

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – COMMUNITY

16 JANUARY 2007

HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY – ROUGH SLEEPING

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Members of the work undertaken by the Street Homeless Outreach Team (SHOT) to provide help, advice and assistance to rough sleepers in the City.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 At the meeting of this committee on the 5 September 2006 Members requested a report outlining the work of the SHOT team and giving an indication of the numbers of clients they have seen and the outcomes they have achieved.
- 2.2 The Street Homeless Outreach team have been operating within the Exeter (now Devon) Primary Care Trust (Public Health Directorate) since September 2002. The value of this team sitting within the PCT is that rough sleeping is viewed as a health problem and not just a social problem or one that is dealt with by the Criminal Justice system via anti-social behaviour policies.

3. GENERAL OVERVIEW OF SHOT

- 3.1 The SHOT Team comprises:

- **Manager** – employed by Devon PCT Public Health Directorate. This is a strategic role with many functions including responsibility for the management and direction of Outreach Services for the City of Exeter.
- **Team Leader** – Employed by Drug and Alcohol Services (DAT) – Responsible for day-to-day operation of the team as well as supervising drug intervention work. The team leader also carries a case load of clients with alcohol issues as there is currently very limited funding for this work available.
- **Outreach/ Housing Support Workers (x2)** – employed by Carr Comm, a specialist support provider funded by supporting people. These workers duties include contact and assessment of all new rough sleepers, referrals into accommodation signposting to other relevant services, relocation on clients without local connection and working with a caseload of clients to enable them to sustain their tenancies once accommodated.
- **Outreach Drugs Worker** – Employed by DAT - responsibilities are to work with those clients who are difficult to engage and assist them into mainstream drug treatment services.
- **Admin Support Worker** – Employed by Devon PCT. This is a part time post to assist the team with all admin duties including monitoring.

- 3.2 The aims and objectives of the service are;
- To reduce the negative impact that rough sleeping/ substance use has on a person's life
 - To be an excellent resource for other partnership agencies
 - To be accessible to both clients and other agencies
 - To be responsive, flexible and creative
 - To promote best practice
 - To provide a comprehensive service to the client that is transparent, honest and empowering.
- 3.3 To help meet these objectives the team undertake the following operations:
- 3.4 **Contact and Assessment of New Rough sleepers:** The team undertake early morning outreach (6.00am – 9.00am) on three mornings each week and one later morning (9.30am – 12.30pm) outreach sessions twice a week. Members of the team are also available at the St Petrock's day centre three mornings per week and at the Big Issue offices one afternoon a week.
- 3.5 During initial contact the team will establish if the client has a local connection to Exeter and explain that there are limited resources in the City in terms of accommodation. If the client has a local connection then the team will assess the client's needs and risks and make referrals to the appropriate accommodation for them.
- 3.6 If the client has no local connection then the team will try to establish whether the client could access accommodation in another part of the country. If they can they will offer to fund a train or bus ticket for them to get there. The client will be informed that if they return to Exeter within six months without good cause they will not receive a service in the City for another six months.
- 3.7 **Prioritising Clients for Accommodation:** SHOT are the sole referrers for Gabriel House, Esther Community (for rough sleeping clients) and the Bridge project (a supported housing project for rough sleepers operated by Signpost Core and Bournemouth Churches Housing Association). SHOT then manage the waiting lists for these projects and prioritise clients for vacancies as they arise. Issues such as the vulnerability of the client and local connection are taken into consideration. This process ensures that those most in need get accommodated first.
- 3.8 **Promotion of Multi Agency Working:** SHOT run a client centred service and where possible and appropriate bring both voluntary and statutory agencies together to devise joint support plans. This is very effective especially for those clients with multiple or complex needs which make finding accommodation difficult.
- 3.9 **Monitoring:** Exeter City Council has a responsibility to undertake one or two street counts per year using a methodology devised by central government. These counts provide a snapshot of rough sleeping on one night of the year only. However, weekly outreach and regular 'hotspot counts' show that the number of rough sleepers tends to fluctuate depending on the time of year.

