

Bristol Homelessness Survey 2007

Summary of the Results

Introduction

The 2007 Bristol Homelessness Survey took place from 5 – 11 February. It was undertaken by the BCAN Homeless Forum in association with Bristol City Council. Nine organisations took part: they can be found listed below under ‘Lessons Learned’.

The aim of the survey was to record each point of contact – each time a homeless person made use of a homelessness service in Bristol – over the space of a week.

Two aspects of the results stood out as being particularly significant. Firstly, the good news is that 76% of the homeless people surveyed were registered with a GP. This is a tremendous achievement. On the other side, the same number of homeless people surveyed, 76%, qualified as being ‘Rough Sleepers’, and 22% of the previous seven nights (in other words, 119 out of the recorded 546 nights) were spent roofless. While we are sure that this percentage would have been lower if more surveys had been returned from people staying in hostels, this is still a worrying figure.

The Results

A total of 129 points of contact were recorded, capturing information about 110 homeless people. We have no way of estimating from these figures what percentage of homeless people in Bristol this represents, but over 100 people is a large enough figure for the results to be significant.

Many of the results confirmed what the organisations involved already knew or suspected. For example, homeless people are predominantly male.

- Female: 17%
- Male: 82%
- Not recorded: 1%

The age breakdown was also very much as expected.

- 0 – 19: 2%
- 20 – 29: 27%
- 30 – 39: 36%
- 40 – 49: 25%
- 50 – 59: 9%
- 60+: 1%

Three quarters (76%) of the people surveyed qualify as Rough Sleepers. There are two tests: in the past two years, have you slept rough on 10 nights, or have you slept rough on 5 continuous nights? Most of the people who ‘qualified’ under one test also qualified under the other as well.

- 10 nights: 72%
- 5 nights: 68%
- Either: 76%

Most people did not answer the question about their level of education, or indicated

that it was 'low', 'minimum' or similar. But some said they had 'finished school' or 'attended college', a few said their level of education was 'high' or 'top', whatever that means, and some others gave more specific achievements

- O Levels: 10
- A Levels: 8
- Degree: 3
- Diploma: 2
- Doctorate: 1
- HND: 1
- NVQ: 3
- NVQ Level 3: 1

Some of the results were less expected. Just under half (44%) said they had used the homelessness health service in the past year.

- Yes: 44%
- No: 53%
- Banned: 1%
- No answer: 2%

We asked where people had slept over the previous seven nights. We were given details of a total of 546 nights, split between the various locations and categories. The 'Night Shelter' is the Julian Trust, while the 'Night Centre' is the council-funded provision based at the Novas day centre in New Street. 'Skippering' is sleeping in a derelict building. We were surprised at the number (22%) of nights reported as 'Roofless'.

- Roofless: 22%
- Julian Trust Nightshelter: 9%
- Skippering: 9%
- Squat: 8%
- Hostel: 10%
- B&B: 1%
- Sofa surfing: 14%
- Car, tent, boat, etc.: 2%
- Your own home: 19%
- Night Centre: 6%
- Other: 0%

We also asked about which services people had used in the past two months. The range of organisations that returned surveys has presumably biased the results here, and we probably need to wait for a more complete set of returns next year before we can reliably interpret these figures. However, the returns from some known individuals suggests that there is a significant level of under-reporting of service usage in these figures.

- Breakfast Run: 8%
- Candle: 10%
- Caring at Christmas: 7%
- CCM (Wild Goose): 10%
- CCM (LITE): 2%
- Easton Salvation Army: 4%
- Julian Trust Nightshelter: 10%

- Mental Health Outreach: 2%
- Methodist Centre: 7%
- Novas (New Street): 8%
- Night Centre: 5%
- One25: 1%
- Outreach: 6%
- Soup Run: 10%
- Streetwise: 1%
- Trinity Tabernacle: 29%
- Other (BDP): 8%
- Other (Missing Link): 2%
- Other (Nightstop): 1%
- Other (Second Step): 1%
- Other (Sisters): 7%

Encouragingly, three quarters (76%) said they were registered with a GP. Bristol has made considerable effort in encouraging GPs to allow homeless people to register with them, and this has resulted in good access to healthcare for most homeless people. This is vital, as they suffer much more than the general public from a wide variety of health problems.

