

EAST STAFFORDSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL

SCRUTINY (ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH AND WELL BEING) COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting of the Scrutiny (Environment, Health and Well Being) Committee in the Coltman VC Room, Town Hall Burton upon Trent on Monday 25th July 2022.

Present:

Councillors Mrs J A Killoran (Vice-Chairman), L Beech, H Hall, Mrs L Walker and P Walker.

Officers Present:

Sal Khan (Head of Service), the Communities, Open Spaces and Facilities Manager, the Housing Strategy Manager and the Senior Democratic Services Officer.

Also present:

Councillor R Faulkner (Deputy Leader (Environment and Climate Change)), and Paul Laffey (YMCA).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs P L Ackroyd, Mrs V J Gould and C Wileman.

13/22 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations at the commencement of the meeting.

14/22 **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business for consideration at the meeting.

15/22 **MINUTES**

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 23rd June 2022 be approved and signed as a correct record.

Voting concerning the above decision was as follows:

Those voting for the motion	Those voting against	Those abstaining
Councillor L Beech		Councillor Mrs L Walker
Councillor H Hall		
Councillor Mrs J Killoran		
Councillor P Walker		

The Council's Housing Strategy Manager and a representative from Burton YMCA had been invited and attended the meeting to give a short presentation on their work regarding homelessness.

It was also noted that a representative from Burton Hope was invited to the meeting but was unable to attend due to COVID.

Brett Atkinson, the Housing Strategy Manager updated Members on the definition of rough sleeping, they are those people sitting next to their bedding on the streets or in open air, and in buildings not design for habitation. Rough sleeping does not include people in hostels, hotels, squatters or on canal boats etc. and affects single and couples people more than it would dependants of any kind.

The Council's approach to rough sleeping was to react when the homelessness team receive a call from a person, saying they are homeless and what can you do for me. On other occasions the housing team may receive a report that there was someone sleeping rough. A member of the housing team would be despatched to make contact with them to find out their circumstances and identify what the team can do for them. The person is then assessed to establish whether they are homeless and try to make verifications. If that person had been asked by a parent/care giver to leave, depending on the circumstances it may be appropriate to speak to the parent, and assess if it was a moment of hot tempers or is the person genuinely homeless. If the outcome of the assessment decides that the person was homeless they would be offered accommodation.

A homeless application is booked in for them and a formal appointment is made to go through all their details. They are normally put in touch with a 'navigator' at this time. A 'navigator' is a full time post who meets up with people in temporary accommodation and assists them with their needs re benefits claim, register at a GP surgery etc. and everything that they would need to secure a route out of temporary accommodation.

The Housing Strategy Manager outlined the services which were funded directly by the Council:

- Rough Sleepers 'sweep' on a fortnightly basis
- React proactively to reports of rough sleeping usually within 48 hours or less
- An emergency 3 bed space at the reconnect building for first night accommodation with the support of the YMCA
- A 'Navigator' service
- Housing First provided by Trent and Dove Housing for those people who have exhausted all their options through repeated evictions and people who have nowhere else to go. The funding for this project is secured by the Government's Levelling Up fund introduced in 2019.

He also gave a brief outline of the timescale for the Council's Outreach service which started in 2019, Housing First in 2019, the Navigator service in 2019 and the emergency bed service in 2020 which was funded by dedicated money from the COVID response fund. The data showed positive results which demonstrated the effectiveness of those interventions since the services had been brought in.

The Stage two project also provided by the Council was to assist people in moving on from Stage one. This project are properties that are purchased by monies from the Levelling up Fund, with a 30 year commitment, which took people out of shared accommodation, by giving them their own four walls and a wraparound support at a lower level, with less interventions than those people at stage one.

It was noted that all funding that the Council had received from the Government was based on the success of the Council's good work with homelessness.

An opportunity for questions followed.

Members also received a presentation from Paul Laffey, Representative from Burton YMCA.

He reported that he had been the leader of the local YMCA for the past 23 years in Burton. He had been involved in delivering some form of housing, initially in the early years it was for people age 16 – 25 years but in the last 12 years the YMCA opened up 31 units at St James Court to house adult homeless individuals. That accommodation primarily for people who have a history of being homeless or have found it difficult to hold a tenancy long term. There are two other units operated by the YMCA, 20 units situated at George William House in Byrkley Street which house 40 young people 18 – 35 years, and a further 20 units at Milton House, Milton Street/Cross Street housing adults 18 – 64 years.

