

**BCAN**  
**Homeless Forum**  
City Road Baptist Church  
22 November 2001

## **Introduction**

The meeting was chaired by Steve Abbott, who opened with prayer.

## ***Those Present***

Steve Abbott (BCAN), Anni Davey (CCM), Paul Hazelden (CCM), Andy Luxford (CCM), Bruce Kent (Key to Life, Bradley Stoke), Yani Nicholls (Sisters of the Church), Annalise (Sisters of the Church and One25), Richard Barrett (Bristol Methodist Centre and Caring at Christmas), Martin Painter (City Council), Frank Troke (City Council), Anne White (CCM and City Council), Mike Bennett (Bristol Christian Fellowship), Sam Colgan (CCM), Trudie Lane (CCM) and Clive Richard (Trinity Tabernacle), Naomi Knapp.

## ***Apologies Received***

Graham Wheeler (Bristol Soup Run), Heather Grinsted (SA Candle Project), Janet Bryant (Easton SA).

## ***Previous Meeting***

One correction to the notes of the previous meeting had been notified: the CAT (Contact and Assessment Team) is *not* available at 'any time.'

## ***Contact Details***

Paul Hazelden circulated a list of those invited, asking that those present indicate their presence by ticking their name. He asked people to check the details on the list, correct any that are wrong, and supply any that are missing – email addresses would be especially welcome.

## **Homeless People and the Council**

Steve Abbott introduced Martin Painter and Frank Troke. Sue Strickland, the RSU Manager, was unable to be present. Steve invited Martin and Frank to say a few words about the council's policy on homelessness.

Martin Painter spoke on the subject. The Council has a remit for all homeless people in the city, both families and single people. Services are divided into 4 divisions, with each division having 3 or 4 area offices. There are 14 area offices, with nine homelessness officers providing a service through these teams.

The Council is required to follow the government's definition of 'homelessness.' When someone is 'intentionally homeless' (if, for example, they have carried out a 'wilful act' which leads to them being homeless), the Council has no duty to house them.

## ***Families***

The Council has a good record of housing homeless families. They are often placed in a Bed & Breakfast ('B&B') place at first, and then moved on to a hostel (Trinity Lodge). The target is for families to stay a maximum of 28 days in a B&B before they move on, and this target is nearly being met at present.

Of course, not all families who present themselves as being homeless fall within the official definition. There are some instances where families can be deemed to be intentionally homeless, but this is very rare. In these cases, emergency temporary accommodation is arranged whilst officers carry out the investigation.

The Council work closely with Next Link and emergency hostels. Use of B&B with families should be minimal and shorter term. On average there are 20 to 25 families per night in B&B, and the Council aim to move them on as soon as possible. All B&B units are inspected by environmental health: all places the council uses meet their basic requirements.

The Council provide a wide range of services for the homeless. This includes training in decorating, gardening, lifeskills, etc, and support for people getting back into accommodation. They work with both the statutory and voluntary sectors. In many situations, they work with Housing Associations to get people into stable accommodation; when there are parents with child care issues, they work closely with SPACE; and so on.

There is a new emergency family unit being built in Fortfield Road, Whitchurch where there will be 21 family units. The target date for opening this unit is August 2002. Use of B&B for families after that date should be minimal.

## ***Single People***

Single homeless people are a much harder problem. There has been quite an increase in single homelessness over the last few years. The Council only has a duty to house single people if they are both homeless and vulnerable. The question of what makes a single person vulnerable is a difficult one, but being sick generally qualifies a person as being vulnerable and hence qualifying for housing.

The Council has a duty to provide assistance and advice to homeless single people who are not vulnerable, and much of this is given through The Hub. The Hub is a multi-agency service that includes Health, Social Services, Benefits Agency, Employment Services and the City Council. Any decision made by The Hub is challengeable. Shelter operates in The Hub, acting as advocates for clients, and can challenge decisions made by workers at The Hub.

If the Council has a duty to provide accommodation, they would aim to use 'direct access' hostels, such as those provided by the Salvation Army, Redland House, Jamaica Street, Dean Crescent and GFS ('Girls Friendly Society'). At present these hostels are full and, in these circumstances, B&B accommodation is used. There were 137 clients in bed and breakfast last week, of which 80-85% were single.

Paul asked whether there is a target for moving on single people in hostels. Martin Painter replied that the Council does not have a duty to house everyone in hostels. Where they have a duty, they hope to move people on as soon as possible. The strategy is that people in hostels make application to the City Council for re-housing. There are 17,000 people on the Council's waiting list at present, and only 33,000 properties on the Council's books. The

Council has very few three bedroom semi-detached houses because of the ‘success’ of the ‘right to buy’ policy. Re-regulation of the housing market has resulted in fewer places being available for young people and those on benefits.

