

HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING ACTION GROUP – 20 DECEMBER 2017

Minute of meeting

Present:

Chair: Jon Sparkes (CEO, Crisis)

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

In attendance: David Signorini (Deputy Director, SG Better Homes Division), Catriona MacKean (Head of SG Housing Support and Homelessness Unit), Marion Gibbs (Team Leader, SG Homelessness Team), Stephen O'Connor (SG Homelessness Team), Una Bartlett (Crisis).

Apologies: Susanne Miller (Glasgow City Council), Mike Dailly (Govan Law Centre)

1. Welcome

Jon Sparkes welcomed members to the fourth meeting of the Action Group and invited roundtable introductions.

2. Update on implementation of Q1 recommendations

Catriona MacKean updated the Action Group on the progress of partner organisations across Glasgow, Aberdeen and Edinburgh (the Q1 Implementation Group) to implement the agreed actions to minimise rough sleeping this Winter. The Weekly teleconferences with partners had been initiated and at the first of these, on 18 December, partners reported that there had been a very swift response and that all the recommended actions in the 3 cities are either in place or being implemented. The Action Group then had a discussion on the work and challenges this winter. The Group welcomed the excellent work and progress of the front line organisations in such a short space of time and discussed how to monitor progress, learn lessons and improve practice, particularly in recognition of the wider challenges within the homelessness system. The Action Group also discussed perceptions around its role, remit and membership and agreed to communicate further information to stakeholders.

ACTION: Scottish Government Homelessness Team to continue with weekly partner teleconferences and provide regular progress updates to Action Group meetings

ACTION: Action Group/Jon to issue a communication to stakeholders with further information on the remit and focus of the group.

3. Update on listening to lived experience

Jon Sparkes invited Maggie Brunjes to update the Group on discussions with people with direct 'lived' experience of homelessness in Scotland. He thanked Maggie for sharing a draft copy of the report of the first phase of the "Aye we can" consultation. Maggie confirmed that five consultation events were held this December, in Aberdeen, Perth, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dumfries and that 122 people had attended. Most people had said they were content to keep in touch with the consultation in the coming months. At each event, the group discussed issues relating to rough sleeping, temporary accommodation and ending homelessness in Scotland. Among the key messages, people described a system that is complex, takes too long to exit and there are too many rules and constraints. A universal message was that people wanted much faster assistance. Maggie confirmed the intention to publish the "Aye we can" report online, with a link to a live survey to collect further data and intelligence. The next phase would seek to include groups underrepresented in sessions to date and to target specific issues (including rural homelessness) using smaller focus groups.

The Action Group welcomed the report's findings and the valuable comments of those who had attended the events. The Group agreed to use the comments and findings in the report as a key focus of the Action Group's work and considerations. The Action Group also agreed to the report's publication alongside a live survey.

ACTION: Maggie to publish the "Aye we can" report and live survey and share weblinks with Action Group Members (<http://www.ghn.org.uk/shien/aye/>)

ACTION: SG Homelessness Team to share the "Aye we can" report with the Minister for Local Government and Housing

4. Recommended approach on each work stream for Q2: who we need to talk to; how to take it forward

Jon Sparkes invited updates on Q2 workstream actions. He highlighted that some workstreams had already made very good progress. He asked members to consider what the Group needed to do between now and February to develop concrete proposals and who the Group should engage with.

Alison Watson updated the Action Group on the workstream to consider the prevention of rough sleeping in Scotland. Alison highlighted the need to understand the profile of rough sleepers in Scotland, and their personalised and often complex needs, to better target prevention activity. The Action Group had a detailed discussion of the issues and agreed that more engagement and information sharing was needed with front-line support partners (police, NHS workers, prison staff, social care professionals and others) so that they can play an increased role in adopting a targeted pathways approach to homelessness prevention. The Action Group agreed that this was an important but underutilised resource for homelessness prevention, particularly for people leaving institutions such as prison, care, armed forces or hospital, as well as victims of discrimination and/or abuse. The Action Group also agreed that an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) be taken on its

recommendations to ensure that people with characteristics protected under equalities legislation are not disadvantaged or discriminated against. This would include consulting with specialist groups including Scottish Women's Aid and LGBT Youth Scotland.

ACTION: Scottish Government Homelessness Team to provide advice to the Action Group on preparation of EQIA

Maggie Brunjes updated the Action Group on the workstream to consider access to accommodation. Maggie set out a framework for recommendations which would contribute to ending rough sleeping by ensuring people received rapid access to settled re-housing, while recognising a range of options needed to be available according to individual need and preference. In its discussions, the Action Group identified a need to go to a point where the default position is a rapid return to settled housing. Recognising that the framework being discussed would be a major shift from the current default position, the Action Group agreed to work up a proposal to commission expert consultancy support to develop a new approach to housing access for people who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness. Josh Littlejohn suggested that Social Bite could consider funding the work. The Action Group also agreed that further work was needed to consider possible housing access options for people 'with no recourse to public funds'.

