

Report to Overview and Scrutiny – 29 November 2018

Report of the Community Safety Partnership Task Group – 5 November 2018

The Community Safety Partnership Task Group met on 5 November 2018. The minutes are published on the [Council's website](#).

The following Members were present:

Present: Councillor Crout (Chair)
Councillors Hastrick, Martins, Mauthoor and Saffery

Also present: Inspector Simon Mason, Safer Neighbourhoods Team, Hertfordshire Constabulary
Steve Devine, Rough Sleeping Prevention Manager, New Hope

The following was a recommendation to Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

9. Street homelessness

The panel received a presentation by Inspector Simon Mason, Safer Neighbourhoods Team. The issue of homelessness was a priority for the community and had been exceptionally challenging this year. There had been a rise in the visibility of homelessness and street drinking, partly due to the hot weather.

The police had been continuing their work under 'Operation Blanket' and considered there were two groups who needed different approaches. The first was homeless people with complex needs who needed support and guidance. The second group was those whose life choices meant they were homeless. The second group was not able or willing to comply with the conditions required for them to be able to access services.

The police used antisocial behaviour legislation to address any criminality. This was monitored through the town centre policing team and the CCTV. The tools that the police could use included Community Protection Notices and Criminal Behaviour Orders. These stipulated certain conditions that needed to be adhered to and if these were broken the individual could be prosecuted. It was not straightforward to obtain these notices through the courts.

A high proportion of rough sleepers had complex mental health needs; many of them were not able to access the services they needed and some self-medicated with illegal drugs. There was a large number of underlying causes and rough sleeping itself further impacted their mental health. The fragility of many who were homeless meant that small events in their lives could cause a return to chaotic behaviour.

The police could deal with symptoms of homelessness but were not in a position to address the causes including addictions, alcohol dependence and mental health problems. They worked closely with New Hope on these issues.

The panel received a presentation by Steve Devine, Rough Sleeping Prevention Manager, New Hope. There were noticeable increased numbers in those presenting to New Hope as rough sleeping in Watford. This was not to say, however, that those persons were sleeping rough on the streets; a large proportion would be staying in accommodation with friends or coming in and out of the borough. There was also an increased number of people who made a living from begging in the town and were not necessarily homeless; their lifestyle choices dictated that they did not access services. New Hope had an inclusive approach and would continue to offer services to those who had declined them in the past so that services would be available when they were ready. New Hope would always seek to meet humanitarian needs such as food and clothing for anyone who needed them.

The recommended way for members of the public to report concerns about those who were rough sleeping was through the Streetlink app; in Watford these reports were sent to New Hope. The vast majority of the reports related to individuals who were known to the organisation.

The night shelter used to be a 28-day service but now service users were able to stay longer until suitable accommodation was available. This did cause pressure on the service but provided better outcomes.

New Hope faced a number of specific challenges in Watford including duplication of services provided by other organisations which were less well-established and were not working in partnership with other authorities. Another issue was the generosity of local residents to those who were begging. The comprehensive services provided by New Hope meant that there was no need for anyone to beg and it was not a productive way to help people. The police signposted anyone begging to the available services.

The importance of partnership working was underlined, the safety of the staff and the facilities were paramount and working with the Police meant that they received intelligence if an individual was potentially violent.

The council's Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) was operated by New Hope. The criterion for SWEP was to be less strict this winter; it would be in operation for any night where the temperature would fall below 0°. Furthermore, additional beds would be available every night between 1 December and 31 January; this was known as SWEP Plus.

New Hope led a successful intervention team consisting of staff from a number of organisations with different expertise. This team dealt with the most complex cases and it was hoped that additional funding could be secured to continue this service beyond March 2019 and to include a mental health professional in the team. Mental health issues, both

diagnosed and undiagnosed, affected the vast majority of service users. The team did have two trained mental health first-aiders who could triage individuals using the services.

There were plans to make the New Haven into a one stop shop for anyone facing homelessness.

The task group underlined their disappointment that no progress had been made funding a mental health professional to work with New Hope. It was felt this was a priority and would benefit the organisation's work enormously.

The work of the Meadowell Centre surgery was explained; although mental health services were available here, sharing information across the partnership had not been agreed. It was suggested by councillors that sharing mental health expertise with the hospital could be a viable option. It was also likely that the job centre would have a mental health professional on site but members were unconvinced that this was the most appropriate location.

There was a discussion about mental health services and the obstacles to accessing the resources. The Police were sometimes called to section individuals and the number of sections in Watford was double the next highest Community Safety Partnership (CSP) in Hertfordshire.

It was agreed that the task group would make this recommendation to the Community Safety Coordinator by email and formally to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Martins also agreed to take up this issue as part of his work as mental health champion.

Sergeant Mason and Steve Devine were thanked for their time and input.

RESOLVED -

that a recommendation be made to Overview and Scrutiny highlighting the critical need for a mental health professional to work with New Hope.

Appendix A - email to Community Safety Coordinator