4. SPECIALIST SERVICES

Multi-agency working

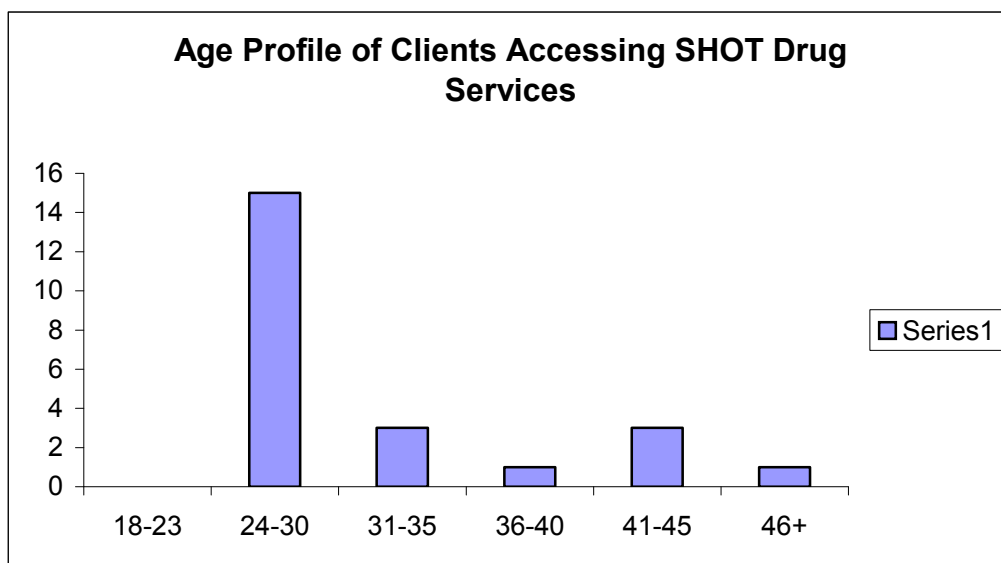
- 4.1 As a multi-disciplinary team SHOT has been well placed to promote a more holistic and integrated approach to working with homeless clients. It is accepted that most of these clients have complex needs; a combination of substance misuse, learning difficulties, mental health problems, behavioural difficulties, offending behaviour, physical health problems etc. Therefore agencies need to coordinate their responses. Not only does this enable the client to progress by

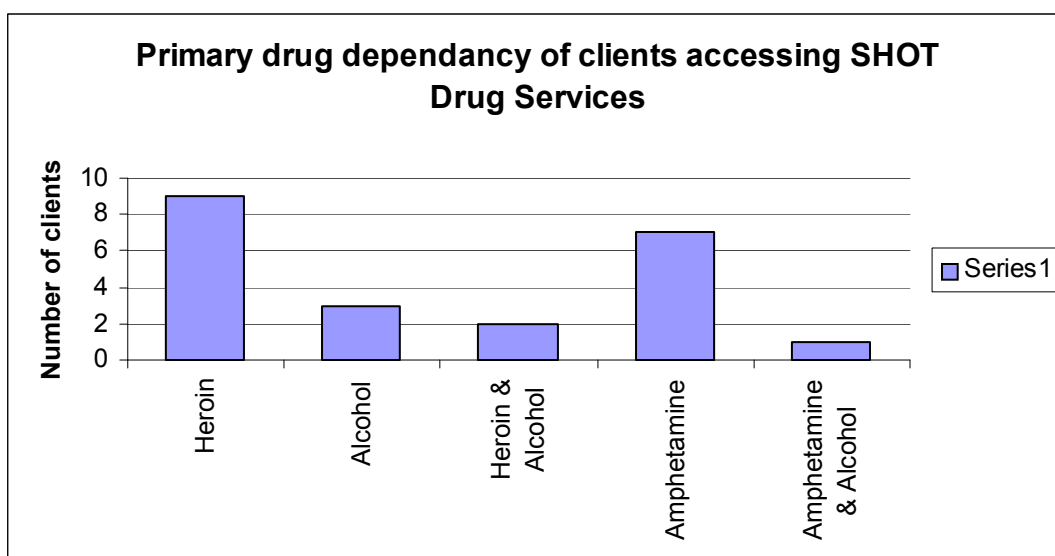
providing them with a robust support package but is cost effective as it prevents the duplication of work by various agencies.