- Yes: 76%
- No: 19%
- No answer: 5%

We asked about the services being accessed, and those that were needed but not currently accessed, in the expectation of discovering significant levels of unmet need. While the figures do indicate a degree of unmet need, they are lower than expected.

| Service Area | Currently use? | Don't use but need to? |
|----------------------------|----------------|------------------------|
| Finding Accommodation | 12% | 9% |
| Physical Health | 11% | 5% |
| Mental Health | 9% | 7% |
| Substance Abuse | 14% | 4% |
| Debt | 2% | 7% |
| Mediation / Reconciliation | 2% | 4% |
| Counselling | 7% | 6% |
| Other | 2% | 1% |

Feedback

Homeless people were given the opportunity to express their own opinions about the provision of services in Bristol by the Voluntary and Statutory sectors, or about government policy.

For the most part, the opinions expressed were very much what would be expected: the work of the homeless services in Bristol was appreciated and highly praised, they

don't think Bristol City Council does enough, and they don't believe that central government cares about homeless people at all.

In addition to the expected opinions, several themes emerged. Many of those surveyed had a significant feeling of resentment towards asylum seekers. There was also a significant amount of reporting of factually inaccurate information: some stories seem to be widespread and widely believed among the homeless community.

It is also clear that many homeless people do not know who provides the services they use. It is an open question as to whether they should know or care about this. There are a number of strongly held and incompatible perceptions within the community of those working to help homeless people: in general, the council workers feel that people do not appreciate just how many agencies are funded by the council to help homeless people, while others often feel that the council does not provide enough funding to do this work, and expects too much of the funding that is provided. The homeless people mostly do not care where the funding comes from – they simply want to be helped quickly and consistently.

One of the positive suggestions from the feedback was a request for a better provision of drinking fountains. On investigation, several agencies reported a significant number of people coming to the door for water. It was also suggested that there is a need for 24 hour toilets, which seems a very reasonable request.

Lessons Learned

Results were returned from the following sources:

- BDP (Bristol Drugs Project)
- Breakfast Run
- Candle Community Centre (Salvation Army)
- LITE Course (Crisis Centre Ministries)
- Julian Trust
- One 25
- Soup Run
- Streetwise
- Wild Goose (Crisis Centre Ministries)

Apart from nine returns from BDP and one from Streetwise, none of the organisations funded by the Council managed to take part, despite promises of cooperation. We hope to repeat the exercise in 2008, and are seeking ways to engage the statutory services more effectively.

One concern expressed beforehand was that homeless people would not want to take part in such a survey, that it was too invasive, and so on. The feedback indicated that a few homeless people declined to take part (one spent 20 minutes explaining why he was too busy!), but the vast majority were happy to do so and appreciated the opportunity to have something of their story and experiences recorded.

In fact, instead of experiencing difficulties, most of the people who took part in asking the questions reported that it created a valuable opportunity to engage homeless people at a deeper level than would otherwise have been possible. A consequence of this is that we under-estimated the time required to complete a form: while the questions can be answered in one or two minutes, the conversation sparked off by the

questions often lasted for ten or fifteen minutes. This was regarded by those taking part as a strongly positive but unquantifiable benefit of the exercise. When we repeat the survey, we need to allow more time and involve more people in asking the questions.

Further Information

If you have any questions about the information provided in this summary, if you would like more details about how the survey was undertaken, or if you would like to offer to help with the survey planned for February 2008, please email:

Ailsa McWilliam (ailsa@caringatchristmas.org.uk) or

Paul Hazelden (paul@crisis-centre.org.uk)

or you can contact the Crisis Centre office:

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St Pauls

Bristol

BS2 8TP

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Appendix: What do you want to say to...?

The Homeless Services in Bristol

The services in Bristol are not bad but they need to provide more support.

I have been successful in securing accommodation through Novas outreach worked with Urban Housing Association.

Spot on, very grateful

It is OK apart from Sunday when everything is shut

Good more beds in nightshelter especially in cold weather – people are shoplifting to get deliberately arrested to get out of cold weather.

I think that the homeless services in Bristol need to be aware of how many people are sleeping rough and need to liaise with other services i.e. BDP and places because I don't think that people know these facilities are open to them.

If you are a single man it is hard to sort something out.

