

Report for the Nottingham City Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Homelessness Prevention in Nottingham – Partnerships in strategy and delivery

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report has been developed to provide insight to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the partnership approach to homelessness prevention and response in Nottingham.
- 1.2 The report highlights the reason partnerships are important and then seeks to provide an overview of the city-wide strategic approach, including examples of what that looks like in practice and ongoing developments.

2 Why is partnership working important?

- 2.1 We know that one single issue does not cause homelessness. A complex mix of societal, circumstantial and personal factors determines risk of homelessness. These factors all interconnect, they cannot be easily separated and they are completely unique to the individual or household.
- 2.2 Homelessness occurs because someone is no longer able to remain in the accommodation that they were living in. However, the loss of accommodation is often just the technical result of other issues occurring, and it is these underlying issues which are actually the causation factors.

For example, if a household is facing eviction for rent arrears we need to ask a number of questions to determine the reason they got into arrears. Assessment needs to determine factors such as: Have they recently become unemployed? Are they in poverty or debt? Have they got sufficient life skills to manage their finances? Are they being abused or exploited? Are there issues with the property or landlord? What is the impact on the children? Have they got support needs that are not being addressed?

When we look at it this way it becomes clear that homelessness is not simply caused because someone has a problem with housing, and so housing alone will not provide an adequate solution to preventing it from happening.

It is therefore, the responsibility of all sectors to work together to help identify and address the issues causing homelessness so the situation can be prevented, or, if it is not possible to intervene to stop it from occurring, that it is resolved in a lasting and sustainable way.

- 2.3 The impact of homelessness is far reaching. Homelessness affects children's educational attainment and life chances. It has a negative effect on the health and wellbeing of the entire household – often exacerbating existing issues leading to unplanned hospital admissions and frequent use of emergency health services. Homelessness reduces a person's ability to obtain or maintain employment, it can lead or be a contributing factor to crime or anti-social behaviour.

It is therefore in everyone's interests to deliver a locally coordinated partnership approach involving organisations and service areas from across the public, private and community sectors to address the wide range of issues linked to the threat of homelessness.

- 2.4 Further information about the causes of homelessness can be found within the Nottingham Joint Strategic Needs Assessment chapter on [Homelessness](#).

3 Who needs to be involved?

- 3.1 Sectors who have a key role in homelessness prevention and response include:
- Housing (social and private)

- Health and Wellbeing
- Criminal justice and Community protection
- Children and Adults Social Care
- Welfare, Education and Employment
- Community, Faith and Voluntary sectors (including advice and support provision)

4 Strategic level partnerships

4.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 introduced a statutory requirement for local areas to produce a strategy setting out how they intend to work together to prevent homelessness. Since that time, in Nottingham there have been three 5-year multi-agency strategies. The most recent strategy ran from 2013 to 2018 and the new strategy for 2018-2023 is currently under development and will be released for consultation in mid-June.

4.2 Strategy development is led by Nottingham City Council and involves a multi-agency partnership of representatives from across the public, community and voluntary sectors. The Strategy Implementation Group (SIG) has worked together for the past 15 years, meeting monthly to oversee the production and implementation of the cities strategy. The group includes representation from various departments within NCC, Probation, Health, DWP, Social housing, private rented sector and multiple community sector providers of support, advice and accommodation.

Each year the group collectively conduct a comprehensive review of homelessness, utilising front line insight and data to determine the level of need, presenting issues and pressures and emerging trends. This then informs the recommendations for key areas of focus for the strategy and helps identify the type of activity we should be looking at delivering over its course (including review of commissioned services).

4.3 The emerging Homelessness Prevention Strategy puts a significant emphasis on a partnership approach. To maximise engagement, ownership and accountability for homelessness prevention, the new strategy includes a Homelessness Prevention Charter (Appendix A) which asks service areas across the public and voluntary sector to:

1. Sign up to the collective vision and set of values of the Charter
2. Set specific pledges from their organisations or service areas highlighting their commitment to contributing to homelessness prevention
3. Outline the activity that they can lead and participate in to deliver our homelessness prevention approach in the city

5 Cross-council partnerships and governance

5.1 A peak in homelessness in Autumn 2017 resulted in the introduction of a cross-council task group with senior officer leadership and under political scrutiny to develop and deliver a joined up council-wide plan of action to tackle the growing demand. The task group meets weekly to consider what short-term measures are necessary to address the increased demand as well as proposals for longer-term solutions. Delivery and accountability are recorded and tracked via a specific action plan, progress against which is reported on at each meeting.

5.2 Both the SIG and the cross-council task group are to be supported by a new governance structure, including an executive group of directors who will ensure accountability for delivery of activity and positive outcomes.

6 What does this look like in practice?

6.1 Positive cross-council partnership activity

In late 2017 an Evictions Prevention Protocol was developed and a process adopted to enable the early identification of households at risk of eviction from social housing because of rent arrears. A

Panel of officers from NCH, NCC Childrens Services, Housing Aid and NCC Revenue and Benefits was set up to case conference any household identified as at risk and assign a plan to support the household to reduce the likelihood of the eviction taking place.

