

Recommendations of the Homelessness Task & Finish Group – March 2016

The following recommendations are made to the Cabinet of Milton Keynes Council (the Council) as providing innovative and practical measures to reduce homelessness and the causes and effects of homelessness.

1. That an independent ‘umbrella’ organisation be established to oversee and co-ordinate the work of organisations, both formal and informal, to alleviate homelessness in Milton Keynes.

- a) In order to meet the myriad of needs of homeless families and individuals, the Council must be at the forefront of the creation of an independent umbrella organisation solely dedicated to reducing the levels of homelessness throughout the Borough of Milton Keynes.
- b) The Council must commit to being the driving force at the outset, providing finance and other resources to help achieve a fully functioning body before the winter of 2016/17.
- c) Agencies, organisations and individuals, including the Council (the partners), who are seeking to reduce homelessness in Milton Keynes, must commit to co-operate and work together, within the umbrella organisation, to provide a complete range of services and opportunities for those who are homeless or who are in danger of becoming homeless.
Each of the partners will work together to provide essential and appropriate services, including data sharing, to meet individual need.
- d) The umbrella organisation will, by the winter of 2016/17, and with the co-operation of all those involved, including the Council, provide access to housing, education, food and health and welfare facilities, including drug and alcohol advice and / or rehabilitation.
- e) Once the umbrella organisation has been established as an independent and co-operative body, then the Council should no longer be the ‘driving force’ and, instead, become one of many partners working together to eliminate homelessness, and the causes of homelessness, throughout Milton Keynes.
- f) All volunteers, especially those on the ‘front line’, and any members of staff employed by the partner organisations, should be provided with relevant, comprehensive training as well as being subject to a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check.

Confirm: Organisations must, of necessity, be ready to confirm that they will work together to help meet the needs of the homeless in Milton Keynes.

Reform: Organisations must be ready to work together to reform the current mixed responses to homelessness and to provide an innovative, different and radical approach to homelessness.

Transform: Organisations, by working in co-operation within an umbrella organisation, will see a transformation by the winter of 2016/2017 which will

bring a unified and holistic approach to the provision of services to those who are homeless or who are in danger of becoming homeless.

2. That the Council adopts a much-needed more flexible approach to planning and planning policies.

- a) The Council's planning policies are not always sufficiently flexible to help provide affordable and suitable accommodation for the homeless and those on low incomes. A new approach to planning, along with changes to policy, is required if Milton Keynes is to become a community where we seek to end the spectre of homelessness. Planning policy should reflect the need to provide innovative solutions to our housing problems by ensuring that new developments, especially on council-owned land, embrace the potential for alternatives to 'standard' homes. Possible alternatives include, but not exclusively, the construction of hostels, permitting converted shipping containers, Swiss-style wooden chalets, homes similar to Y-Cubes in style, homes especially adapted for those with disabilities and even the provision of council owned / managed houses in multiple occupation! Homes which are both innovative and affordable should be incorporated into development plans at the outset – and not simply be viewed as impossible afterthoughts!
- b) The Council must strictly enforce a minimum of 30% affordable housing in every new development, especially in developments on council-owned land. Planning policy must be changed in order that this 30% is seen as a minimum and not a maximum aspiration.
- c) The Council must seek ways for its Housing and Planning Teams to co-operate much more closely, in order to determine, before homes are constructed, exactly what is needed in each new development.
- d) The Council must examine the land it currently owns to see whether or not there is already the ability for it to provide much-needed and alternative forms of affordable housing. An example of this is that when the Task and Finish Group visited a council-managed hostel in the south of Milton Keynes, they were impressed, not just with the hostel itself and the care provided by the Council's housing officers, but also the huge, unused tract of land on which the hostel sat. The land was easily large enough to provide a second hostel at least as large as the one already there!
- e) When this report recommends more flexibility in planning policy, it must be seen as including the Milton Keynes Development Partnership (MKDP) in these comments. MKDP must, in order to facilitate the provision of housing solutions for the vulnerable and homeless, be able to provide the land at no or very little cost. The loss of the value of the land should be considered against the considerable value of providing hope and security to families and individuals who otherwise could not afford to buy a home of their own. Additionally, of course, the savings accrued by the discontinuation of the need to send these same families to live in temporary accommodation outside Milton Keynes should not be underestimated and should be set in context against the reduction of income from land values.

Confirm: Milton Keynes Council must confirm and demonstrate that it is willing to embrace the flexibility required to create innovative and affordable solutions to our current housing crisis.

Reform: Milton Keynes Council must be prepared to reform its way of thinking and its planning policies with regard to providing homes and accommodation that are low-cost, sustainable, well designed and purpose-built.

Transform: Milton Keynes needs communities, not just houses – communities that include hostels, residential homes and homes adapted for those with disabilities, to name but a few.