



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16:35 to 18:00

15 January 2015

Present: Councillors Wright (chair) Maxwell (vice chair), Barker, Bogelein, Button (substitute for Ryan), Carlo, Galvin, Haynes, Herries, Howard, Manning, Packer and Woollard

Apologies: Councillor Ryan

1. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Review of challenges and responses to rough sleeping and homelessness in Norwich

(Councillor Waters, cabinet member for resources and Councillor Bremner, cabinet member for housing were present)

Dan Chadder, a student of the University of East Anglia presented a report to the committee on public perceptions of rough sleepers in Norwich. He took members through his findings and said that the individuals he had spoken to were generally positive about the work being carried out by charities but displayed less of an understanding of the work of the council in this regard. Perhaps this showed the need for a clearer dialogue between the council and those who are homeless. He said that the number of rough sleepers had risen from 6 in 2006 to 13 in 2014 but due to the nature of rough sleeping, these figures were only a snapshot. It was difficult to say whether these rough sleepers had come to Norwich from outlying areas to use services although anecdotal evidence suggested that this was the case for some rough sleepers.

Christine Spooner from Homeless Link gave the committee an overview of homelessness in the east of England and Norwich. She said that the public perception of what homeless people needed was very different from what they actually needed.

Rough sleeper numbers used to be recorded by central government with local authorities reporting an annual figure.

Issue surrounding homelessness and rough sleeping in Norwich were typical of those both in the Eastern region and nationally. Norwich had undertaken a lot of

preventative work such as reducing evictions, hostel move on services, and 'No second night out' which tried to meet needs of rough sleepers as soon as possible.

Agencies had become very adept at assessing needs and finding individual solutions, however, service users were presenting with increasingly complex needs which was a challenge.

In response to a member's question, Christine Spooner said that a lot of 'spend to save' work was being undertaken and that work on co-ordinating services would help to save money. The new Homeless Link manifesto had asked government to commit to five principles with a view to having a more strategic approach at a higher level.

She said that those with no recourse to public funds, including those with asylum status, were a very difficult group to help. Drug and alcohol services were open to everyone but language could be a barrier. Sometimes voluntary reconnection with an individual's home country was the best solution.

In response to a member's question, she said that hidden disabilities such as learning disabilities were sometimes a factor in homelessness and that the emphasis was on assessment of need on an individual basis, with the realisation that a hostel placement was not the best solution for all individuals.

A member commented that in the draft of the Greater Norwich Homeless Review, there seemed to be an increase in those who had been excluded from services. Christine Spooner said that complex needs, including behavioural issues, could be difficult to manage. A hostel was not the solution for everyone so a range of approaches were needed. A 'housing first' approach was being trialled in Norwich rather than a treatment first approach before being considered for housing.

The executive head of strategy, people and neighbourhoods presented the report and said that it was the culmination of many pieces of work undertaken by the scrutiny committee and officers in recent months.

Discussion ensued in which he responded to member's questions and comments. This included an explanation of 'Groundswell' which was an organisation that trained service users to have greater influence on services through a range of project work.

RESOLVED to:

- 1) commend the proactive approach of the council and its partners towards homelessness and that investment levels are maintained and increased where possible and that a specialist services continue to be available on the frontline
- 2) lobby against policies that detrimentally affect this client group who are suffering from mental health issues,
- 3) develop a report on the effect of cuts on mental health services on homeless people in Norwich and take this to the County Health Scrutiny Committee

- 4) further promote information on available services,
- 5) recommend the development of an accreditation scheme for services in Norwich,
- 6) support the proactive work to increase the percentage of people kept in their own homes,
- 7) continue to provide an individualised approach and ensure services to different groups are as accessible as possible,
- 8) explore with partners the plans for other solutions other than hostels, earning from the 'housing first', pilot
- 9) explore and develop with partners user opportunities to inform the work of the council's services for this client group,
- 10) ensure that an understanding of mental health issues underpins all work,
- 11) calculate the true value of preventative approaches to homelessness,
- 12) develop further protocols with other organisations on steps to take when dealing with the homeless and rough sleepers,
- 13) recommend that senior officers raise, through the Norfolk Chief Executives, the issue of cost sharing when Norwich works with homeless people from surrounding districts,
- 14) continue to treat people based on individual need,
- 15) continue to work with and assist partners in identifying additional support; and
- 16) For the scrutiny committee to carry out a review of the DWP sanctions with particular emphasis on the effects for the homeless and for officers to investigate who best to include in this scrutiny review, including inviting relevant politicians.

CHAIR