## ***Young People***

Overall numbers of people who are homeless have been roughly consistent, but there has been an increase in the number of clients who are considered vulnerable. There is also an increasing number of homeless young people aged 16 to 17 years, mainly due to family breakups and children not getting on with their parent’s current partner. In this area, the Council works closely with Social Services, East Bristol Youth Housing association and Priority Youth Housing Association.

An effective resource for young people has been The Bristol Foyer which opened last year and works to prevent young people ending up on the street. It caters for people aged 16 to 25 and has 55 bed spaces. There were 48 young people there last week. As well as providing accommodation, Bristol Foyer has links with major employers.

## ***Drugs and Mental Health***

Drugs play a significant part in homelessness. 10 years ago, people with mental health issues and alcoholic middle aged men made up the majority of the client group. Now there is an increasing addiction problem linked with mental health issues, and these people are more difficult to help through the various services available to them.

## ***Furnished accommodation***

It is often the case that someone who is homeless gets allocated a flat, but the flat is unfurnished, and they have no possessions whatsoever. This increases the difficulty experienced by single people in accessing good quality cheap accommodation.

In response to this need, the City Council has started a pilot exercise of offering furnished tenancies. This has proved to be popular, and the Council is encouraging Housing Associations to consider providing furnished tenancies.

For some people, this is a helpful development. It does, however, increase the risk involved in offering the tenancy, both to the housing provider and to the tenant.

## ***Reasons for breakdown with accommodation***

There was a brief discussion about the main reasons why tenancies fail. There seems to be a variety of reasons, and no clear statistics are available. One problem is that short term tenancies make it easy for the landlord to regain possession. Another issue is that sometimes a delay in issuing Housing Benefit results in the tenant being turned out.

Paul asked whether it might be possible to gain access to the figures regarding delays with Housing Benefit, but it does not seem that these figures are available.

## ***Deposit Bond Scheme***

Sam asked whether the old ‘Deposit Bond’ scheme still existed. It seems that few people

knew about the scheme as it was poorly advertised, and is no longer in operation.

There is, however, a similar scheme run by Neighbourhood Housing Services, who work closely with private landlords to take on single tenants. Under the scheme, rent is paid direct to the landlord and the tenant cannot cancel these payments as long as they stay on benefit. This scheme has operated on a small scale and has been successful, but for some reason it can be difficult to get landlords to take part in the scheme.

### ***Accommodation in the pipeline***

There are a number of housing schemes underway. Apart from the Fortfield Road scheme for families mentioned above, there are several large projects and a large number of individual flats underway.

Sovereign Housing have put in a planning application for a youth housing project in Cranbrook Avenue, but there is a lot of local opposition to this. A new scheme at Fishponds should be running in January, offering over 20 bed spaces. In addition, 172 flats are being developed now for accommodation for emergency hostels, and 180 extra units in the Clifton Triangle have been designated for tenants with a rough sleeping history.

There have been quite a number of meetings with Val Jeal of One25 to talk about the needs of that client group and identify how to deliver better services to them.

### ***Counting Rough Sleepers***

Statistics indicate there were 84 people sleeping rough in the city centre area 6 years ago. This had reduced to 23 by May 2001. Paul reported that at the September meeting of the Practitioners Forum, Christine Bolton said that the number of rough sleepers had increased from an average of 10 one year ago to an average of 25 over the previous month.

There was some discussion of the official figures for rough sleepers in Bristol. The CAT ('Contact and Assessment Team', managed by Christine Bolton) is involved in outreach to rough sleepers: they make contact with and seek to help people living on the street. The CAT know around 99% of people sleeping on the streets, and are convinced that 25 is accurate.

The method used in counting rough sleepers was described: Council representatives go to specific locations in the City centre at a specific time of night and count the number of people lying down. The difficulty with this is that people may be sitting up, or have been sleeping and moved on just before the count, or may be sleeping in areas not included in the count. There was a general sense that the real figures are higher than those indicated by the statistics, even if you accept that some people will be telling us they are sleeping rough when that is not the case. Clive mentioned that at a recent breakfast at Trinity Tabernacle 40 people had said they were rough sleepers. Paul mentioned the possibility that the groups represented on BCAN might work together to provide more complete information.

Martin Painter advised that there are national standards defining when someone is sleeping rough. He felt that there has been a significant improvement in the situation in Bristol because of all the hard work taking place. Over the last 2 or 3 months, Christine Bolton has housed over 50 people and a great deal of effort is being made to try to maintain the momentum.