In addition to the housing, the YMCA run a range of services supporting those individuals and the wider community. They run an emergency food bank which have been going for over 20 years. He reported that so far this year the demand for food parcels had increased by around 82% on this time last year. From January to June 2022 the YMCA had distributed 1625 emergency food parcels with the help of voluntary efforts, donations from churches, businesses and local retailers. The supermarkets also work closely with them. It was recorded that last month had 61 people received food parcels that has never visited a food bank before. Mr Laffey informed the Committee that he had a great team of staff and volunteers who meet and greet people that visit the bank. These visiting people not only receive a food parcel but the staff and volunteer also offer any additional help that they may need.

The YMCA also run a Family Mediation Service, which is all about homelessness prevention, funded by the Henry Smith Foundation based in London. They have been involved with a number of schools, particularly with Paget School in training up their sixth formers' to assist those young people to mediate between friendship and family disputes. This had been a significant programme and had prevented many young people from entering homelessness services. The YMCA work with the family to start communication effectively.

The YMCA run a Counselling service in-house for the residents and this is in addition to the services that the Borough Council will pay for to help deliver their Outreach work.

A three emergency bed units are available to the YMCA. There has been a good take up of this service, but they have seen a trend where a number of entrenched homeless people and those sleeping on the streets have significantly reduced in the last few years. One of the benefit of the pandemic was the successful strategic approach with the Borough Council and other agencies for getting people off the street and never returning, which is good news for the borough. This year to date the YMCA have helped 25 people. The service is overseen by two YMCA staff and 6 dedicated volunteers supporting the service. The target for the response is 48 hours at the site of a homeless person but they usually respond within 24 hours and sometimes sooner.

The Navigation service have engaged with 62 people at present to date from January 2022. The service have seen a number of rough sleepers, who have been rough sleeping or have a history of rough sleeping, which have now moved into secure accommodation, and staff are working to maintain those tenancies. An example of issues that staff deal with is sourcing identification so they work closely with the client to get their birth certificates sorted for them.

Mr Laffey reported that The YMCA has had three clients repatriated and allow them to return to their home countries, where it has been appropriate to do so.

There are 19 clients currently supported to maintain tenancy where they are vulnerable to losing it in the past.

The emergency bed spaces are occupied by Connect which are pretty much full continually. There are 52 clients through that emergency bed facility since the beginning of the year. Once a vacancy arise, housing options quickly find someone to move into that accommodation.

The YMCA also offers a complex need service, where they have a specialist team of staff dealing with mental health and childhood trauma. Many of the issues that comes out once people start to settle and build confidence with staff and getting to know the team are issues which led them to repeated homelessness. Mr Laffey informed the Committee that the YMCA's objective was to stop that happening. The worker also deals with psychological mental health issues and she has a caseload of 15 clients.

In addition the YMCA run a Chaplaincy support service where they employ a chaplain offering pastoral support to all those clients and she is supported by a team of volunteers.

The YMCA have 4 furniture shops, and particularly during lock-down they were able to help 28 families to relocate after domestic violence. Mr Laffey reported that they could not do what they did without the assistance of volunteers and they are involved in all areas of the YMCA's programmes. On average they have 60 volunteers working within the charity.

Mr Laffey requested that it be noted that on 27th October 2022 it would be YMCA's 135th anniversary, and last year in England and Wales they were voted YMCA of the year, showing predominantly how they deliver the services during lockdown.

He also mentioned that the 14th annual 'Sleepout' would be on 28th October 2022 to which anyone was invited to join them, where the YMCA could raise unrestricted funds to help to deliver those services.

Mr John Anderson, Representative from Burton Hope, attended an informal meeting of the Committee to give a brief presentation of their work on 8th August 2022. This was because Mr Anderson had COVID at the time of the meeting on 25th July 2022.

He began the meeting by saying that he was the Chairman and Support Coordinator with CIO Foundation Charity, Burton Hope. Burton Hope was founded in August 2017, set up to fill in gaps in services in Burton, after photos of himself were published, showing the squalor Burton rough sleepers were living in. The photos went viral with most of the national and local press used the headline "Shocking Conditions".

During the 2017 Rough Sleeper's count, Burton Hope put forward two teams of three volunteers, with the Council's housing manager providing maps. The teams were split, first team covered seven areas, Derby Road west, the Trent to the east, Horninglow Street North and St Peters bridge to the South. 18 rough sleepers were found. 16 of the 18 rough sleepers found that they were recorded by Homeless Link despite their employees being out with their teams. The actual search time being little more than 2 hours. The other team that participated took on six other areas of East Staffordshire and found no rough sleepers. Mr Anderson felt that the method used for the count in East Staffordshire was neither accurate or appropriate, as their searches relied upon a small amount of people searching the whole of East Staffordshire in a short space of time. Mr Anderson believed that the estimated counts relying on organisations completing names

and details of rough sleepers would be far more accurate, since local organisations dealt with the rough sleepers daily. He reported that he had personally challenged the method used by East Staffordshire but was told that it would upset the graph. He also mentioned that there were quite a few organisations that were in disagreement with this method, and this needs to change.