- 4.2 SHOT have devised the Delta System for working with clients who present with complex needs. For each client, there should be allocated a Case Co-ordinator. This will be whoever has the most appropriate role to play; Community Psychiatric Nurse, Substance Misuse Worker etc. In cases where there is no statutory involvement, SHOT will take the coordinating role. This may involve arranging multi-agency meetings, preparing care/support plans, referral to agencies, completing risk assessments etc. A Multi Agency Meeting is called and an action plan is drawn up by the various agencies agreeing to meet the aspects of the clients care/support needs. SHOT then oversee this plan ensuring each agency is playing their part, the plan is then reviewed regularly and of course the client is given the opportunity to fully participate in this process.

Substance Misuse

- 4.3 Traditionally homeless clients have been excluded from drug services because their lack of address and chaotic lifestyles have made it difficult for them to make appointments. Many clients have a long history of substance misuse (including alcohol) and failure in drug treatment. SHOT has worked in partnership with a number of specialist agencies to ensure that some of the most difficult to engage clients can access information, advice and support. Since September 2002, SHOT Drugs Workers have assessed 394 clients, key working 81 of them and referring the others to other services.
- 4.4 The SHOT Manager has also worked with accommodation providers, offering them training and support so that they better understand the needs of clients with substance misuse issues and feel confident managing them within the law.
- 4.5 The SHOT manager has worked closely with Shilhay Community to develop a special part of the Gabriel Hostel where clients can stay and be helped to address their substance use issues. This unit will come on line by the end of 2006.
- 4.6 The graphs below show the age group of clients accessing SHOT team drugs services and the types of drugs they are commonly using. It can be seen that the majority of clients fall within the 24-30 year old age group:





5. REDUCING ROUGH SLEEPING

5.1 The SHOT Team was set up initially as part of the Governments initiative to reduce rough sleeping by two thirds nationwide. This target was achieved in Exeter by 2002 and the SHOT team were tasked with ensuring that numbers did not rise again. The Government target is that there should be 9 or fewer rough sleepers in the city. This target is assessed via 2 annual street counts (Spring and Autumn) where SHOT team members and various volunteers cover the whole of the city counting the number of rough sleepers bedded down. The count starts at midnight and finishes when all the areas of the city are covered (this includes Exeter Services and all along the River Exe). Since Autumn 2003 these counts have recorded 9 or fewer rough sleepers. For the first time in November 2006 this number was exceeded with 10 recorded.

5.2 Despite these low numbers Exeter continues to attract a high number of transient homeless people and the SHOT team work hard to keep rough sleeping numbers low. Last year the team made contact with 265 individuals, 229 were male and 39 female, of these 138 had no local connection to Exeter and 27 were released from HMP Exeter with no accommodation.

