

HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING ACTION GROUP – 7 FEBRUARY 2018

Minute of meeting

Present:

Chair: Jon Sparkes (CEO, Crisis)

Members: Russell Barr (Church of Scotland), David Duke (Street Soccer), Lorraine McGrath (Simon Community/Streetwork), John Mills (Fife Council & ALACHO), Alison Watson (Shelter Scotland), Susanne Millar (GCHSCP), Maggie Brunjes (GHN), Shona Stephen (Queens Cross Housing Association), Josh Littlejohn (Social Bite)

In attendance: David Signorini (Deputy Director, SG Better Homes Division), Marion Gibbs (Team Leader, SG Homelessness Team), Hazel Bartels (SG Homelessness Team), Stephen O'Connor (SG Homelessness Team), Lynn McMath (Crisis), Dr Beth Watts (Heriot-Watt University)

Apologies: Mike Dailly (Govan Law Centre), Suzanne Fitzpatrick (Heriot-Watt University)

1. Welcome

Jon Sparkes welcomed members to the sixth meeting of the Action Group. Jon thanked each of the workstream teams for circulating draft discussion papers on their consideration of Q2 recommendations in advance of the meeting. These would be discussed in detail in a workshop type setting and the agenda shortened to allow the meeting the maximum amount of time to focus on what was required to further develop recommendations in advance of a final consideration at the Action Group's meeting on 22 February, before submitting a final set of Q2 recommendations to Scottish Government by end of February. Jon also thanked members for agreeing to stay a bit longer so that a discussion around the Group's governance and transparency of decision making could be added to the agenda.

2. Discussion on the role of Community Hosting – update from Dr Beth Watts

Jon Sparkes welcomed Dr Beth Watts to the meeting to update the Action Group on the findings of the Working Group to consider the role of 'community hosting' models. Beth reminded members that the Working Group's aims were to consider options on how community hosting models could contribute to the 4 questions of the Action Group and to report to the Action Group on their findings. The Working Group had identified a variety of community hosting models, each focusing on different (but sometimes overlapping) target groups, and with differences in how they operated and were funded. These were: Nightstop services; Supported Lodgings; and Shared Lives. The Action Group discussed in detail and agreed that community hosting options complemented its objective of a housing-led response, providing community-based accommodation in an 'ordinary' home environment and a platform to reintegrate into the mainstream community. The Action Group agreed there should

be a commitment to acknowledging the role of community hosting models such as NightStop or supported lodgings and agreed to the Working Group's recommendations to test and scale models. There would be further discussion around the relationship between these models; the local authority discharging its legal homelessness duty and the views of the Care Inspectorate. It was also agreed that the proposals would be incorporated into the recommendations being considered by the Access to Accommodation workstream.

ACTION: Access to Accommodation workstream to integrate the community hosting proposals within its recommendations

3. Discuss and agree approach to proposals from Q2 workstreams

Jon invited the Action Group to consider the (around 50) initial proposals for Q2 recommendations that had been developed by workstreams. He asked workstream leads to update the group on the proposals which had been developed so far and invited the Group to consider which draft recommendations could be agreed at the next meeting on 22 February, which could be agreed subject to some further work to develop them, and which ones the Group was unable to progress - as well as any new recommendations workstreams might consider.

Prevention

Alison Watson updated the Action Group on progress of the workstream considering prevention of rough sleeping and homelessness. The workstream was clear that prevention approaches needed to address a wide range of public services, including the current and future benefits systems in Scotland. The emerging recommendations from the workstream included a focus on actions to secure higher levels of prediction and prevention of rough sleeping both when people leave state institutions (care, prison, mental health services, armed forces) and at other points in their lives, including embedding best practice in responding to the needs of different groups considered likely to experience homelessness (e.g. women who experience domestic violence, people experiencing relationship breakdown, and people migrating to Scotland or seeking asylum), increased engagement to extend prevention duties across public and third sector, and consideration of strengthened legislation on duties of prevention. The Action Group discussed in detail and agreed to consider recommendations to:

- conduct homelessness assessments at a range of locations to fit with the lives and schedules of those that require support, to ensure timely preventative interventions
- delegate assessments across public sector and voluntary sector bodies operating in collaboration with the local authority: establishing a 'no wrong door' approach to maximise opportunities to prevent homelessness – however, it was noted that both Alison and Susanne agreed that the Action Group needed to be very careful about the language used in relation to this and what the group is actually recommending
- utilise the purpose, culture and skills of Housing Options to focus on preventing people from becoming homeless and providing appropriate rapid re-housing solutions – however, the Action Group noted concerns/questions raised by Alison

which highlighted that further clarity was needed about rapid re-housing in the context of housing options.

