citizens Advice Bureau
DAT – Drug Action Team
DCLG - Department for Communities and Local Government
FCENS – Forest Churches Emergency Night Shelters
FEANTSA - European Federation of National Organisations Working With the Homeless
FoI – Freedom of Information
HA - Housing association (RSL)
HALG - Housing Association Liaison Group
HMO – Houses in Multiple Occupation
LA – Local Authority
LBWF – LB Waltham Forest
MRSG – Mayor's Rough Sleeping Group
NLOS – No Living On The Streets
NSNO - No Second Night Out
OSMC – Overview & Scrutiny Management Committee
PRS - Private Rented Sector
RSL - Registered Social Landlord
RP - Registered Providers
SP – Supporting People (Fund)
TA – temporary accommodation
WXH – Whipps Cross Hospital