

## MEETING OVERVIEW

We met from 6.30pm on Thursday April 19<sup>th</sup> at the Julian Trust night shelter with the overriding aim to meet and discuss issues of shared relevance in line with the aims of Bristol Homeless Forum

***“to be an inclusive group of those organisations and individuals working with homeless people in and around Bristol which enables its members to provide support, encouragement and resources to each other in their work.”***

The meeting was attended by 22 people who represented a wide cross section of forum members and organisations working with the homeless in Bristol. As well as some individuals, organisations present included Breakfast Run, Caring in Bristol, Christ Church , Churches Together, Help Bristols Homeless, HelpHomelessBristol, Julian Trust, Keep Bristol Warm, One25, Pastles Productions, Salvation Army, See Change, St John Ambulance, St Mungos, Streetwise.

After a formal welcome to the forum Ed Reed from Caring in Bristol gave an update on the development of Bristol Homeless Connect encouraging any present who were not already listed to get included.

Richard Drake then gave a summary of our Homeless Awareness Week activities over the last 4 years by way of introduction the themes of the table discussions in which everyone could participate.

The notes arising from these discussions follow.

*[Note: these are unedited at this stage and represent things that were said around the tables and which we will discuss further as the opportunities arise. They are not necessarily views on which everyone agrees, indeed that was not the point of the discussions.]*

In plenary session at the end of the evening the following additional points arose

- We need to empower the homeless, or they will lose hope and capability.
- We need more collaborative meetings like the BHF
- Work with other cities with similar problems.
- Social Action groups could distribute Questionnaires and/or information. Possibly for St Mungo's Client Survey?
- If Rough Sleepers are not invited to BHF, could we have video testimonials to raise issues.

## WORKING TABLE A MESSAGE

Through Homelessness Awareness Weeks in the past we have worked together to increase awareness of issues around homelessness in Bristol and the work we do.

**Key Questions** : what is our message & to which audience?

Have we succeeded during Homelessness Awareness Week?

What message(s) are given out by our work?

### Message

- Have we asked Rough Sleepers what we should be saying?
- The first group were unclear of the message/theme for 2018 it had 'drifted out of consciousness'.
- Homeless Awareness Week should be more focused on the needs of Young People. And aimed more at young people, engaging and educating them.
- Need to raise awareness of the importance of the Prevention of homelessness.
- Educate about the impact of cutting council and government services.
- Educate about the Hidden Homeless, and what can be done to help them.
- Different views/attitudes and different solutions to types of homelessness:
  - o Rough Sleepers
  - o Beggars
  - o Hidden Homeless
- Focus on rough sleepers may detract from others in need.
- Educate supporters what to do in response to 'emotional blackmail' by those asking for money.
- Homelessness can change. People move from Sofa Surfing to rough sleeping.
- 'No one that uses the Breakfast Run/JT begs in the town centre' (the need to address the issue of what to do when asked for money).
- Demonising Homeless People adds to the problem, making them feel part of the community helps.
- Different tactics/behaviours and locations of homeless people at different times of year.
- Impact of welfare reforms/austerity on Homelessness
- Correct misinformation about how to access services/shelter costs etc.
- If people don't have time/transport how can they help?
- Need to educate people about the successes of homeless charities etc. in Bristol
- 'The Homeless' are viewed as a single demographic, which is wrong; different types of homelessness.

### Audience

- Public in Bristol is now aware of homelessness.
- We should engage with more non-homeless charities such as Off- The-Record to reach a wider audience.
- Physical donations are not as helpful as financial donations and given time.
- BHF should set up a Facebook group
- Educate people that homelessness is a constant problem; too much focus on the winter and on the weekends.
- Educate Young People on the hugely negative impact of anti social bullying of homeless people.

- Involve community leaders/celebrities/social media influencers/popular people to spread a wider message.
- Link with other cities to make it a national message.
- Need to recruit Facebook action groups to spread message.
- Educating the 'angry people' you see on the Bristol Post for example.
- Share experiences of different types of volunteering: giving out food, overnight etc.

### Other points

- 'It can happen to anyone'
- 'Humanise rather than condescend'
- 'Give them a fighting chance'
- 'What a homeless person looks like'
- 'Focus more on the people than on the label of homelessness'
- 'An exhibition of homeless people stories and thoughts'
- 'People will listen more if they trust the message'