5.3 Outcomes

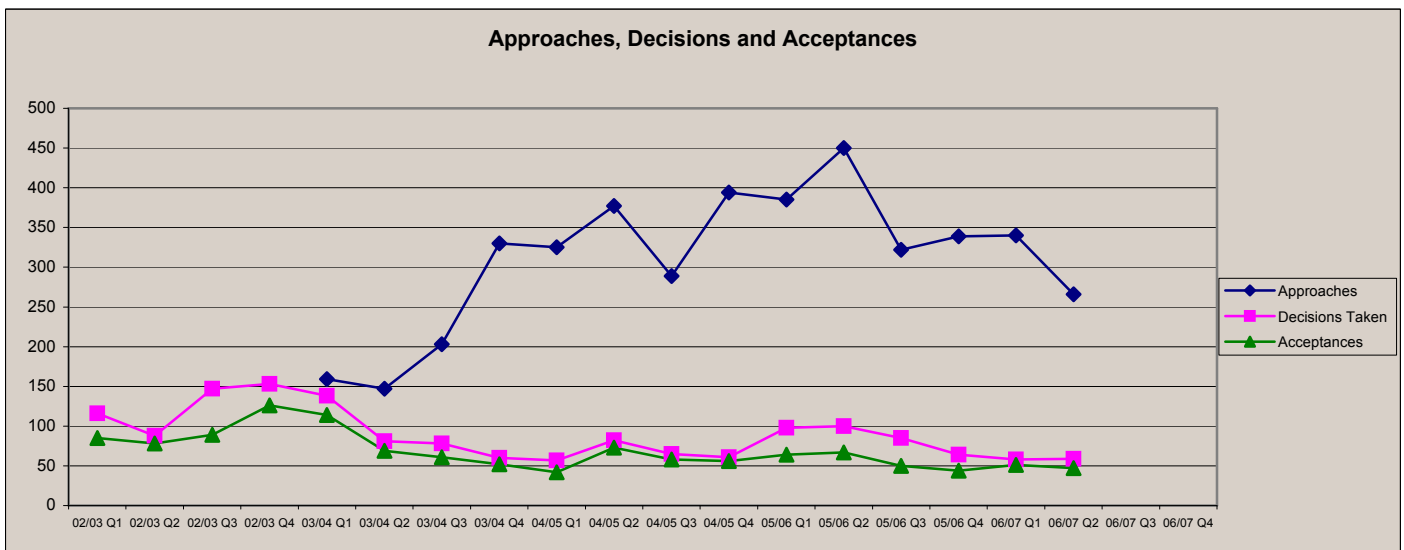
Unknown/ disappeared	93
Returned to Prison	7
Relocated	64
Accommodated – Gabriel House	43
Accommodated – Esther Community	14
Accommodated – Bridge project	7
Accommodated – other	37

6. GENERAL HOMELSSNESS STATISTICS

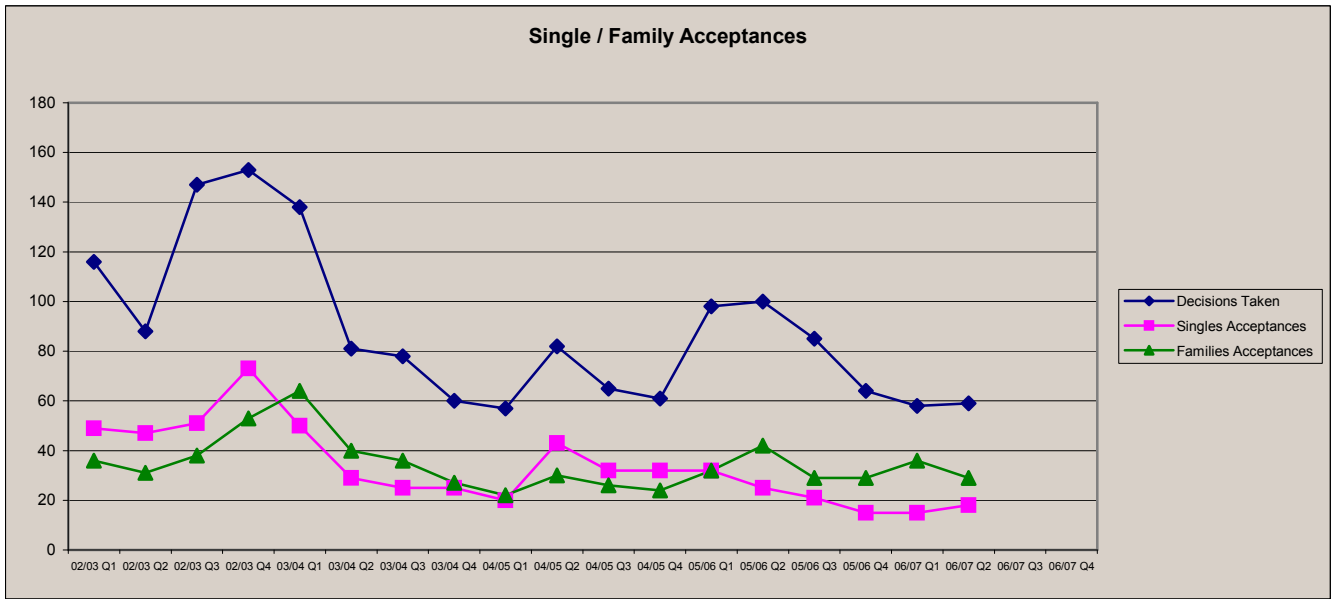
6.1 At Scrutiny Committee - Community on the 7 November 2006, Members requested a range of historic information on general homelessness within the City. The following graphs show a range of statistical information dating from the 1 April 2002 by each quarter and reflect the work undertaken by the Council's Homelessness and Housing Advice team.

