

Homelessness Task and Finish Group – Responses from representatives of bodies and activists

<u>Date Received</u>	<u>From</u>	<u>Comments</u>
26 August	Stephen Froom	<p>Homelessness-related services in Exeter</p> <p>Good day, I'm writing on behalf of Divrse Ltd. We as a company provide accommodation to Councils for vulnerable people in several areas of England, including Exeter.</p> <p>This is a letter of two parts.</p> <p><u>Part One</u> - a very generalised letter of observations and suggestions. Our experience over the last five years has been that difficulties arise when Housing teams at Councils are forever putting out fires so to speak, rather than being in a position to be more proactive and strategise over several years. This is especially prevalent in Exeter where the pressure on the Housing team is heavy. It's never easy, and there are complications in Exeter with it being a "desirable destination" for dislocated, disenfranchised people, plus the prison is in the City with ex-convicts being released and presenting as homeless, and it being a convenient centre for drug dealing - sucking in dealers and their customers from surrounding rural areas.</p> <p>As a very general observation, without going into the fine detail of the homelessness operations at the Council, we find things work best when needs can be identified and a mid-to-long-term shopping/order list can be put out to suppliers such as ourselves. Then we can provide fit-for-purpose properties at the right times and places. As you will be aware the property market is "hot" and moves quickly, so keeping up with it requires us to be nimble, with full clarity about what's needed.</p> <p>Homelessness is often seen as an ugly problem that everyone wishes would go away, but it needs to be taken more seriously, with real commitment from all parts of Local Government, Central Government, and community. The city will not benefit from keeping things the same.</p> <p>Backing for the Housing teams within the Council to help them provide longer term planning so they can do things in a more effective way is important - they need to be higher up the list of budgeting priorities if the situation is to be improved significantly. This is said from a close-up view and real respect for the highly valuable work done. These dedicated teams know what to do, but are forever juggling and scraping along with too few staff and limited funds while their challenges grow.</p>

		<p><u>Part Two</u> - a specific project that we may be able help bring to life would be a small wildlife-garden community (perhaps 12 units on 1-2 acres) with eco-build properties for homeless people to live in temporarily. Support can be based around polytunnel and outdoor gardening projects to provide useful year-round training and support in different aspects of sustainable food growing. The advantages of gardening as a therapeutic tool are well-documented. We have a local developer and architect who could provide the design expertise.</p> <p>Suitable sites would need to be identified and long term planning is needed, but this type of set-up makes a lasting difference to people's lives and reduces the number of people who end up being back on the streets and back in Council accommodation..</p>
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