

Statement and questions on the homelessness and rough sleeping update report

Eleanor Jackson (Cllr)

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Thank you for giving me the opportunity to commend the officers on their excellent work during the pandemic, which is no more and no less than I would expect from my long association with the team, beginning with the survey of youth homelessness in the Somer Valley in 2010, and subsequent studies, as well as the work the O and S panel for Housing and Economic Development did on boaters, Roma and travellers. On two occasions since March I encountered a homeless street person, and a team from Julian House were talking to them within hours. We uncovered then the role that mental health issues and addiction play in reducing people to homelessness, and I am proud that this council has put measures in place to assist veterans of the armed forces, whose itinerant past has left them with nowhere to call 'home', and who so often have a degree of post-traumatic stress disorder. There are many uncertainties in the current crisis, but three things can be said with confidence:

- 1) The causes of homelessness are complex affecting each individual differently, often in a lethal combination of relatively minor solvable problems
- 2) Lockdown has aggravated health problems, domestic violence and child abuse and relationship breakdown, and even the practical problems of finding rented accommodation.
- 3) Working with charitable agencies like the Big Issue Foundation and the YM is essential, as this report shows.

What is becoming clearer to me from my Westfield casebook is that people are becoming homeless (and will do in increasing numbers) because they can no longer pay their rents or mortgages, which were computed on two salaries. Now the family may be jobless or on very low wages as skilled work disappears. Others, especially self employed 'white van man', have slipped through the cracks of the government covid aid – or they find the forms too complicated to navigate, in the case of small businesses.

I referred two families to the housing team, but they could not help because the families were homeless because they could not get the keys of the shared equity properties the housing association had promised them 10 months ago. Their deposits counted as savings, and hence the ineligibility. I predict far more 'white collar homelessness' – which usually means staying with relatives in our area - as building slows due to covid smiting the workforce or the lack of building materials.

At the other end of the scale, I have single elderly residents in their old family homes who ought to look for residential accommodation, but cannot because such a traumatic move is difficult with the shortage of care home beds, and their fear of contracting covid .

I appreciate that the council is short of resources for this kind of work, but I would request the council to do a more indepth study before the storm of homeless bankrupt families is upon us. I think the policies outlined in this report are excellent, but they will only cover the tip of the iceberg.