6.2 **Approaches Decisions and Acceptances:** This graph demonstrates the huge increase in approaches the service has received over the reporting period. This ranges from a low of 150 new approaches in Quarter 2 of 2003/04 to a high of 450 new approaches in Quarter 2 of 2005/06. Many of these new approaches are related to an increase in the lack of affordable accommodation within the City both for sale and for rent. Indeed, many landlords during this time sought to capitalise on their assets and dispose of properties in their ownership resulting in more properties being re-possessed. However, there has also been a large increase in the number of parents/friends/relatives who are no longer willing to accommodate their children or relatives.

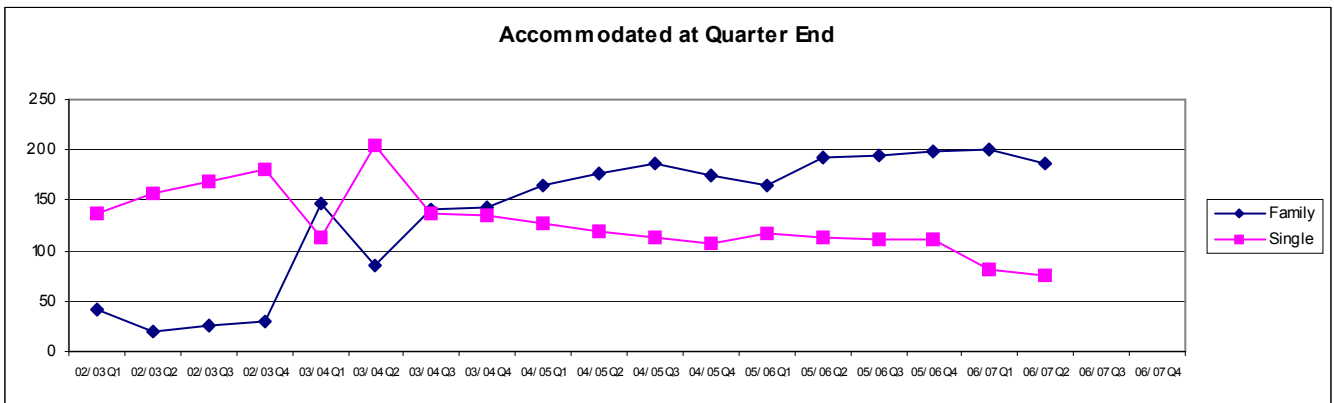
6.3 Despite these increases the graph also demonstrates that the number of homeless applications taken and the number of people formally accepted has decreased over the same period. Indeed, in quarter 4 of 2002/03, 126 applicants were accepted as homeless. This has reduced to an average of 50 applicants per quarter now. This success is mainly due to more robust prevention procedures being put into place together with the use of mediation and debt advice services, greater intervention with landlords, improved liaison with Housing Benefits and the provision of alternative housing options.



