

## **Food handouts and the Bearpit – notes of meeting on Thursday 27th November 2014**

### Present

Bearpit Improvement Group (BIG):

- Alan Morris (Chair of BIG)

Voluntary providers of food handouts in the Bearpit:

- Jackie Stephenson (Churches Together in Clifton, Cotham and Redland - CTCCR)
- Jackie Harvey (Jackie's Feed Programme)

Other voluntary organisations:

- Paul Hazelden (Bristol Churches Action Network)
- Jonnie Angel (Wildgoose Cafe)
- Jenny Riley (St Mungo's Broadway - Outreach Manager, Compass Centre)
- Lindsey Jones (Caring in Bristol - Bristol Nightstop, Christmas and New Year night shelter. Also volunteers with Bristol Methodist Centre on Midland Road, and Bristol Soup Run Trust, which operates at Pip n' Jay and Redcliffe Wharf)
- Rachel Haig (Community Minister at Tyndale Baptist Church – one of the CTCCR churches)

Bristol City Council

- Richard Hawkridge (Streetwise)
- Hywel Caddy (Senior Commissioning Officer, Strategic Housing)

### Apologies

Bearpit Improvement Group (BIG): Sara Venn, Miriam Delogu

Providers of food handouts in the Bearpit: Jamuna Fisher (Hare Krishna Food for All)

- 1 Welcome and introductions
- 2 Purpose of meeting

*Purpose of meeting:* coming together to explore the best means of delivering food handouts in Bristol in the context of current provision by various agencies for homeless people and street drinkers. In that context, to review the provision of food handouts in the Bearpit.

- 3 Setting the scene

*Bearpit Improvement Group:* formed in 2010 to help turn the Bearpit from a feared space which some people avoid to one that is more safe, welcoming, diverse and inclusive. Making improvements incrementally, via a number of workstreams. Firstly, trading, which provides a presence during the day, and encourages people to stay. Also art, greening, play etc. The council in parallel have decided to do works in the space to make it feel more welcoming; the works are nearing completion with most of the new paving done. BIG consists of a small and mixed group of volunteers. The council recognises BIG as the community group for managing the Bearpit, and has designated the Bearpit a Community Action Zone.

*Handouts in the Bearpit and nearby:* as well as Jackie's Feed Programme and Churches Together on a Saturday, there is sometimes a third provider (BIG has yet to make contact). Christchurch do a soup run at the bus station between 8am and 9am on a Saturday. Edge

Church do a handout in Brunswick Square on Saturday evening. The cafe next to Debenhams is used for free meals on Sundays between 1pm and 3pm. Hare Krishna do a handout on some Monday afternoons.

*Impact of handouts in the Bearpit:* The Bearpit has high volumes of people passing through – commuters, shoppers, local office workers, people arriving from the bus station, tourists. The trading and other activities are aimed at encouraging people to linger. A crowd of 50 to 60 people can feel intimidating to other members of the public, and make them less likely to stay. This is not to say that there is anything to fear, it is just perceptions, how people feel. This is the same in other places where services for the homeless are provided, eg the Wildgoose Café.

#### 4 The Bearpit: where everyone is at

*CTCCR:* the CTCCR soup run has been run for 20 years, started by Pat Reynolds of Clifton Cathedral. It operates in the Bearpit from 12.00 to 1.45pm on Saturdays every week, after doing a circuit of places, eg the Triangle. They use the St James Priory car park as a base. It attracts c.60 people in the Bearpit. 10 churches share a rota. Most churches do one calendar month, one does two months. They provide soup and take-away food, and try to engage with individuals.

Jackie has observed that the population of people using the soup run has changed, and now includes more transient types than before. Some are not homeless, but vulnerably housed. She has been told that people like the Bearpit as a venue for handouts you can see people coming from any angle, so it feels safe.

*Jackie's Feed Programme:* started 2012. Hot, nutritious, balanced food. Desserts too. 'Cook it with love'. Funded by BIG Lottery. Starts at 12, every other Saturday. Parks by Premier Inn, bringing the food in a taxi. Christmas dinner on 20<sup>th</sup> December. Goal is to find a facility outside the Bearpit.

