

## EXETER BOARD

15 JANUARY 2015

### ROUGH SLEEPERS IN EXETER

The rough sleeper count in November 2014, found there to be a 48% increase in the number of homeless people living on the streets of Exeter. The breakdown of the figures, together with possible reasons for the increase in numbers, is set out below:

The total number of homeless people sleeping on the streets was counted at 34. What we know about these individuals is:

- 1 is under the age of 25
- 5 are over the age of 50
- 1 is over the age of 70
- 2 out of 34 are Polish; the rest are believed to be from the UK
- 7 out of the 34 were unknown to Street Homeless Outreach Team
- 5 were first contacts at the start of the week
- Over 50% had a local connection to Exeter
- 2 were females (1 was part of a couple)
- 10 are believed to have enduring mental health issues
- 7 have been out for longer than 1 year
- 2 have been out for over 5 years
- 6 have Alcohol Issues
- 2 predominately have issues with legal high use
- 7 indicated or are known to be heroin users and a further 3 are believed to be using. However, there is evidence that heroin users have also been using Legal Highs
- 10 show no interest in coming in doors and are entrenched in rough sleeping
- 11 have been identified as needing self contained accommodation although this maybe difficult as some will have very high support needs.

#### **Possible Causes for the Increase in Numbers of Rough Sleepers in Exeter**

1. Increases in rough sleeping are on the rise across the country. In Devon, Mid Devon's number of rough sleepers has increased from nil to 4, East Devon's has increased from 5 to 6 and Torbay's has increased from 5 to 15.
2. It is becoming more challenging to work with some rough sleepers and the Street Homeless Outreach Team are finding it more difficult as they are seeing an increase in chaotic behaviour. Some of this behaviour can be linked to unmanaged substance misuse and mental health problems. Reductions and changes in service provision and a lack of outreach support in terms of health, mental health and substance misuse workers, is often resulting in non engagement by clients who are expected to attend the services rather than the services coming to them.
3. Changes in the commissioning of services by Devon County Council (DCC) has meant that there is only one property (Gabriel House) which is capable of supporting and accommodating clients with complex needs. If this accommodation does not prove successful for the client or if there is no available room at Gabriel House, there is no other alternative. There is a substantial amount of available hours in the floating support element of the contract that has been commissioned. Some of these hours are being used with the outreach team to assist people on the streets but detailed recovery work cannot take place without some form of accommodation and equally, many assessments such as the need for social care services are often restricted until accommodation is

found. Exeter City Council's (ECC's) ability to input into the design of services to be commissioned was limited as we were a part of a sub contracting bid.

4. The loss of the Esther project for vulnerable females has led to a change in the gender make up in services and especially Gabriel House. Across all the services, 22 females have been accommodation since April, 15 of which are still accommodated across BCHA services.
5. Homeless numbers have generally increased and there are more people in need of accommodation and support. In the last quarter alone (July to September 2014) SHOT has opened 71 cases with 84% of those deemed to have complex needs, 66% had a primary support need for substance misuse (51% of these cases stating NPS (Legal High) as primary substance). 65% had Local Connection to Exeter, East Devon 20%, Mid Devon 3% North Devon 3 %. 83% are Male, 17% Female.
6. 11 rough sleepers have identified that they will only leave the streets if offered self contained accommodation. This would be at great risk to the City Council in terms of financial loss, anti social behaviour and potential risk to staff that would need to try and manage the behaviour. Whilst potentially there is a possibility for a very small pilot this is not a viable solution for the numbers on the street.

## **Solutions**

1. Exeter along with East Devon, Mid Devon, Teignbridge and Torbay have been successful in bidding for Single Homeless Fund funding which will assist this client group over the next year. Renewed efforts around the Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) approach will focus on encouraging agencies to come together and resolve individual's circumstances rather than them falling between the cracks.
2. Traditionally, Exeter does not have as robust an approach towards rough sleepers as other areas. In order to combat rough sleeping, partners need to ensure that there is a balance between an approach that offers support but is clear that the choice to live on the streets in Exeter is not an acceptable. The City Council intends to work closer with the Police to deal with chaotic behaviour where it is deemed anti social.
3. With continued reductions in public funding, there is little chance of significant increased investment in this area. Therefore it is vital that parties (including the voluntary sector) work closer together with the resources we do have to provide a coherent response to the increase and enable flexibility in approach in order to combat it and turn it around.
4. The services based in Exeter and funded through DCC are not just for Exeter Residents. They are for clients in need in the Eastern Area of Devon which includes Exeter, East Devon and Mid Devon. These services are part of the Eastern Hub. Unfortunately the Hub is not functioning as effectively as is possible. There is an expectation on the City Council to manage the relationships within the contracts, to collate and review data and thereafter make comment on changes needed. In practice, the City Council does not have the capacity to do this nor the contractual relationship with the providers to require the data to be shared. DCC has indicated that there is no available funding for this.
5. There has been additional funds released by DCC to assist in Winter Provision. For the future, the City Council and the Hub hopes to be consulted prior to the distribution of these funds to ensure that the funding meets local needs and maximises the opportunity for a positive impact.

**Nicola Forsdyke, Housing Needs Manager**

**Exeter City Council**