I felt like I had a raw deal with the help I received from the Hub. I feel like the Hub could do a lot more to help me get safe and secure accommodation. I've fought against addiction with drugs and right now I'm currently clean but since I have not got help, it will not be long before I'm hooked again.

Homeless people need to be nicer – disrespect volunteers

JT needs to have a fair system on door, people outside for 4 – 5 hours are pushed out way. Operate system anyone under the influence not admitted.

Why are there so many empty houses and homeless people?

You are doing a good job but your homeless booklet has a lousy map for new comers.

You need to provide a better guide to your services with regards to your maps as people new to Bristol find it difficult to find many places. Other wise keep up the good work.

Is appalling with regards to helping you find suitable accommodation during the winter periods places close down and you need to be seen sleeping rough before anyone will help yet no one comes to the place you say your sleeping rough.

Services are O.K. but it takes too long to access services and get help, especially if health problems are involved.

It could be better. Like to get involved in helping. People who use the service could behave better.

The services in Bristol are very good and I appreciate the volunteers who give their time in order to provide food for homeless people.

I don't feel the homeless service is that good because if you have debts or arrears you can't get accommodation access easily. That's my situation so basically I'm with missing link and have to find work to get accommodation.

I have concerns over some of the locations that are currently used for Soup Runs etc and in particular the Saturday lunch run at the 'bear pit'. I am very conscious that the sight of so many often drunk or drug fuelled people is causing understandable concern to passers by.

Is appalling because you have to be seen sleeping rough before anyone will help or offer help.

JT excellent well pleased, feel safe here very thankful

One25 are very good

You give asylum seekers accommodation quicker than other people have been waiting 5 years and still waiting yet they get in, in a week.

Criminal offence to be homeless

They provide a good service but need more in the mornings

The Council and Statutory Services

Give me a flat

Its c**p unless you have been homeless for about 2 years

Rehouse quicker – process=years=too long. Inequalities – priorities to Asylum, get straight away, single white men – ill- treatment

Don't look at things in a sensible way

In prison 11 years in Bristol since and not a sniff of a flat. Is contributing to re-offending and spending time in prison. Not pleased with the service and way treated – if Somali would have helped.

Stop focusing on the rich and do something for us

Pass the butt to the Hub who in turn passes the butt to outreach and other agencies who in turn passes the butt back to the council.

D.S.S. services take too long and lack of communication between various services results in many problems. Communication by phone is not effective and lacks the human touch and understanding.

Build some more houses stop giving them to other people in a way that puts me lower down the list.

Adequate could be worse, Jamaica St is a good point of access for services. Outreach experiences have been good.

Brilliant, If not for the homeless services there would be a lot more people worse off than they at the moment

These services I find are average. The housing associations are good but the city council leave a lot to be desired.

A bit on the slow side to get sorted out

I do not like the council, because I went to missing link from dec 05 and I had a flat, I was unwell and the council did not help me with the arrears and I was not in a fit state to pay and now I can't get on deposit bond scheme.

There is a need for an accessible source of fresh drinking water and also a need for more 24 hours toilets. The other thing that would be helpful would be to have a central location away from the main public pedestrian traffic flow where homeless people can congregate and drink (alcohol).

Would like more secure accommodation away from people using drugs as is trying to stop using – on methadone programme.

Don't make any rights or priority for people who are homeless and in contact with the correct agencies.

More attention focus budget on people lower socio-economic status to reduce homelessness and associated affects such crime and community health.

Get more homeless people off street.

4 years ago smashed hub up – tried to commit suicide never been forgiven

Be quicker on rehousing people

Been waiting on a list for last 12 months over 100 points Fed up of waiting unable to access B+B

Do not use them much but has been useful when have.

Central Government

Sort out more homes.

I think accessing flats is getting much better but could get better

Get everyone in the cabinet to sleep rough for a week, get them to live on benefits and amend their policies accordingly

I want to get a flat

Start treating own people respect instead of treating other people as charity cases, running up our resources on them.

Stop taking in asylum seekers and sort out your own countries homelessness problem.

Seen to have no concern with the regards and requests made by the homeless agencies in what needs to be done to meet the needs of the homeless and reduce the homelessness crisis in and around Bristol.

Poor, Not enough is being done to provide the necessary requirement to accommodate those with prior need.

Don't care what happens to the homeless as long as it don't effect them or they're family and lifestyles.

Ethnic minorities seem to get a better deal than British born.