From Flip charts & other notes :-

- Ask Homeless People; Is the IF Group invited to the BHF?
- Raise awareness with young people (schools)
- 'Hidden Homeless'
- Image – 'People in doorways' – educate re all types
- 'Homeless' vs 'People who are homeless' \*
- Not just for Christmas
- 'BIG' problem – wide range of issues
- Creative thinking about "Housing"
- Homelessness is not an identity \*
- Encourage and praise groups that collaborate with others, name and shame ones that don't.
  - People want to volunteer for a day, during the day. Can we do something with these volunteers?
  - Organisations are too precious about their turf/time slots. Need to collaborate to make better use of time.
  - Need a way to share volunteers expertise.
  - Volunteers should move between organisations to gain expertise.
  - Educate people setting up new groups
  - Way to share donations and stop stockpiling
  - Ways to involve children and teenagers in volunteering
  - A 'Safer Off the Streets' style campaign, but not 'on behalf of the council and St Mungo's'
  - Need 'a Focal Point for Action'
  - Do a TED event on Homelessness
- If people don't have time/transport how can they help? Social Media, online campaigning etc.
  - Need a large effort from small housing providers
  - Homeless people need skills and support
  - Engage with emergency services

## WORKING TABLE B ACTION

We have run Homelessness Awareness Week for 4 consecutive years. It is suggested that awareness of the rise in homelessness is unavoidable and we might instead try Homelessness **Action** Week to focus on engaging the public in our work.

**Key Questions** : If we have a Homeless(ness) Action Week what does that mean?  
What might we do, how can we get others involved?

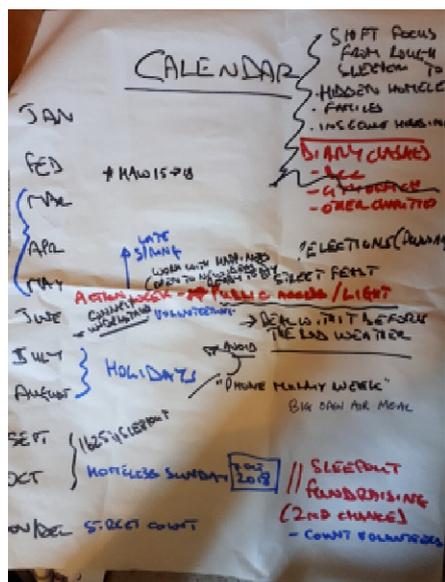
Overall a really good idea to have Homelessness Action Week

- Asking people with properties to rent them at affordable rates – contact Landlords (provide a pack to give landlords)
- Publicise deposit bond scheme
- Talk to people who are rough sleeping
- Encourage people to do things they can continue through the year
- Still need to raise awareness
- Petition for a Rent Cap/Have a campaign focus (need to plan very early)
- Use local media (Made in Bristol ....) to run adverts for the campaign
- Use Marvin (& famous names) to publicise activities & Campaign
- Commit resources to plan Action Week – Time & Money
- Comedy Fundraiser
- Helping people get jobs, work placements  
(Business in the Community organising work placements now?)
- Part of the message is that back office & admin support are essential – and need to be paid for
- BHF needs a facebook page – easy to share – ask for volunteers at BHF AGM
- Target populations for our actions:  
Public – do something now, get involved (volunteer, donate, promote, campaign)  
Business, Property Developers
- Public Information – Reasons to Care; Reasons to Act
- Work Fair – bring together employers & ex-homeless people as part of a bigger event, stands like at the Galleries
- Big meal if HAW in summer
- What are other cities/countries doing?
- Work parties – eg to convert shipping containers
- Campaigning – letter writing, street surveys, social media
- Encourage people to address underlying issues (not just giving food/sleeping bags)
- Encourage autonomy/empowerment – give an Argos voucher not a gift
- Connect with schools & young people, youth groups
- Action week needs a clear focus and aims
- Foodbanks & hidden homeless, shopping \* cooking on a budget

## WORKING TABLE C CALENDAR

We have run Homelessness Awareness Week for 4 consecutive years in late February/early March in the week leading up to the Sleepout. The timing of the Sleepout was originally set to align with release of government rough sleeper count figures and broadly follow the timing of Homeless Sunday where churches might have a focus on homelessness issues. Rough sleeper count numbers are now often publicised in November/December and Homeless Sunday is scheduled for October 7<sup>th</sup> 2018. It is suggested that we run our next Awareness/Action week in June 2019.

**Key Questions :** Are there better times of year to work together?



Main outcomes:

➤ Makes sense to separate Sleep Out & Awareness/Action week as it gives 2 opportunities to get messages across

➤ Sleepout is primarily fundraising & many 'church' contacts so tie-in with Homeless Sunday (7<sup>th</sup> October in 2018) makes sense;

Risks/Opportunities :

- 1625ip Sleepout, possible clash/work together
- Pre-homeless count, potential to recruit count volunteers
- Focus on early warning not crisis
- Less risk of being snowed out

- Action/Awareness Week should be late spring; Risks/Opportunities :
  - After Easter but before "phone mummy week" (Glasto kids)
  - Avoid May elections (purdah)
  - Lighter evenings give opportunity for public engagement
    - Work with peoples happiness, openness (post SAD)
    - Volunteer recruitment
    - Street feast
    - Preventive messages vs Crisis response
- Shift focus from 'Rough Sleepers' in crisis to prevention, hidden homeless, insecure housing
- Need to check for diary clashes with BCC, City Office, Other Charities

## WORKING TABLE D TENSIONS

Bristol Homeless Forum is open to any individual or organisation working with homeless people and homelessness issues in Bristol. It's only aim is to "..... be an inclusive group of those organisations and individuals working with homeless people in and around Bristol which enables its members to provide support, encouragement and resources to each other in their work."

