

Minutes of the meeting of the HOUSING AND COMMUNITY COMMITTEE held on THURSDAY 14 JULY 2016

Present: Councillor C Williams (Chair)
Councillors Burke, Ferrans, Ganatra, Geaney, Jenkins, Khan, D McCall, Wallis and Webb,

Officer: E Richardson (Overview and Scrutiny Officer)

Also Present: Councillor Long, D Sharkey (Corporate Director Place), S Green (Director of Operations - MK YMCA), D Haydon (Homeless Support Officer – Church of Christ the Cornerstone), K Vickers (Convener / Chair, MK People’s Assembly) and 17 members of the public

Apologies: Councillor Hosking

Disclosure of Interests:

Councillor Ferrans declared an interest as a member of the Milton Keynes Development Partnership (MKDP) and as a substitute member of the Development Control Committee.

Councillor D McCall declared an interest as an employee of the Milton Keynes Winter Night Shelter.

HAC03 MINUTES

RESOLVED -

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Housing and Community Committee held on 25 May 2016 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

HAC04 PRESENTATIONS

Witnesses:

Simon Green – Director of Operations, MK YMCA

Daniel Haydon – Homeless Support Officer, Church of Christ the Cornerstone

Kevin Vickers – Convener / Chair, MK People’s Assembly

YMCA Development Plans

The Committee received a presentation (see Annex A) from Simon Green, Director of Operations at the Milton Keynes YMCA about their plans to expand their facility and improve the range of services available in Milton Keynes.

Both councillors and the members of the public who attended the meeting were invited to raise questions with Mr Green. During the ensuing discussion, it was noted that:

- The new accommodation was based on 3 stages of progression and would provide much greater flexibility for the

YMCA in how it provided services for those who approached it for help;

- The new development would be built in stages, allowing the YMCA team and its service users to move round the remaining / new construction as the phases developed in order to maintain the current level of service;
- It was estimated that the rental for the new flats would be around £100 per week per person. However this was above the level set for the Local Housing Allowance benefit (approximately £325 per month) and Mr Green agreed that this could be an issue. Clarity was needed on the capping of the Local Housing Allowance but nothing was forthcoming from central government. Wherever possible the YMCA tried to discourage a culture of benefit dependency;
- The new accommodation would be similar to communal “student” accommodation and had already been piloted by the YMCA in Stoke and Crewe, where the developments were known as “campuses”;
- The new development would provide support for young people up to the age of 35 as the current benefits system discriminates against those under the age of 35;
- Generally, it was anticipated that service users would spend a few months in the hostel, eventually moving on to the student-style flats / individual accommodation for a period of 2-3 years before being independent enough to move on;
- Despite the increase in accommodation and support for young, homeless people that the new development would provide, Mr Green thought it would fill up almost immediately and remain full, given the increase in numbers applying to the YMCA for help each year;
- The development had been fully costed and currently there was a shortfall of £300k which covered the cost of the proposed sports hall, equipping meeting / training rooms, gym and dance studio, or provide bedroom furniture. The YMCA was planning a capital fundraising campaign to cover the shortfall (the Council had not approached for the extra funding);
- In response to a question about whether the scale of this development reflected the scale of the local problem Mr Green explained that the new Milton Keynes YMCA would be much bigger compared to other similar sites – the Stoke and Crewe campuses had about 100 residents each, compared to the proposed 196 in Milton Keynes;
- The YMCA used to hold a list of landlords willing to offer accommodation to young people moving on from the YMCA, but no longer did so as the demand in the private rental sector was so local landlords could pick and choose their tenants.

The Homeless Landscape in Milton Keynes

The Committee received a presentation (see Annex B) from Daniel Haydon, Homeless Support Officer with the Church of Christ the Cornerstone for the past 3 years, about his experiences in this role and some possible solutions.

Both councillors and the members of the public who attended the meeting were invited to raise questions with Mr Haydon. During the ensuing discussion, it was noted that:

- There did not appear to be a single definition of what constituted a “vulnerable” person in homelessness terms or who was classed as being in priority need and this needed to be worked out and applied consistently;
- The 1997 Homeless Person Act has what, the Council Administration considered to be, a very clear definition of those in priority need of housing. The law also defined a vulnerable person as someone who could not cope if they were out on the streets. However, the social care definition of a vulnerable person was much vaguer and the Council was working towards a single definition which could be used across housing, social care and other related services;
- Although several local charities / community groups had provided tents and sleeping bags to provide immediate, emergency accommodation for the homeless, it was reported that these were being regularly removed by the Council;
- A one-stop shop would only work if it was properly resourced, which included having the right staff and services in place;
- The Council had indicated that it hoped to have plans in place for a one-stop shop by March 2017. However, the Committee was concerned that this too long a timescale and the Chair indicated that he expected to see progress by September 2016;
- The suggestions put forward by Mr Haydon at the end of his presentation should be considered by the Committee as possible recommendations to take forward for action;
- Most homeless people did want real and safe accommodation, even those who appeared not to want help. Mr Haydon explained that it was necessary to reach people as soon as possible after becoming homeless, so that it did not become an ingrained pattern;
- However, buildings on their own were not the whole answer; they need to be properly equipped and resourced.

