



City and County of Swansea

## Notes of the **Scrutiny Working Group - Homelessness**

Committee Room 3A - Guildhall, Swansea

Tuesday, 12 June 2018 at 10.30 am

**Present:** Councillor P M Black (Chair) Presided

**Councillor(s)**

L S Gibbard  
O G James  
E T Kirchner  
T M White

**Councillor(s)**

J A Hale  
Y V Jardine  
S Pritchard

**Councillor(s)**

T J Hennegan  
L R Jones  
L J Tyler-Lloyd

**Other Attendees**

Andrea Lewis  
Gareth Bartley

Malcolm Jones

Cabinet Member - Homes & Energy  
Head of Partnerships and Development, Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board (ABMU)  
Locality Manager for Mental Health and Learning Disabilities Services, ABMU

**Officer(s)**

Anita Evans

Peter Field

Jane Harries

Liz Jordan

Steve Porter

Alex Williams

Planning, Performance and Development Officer,  
Supporting People Team  
Principal Officer Prevention, Wellbeing and  
Commissioning  
Landlord Services Manager  
Scrutiny Officer  
Operations Manager, Community Housing  
Head of Adult Services

**Apologies for Absence**

Councillor(s): V M Evans, A Pugh and G J Tanner

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**1 Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests**

Disclosures of interest – Joe Hale and Oliver James

**2 Homelessness Report**

Andrea Lewis, Cabinet Member for Homes and Energy attended to answer questions from the Working Group along with Alex Williams, Jane Harries, Steve Porter, Peter Field and Anita Evans from the Council and Gareth Bartley and Malcolm Jones of Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board.

Andrea Lewis gave a short introduction on the Council's work on homelessness, stating that the Council will be working closely with a range of partners to develop the Homelessness Strategy. Members were informed that not all of the issues fall within her portfolio but that she will ensure that any conclusions and recommendations are passed on to the relevant Cabinet Member.

The following main issues, including evidence heard at the first meeting of the Working Group, were discussed:

### **Accommodation**

- It is felt that there is a lack of specialist accommodation for people with complex needs (people with multiple conditions such as substance misuse and LD, or substance misuse and mental ill health, Alcohol related brain injury, etc.).
- The Wallich argue that a specialist residential project is needed as a priority for those clients who have become homeless due to the issues surrounding their mental health and/or substance misuse. These individuals are often very chaotic, and their needs deemed too high for a standard hostel.
- There is an increasing number of homeless people with complex/multiple needs including mental health. Many of these individuals don't have basic life skills and need continuous support over a long period of time. Often this support is not available. No one takes responsibility in the council or health board to assess and meet their needs.
- Concern that wet houses are no longer meeting the needs of alcoholics with many becoming incontinent and ending up blocking beds in hospitals. Is this model fit for purpose? Should we be looking at specialist 'wet residential care homes', employing care staff at our current wet projects or opening a Managed Alcohol programme?
- Further gaps include hostels that take women, under 18s and under 21s and provision for EU citizens or people with no recourse to public funds. Shelter dealt with 100 of the latter category last year.
- Very little emergency accommodation for homeless couples. Private renting is the only route other than living on the street. Hostels and supported accommodation providers are very reluctant to accommodate couples in the same project.
- It is important that Swansea learns from any good practice being used by Councils elsewhere in relation to the Housing First approach. Are the witnesses aware of any?
- There is concern that homeless people are not fully benefitting from housing association accommodation.
- Caer Las argue that there are long waiting lists for access to move-on panel. There needs to be options from providers for bespoke packages for individuals.

- Concern about potential changes to legislation with the abolition of priority need and intentionality. This will have a major impact on temporary accommodation and provision of supported housing. How will the Council cope with this?
- The Working Group felt Swansea needs a seamless way for people to access provision following concerns raised by some groups that they were unable to direct clients to suitable provision at certain times during the week.
- There is concern about support for people with learning difficulties who have moved into housing.
- Concern that some people who have moved into housing have issues with budgeting.
- Concern about how we identify the needs of people who do not have mental health issues but have never owned or rented a house before and do not know what to do.

### **Social Service and safeguarding issues**

- The thresholds for homeless and vulnerable adults being accepted for social services involvement are too high. Agencies work with some of the most complex and challenging individuals and yet it is almost impossible to get additional specialist support for them especially if they have not been in the system before.
- Dual diagnosis remains an issue. People with mental health needs are unable to access the Community Mental Health Team support because of drug dependency issues.
- The homelessness nurse has identified that there is an issue with data sharing between health and social care.