As an inclusive group we do not all work in the same way or with the same motivations so tensions are quite likely to arise from time to time, but we would still hope there is much to be gained from working together.

**Key Questions :** Do our different approaches create tensions?  
How might we respond to tensions between, say, businesses and rough sleepers?  
Do the tensions matter? In what way?  
How might we work together to manage these tensions?

- There are gaps in service, which are being filled by smaller independent groups, CICs and community organisations.
- Some commissioned services get big grants and contract funding, how is this used?
- Do commissioned services always meet the needs of the people they provide service to, or are some parts of the charity sector self-servicing, not just business like, but like a business.
- Help Homeless Bristol hear that their, and other small scale groups, workers are "getting in the way" of paid staff from commissioned services.
- Independent outreach and engagement can be more accessible to individuals in need than other services. We don't make demands on people regarding engagement. Some of the professional services have lots of expectations of people they work with and need them to go through hoops to get what they need.
- Relationship building, trusting and sharing are strengths of the independent services.
- Help Homeless Bristol focus as much on the relationship with people that they meet as on giving out food or other items. This makes them different from "soup runs" operating in the same areas.
- Lots of people don't want to engage with commissioned services
- Anti-Social Behaviour Team/ Police and Council sometimes feel that there is poor communication from services working on the streets. How can those responsible for community safety find out who is working with which person on the streets.
- e.g. recent example of couple taken to court in relation to rough sleeping, highlighted that although those bringing the case felt no one was working with the couple, once the case started lots of groups and individuals came forward to say that they were involved.

- Bristol's Homeless Pathways are too prescriptive for some people, resulting in them not engaging or disengaging. Even on the streets accessing services can come at a price, when all people want is their immediate needs met.
- Discussion which included the following: Bristol City Council has taken a decision to give large contracts to a small number of larger providers, this is not always in the best interest of those who are homeless. Rather than awarding one contract worth e.g. £500K the Council should have awarded 5 contracts of £100K to increase diversity of services and more choice for those who use them.
- Tensions between non UK Nationals and UK Nationals within the homeless community have resulted in violent incidents at Wild Goose and Compass Centre. There is a belief that these tensions, with violence and assaults are being played out at an even greater level on the streets and away from services.
- There has been targeting of caravans and tents, including tents being slashed or burned.
- Longstanding view from people on the street that you can't get into Julian Trust Shelter as "it's all Polish and Romanians" queuing up first.
- There are some very persistent and pushy drug dealers working on the streets. They won't take no for an answer when they are trying to sell and give cheap "introductory offers". Failure to buy after this can lead to violence and other reprisals.
- Why aren't the police acting against these people, especially in respect of selling Spice? Explanation that if what is being sold is tobacco sprayed with spice, then to a neighbourhood officer this just looks like tobacco. There are no police drug squads any more, just neighbourhood policing teams. Intelligence and clear evidence is needed before action can be taken.
- There is a focus of services in the broadly central area of Bristol, this means that those who are trying to stay away from dealers or specific people in the homeless community, cannot do so because they all need to access the same services. No way of avoiding each other's problems.
- There needs to be more service outside of central Bristol. Some supported accommodation schemes not in central areas were mentioned, but these are typically second or third stage on accommodation pathway and so not always able to be directly accessed.
- Particular problem with the lack of South Glos./Kingswood services. Meaning that people have to come out of the area they know in order to get any service.
- StreetLink is it fit for purpose? There can be a significant gap between a report and someone being seen, if they are seen at all.
- Fundamentally there is not enough available accommodation at all levels within the housing pathway or in the social or private rented sector. We need to develop more accommodation.
- There are people in higher needs accommodation who don't need to be there but can't move on due to lack of lower level supported accommodation options, this has the net effect of holding complex needs people on the streets as they can't go

anywhere but higher needs services which are already full. There are blockages and silting up at all stages of the housing support pathway.

- Problems with the way in which the media reports stories about homelessness. Media are keen to hold power to account, but do not apply the same understanding or need for accountability from those on the street. This problem can be seen where the media talk about the issue being homelessness for an individual without delving into the complexities of addiction, mental health, trauma, offending etc.
- Some media stories do help to highlight the need, even though the depth of understanding can be missing from the published or broadcast article.
- Business Community concerns – actually dialogue with businesses is often good and examples were given by small groups represented e.g. talking to the tanning salon about the impact of their short lived policy to keep the area outside of their shop wet to deter rough sleepers.
- Some businesses stay below the parapet, voicing their views through larger organisations such as Bristol BID.

***Bridging the gap between different types of services – “we all bring something to the table.”***

***How can we all work together and work better together?***