The issue of hidden homelessness was briefly talked about, especially concerning young women and black people. The fact that it is 'hidden' makes it hard to substantiate, but One25

offered to provide statistical information.

## ***Helping Rough Sleepers***

The CAT are trying to engage rough sleepers and get them into accommodation. This would be, in the first place, a hostel bed. They would aim to continue involvement with the people placed into hostels, to prepare them for the next stage. Drug use is one of the biggest problems and, in this connection, the Bridge Project (run by Salvation Army) is now showing positive results.

It was acknowledged that hostel accommodation is not brilliant, but there have been improvements and the longer-term aim is to have smaller, more dispersed hostels. Paul responded that the problem with hostels is not décor, but their management and the way people are treated. Many people will not go into hostels because of the availability of drugs and the risks associated with using the hostels. Martin advised that all the hostel managers have policies regarding dealing with drugs and they work closely with the police.

Regarding the issue of drugs, Naomi asked what the Council's attitude was to rehabilitation centres in the area. The CAT work closely with The Bridge Project, Walsingham House, ARA, and have been consulting with the DAT ('Drug Action Team') over policy.

The CAT works with the Sustainable Tenancy Team. Once someone is provided with accommodation, they are given the support – including life skills – to enable them to stay in the accommodation. There is a tracking system and the vast majority stabilise.

The Bristol Rough Sleepers Consortium includes groups from both the statutory and voluntary sectors. The RSU ('Rough Sleepers Unit') funds the Homeless Action Programme, which provides funding and support for some voluntary groups. There is also a Begging Group and a Case Review Group.

One of the key areas to develop is the provision of 'meaningful occupation' for homeless and recently homeless people. More Day Centres may be needed to provide this meaningful occupation, which could reduce the number of people begging on the streets: local research indicates that 9 out of 10 people who are begging are not homeless, and 8 out of 10 have drug and/or mental health problems. The key issue is to help them, not just find them somewhere to stay.

## ***The way forward***

The Council are in the process of re-issuing the "Where to find help" leaflet for homeless people. It had been understood that all the details had been checked, but nobody present had been contacted by the Council for up to date details.

Trudie asked about money available for addressing drug and mental health issues and their impact on accommodation. Martin referred to 'Supporting People', a scheme that will be in place from April 2003. From that time, Housing Benefit will only cover the cost of rent. This is a significant change, and the full implications are not yet understood. In this context, Frank mentioned Transitional Funding.

Richard asked regarding the attitude of the Council towards groups, such as those represented here, involved in basic provision. Martin indicated that there is the possibility of

churches and the organisations represented on this Forum playing a significant role.

### ***Participation on groups***

Homeless people need more than just somewhere to live if they are going to be able to sustain the accommodation that is offered: this is where Day Centres can play a significant role. The Council are therefore open to networking with advice centres, day centres etc to help build bridges, with the aim of getting people off the streets and doing something else.

There has been a Meaningful Occupations task group, and it was suggested that this may reconvene. If it does, BCAN could participate in some way. This group works closely with Business in the Community, with some employers beginning to recognize the part they can play. BCAN could also be represented on the Supported Housing Forum.

Regarding constructive ways forward, Naomi asked about the possibility of communal living for the single homeless/rough sleepers. It was confirmed that some of the new housing stock currently being developed would provide an element of communal living, but the relative numbers were not known. Self Help housing was also mentioned.

### ***Providing information/networking***

Anni asked whether the Council were aware of the training course run by CCM. This did not seem to be the case, but served to highlight the benefit of efficient networking and to reinforce the value of the Council's strategy to work together with all other relevant groups and organisations.

Paul mentioned the benefit of work placements as part of the LITE course, and how these can be an important part of helping people move on. However, it is still the case that, after our clients have completed placement, they still have immense personal problems and what is needed is a deep level of ongoing support for at least the first two years.

### ***Mutual support***

It was agreed that the BCAN groups and the Council need to develop a closer working relationship if they want to deliver the best possible service to homeless people in Bristol.

The Council are undertaking a 'Best Value' review, and need to ask for comments from interested parties to help them plan how to provide their services. This means that the Council need to ask for comments, and groups such as those represented here need to take the time to give them a reply.

The Council will provide Paul with details of the 'Section 180' services for homeless people, and Paul will circulate these details to the members of the forum.

### ***Next Meeting***

The next meeting has been arranged for 7 January 2002, 7.30 pm, City Road Baptist Church (side entrance).