### **Health Service issues**

- Hospital social work for people who are homeless or vulnerably housed is extremely limited. Homeless people in hospital should be assessed as quickly as possible to prevent delayed discharges.
- Within Swansea any client who wishes to be scripted must first self-refer to AADAS on either a Monday or Tuesday morning. To a chaotic drug user this is a time where they may be potentially begging etc to fund their first hit of the day. These referral hours need to be made more flexible and dramatically extended as clients who neither make it on a Monday or Tuesday must wait an entire week before the opportunity again arises. Once referred to AADAS there is approximately a six-month waiting list to be scripted. Many clients therefore do not even start the process. There is a 12 month wait to go into rehab.

- Caer Las argue that services for people who are unable to access services due to dual diagnosis could be improved by Swansea having a network that brings together stakeholders from health (incl. mental health), D&A services and housing.
- Concern that ABMU cuts will see the homeless nurse being axed.

### **Learning Disabilities**

- There is an increasing number of homeless people with Borderline Learning Disabilities who have no access to Learning Disability services but are unable to read (or have limited reading and language skills), write, manage money or maintain a tenancy and are either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless

### **Housing First**

- The Wallich argue that without the recruitment of additional experienced staff to provide intensive support then this pilot is doomed to fail. They say that there are still gaps in service provision which requires the full engagement of the health board specifically around mental health. Crisis argued that Housing First cannot be implemented in isolation but that it was not on the health board's agenda.

### **Ex-Offenders**

- People are coming out of prison and have nowhere to go. What advice and support are being given to them before they are discharged? Is probation liaising with housing at appropriate staging points? What work is being carried out to maintain continuity of housing provision for Swansea residents from the start of their prison term to release?

### **Day Centre**

- The loss of the St Matthew's day centre is felt particularly hard by agencies. Many argue for a one-stop seven-day service shop, opening long hours and which accommodates all staff including outreach, Big Issue, physical and mental health professionals, Housing Options caseworkers, probation etc and which would benefit from regular drop-in sessions from Citizen's Advice, DWP and job centre coaches. They believe this building would include subsidised food, computers, lounge area, laundry facilities, showers, lockers etc. and could be used to develop suitable social enterprises to assist clients back into work.

### **Gateway**

- All the agencies argued that the Gateway system, which is the single central referral system that operates all the supported (hostel) accommodation in Swansea needs reform. They argue that the system is not being managed or utilised to its full potential. They would like to see an allocated 'Gateway Officer' appointed to oversee all hostel vacancies in Swansea.

Because some hostels allegedly 'cherry pick' clients leaving the most difficult clients to sit on the waiting or declined lists indefinitely, and because many hostels also require their own specialist referral forms to be completed as well as the gateway referral form, this creates a duplication of work and places an extra burden on the limited outreach services.

There was also an assertion that there is a lack of confidence/knowledge from frontline staff in using/managing Gateway effectively. This could be due to the turnover of staff in residential projects and needs to be addressed by training new recruits correctly.

### **Evictions from supported accommodation due to rent arrears**

- Wallich argue that many of their clients have previously relied on Simple Payment or Post Office accounts for their benefit payments. However due to the closure of these types of accounts all supported accommodation providers are being urged to ensure that residents are being assisted to open bank accounts. Clients are frequently being evicted from supported accommodation due to service charge arrears.

Can the council work with these providers to assist them in setting up Direct Debit payments for these charges? This would assist the most vulnerable, those lacking budgeting skills, and financially exploited members of our society to avoid losing their accommodation due to these arrears.

### **Out-of-hours support**

- Matthew's House argue that there does not appear to be any support at weekend and out-of-hours. They say that being open on Sunday evenings they are often caught in a volatile situation with people struggling with nothing. On many occasions they say they have been unable to access anything after 2pm on weekdays. Can the council provide clearer signposting for volunteers and charities to access support out-of-hours?

### **Co-ordination**

- There are many small groups that have established themselves on Facebook etc. and want to help homeless people. However, these are not co-ordinated or monitored. Do we have the capacity to try and tackle this?

### **City Centre**

- A number of agencies told us that the City Rangers and Police have acted in an aggressive way towards homeless people and even outreach workers seeking to help them. As well as homeless people, Big Issue sellers have also been moved on by Rangers. Can the council provide training for the Rangers to act in a more sympathetic way? Can they liaise with the police on this issue?

### **3 Discussion and Conclusions**

The Working Group discussed progress and made the following conclusions:

- The Working Group appreciates what is being done by everyone involved but feels that the threads need to come together – a clear pathway is needed.
- The Working Group feels that it is important for the Council to take a strategic viewpoint and that is why Housing First is so important.
- Scrutiny will need to do pre-decision on the Homelessness Strategy before it goes to Cabinet. The issues highlighted by this Working Group will need to be taken into account when developing the Strategy.

Following on from this meeting:

- A letter will be written from the convener of the Working Group to the Cabinet Member for Homes and Energy, summarising the discussion and outlining the Working Group's thoughts and recommendations.

The meeting ended at 12.20 pm