ACTION: Action Group to develop a proposal to commission work on developing a new approach to housing access

ACTION: Action Group/Maggie to undertake further work to consider housing options for people 'with no recourse to public funds'

Lorraine McGrath updated the Action Group on the workstream to consider the issue of front-line support for people who are already sleeping rough, building on the work the Group is implementing this winter. The Action Group agreed it was essential to make direct contact with homeless people to understand their experiences and the complexities around their support needs and that responses needed to be flexible and prioritised to tackle the most vulnerable people first so as to provide rapid access to the most appropriate support. The work of outreach workers was vital and Lorraine reported that the actions this winter to empower front line staff to act on the spot, including personal budgets, was having a good impact. The Action Group agreed it was also important to equip front line workers with the latest information and training and that multi-agency collaboration was essential to targeting and prioritising support. The Action Group also agreed it was important to learn from the evidence from the Group's work this winter and to assess and learn from the impact and challenges.

Action: Lorraine/Maggie to speak to front line workers network and CAN keyworker group and come up with a proposal for engaging with frontline staff

Suzanne/Alison updated the Group on the workstream looking at the potential need for legislative change, based on a paper Mike Dailly provided to the Group. The Action Group welcomed the update and, following a detailed discussion, recommended that the workstream should now:

- put together the recommended principles for a prevention duty, building on the lessons learnt in Wales and England in recent years, and recommend how to change arrangements such as intentionality and local connection in a way that would help reduce rough sleeping specifically, and homelessness more broadly
- produce an account of how current law is not being effectively implemented in practice in a way that is increasing rough sleeping, homelessness, and extensive use of unsuitable temporary accommodation, with recommendations on how to correct this situation
- take a watching brief on the consultancy work on accessing accommodation (mentioned above) and consider whether, if appropriate, there are legal changes that would enable and support changes the consultancy work suggest.

Action: Mike and workstream members to take forward Action Group's recommendations on further consideration of the need for legislative change

5. Discussion on the vision and aims for Q3 and agree the work streams

Jon Sparkes invited the Action Group to discuss the 3rd of the 4 questions the Group had been asked to consider: how to transform the use of temporary accommodation. The Action Group agreed that the issue was complex and that there are wide geographical variations in the rules applied and the quality, nature and average length of stay in temporary accommodation. The Action Group agreed that the original concept of temporary accommodation as a short-term stop-gap should be the aspiration and that there was a need for further data to determine standards and the nature of the current situation, noting that 'Homelessness in Scotland' and 'Housing Options' statistics were due to publish on 23 January . The Action Group agreed that further research on the current landscape was required to allow the Group to assess the nature of the change needed. It was agreed that Suzanne Fitzpatrick would consider further and produce a proposal.

Action: Suzanne Fitzpatrick to consider and produce a research proposal for looking at the current position on accessing temporary accommodation, building on the paper that ALACHO developed.

6. Initial discussion on the Ending Homelessness Together Fund (paper to be provided by SG for views)

Catriona MacKean invited the Action Group to consider a discussion paper with draft principles for the Ending Homelessness Together Fund of £50 million over five years. The Scottish Government intends to develop the approach to use the £50 million with key partners, including the Action Group, and it was recommended that a set of shared messages and guiding principles be developed with the Action Group which will inform development of the approach. The Action Group discussed and agreed that it will be important that the money is invested to support the Action Group's recommendations and to both provide an immediate catalyst for change as

well as ensuring sustainable change and improvement in the long term. To achieve this it was suggested that rather than considering the fund in five discrete chunks of £10 million each year, a more flexible funding plan could consider some portion of the money invested early in projects and initiatives that will immediately support the Action Group recommendations in order to achieve quick wins and good evidence; and then there could be opportunities to bid for longer-term funding that enables work to be piloted, evidenced and then mainstreamed as new ways of working. The Action Group noted that there were some expectations arising in the sector around the fund and it was important to clarify the purpose with stakeholders. Catriona thanked members for their comments and agreed to develop the proposal further, including through discussions with other partners, for the next action Group meeting.

ACTION: Scottish Government Homelessness Team to update the Ending Homelessness Together Fund discussion paper

ACTION: Action Group/Scottish Government to clarify the purpose of the Ending Homelessness Together Fund in communications to stakeholders

Next meeting – 18 January 2018. A full stakeholder event will also be arranged for end of January.