6.2 **Strategy translating into cross sector activity**

Each year the SIG develops an extended Cold Weather Plan which sets out our local approach to protecting rough sleepers from cold weather during the winter months. The plan informs local people on how we intend to ensure identification, assessment, support and accommodation are available and accessible. Various measures are delivered under the coordination of the plan, including:

- Analysis of need – which over the past two years has led to release of additional funding for extra bedspaces and enhanced activity of the Framework Street Outreach Team
- An agreed sector-wide communications campaign which informs members of the public on how to get support if they see someone who looks to be street homeless
- The plan is a single access point for information on services that are available to help meet support needs (including free food provision, domestic violence helpline and contact details for the Wellbeing Hub)
- Led by Emmanuel House, the local Christian faith sector coordinate provision of the Winter Shelter and from last winter NCC worked with the Fire Service and the Red Cross to make available a sit-up service providing warmth and shelter when temperatures reach zero.

6.3 **Collaborative service design resulting in joined up service delivery**

In Summer 2017, NCC undertook a review of commissioned housing related support (including supported accommodation, rough sleeper reablement and independent living support services). The process included stakeholder engagement in scoping and designing of the services and service user participation in development of the service specification and designing and scoring of tender questions.

The resulting new independent living support services have been designed to flow directly from local authorities new requirement to produce a personalised housing plan for each household presenting in need of support. This means that there is a cohesive process between statutory assessment of need and delivery of support by community sector providers.

6.4 **Opportunity Nottingham – integrated delivery and systems change**

Opportunity Nottingham is a project led by Framework set up to work with individuals with multiple and complex needs under the Big Lottery's 8-year Fulfilling Lives Programme. One of the main aims of Opportunity Nottingham is to influence the design and delivery of services and treatment locally and bring about system change so that Nottingham is effective in responding to people with multiple and complex needs.

Opportunity Nottingham are members of the SIG and on several occasions have led discussions to share their insight and learning on areas such as Psychologically Informed Environments (PIE) and Housing First provision of accommodation and support. Both of these elements were included within the specifications for the new housing related support services contracted out from April 2018. Furthermore, a person centred approach is at the very core of the draft Homelessness Prevention Strategy which seeks to explore opportunities for joint assessments and includes aspects of the Beneficiary Pledge in the Homelessness Prevention Charter.

7 **What is on the horizon?**

7.1 **Duty to Refer**

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 introduced a new requirement on public sector bodies to refer individuals or families for support if a need to prevent homelessness is identified. The duty does not come into force until October 2018, however NCC is making arrangements to become an early adopter by volunteering to work with local partners across the criminal justice, health and DWP sectors to pilot software which will allow for information to be exchanged via a singular IT

system. The intention is for this to reduce the burden, deliver efficiency and crucially, ensure that more people in need of support are identified and referred.

7.2 **Quarterly stakeholder forum**

To prevent and respond to homelessness in Nottingham in a way that is effective and meaningful we must understand what frontline community, voluntary and public sector organisations are seeing and experiencing – and what they think needs to be done. We have remained committed to including partner insight and views in service design and development but we want to enhance the channels of communication to allow for more regular sharing and dissemination of information. Therefore, from winter 2018 we intend to start facilitating a quarterly stakeholder forum to give local groups the opportunity to learn about the services that are available, share good practice and highlight areas of concern.

7.3 **Enhanced communications**

To accompany the new homelessness legislation we are in the process of developing a suite of online and paper based information to share with citizens. The information will be designed to provide knowledge on how to seek support, self-support and what to expect from support.

8 **Further information**

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VISION

Nottingham City Council, partners across the public sector, community groups, voluntary sector organisations, faith groups, businesses, developers and private sector landlords commit to working together to reduce the risk of homelessness and repeat homelessness for local people.

VALUES

Housing

Everyone should have a suitable place that they can call home where they feel safe and stable and are receiving any level of support they need to sustain their accommodation

Safety

People and communities should feel protected from the threat of discrimination, violence, abuse and other crimes

Respect

Individuals should be treated with respect and provided with a good standard of service. People should not be judged or have assumptions made about them and their wishes and aspirations should always be heard

Understanding

Partners should be conscious and considerate of the needs of the person. They should see each individual as a person not a problem and respond to them in a courteous and compassionate way

Access

Pathways to information, advice and support services should be clear and accessible for all

Opportunities

People should have equal opportunity to achieve their aspirations through education, training, employment, volunteering, leisure and creative activities

Listening

People should always be listened to and involved in decisions that affect them. Insight from people with lived experience of homelessness should be used to shape and improve service design and delivery

Honesty

Partners should be realistic with people and help them to understand what is going to happen. There should be a good standard of communication that is delivered consistently across all services

Belief

Partners should demonstrate that they have belief in people and commit to continuing working with them for as long as necessary to ensure that solutions are found and can be sustained

TAKING ACTION

All organisations have a role to play in helping to prevent homelessness and equally it is the responsibility of all sectors to ensure that effective outcomes are provided for people who are homeless – to help them to recover and sustain living in accommodation as independently as possible.

If you wish to adopt the vision and values of the Nottingham Homelessness Charter please complete the form below to pledge your commitment and outline the activity you intend to deliver or want to get more involved in.

Please put a cross in this box if you agree to having your organisations logo displayed alongside our other partners on the Nottingham Homelessness Charter

[Organisation] recognises our responsibility in homelessness prevention and role in helping people to recover from homelessness.

We commit to.....
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This will be achieved through.....
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By.....

Further comments.....
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