

Rough sleeping

December 2014

Context

Services

Challenges

Context

- Nationally rough sleeping has been on the increase. Since 2010, counts and estimates have taken place in each local authority in England. At our last count conducted on the 12th November 2014, 13 individuals were found bedded down and rough sleeping in Norwich. The previous year we saw 5 people.
- Over the last three years, the council commissioned CAPS outreach team has carried out over 1,500 assessments of individuals who are either threatened with, or are homeless.

Common reasons for homelessness:

- 1) Relationship breakdown
- 2) Eviction for arrears or ASB.
- 3) Eviction, friends or family
- 4) Leaving institutions (prison, hospital etc).

Local Context

- Norwich is the centre of a wide rural area and services are here. People from outlying districts will come into Norwich to access a wide variety of services that provide help for people who are sleeping rough. These services include: day centres, free food provision, substance misuse services, accommodation, statutory services such as mental health, general health services and emergency health care.
- There is the opportunity to make money through begging, particularly within the night-time economy.
- Drugs/legal highs are readily available in Norwich
- There is no local connection criteria placed on services.
- Of 13 rough sleepers seen on the recent rough sleeper count, 10 were new to Norwich.

The council's approach

- Pro-active. The council takes a pro-active approach through the employment of a specialist rough-sleeper co-ordinator who seeks to actively manage/co-ordinate rough sleeping and homeless services.
- An approach designed to minimize rough sleeping through intensive management of rough sleeping and of hostel bed spaces.
- Works closely with agencies to fulfil strategic role. (CAPS, City Reach etc) and ensure a co-ordinated approach to the issue.
- Co-ordinates the MARS (multi agency rough sleeper) group, ensuring a person based approach to resolving each individual rough-sleeper's situation.
- An approach based on meeting need rather than aspiration.
- Rough sleeper reporting via Homeless Link and website
- Has introduced innovations such as hostels eviction protocol, alternative giving campaign, reconnections, homeless services maps.
- Working on 'No second night out' and rough sleeper strategy.

What the council offers

Depends on individual's circumstances and needs.

- Hostel referral
- Reconnection
- Housing advice
- Statutory homeless application
- Rent deposits (limited external funding)
- Home Options
- Signposting to other services (health, social services)
- LEAP project
- Food vouchers, rough sleeping kits, homeless services maps.
- SWEP (severe weather emergency provision)
- Hostel move-on policy – route into social housing
- 'No second night out'.
- Personalisation for rough sleepers
- Projects such as MEAM, Housing First.

Hostel provision

- There are 260 hostel beds in Norwich, by far the greatest number in the region.
- The hostel system in Norwich provides a key service in finding temporary housing for the majority of people who find themselves homeless in the area (including those who are street homeless).
- Once a client has accessed the hostel system, usually through the direct access hostel at Bishopbridge House, support packages can be put in place and clients can move through the tiered hostel system. This system is managed through a weekly accommodation meeting chaired by the council's rough sleeper co-ordinator, to ensure that occupation of hostel beds is maximized.
- This council's Home Options policy contains a 'move-on' agreement enabling hostel clients that are deemed ready to maintain a tenancy to be awarded gold banding to enable a managed transition into social housing and a through-flow within the hostel system.

Voluntary provision

- Day centres (The Arc)
- 9 food kitchens/soup runs
- Big Issue foundation
- Faith groups
- Advice projects
- Substance misuse support
- Mental health support
- Specialist support (Matrix etc)
- Unregulated accommodation providers (Hope into Action).
- Street pastors
- Community first responders

Challenges

- Norwich is attractive to rough sleepers, providing services which may not be available in their local area.
- The majority of rough sleepers are new to Norwich. These individuals are reluctant to be reconnected to their home districts.
- There is currently an entrenched group of rough sleepers who refuse offers of accommodation and support.
- Most rough sleepers have dual or triple diagnosis problems such as mental health, physical health, and alcohol and substance misuse issues. There is limited access to suitable move on accommodation for people with multiple or complex needs
- Whilst there are some good examples of partnership working (GP practices, police and accommodation providers), work is still needed to improve partnership working with mental health services and probation.

Challenges continued

- Norwich is the regional shopping and nightlife capital, providing begging opportunities which attract rough sleepers and transient individuals. Public perceptions about homelessness in Norwich need to be challenged in order to address this issue, as per our 2013 'Alternative Giving' scheme to expose the link between giving to beggars and funding substance misuse
- Rough sleepers who do not meet the threshold of mental health services/ adult social services/learning disabilities team meaning that people with lower level but significant needs can't access them.
- People with low support needs are using provision they do not need.
- Once someone comes off the street and gain a pathway into housing there isn't enough specialist support to provide ongoing help
- Youth homelessness appears to be increasing.
- People facing exclusion from services (through their own actions) will continue to rough sleep
- Effects of cuts to other services (mental health, floating support).