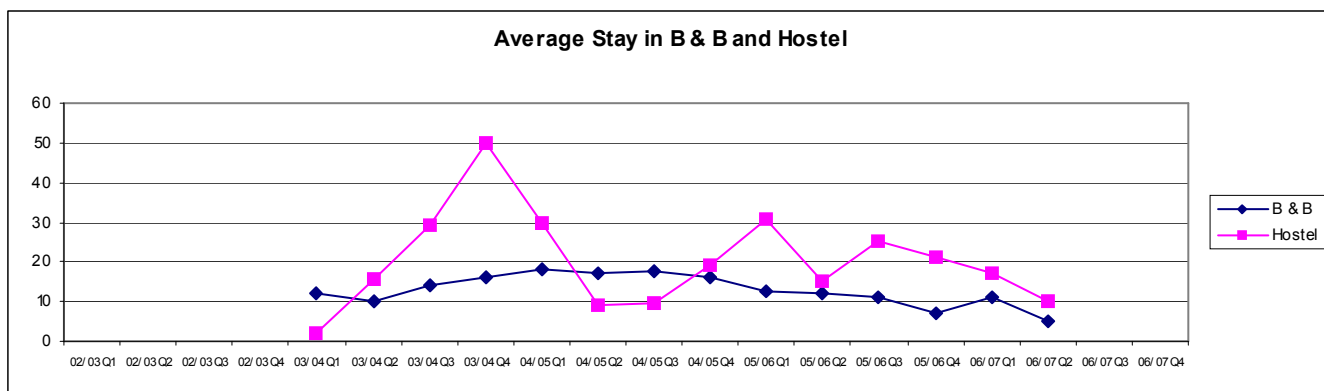
6.4 **Single and Family acceptances:** This graph shows the split in accepted homeless applicants between single people and families. Once again the trend is clearly downwards. However, it can be seen the number of single homeless acceptances rose dramatically in 2002/03 as the new Homelessness Act 2002 was implemented making a wider range of clients eligible for support. It has been in this area where we have had the most success by providing intervention services early within the process and preventing homeless before it occurs. Using the full range of supported housing accommodation within the City has also contributed to this success.



6.5 **Accommodated at the end of the quarter:** This graph shows the total number of homeless applicants accommodated by the Council at the end of each quarter. Accommodation could range from bed and breakfast, private sector leased properties, contracted supported accommodation and Council or housing association stock used as temporary accommodation. These figures represent all homeless cases that are accommodated and include those who have yet to receive a formal decision pending an investigation.



6.6 **Average stay in Bed and Breakfast and Hostel accommodation (BVPI 183 a & b):** This graph shows the average length of time (in weeks) homeless applicants have spent in either bed and breakfast accommodation or hostel accommodation provided by the Council. There has been a steady decrease in these indicators as those long-term homeless applicants are housed through the Home Choice system. However, because our hostel accommodation is mainly specialist supported housing for clients who are unable to live independently without intensive support this figure is very difficult to reduce as people are only 'moved on' when they are ready to do so. Consequently, some vulnerable clients could be placed in supported accommodation for up to two years.



7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The SHOT team has successfully worked in partnership with agencies across the City to provide a coordinated response to tackle rough sleeping or street homelessness. These agencies include the Clock Tower Surgery, Community Mental Health Team, DAT, Addaction, Devon Ambulance service, A&E, Exeter City Council, Devon and Cornwall Probation Service, Supporting People, Exeter Shilhay Community, Esther Community, Bournemouth Churches Housing Association, Exter Housing Action Group, Devon and Cornwall Police and St Petrocks.
- 7.2 As a result of the team's work the targets set by central government for reducing rough sleeping within the City continue to be met. However, the team face new challenges each week and it is essential that they remain focussed and assertive wherever possible. Exeter City Council will continue to support the SHOT both financially (from within its government homelessness grant) and strategically to ensure these targets continue to be met.
- 7.3 The additional resources placed into the Council's homelessness and housing advice team have contributed to the increasing success of this team. Despite increasing demand, we continue to prevent homelessness in the majority of cases and the number of people that we formally accept as homeless continues to decrease, together with the numbers of applicants placed into temporary accommodation. Such success should ensure our continued grant funding from the government that in both 2006/07 and 2007/08 totals some £670,000.

8. RECOMMENDED:

- 1) that Scrutiny Committee – Community note the report.

HEAD OF HOUSING SERVICES

Originator: Steve Warran

H:LP/ Committee/107SCC7
4.12.06

COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:

None