



City and County of Swansea

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

Committee Room 3A - Guildhall, Swansea

Monday, 14 May 2018 at 10.30 am

Present: Councillor P M Black (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)

V M Evans
O G James
S Pritchard
L J Tyler-Lloyd

Councillor(s)

L S Gibbard
L R Jones
A Pugh
T M White

Councillor(s)

J A Hale
E J King
M Sykes

Officer(s)

Liz Jordan Scrutiny Officer

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): T J Hennegan and G J Tanner

1 Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

Disclosure of interests – Oliver James and Alyson Pugh

2 Evidence from representatives of organisations

Two sessions were held to take evidence from representatives of relevant organisations on what the Council can do to help homelessness in Swansea. The Working Group received responses to a number of questions.

What is working well in Swansea?

- Housing Options provide an excellent service and accessibility to it is good
- The Council's use of the Homeless Prevention Fund is working well
- Good access to homeless nurse who provides a vital service. However there is concern that the Health Board is looking for budget savings and without their understanding could cut this post.
- There are pockets of excellent practice eg Tenancy Support Services which have made good links with other homeless services
- Collaborative work with Council is very good
- The fact that there is a Homeless Working Group which is bringing everyone together to discuss this issue is a good start

Where are the gaps in provision?

- Many homeless people have complex/multiple needs including mental health which it is very difficult to get support for. Many of these individuals don't have basic life skills and need continuous support for a long time. There is no one within the Council or Health Board taking responsibility for these individuals and assessing their needs. Housing is important but it is the ongoing support for individuals as they go through their life which is vital
- Also very difficult to get support for people who self-harm, women and people who have no access to public funds.
- People are coming out of prison and have nowhere to go. They should be given advice from probation before they leave prison, on housing etc and receive ongoing support and advice when they come out.
- A vital thing that is missing is a day centre where homeless people can go all day, can speak to people who understand and can access services such as washing facilities.
- There is hardly any housing for homeless couples. Emergency beds will not take them and private renting is the only route other than living on the street
- There is a lack of specialist supported accommodation in Swansea for individuals with multiple needs such as substance misuse, mental ill health and alcoholism. Real concern about wet houses not meeting the needs of alcoholics
- More social housing is needed in Swansea. There are long waits and rents are not realistic.

What is not working so well?

- Gateway is a central system for all hostels. This is the first place individuals needing help are referred to and are signposted from here to other organisations. However it is difficult to contact them and it is not managed as well as it could be. Some organisations feel there is cherry picking with supported accommodation. A full time gateway officer is needed who is accessible at all times to oversee everything and to ensure consistency across the board and ideally to work alongside Housing Options.
- The thresholds for receiving support from social services and mental health services is too high so many homeless and vulnerable people needing specialist support don't receive it
- There is a problem with PCSO's and City Centre Rangers moving homeless people out of the centre of Swansea. A new approach to enforcement is needed.
- Homelessness is increasing massively, a huge amount of money is being spent on it but this is not solving the problems
- Homeless policy seems to be crisis led. It is important to have a joined up approach across various agencies and departments
- Many small groups have established themselves on Facebook etc, which want to help homeless people. However these are not coordinated and monitored. It is completely sporadic. A big piece of work is needed to harness all this good work
- The system is very complex. If coordination is improved this could help to stop people from falling through the gaps.

What best can the Council do to make a difference to homelessness in Swansea?

- Need to invest in a one stop place like St Matthew's used to be before it closed. A quality day centre is fundamental and would be a massive cost saving to the Council and other agencies – everything under one roof seven days a week
- Needs to be options from providers for bespoke packages (more flexible) for individuals
- Housing First is an important tool for housing and support
- Very healthy dynamic between volunteer groups in Swansea but need LAC type workers which are not based on geography for first thing in the mornings and last thing at night when other agencies are not around
- Cardiff Gateway scheme has some positives (and some negatives) which Swansea could learn from.

The evidence gathered from this meeting will be used to prepare questions to put to the Cabinet Member and relevant officers at the next meeting of the Working Group on 12 June.

Actions:

- Health Board representative to be invited to attend the next meeting of the Working Group, specifically the Director of Mental Health or someone who is able to answer questions from the Working Group on mental health issues in relation to homeless people
- Head of Adult Services to be invited to attend the next meeting of the Working Group to answer questions from the Working Group.

The meeting ended at 12.30 pm