

**BCAN**  
**Homeless Forum**  
**Bristol Methodist Centre**  
**13 May 2004**

## **Introduction**

The meeting opened in prayer.

### *Those Present*

Lee Barnes (Bristol Methodist Centre), Paul Hazelden (Crisis Centre Ministries), Andrew Kellett (Salvation Army Social Services Centre), John Knuckey (Carmel Christian Centre), Val Moore (Christ Church, Clifton) and Barry Penn (Bristol Methodist Centre).

### *Apologies Received*

Apologies had been received from Peter Bruce (Easton Salvation Army), Anni Davey (Crisis Centre Ministries), Ailsa McWilliam (Caring at Christmas), Susanna Misson (Hope Centre & Christ Church), Martin Spink (Bristol Soup Run Trust), Kevin Stone (Candle Community Centre, Salvation Army), Paul Tipler (Aspire) and Graham Wheeler (Bristol Soup Run Trust).

### *Previous Meeting*

The notes of the previous meeting were agreed to be an accurate record, although a few details have changed since the meeting: the Homeless directory is not going to be a book but will be on the Internet – it may be available as a pamphlet but it won't be a professionally produced one, and it is not in the Internet at the moment; and the new Survival Handbook is due out in June 2004.

## **Main Discussion**

### *Other Homeless Groups and Forums*

Andrew K asked if there were any other homeless groups, and about how this forum relates to the other groups and forums.

There is a mental health and homelessness forum run by the Inner City Mental Health Team, which is attended by people from Crisis Centre Ministries and the Bristol Methodist Centre. It tends to focus more on reviewing individual cases than issues of policy, practice and working together, but it would be good to discuss with them how we can work better together.

The CATS Manager used to run the Practitioners' Forum, but this ceased operating some time ago. It was mainly attended by organisations operating hostels and drop-in centres.

The Council run several meetings related to homelessness: the Supported Housing Forum, which is primarily for groups supplying housing to people like our clients; the Meaningful Occupation Forum, which looks at the issues relating to helping people who were homeless find non-destructive things to do with their time; and the Homeless Consortium, which is a

high-level meeting of the statutory agencies – please see the attached Information Sheet for more details. But there does not appear to be any meeting (other than this one) that seeks to network the front-line groups.

### *Bristol Housing Policy*

Andrew suggested that we map provision across the city. The Council are planning changes to the housing set up, as the current system does not work and the Government wants all councils to implement Choice Based Lettings.

The current plan is to do away with the points system, which is disliked and almost entirely irrelevant because the system is clogged up by the emergency cases. The Council plans to simplify the system by reducing the number of criteria and then, when the client comes to the top of the list, give them a list of properties to choose from. This will potentially solve some of the problems, but will not address the problem of shortage – which is getting worse each year as the Council has fewer properties in which to house people.

At the same time, the Council plans to combine the Housing Register and the Supported Housing Register. This is a complex undertaking, but it should simplify the system for the clients, and should generally mean they will only have to cope with one interview and one assessment. Paul H attended the meeting at which these points were discussed, and is happy to try and answer questions on the subject.

Paul's suggestion to the Council was to address the problem in a different way: retain the points system (simplifying it if possible), but only allocate approved properties to people with points. This could be done using the Choice Based Lettings approach, with little difficulty. The emergency cases, which are preventing the current system from working, should be allocated properties that are not up to the approved standard but are available immediately. The emergency cases would then be housed in inadequate accommodation, and would therefore be allocated points as appropriate within the present system, and would be dealt with as any other case of housing need. Nobody would be jumping the queue, and, most importantly, the points system would be seen to be working.

Andrew and Paul will try to follow up these points through the Salvation Army and their Council contacts.

<b>Action:</b> Andrew & Paul
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## Relating our Work to our Faith

### *A Church for Homeless People*

A discussion was held concerning the provision of church services for people who are or who have been homeless and who don't easily fit into most 'normal' churches: this has been summarised in the BCAN Homeless Forum discussion paper circulated with these notes.

It was agreed that Paul would circulate details of the discussion to some key church leaders in Bristol, and seek to arrange a meeting to discuss the subject.

<b>Action:</b> Paul
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### *The Christian Aspect of the BCAN Homeless Forum*

One aspect of the BCAN Homeless Forum's central ethos is to serve both the Christian and the secular groups working to serve homeless people in Bristol; if any homeless organisations based in other faiths are established, they would be welcomed as well.

It was suggested that the challenge is to provide a context in which the faith-based groups can express their faith without alienating the secular groups. In practice, however, the distinction is not between different groups as between individuals: it is impossible to draw a clear line between the faith-based groups and the others, as most organisations working with homeless people have a Christian origin; and many Christians work in this area, both for Christian and secular organisations.

