

EXETER BOARD

28 April 2015

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping in Exeter – Update Report

Introduction

This report is to provide an update as to the current position of single homelessness and rough sleeping in Exeter. It will highlight the current levels of rough sleeping and demand as well as changes which have been put into place to reduce the number and impact of rough sleeping since the previous Exeter Board meeting in February 2015.

Current Figures

The last official street count was in November 2014 when 34 rough sleepers were identified. This figure was reported to the Department of Communities and Local Government for the annual return. Current figures suggest that there has been a slight reduction in the number of people sleeping rough in Exeter with the Street Homeless Outreach Team (SHOT) reporting an average between 25 and 30 during the first week of April.

More than just a housing issue

Exeter City Council recognises that it cannot work alone in resolving the issue of rough sleeping. The intention is to build a multi agency approach to homelessness with key partners. This has progressed significantly over the last 3 months with the issue being raised strategically in wider arenas:

- Community Safety Partnership – The Community Safety Partnership is currently in the process of revising its strategy and action plan, with a focus on achieving a greater partnership approach. There is a proactive approach emerging with joint work between Exeter City Council, SHOT and the Police. This has included serving Anti Social Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) to prohibit residents with accommodation from sleeping rough, and in serious cases individuals are being considered for criminal behaviour orders and community protection notices. Evidence is also currently being looked at to consider whether there is a need to implement a public spaces protection order. The public spaces protection order can cover issues such as street drinking, defecation and urination, encampments and the taking of new psychoactive substances (NPS). Whilst some of the partnership work will involve dealing with some individuals who are rough sleepers, not all rough sleepers cause Anti Social Behaviour and many can become victims of crime. The aim of the approach is to improve the perception and reality of safety in the city.
- Integrated Care Exeter (ICE) – The health needs of the homeless community have been highlighted through the development of the ICE project.
 - A review of client health needs at Gabriel House highlighted that 17 residents had significant health needs, 9 of which had multiple health needs. Their needs required a high level of emergency health responses with one hostel having 11 hospital visits in January 2015, with 10 of those being via ambulance.
 - Reviews at the St Petrock's day centre highlighted 37 out of 49 service users 49 services users surveyed had mental health disorders, but only 5 clients were actively engaged in health services. Other health issues included high levels of blood borne viruses and 2 were malnourished.

Potential service redesign has been put forward including integrated health care options with SHOT, health clinics at Gabriel and St Petrock's to address health inequalities and increase engagement opportunities and a multi agency approach to homeless hospital discharge cases.

- Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) – Exeter was successful alongside East Devon, Mid Devon, Teignbridge and Torbay in gaining Help for Single Homeless Funding from the DCLG.
 - Around £80,000 of this has been directed toward implementing a MEAM approach to clients with the most complex needs. Many of these are homeless clients. Torbay Council are pursuing a slightly separate approach which will be used to contrast outcomes.
 - The MEAM project has an Executive Steering Board and an Operational Group to promote change at both strategic and case management level. The process will be supported by a co-ordinator who will not only inform the Executive Steering Group of progress and support the work of the front line practitioners they will also lead on maximising the potential future workforce for this area with the inclusion of volunteers and peer mentors. This post is currently out to advert and will be hosted by CVS at the new Engagement Hub at Wat Tyler House.
 - An initial cohort of 6 cases has been identified for the first steps with an active caseload of 15 to be achieved within the next 3 months.
 - Front line workers are receiving in depth Appreciative Enquiry training to assist in unlocking barriers to engagement. The training is being delivered by Steve Beety (Devon and Cornwall Police) who was heavily involved in changing working approaches within the local Targeted Families programme. The rationale being that the approach needed with complex individuals is similar and that there was a wealth of knowledge gained from this programme.

Current Practice Improvements

Over the last 3 months there have been operational improvements in managing homelessness and rough sleeping in Exeter:

- **Aligning of SHOT and Sanctuary Supported Living Support hours** – 2 workers from the DCC funded Sanctuary Supported Living contract have been working alongside the Outreach Team to provide support interventions with rough sleepers. This has assisted in increasing capacity within the team and bringing together the work of engagement and support. This new approach has seen 10 rough sleepers received more intensive interventions and improved engagement to move into accommodation.
- **Immediate accommodation options for rough sleepers** – Whilst limited in number there is emergency accommodation provision in the G8 room of Gabriel House. From April 2015 SHOT have been in control of the access arrangements for this project. The accommodation is funded through Housing Benefit and a small contribution from Exeter City Council. The ability to access the project immediately is also being linked to a move towards the inclusion of evening outreach work. This will enable the team to offer accommodation to some rough sleepers on the spot. This will be especially useful for those new to rough sleeping to provide an intervention before they enter into the rough sleeping community. Unfortunately this resource is not sufficient for all of those sleeping rough and only those with low support needs would be suitable for the communal nature of the project.

- **Joint work with the Police to reduce impact of NPS** – Whilst not solely a problem for the homeless population, the use of NPS or substances often referred to as ‘legal highs’ has had a significant impact on the sustainability of accommodation and engagement in support across homelessness services. Exeter City Council has worked in partnership with the Police to combat the sale of NPS and has seen 2 shops closed and other businesses voluntarily cease trading in the substances. There are close workings in sharing intelligence and specialist training is being delivered this month for front line workers to raise awareness and understanding of the impacts as well as introducing harm reduction processes.

Next Steps

The circumstances around this agenda change regularly. The issue of clients with Complex Needs is being picked up nationally with a new government consultation being released. The following projects give an overview of further development in this area expected in the next 6 months.

- **Redesign of SHOT** – The contract with SHOT has come to an end and a transitional arrangement has been put in place pending a new tender. A new service design is being drawn up with intention to discuss with wider statutory partners before moving to commissioning to align services where possible.
- **Eastern Hub** – As the data from the first year of Devon County Council’s commissioned homeless prevention services has been completed a review of arrangements at the Eastern Hub meeting is due. This will enable the partnership to look at any gaps in current services to determine a way forward. Whilst there is no additional finance available the contracting circumstances are sufficient to allow delivery arrangements to be flexible to meet local needs. This gives an opportunity to change some of the accommodation options to which support is connected and therefore present a greater choice in the options to meet complex needs.
- **Exeter Engagement Hub** – Exeter CVS led a successful partnership bid for the department of Health / Public Health England capital funds. They were awarded in excess of £400k to develop a health and wellbeing hub at Wat Tyler House. The project will see the Clock Tower GP Surgery; parts of probation services and a collection of voluntary agencies come together in one building to allow for a more holistic approach to vulnerable individuals to be formed. It is envisaged that SHOT will have a clear presence at the Hub. Exeter City Council is currently looking at how services delivered to the homeless and those in financial need can be aligned to the project.
- **Homelessness Strategy** – Over the summer of 2015 Exeter City Council will be developing its strategy for tackling homelessness. This will bring together relevant stakeholders to set out a combined vision for the future.

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Exeter City Council