Jackie has observed that some of those coming have mental health problems, some are alcoholics.

*Bearpit Improvement Group:* Food handouts are just one aspect of all the things that BIG is doing in managing the Bearpit as a public space. The physical changes to the space are an opportunity for reviewing the operation of the food handouts. There are different views about food handouts amongst individuals in BIG. The group is however united in wanting to engage with the providers of food handouts in the context of overall provision for the homeless – hence this meeting.

*Lindsey:* is concerned that the homeless are not moved on just because they can't afford what is on offer commercially. They need a place where they can be comfortable.

*Rachel:* is concerned that an inclusive approach is taken. In comparison, the shopping centres nearby (Cabot Circus and Broadmead) are excluding to the homeless.

*St Mungo's Broadway*: Jenny leads an Outreach Team that goes on the streets to engage with and support the homeless.

*Streetwise*: They engage with beggars, street drinkers, homeless people, and build a detailed knowledge and understanding of, the individuals involved and tailor the approach to dealing with them. They find out what support is needed and are proactive in facilitating referral to support services, eg finding accommodation for homeless people.

Where anti-social behaviour occurs, Streetwise apply enforcement measures. The Bearpit is a focus for Streetwise because anti-social behaviour is more common there. Streetwise are concerned with those who linger after food handouts, which can be the trigger for anti-social behaviour. The police do not have resources to counter anti-social behaviour all the time, so look to ways to minimise the risk of anti-social behaviour.

## 5 The wider picture of provision for the homeless

*Bristol Churches Action network (BCAN)*: the BCAN Homeless Forum was started in 2001, and meets every other month. Its aim is to network all the different individual and groups doing voluntary services for the homeless. It has no power over the groups, but can share good practice. A survey in 2001 showed 35 groups, but it is probably fewer now. There are 10 to 12 at each meeting, and others receive copies of minutes. The BCAN table of providers lists 16.

The approach differs between groups in the balance between giving food, signposting, engaging.

*Bristol Council homeless services*: they have noticed a huge increase in homelessness. They engage with all groups to facilitate support services. They recognise that vulnerable housed people too will take from food handouts. Would like to see structured services.

They have links with public health part of the council. A Food Poverty Strategy is being developed; a needs analysis has been done.

## 6 Discussion

### 6.1 Medium-term proposal

Jonnie Angel's 'big idea' is for a premises at weekends where food and shelter is provided, filling the gap in the week between other services, eg Wildgoose Café and Julian Trust night shelter, Spring of Hope Night shelter. A central, safe, neutral ground. A place to go to, not for a specific service. To include signposting for where else to go. A partnership of volunteers from many groups.

(Jonnie is not offering Wildgoose Café for this. Other activities take place there on a Saturday, and the staff and the building need a break.)

There was general support for this, subject to:

- a large enough space (bigger than Julian Trust night shelter)

- managed well, with strict ground rules that are enforced (as at Wildgoose Café), so that people feel safe
- training for volunteers. (It will be a big transition for volunteers used to food handouts.)
- developed in consultation with homeless people

The question is: how could it be resourced ?

## 6.2 Short-term actions

*Management of food handouts:* Food providers to consider how to ensure that the mix and number of volunteers present is right for confronting any anti-social behaviour that arises. (Paul Hazelden could advertise for more volunteers, if needed.)

Note: it is not just about the anti-social behaviour that arises during the food handout, but also what may arise after the food handout has ended.

*Seek feedback:* Explore with people what other areas feel safe to them. Food providers to seek feedback from individuals coming to the food handouts: why do they come to the Bearpit, what do they look for in a place where food handouts take place, are there other places where it would work well, what do they need in a place to feel safe and comfortable ? Do they want to be in the centre, would those who are housed prefer food handouts nearer where they live ?

## 7 Next meeting

A further meeting was fixed to follow on from the above discussion.

Date/time: **Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> December at 6pm**

Place: Surrey Vaults (tbc)

Jackie S will invite Richard Townsend of Edge Church.

Hywel will invite someone from the council's public health team.

A possible date for a third meeting is to tie it in with the next BCAN Homeless Forum meeting on Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> January at 6pm at Julian Trust.