The basic principles should be respect for one another and freedom of conscience: nobody will be forced or required to adopt a 'Christian' approach to the work we do, and those who don't share the Christian faith will accept that the Christians present will sometimes feel it is appropriate to express their faith in some tangible way such as praying.

Paul H said that he had recently been told that our attempt to help the secular and Christian groups work together more effectively in this way may be unique in this country, but he hoped that this was not the case.

Concern was expressed that we could, somewhere down the line, become just a homeless forum and completely lose the Christian aspect. This has always been a potential problem for groups involved in social action of any kind, but this will not happen unless the members allow it.

Val was asked to find out about the Lee Abbey community of houses, who have at least one place in or around Bristol.

<b>Action:</b> Val
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## Information Share

### *General*

**Bristol Methodist Centre.** They are still exploring the possibility of joining with St Nicholas in the redevelopment of their site.

**Cyrenians.** From 3 May, they will only deal with people who do not have tenancies. Some of their previous clients were hurt by this change of policy, but it was required by their funding arrangements. The Bristol Methodist Centre would have appreciated being informed.

**Carmel.** They are looking for a few more places to distribute food.

**Christchurch.** They are still supporting the Breakfast Soup Run, and are planning to support the Wild Goose Coffee Shop with their next brown bag appeal.

**Evangelical Alliance.** They will be holding a regional consultation on the subject of social action on Friday 25 June 2004.

**Julian Trust.** They have a trustees meeting tonight, and there is a real concern that they are short of volunteers.

**The Hub.** An updated list of telephone numbers has been received from them.

**Aspire.** Paul T confirmed that Aspire Bristol is going well despite the catalogue part of the business ceasing to trade. Most of their work now comes from the recycling and window cleaning activities.

### *Salvation Army*

The question was asked whether the BCAN Homeless Forum could meet during the working day, rather than an evening. This would make it easier for the professionals to

attend. After a short discussion, it was agreed that a number of the voluntary members would not be able to attend a daytime meeting, while the professionals can choose to attend an evening meeting. The Council officials who have come in the past have indicated they are happy to attend two evening meetings a year.

The Salvation Army are appointing a new part time chaplain. Because of the renovation work being undertaken, the hostel is only half the size that it used to be. However, the Bridge Programme (their addictions unit) is functioning as normal. The hostel will have en-suite rooms replacing the old dormitories, and will grow again, but not to its previous size.

They will shortly be opening a life skills training centre in Bedminster sponsored by Tomorrows People. This will provide a pre-employment training course, bringing people from the Hostel by a mini bus. Some doubts were expressed about whether people will turn up in time to catch the bus.

## *FareShare*

Only 24 people attended the initial meeting about FareShare, but it sounds like it will probably go ahead in Bristol, and they will need local people to run it. It could be very significant for the soup runs and some other organisations.

Fare Share was established by Crisis, the national homeless charity, and has been operating for around 10 years. Retail outlets and food suppliers deliver to one of their centres; they in turn deliver the food to organisations working with homeless people. The food is between the sell by and the use by date. You can order from them, and a nominal charge is levied.

## Other Business

Paul will be speaking at *Jesus in the City*, in Glasgow, between 17-22 June 2004.

We urgently need people who want to do the First Aid training to sign up for the two sessions on 22 and 29 May.

The Shaftsbury Society had a conference in London earlier this month, and have produced a useful booklet called *Integrated Faith*.

Crisis Centre Ministries are holding their Open Day on Saturday 26 June from 2-7 pm on the theme of *Hope*. All are welcome.

The Council have produced a new document, *Reviewing the Voluntary and Community Investment Strategy*, which we need to respond to.

## Final Details

### *Usual Documents*

The usual set of documents were made available for people to look at and pick up. These are listed, as usual, on the Homeless Forum Documents page of the BCAN web site: you can navigate from the BCAN home page (<http://www.bcan.org.uk>), or go directly to [http://www.bcan.org.uk/bhf/12\\_homeless\\_docs.html](http://www.bcan.org.uk/bhf/12_homeless_docs.html), and they are available from the Crisis Centre office.

## *Future Meetings*

The next meeting, on 15 July, will also be at the Bristol Methodist Centre on Midland Road, just off Old Market, between 7.30 pm and 9 pm. Paul H has directions and a map available on request.

We have been invited to the Caring at Christmas offices, so that will probably be the location of the following meeting on 16 September 2004, when we plan to hear an update from the Council on their homeless strategy.