

## **Update Report on HWW Engagement with Rough Sleeper Thematic Review: PBM - 28th May 2020**

**Background:** HWW's initial involvement in this matter arose when a member of the public attended our BMiP in September 2017 and raised a number of questions around the death of Mr Cardon Banfield, a gentleman who had been sleeping rough in the Worcester area for a period of time. His decomposed body was discovered in a tent close to the river in July 2016. Over a three year period (2016-2019) there were a further 5 deaths of people who had at some point been sleeping rough in Worcestershire and were known to at least some of the relevant public services. As a result of various meetings and conversations with a range of people and agencies over this time it was agreed through the Safeguarding Adults Board that a Rough Sleeper Thematic Review should be undertaken, commencing in late 2019, to consider all of these matters.

**Current position:** In November 2019 I attended a Stakeholder Event with around 50 other participants to meet with Brendan Clifford, the Independent Consultant leading the review, and to discuss the draft Terms of Reference. Following this meeting work was undertaken on the review and HWW indicated its wish to be involved in further discussions with Brendan Clifford and to contribute to the process. A telephone meeting with Mr Clifford was convened at County Hall on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020 attended by Simon Adams and me on behalf of HWW. We confirmed at this meeting that we intended to report back to the BMiP in May.

We referred to our letter of 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2019 to the WASB (previously published on our website), in which we raised a number of issues. We welcomed the formal opportunity to contribute to the Thematic Review and throughout the discussion we emphasised our focus on continuous learning and improvement, a no-blame culture and the sharing of best practice. The HWW stance during this process has been to seek to ensure that lessons are learned and that services are improved.

We stressed the need for all agencies working with homeless people, formal and informal, to embrace the change in approach introduced by the Care Act, and confirmed our commitment to challenging the apparent difficulties in the public sector around safeguarding and homelessness, with attention paid to the fairly new definition of self-neglect.

We noted that the Thematic Review appeared to have acted as a springboard for better co-ordination and integration of services for people who were 'rough sleeping' and there was an evident commitment from many agencies to work together wherever possible.

HWW expressed concern about the co-ordination of services for transient rough sleepers with neighbouring authorities and how information/communication across county borders could be handled (this apparently was an issue in relation to Mr Banfield). We also highlighted the importance of improved cross-boundary working.

We noted that that recent reports seemed to focus primarily on a housing perspective and may not have given sufficient weight to other key elements that undoubtedly impact on people's lives (eg alcohol and substance misuse/mental health issues), and the need therefore for a person-centred and holistic approach.

As part of our enquiries HWW has made Freedom of Information requests, partly to ensure that information received can be placed appropriately in the public domain.

HWW expressed concerns about the plethora of VCS organisations, community groups and individual volunteers - many of whom are unlikely to receive public funds - that appear to be involved in different aspects of care and support for potentially vulnerable people living on the streets. The need for oversight and accountability was emphasised, and for an effective Action Plan for homelessness (including rough sleeping) that embraces all of the stakeholders, building on the existing strategic document. In addition we suggested that opportunities for shared training could be beneficial.

While much of HWW's early involvement in this matter was focused on Worcester City our interest has always been in the approach adopted across the whole of Worcestershire and ensuring consistency in services for rough sleepers and homelessness, particularly where people have care and support needs. We have noted the complexities in the County, whereby the 6 District Councils have Housing responsibilities while the County Council has Public Health and Social Care responsibilities. We have also noted the increasing levels of co-operation and collaboration with dedicated workers across all agencies and the push for improved co-ordination, and would anticipate that there will be the potential for significant learning from the Thematic Review

HWW has requested clarification about the timescale for publication of the Thematic Review. The process has inevitably been affected by the current Covid-19 situation, and plans for a follow-up Stakeholder Event had to be cancelled because of the pandemic. However, a Homelessness Taskforce has been established recently and work is being undertaken at pace to address many of the key issues confronting people who are experiencing homelessness or rough sleeping. I have been asked to attend one of the sub-groups and can confirm that work is underway.

It is anticipated that the publication of the Thematic Review, together with the work currently being undertaken to improve options and services to people who are sleeping rough, should provide a helpful framework for ongoing service delivery. Should that prove to be the case then this aspect of HWW's work should be concluded.

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Director