

Central Bedfordshire Council
Tenant Scrutiny Panel
First draft report
Homelessness

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EXECUTIVE.SUMMARY

The report was undertaken for the Housing Service at Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) to examine how they are dealing with Homelessness and all its implications, and to work with CBC in making Recommendations to improve the Service. As a result, the report intended to cover all aspects of the Homelessness Service.

When scrutinising the subject of Homelessness, we found that CBC are heavily involved and have made some implementations already, and have welcomed us onboard. A difficulty for us as a scrutiny panel has been the uncertainty of the new government legislation which has been given royal assent to come into effect from April 2018. CBC have been waiting for this so they can see how much this will influence the way they run the homelessness services.

It is early days still for Housing Solutions, but we can see a positive relationship building between CBC and their partners. The Scrutiny panel have met with the Partners at a seminar and found there is a lot of organisations who help the homeless. We see the work they are all doing as positive and enlightening.

More information should be made available to where homeless clients can contact CBC and informational packs should also be out in the community for clients. Clients should be made aware they may be housed in a new location and information will be supplied when they move to help them with the transition.

We have made recommendations, which are tying in with the actions that CBC have already made. We the scrutiny panel have formed a good working relationship with the key CBC colleague dealing with Homelessness. There needs to be more affordable housing for Temporary and permanent Accommodation built. We found it is important to know where Homelessness occurs and CBC have advised us they understand where demand is. One big turnaround for CBC is they are no longer putting clients into hotels or Bed and Breakfast which has been a huge expense to CBC in the past, so well done for that.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1

The Tenant Scrutiny Panel (TSP) has been working alongside with CBC for almost four and half years now, scrutinising the housing Service department. To date we have looked at Anti-Social Behaviour ASB which we made 28 Recommendations how CBC could improve the service, and all 28 were adopted. Moving on we have also looked at Customer Satisfaction in the housing repairs service and we interviewed staff and tenants alike with all recommendations made and all have been adopted.

1.2

We are currently dealing with the topic of Homelessness and working closely with a dedicated staff member of CBC. The panel also attended a partner's seminar which was very enlightening. Meetings have taken place with the Managers of a Temporary Homeless Complex and met with some homeless Clients. The panel currently consists of five members: Mal (chair), Maggie, Ron, Rosa Marie, and Darren.

1.3

This project has been a more testing one for the scrutiny panel not least because of the delay caused by the governments new homelessness legislation bill. Which has prevented CBC from moving forward in certain areas of the Homelessness Service until they understand the implications of the New Bill.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. The Scrutiny project was undertaken using the following methodology.

- Working with the lead staff member responsible for homelessness within Central Bedfordshire.
- Meetings with partners that are extensively involved with homelessness.
- Interviews with onsite housing managers of Temporary Accommodations.
- Meetings with Homeless clients.
- Waiting for the Government to produce the New Homeless Legislation Bill.

3. FINDINGS

3.1. ACCESS TO THE SERVICE

3.1.1

Housing Solutions is a comparatively new service that has come about from homelessness and is a big learning curve for everybody at CBC, partners and Homeless clients. The Governments New Homelessness Legislation Bill, has led to a delay in certain areas in which CBC can operate until they understand the implications of the Bill.

3.1.2

A lot of work has been done so far by CBC but what we have found is a lack of information for homeless clients at the onset of being made homeless. We checked in CBC reception, there is nothing to inform people in a potential Homelessness situation as to where they need to go or phone. Information should be on the entrance doors of the Council Offices. This information is basic for an Out of Hours situation. Though since we raised these points we note a leaflet stand with information, along with relevant youtube videos on the flatscreen t.v, are both in the customer meeting room.

3.3.

DEALING WITH HOMELESSNESS

3.3.1

Surveys should be done to establish where in the CBC area, Homeless clients wish to live so the Council can plan where to build more affordable homes, as becoming homeless can affect anyone. This will give a clearer view to where to we can also acquire properties for Homeless clients for both temporary and permanent accommodation.

3.3.2

Information needs to be readily available to homeless clients, to inform them of local Shops, Schools, Job prospects, and all that surrounds that. This could be part of the conversation had when customers meet with staff from the Intensive Property Management Team.

3.3.3

More information needs to be given about the numerous partners involved with homelessness. The TSP panel have met with some of them at a Seminar through CBC and found it very Positive and enlightening. The new homelessness Act is developing a prescribed list of the partners who have a statutory duty to work with the Council. This along with a self assessment toolkit will be available on the website.

3.3.4

Benchmarking is carried out monthly and should be set to see comparisons with other Councils for CBC to then gauge how they are performing. This is updated monthly by central government and can be found on the Gov.uk website.

3.3.5

As this Homelessness project has grown our lead CBC staff member has informed us she is taking on new staff to cope with the work load which needed to happen.

3.3.6

One of the Partners known as the Night Bus Service: run a pick-up system, they go to given points and pick up people that are Homeless and provide soup, sandwiches etc. The seats are reclining so they can sleep on the Bus and then in the morning they are dropped back as to where they had been picked up the night before. We are hoping to visit this service if possible.

3.3.7

The government have recently presented their new homelessness legislation bill, which has been given royal assent, to all Councils. This is taking time for CBC to digest and work out what the implications mean to CBC. This will create differences as to how they can run the Homelessness Service.

3.4. RECOMMENDATIONS

NUMBER	RECOMMENDATION	PRIORITY	TIMESCALE
1	<p>a) The overall, underlying problem is there is not enough housing for the central Bedfordshire area.</p> <p>b) There is not enough housing being built to house the growing population of central Bedfordshire.</p>	High	6 months
2	More accommodation needs to be available now and in the future for the ratios of the Housing temporary on licence clients or permanent clients	High	2 months
3	CBC should be considering the help that Housing Associations could give them with the homeless situation, this should include all Housing Associations.	High	4 months
4	CBC to work with private landlords in the prevention of their tenants becoming homeless, through dialogue/mediation.	Medium	6 months
5	We feel CBC needs to look at a way of Managing properties in the private sector to give them an added arm with housing the homeless.	High	4 months
6	CBC should acquire properties in the Central Beds area for the Housing of the Homeless and people on a temporary basis which would help keep Homeless clients in their own communities.	High	6 months
7	Leaflets should be made available for potentially Homeless People Via Doctors Surgeries, Supermarkets, Libraries, Hospitals: in the community.	High	2 months

8	We feel the Night Bus Service that operates a pick up service for homeless clients, feeding them and supplying a bed, for example in Bedford and BullPond Lane, Dunstable, should be supported by CBC. We feel CBC are missing some clients, and a pick-up system traveling round the Central Beds area would capture a wider cliental.	High	1 month
9	a) We would like posters advertising that CBC can help prevent people from becoming homeless. b) Out of hours details on Council building doors. This would help point them in the right direction when Council Offices are closed.	Very high	1 month
10	We would like more information made available to clients when in a new area i.e. local services, a pack.	High	1 month
11	More Communication should be available from CBC to Homeless clients. Maybe a package containing details of Schooling, Job Centres, Libraries, Foodbanks, shops, bus Services.	High	1 month
12	A survey of the CBC area should be undertaken to ascertain if there are certain places that Homelessness occurs, which would help in the way CBC can house clients, be it temporary or on Licence or Permanent.	High	2 months
13	There is a Rough Sleeping Partnership (RSP). We support CBC being involved in. It is only a two-year project and we would urge that it can continue after the two years to benefit and be accessible to future clients.	Medium	6 months

14	Bench Marking: could give CBC feedback as to how they are performing in dealing with the Homelessness Situation : this needs to be shared.	Medium	6 months
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