Since then Burton Hope had refused to be involved in this method of count, but has participated by sending the Housing Manager a list of known persons that are rough sleeping along with various other details. In 2018/2019 this list contained over 40 names, a far cry from the published figures at that time.

He reported that Burton and East Staffordshire Homeless Partnership was set up by East Staffordshire Borough Council Housing Manager with assistance from Homelesslink, to encourage organisations to collaborate. Only the YMCA and Burton Hope would attend these meetings in the early days but he was happy to report that this eventually grew. A card sized flyer was produced to enable homeless people to easily what assistance was available to them. It was noted that there has not been a meeting for some time now as according to the ESBC Housing Manager the rough sleeping situation had changed, but although Mr Anderson agreed that the rough sleeping situation had changed it had not gone away.

In Spring of 2020 the Everyone In scheme was launched because of COVID19 pandemic, and it was good that the Government had finally committed to get rough sleepers off the street. Entrenched rough sleepers were put into temporary accommodation and navigated into supported accommodation, which was very expensive. It was often a small room in a HMO property with shared facilities, and Mr Anderson requested the committee's thoughts about 'Is a person in temporary/supported accommodation still a homeless person'? Supported accommodation varies a lot, some support is as little as one hour per week. The cost of a small room and shared facilities cost the tax payer about £225 to £300 per week. He reported that Burton Hope delivers food parcels to these properties and conflicts are common practice like bullying and their food and money taken from them. He also mentioned that supported accommodation was very lucrative for the landlords which is not effective for the service user.

Since 2020, Mr Anderson agreed that the numbers of rough sleepers had reduced drastically and most of the time a call to Housing Options would get a person into temporary accommodation, often the Queens Hotel, supported accommodation or failing those into one of the emergency beds available.

He reported that some rough sleepers Burton Hope come into contact with are people with mental health, addiction issues, broken relationships and illegal evictions and help through Housing Options are more effective these days. Normally a call during office hours or to the out of hours' number would get a person into some kind of accommodation very quickly, providing they can prove local connection. A major issue that comes up was domestic abuse victims, who have to leave their homes to escape the perpetrator. Victims are encouraged to request help from Housing Options, and they will almost always send them to another town, often Birmingham, which could be quite frightening for the abused victim. Mr Anderson requested that the Scrutiny Committee gave consideration to recommendations for those people not being moved to Birmingham as it can be quite petrifying for the victims.

Mr Anderson informed the Committee that the rough sleeper situation was much better now because Burton Hope do not see a large number of people at the Washlands in tents or in shop doorways in the town. There are however still homeless people living with friends, sofa surfing which do not show up on any surveys, they are still homeless and their sleeping conditions are often rough. He suggested that these number should be recorded and assistance extended to them.

Mr Anderson put forward the following recommendations, and advised the Committee that the Burton Hope Board would be happy to get involved in any changes to improve the local situation.

1. To use housing association properties, at the usual cost, for support services independently rather than the current supported accommodation, although he is fully aware of the shortage of association housing at this time. He also suggested that the housing stock could be extended on brownfield land, near good employment, so the homeless could continue to live in the association homes.
2. Information signage should be posted in strategic locations on the Washlands and other places where rough sleepers tend to find themselves.
3. A list of local services should be regularly updated to account for changing circumstances.
4. Coors bailiffs on the Washlands could be introduced to carry business cards with simple useful information, not only for offences but for rough sleepers too. ESBC Grounds Maintenance staff could also be instructed to give feedback on rough sleepers too, and an email account for all members of the homeless organisation to report any new information.
5. The rough sleepers count needed to be by the estimated method which would be far more accurate.

Mr Anderson completed his presentation by saying that he was invited to tender for the East Staffs Outreach contract in 2020, and when he completed the form he could not do so because Burton Hope's charity financial turnover were not great enough. He continued to say that he had grave doubts about the effectiveness of the current methods used for rough sleepers outreach, because East Staffordshire is a huge area, so information from collaboration would improve the service immensely.

Generally Mr Anderson felt that more empathy were required as we often hear the words 'they wouldn't engage', most people that rough sleep have other issues and need a gentle approach. Some may be without their medication, have literacy and communication issues and English may not be their first language. He also stated that he had yet to find a rough sleeper that chose that life to be homeless.

17/22 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting would take place on Thursday 22nd September 2022.

NOTED.

Chairman