

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING: Wellbeing Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel

MEETING
DATE: 7th October 2011

TITLE: Homeless Hostel Update

WARD: ALL

AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM

List of attachments to this report: None

1 THE ISSUE

1.1 This briefing paper aims to update the Panel on progress to provide an alternative solution to improving homeless provision in light of the decision not to proceed with the James Street West hostel provision.

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Wellbeing Policy Panel is asked to:

2.1 Note and comment on the issues raised in this report

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The future development of the direct homeless hostel could have financial implications for the Council and in particularly the Supporting People and Communities revenue support budget. There will also be the opportunity to utilise some of the under spend of the Government Homelessness Grant to facilitate progress of the proposed option.
- 3.2 At this stage this briefing report has no identified financial implications as proposals are at an exploratory stage but the evaluation and consideration of final proposals will include full financial implications. Any revenue implications will need to be agreed with the Supporting People and Communities Commissioning body.

4 THE REPORT

- 4.1 The Council, through Supporting People & Communities funding, commission Julian House to provide a direct access homeless hostel. The service is provided from a basement in Manvers Street Baptist Church which is leased to Julian House from the Church. It provides 18 beds for men plus 3 for women. It is open every evening from 8pm until 8.30am providing shelter, food and support.
- 4.2 However, the facilities and accommodation are poor and do not meet modern hostel standards. There are a number of specific issues which include: limited capacity; dormitory style accommodation; inadequate provision for women – simply a small room where beds are laid out as required; lack of meeting rooms (including private rooms) to engage with clients and encourage them to work with support services; inability to host additional services and some doubts over the long term security of tenure.
- 4.3 In light of the decision not to proceed with the James Street West homeless hostel scheme officers were asked to investigate alternative solutions. The following provides an outline of what is likely to prove the best, and at present only proposed solution in the circumstances.
- 4.4 Julian House are planning to undertake some refurbishment in the near future, which will include improved ventilation and other superficial changes. However, more significantly they are in negotiation with their landlords to discuss a potential extension to their hostel lease which is due to come to end in 7 years. Julian House are also considering leasing another 2 properties in Bath. This could present an opportunity to remodel provision by designating Manvers Street as male only accommodation; reducing units of accommodation and redesigning interior; utilising the new buildings as move-on for more settled service users & provision of a new service for female rough sleepers.
- 4.5 We have had positive preliminary discussions with Julian House around this proposal. However, it is important to note that the proposal outlined above has been developed at short notice and needs further in-depth work in order to test out viability and strategic fit. In particular this proposal raises the following issues around risk, including:

- (1) Where will the capital funding to remodel the existing hostel come from? Julian House have advised that they may be in a position to fully fund these works. However, it is important to note that the design work has not been commissioned.
 - (2) The remodelling would only be financially viable if the landlords agreed an extension to the Julian House lease.
 - (3) Would a female only provision be viable? If finances for this service have to be taken from the current contract, how does this affect the viability of the existing Julian House service?
 - (4) The Government is currently consulting on changes to how Housing Benefit is calculated for residents in supported housing schemes. This could potentially affect the viability of the model, particularly the move-on element.
 - (5) The proposed model relies on the availability of two properties in central Bath. Should these not be secured, the model cannot work.
 - (6) This model has not been formally put before the Supporting People & Community Commissioning Body and so the financial resources have not been identified to procure a new service for female rough sleepers.
- 4.6 Officers are now working with Julian House to offer our assistance in moving this proposal forward. However, until the landlords of Julian House make their intentions clear there is relatively little progress that can be made.

5 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 5.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has not yet been undertaken.

6 EQUALITIES

- 6.1 No equalities impact assessment has yet been completed on the proposed solution. However it is well documented that rough sleepers frequently have health/disability issues and it is known that the provision, particularly for women, in Bath is inadequate. The core of this proposal would address the current adverse impact on both groups.

7 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 To date consultation on this model of provision has been restricted to the Cabinet Member for Housing & Major Projects and the Homelessness Partnership. The Homelessness Partnership comprises a range of organisation involved in homelessness, including Julian House, DHI, Shape Housing Association, Somer Community Housing Trust, Bath Abbey Homelessness Initiative and others.

8 ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN REACHING THE DECISION

- 8.1 Social Inclusion; Customer Focus; Sustainability; Young People; Human Rights

9 ADVICE SOUGHT

9.1 The Council's Monitoring Officer (Divisional Director – Legal and Democratic Services) and Section 151 Officer (Divisional Director - Finance) have had the opportunity to input to this report and have cleared it for publication.

Contact person	Graham Sabourn, Associate Director (Housing Services) Ann Robins, Supporting People Manager/Planning & Partnership Manager
Background papers	None
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	