- ensure an easily understood and clear national training programme and ongoing accreditation so that the needs of specific groups are addressed by all front-line staff working with people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, and that trauma informed approaches are adopted
- articulate the pathways and interventions needed for particular groups (e.g. SHORE (Sustainable Housing on Release for Everyone) standards) and ensure that these are consistently followed for people we know are at high risk of homelessness including on leaving public institutions, such as the care system, hospitals, or the armed forces

The Action Group agreed that the prevention workstream should also discuss the potential for further recommendations on:

- developing a whole systems approach, with buy-in across Government, for those with multiple and complex needs
- addressing earlier indicators which drive homelessness such as poverty, social exclusion or adverse childhood experiences,
- the impact of affordability of housing and whether this can have an impact on efforts to prevent homelessness, particularly in relation to the impact on rent arrears of roll out of universal credit.

Frontline Support

Lorraine McGrath updated the Working Group on the progress of the workstream looking at frontline support and what was needed to help people who are already sleeping rough or might be at risk of sleeping rough, the majority of which will have multiple and complex needs. The emerging recommendations from the workstream focussed on delivering a national delivery model which empowers staff to find solutions and resolve rough sleeping quickly, and supports people in a successful and sustained transition away from rough sleeping for good. The Action Group discussed in detail and agreed to consider the workstream's recommendations aimed at:

- Empowering staff to prioritise based on need, carry out intensive case management and ensure individuals have access to necessary services and resources to facilitate successful and sustained transition off the street
- Ensuring consistent, well managed multi-agency coordination to maximise effectiveness of support for individuals e.g. through 'by name lists'; Inter-Agency Street Network Approach and psychologically-informed responses to people with multiple and complex needs.
- Ensuring increased flexibility in statutory services to enable rapid transition in certain circumstances, including from the street – recognising that this may involve changes to current allocation policies
- Ensuring access to 'by-name' information (including that generated by any new data system) supports more effective multi-disciplinary front line interventions in real time

In addition, the Action Group agreed that the front-line support workstream should also consider the issue of supporting people at risk of rough sleeping who were also

street begging - while recognising that not everyone who experiences rough sleeping is engaged in street begging and vice versa.

The Action Group also agreed that drawing out learning from this year's winter actions was important to identifying approaches that work with a view to extending learning and good practice nationally. SG Homelessness Team was taking forward work to capture learning from front-line workers to help inform the recommendations.

Access to Accommodation

Maggie Brunjes updated the Action Group on the access to accommodation workstream, which in particular was looking at why people sleeping rough might not be able to access temporary or settled accommodation rapidly enough. The workstream had identified four overarching access to housing parameters: Housing Options; Temporary & Emergency Accommodation; Permanent Accommodation & Housing Supply; and challenges for people with 'No Recourse to Public Funds'. Jon Sparkes reminded members that some areas of this work would go beyond Q2 considerations and would carry forward to the next phase of the Action Group's considerations of Q3 and Q4 and beyond, particularly the third question on how temporary accommodation can be transformed. The Action Group discussed in detail, particularly in respect of the proposal to move to a system of rapid rehousing by default. Alison Watson made the point that it was crucial to consider the impact on the whole system, not just on rough sleepers, and that the risk of creating a 'two tier' system should be addressed. The group noted that it would be important to recognise that further work is still required on transforming temporary accommodation (Q3), which will also impact on this. The significant challenge of existing waiting lists was recognised, and the importance of ensuring sufficient housing is available to meet the needs of all, not just rough sleepers. On balance, the group agreed that a recommendation should be formed around rapid rehousing as a principle, setting the vision of what the system should look like, but that it would be important to ensure that this was in the context of local, whole system strategies. They considered the consultancy work they have commissioned will support this to happen. The group agreed to consider recommendations to:

- default to rapid re-housing into settled accommodation (including Housing First for people sleeping rough and experiencing multiple forms of exclusion, and emergency or supported accommodation for those who initially cannot take up a mainstream housing situation for reasons such as health, mental health or security) instead of a default to temporary accommodation
- implement a whole system strategic review of access to housing and ensure that each local authority/housing option hub develops and implements a local 5-year 'Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan'
- develop testing and scaling of Community Hosting models such as NightStop or supported lodgings as a way to diversify and offer a transition option within the housing offer available to those experiencing or at risk of homelessness
- ensure an adequate truly affordable / social housing supply to tackle immediate needs and then maintain supply

The Action Group also agreed that there should be a clear message that the Scottish Government commitment to deliver 50,000 affordable homes over the lifetime of this

Parliament is an important and fundamental pledge that will support this work and a recommendation that this commitment to affordable housing is maintained beyond the life of the current parliament. It was agreed that a further recommendation to consider 'local connection' and 'intentionality' rules should be transferred to the legal reform workstream to take forward.

Measurement

Hazel Bartels from the Scottish Government team updated the Action Group on the proposals from the Measurement workstream in the absence of workstream lead Suzanne Fitzpatrick. The Action Group had been clear that it wanted to provide recommendations in this area which would provide a robust suite of information to drive and track progress of rough sleeping in Scotland. The Action Group discussed in detail and agreed that the particular geographical nature and the spread of homelessness in Scotland should be considered as part of an options appraisal. The Action Group agreed to consider recommendations to:

- conduct an option appraisal on the development of a comprehensive, cross-sectoral data collection and management system (along the lines of the CHAIN system used in London) to facilitate the 'by name list' approach by providing shared access to case level data to help all those involved in working with an individual work towards a better outcome
- ensure that the data collection and management system will both support service delivery and generate a suite of measures which enable it to evaluate progress to ending rough sleeping in Scotland
- report regularly to the Scottish Parliament to facilitate scrutiny of progress to ending rough sleeping in Scotland

Legal Reform

Finally, the Action Group considered proposals emerging from the Legal Reform workstream. The Action Group agreed to consider recommendations to:

- consider principles for more agile powers and duties to prevent homelessness in Scotland, learning from recent experience in Wales and England
- review current legislative arrangements for intentionality and local connection in a way that would remove barriers to support and help reduce rough sleeping specifically, and homelessness more broadly, but in a way that is mindful of the risks of unintended consequences
- clarify the role and responsibility of local authorities to people with no access to public funds
- amend and update Scottish Code of Guidance on Homelessness to reflect both existing non-statutory guidance on Housing Options and any new legislative requirements

The Action Group agreed that the other recommendations from the workstream should be developed further so that the Action Group could consider, at the next meeting on 22 February, their intended impact and how legislation might address the issues the workstream had identified.

ACTION: Mike/workstream to develop case for remaining Q2 recommendations from legal reform workstream

The Action Group agreed that SG Homelessness Team would circulate a table of the potential Q2 recommendations and the actions agreed to develop them further so that the Action Group could consider and finalise them at its meeting on 22 February, before submitting a final set of Q2 recommendations to the Scottish Government by end of February.

ACTION: SG Homelessness Team to circulate a table of the potential Q2 recommendations and the actions required to develop them further

ACTION: Action Group Workstream leads and members to work with SG team to develop recommendations further in advance of meeting on 22 February

4. Discuss and agree approach to governance and decision making

Jon thanked the Action Group for agreeing to extend the meeting to discuss the governance and the transparency of the Action Group's decision making. The Group has made a point of 'working in the open' and, in addition to the high number of meetings (six in four months), has also engaged regularly with the wider sector, and with those with direct, personal experience of homelessness.

Building on this openness, the Group was mindful that their recommendations need to be clearly based on good evidence, and framed in terms that are not seen to favour any particular organisation. The information published about the Action Group on the Scottish Government website included details of the organisation affiliation of each member, and the full minutes of each meeting and the recommendations, which the Group felt was currently sufficient to address any concerns about potential conflict of interests.

They also discussed how to handle potential recommendations where the Group could not form a unanimous view. The Action Group agreed that the SG Homelessness Team would circulate a paper setting out the key points from the conversation and a suggested approach to decision making for the group.

ACTION: Catriona MacKean from the SG team to circulate a paper setting out the approach to governance and decision making of the Action Group

Next meeting – 22 February 2018.