Wellbeing Centre Campaign

The Committee received a presentation (see Annex C) from Kevin Vickers, Convener / Chair of the Milton Keynes People’s Assembly outlining the Assembly’s campaign for a fully funded Wellbeing Centre in Milton Keynes.

Both councillors and the members of the public who attended the meeting were invited to raise questions with Mr Vickers. During the ensuing discussion, it was noted that:

- Item 3.2 of the new Council Plan, which had been agreed at full Council on 13 July, made provision for a one-stop shop to provide help, support and prevention services;
- Although this looked positive on paper, the facility needed to be able to not just help people, but empower them so that they could start to help themselves;
- There was a need to work through what was really meant by a one-stop shop / wellness centre and what services and facilities it should provide;
- Effective preventative measures were needed to stop people becoming homeless in the first place and to steer people towards independent living;
- There was no disagreement that a significant increase in temporary accommodation and the supply of affordable housing was needed; the issue was how this could be achieved;
- The Council was keen to work in partnership with other organisations and item 3 of the Council Plan was very clear that the Council wanted to move forward and progress this, but it needed to be resourced and the Council was not in control of all the factors currently adding to the homelessness crisis;
- The housing crisis was putting the housing budget under severe stress as there were things the Council was obliged to do by law, which added to the budgetary stress, creating a vicious circle;

Following the presentations and consideration of the specific points raised, the Committee and the members of the public present at the meeting then had a general discussion about some of the homelessness issues being faced in Milton Keynes.

Members of the public attending the meeting were concerned that the Council was removing and disposing of tents, and their contents, supplied to the homeless by various charities and other benefactors as a temporary solution to homelessness

They were advised that the Council was unable to support the use of tents on land not designated for camping as these impromptu camps could cause a nuisance to other residents, as well as having a public health implication. The Council had no jurisdiction over camps on private land and there was scope for organisations trying to support the homeless to approach local farmers or landowners to see if they were willing to set aside an area which could be used to provide temporary camping for the homeless. However there was a danger that such encampments could get out of hand and actually create more problems than they would solve.

Concern was also expressed that the new Housing and Planning Act was likely to make homelessness worse as it supported the continued

right of landlords to impose short-term tenancies. Councillor Long considered this to be a negative approach and commented that there was a need locally to encourage private landlords to move from issuing short term tenancies.

RESOLVED –

1. That Simon Green, Daniel Haydon and Kevin Vickers be thanked for their presentations and that the members of the public who attended the meeting be thanked for their contribution to the ensuing discussions.
2. That the notes from the three presentations be circulated to the Committee, the Cabinet and the members of the public who attended the meeting to enable possible, further discussion to take place.
3. That the Cabinet be advised that the Committee supports the plans for the regeneration of the YMCA in Central Milton Keynes.
4. That the Committee requests the Cabinet to reconsider the cost of the land it is proposing to sell to the YMCA, as a lower charge for the cost of the land would mean that the YMCA would have sufficient funds to complete the project in its entirety.
5. That the Committee recommends that the Cabinet Member and the Acting Service Director (Housing and Community) urgently examine the list of empty buildings recently supplied by Milton Keynes People's Assembly in order to ascertain whether or not any of them might be suitable for conversion to temporary accommodation for the homeless.
6. That the Committee, recognising that the Cabinet is currently undertaking a review of the role of the Milton Keynes Development Partnership (MKDP), recommends that consideration be given, in certain circumstances, to MKDP selling land at below market value in order to provide land for the development of social housing at an affordable level.

HAC05

TASK AND FINISH GROUP UPDATES

The Committee was concerned at the high rate of increase in homelessness locally compared to the national average and whether this was due to a lack of responsibility on the part of the Administration. However it noted that figures for homelessness, both locally and nationally, seemed to vary depending on how they were actually reported. There was no agreed standard for reporting homelessness figures and this could lead to wide variations in figures quoted.

There was also a conflict between what the law defined as homelessness and the reality that local authorities and the voluntary sector had to deal with on a day to day basis. Only people over 35 were now entitled to statutory housing benefit although monitoring of those using the Winter Night Shelter during 2015/16 showed that the age range they accommodated ran from 19 to 63.

The Committee agreed that the Council needed to start planning in order to provide effective support for the homeless before winter 2016 set in. The Committee was disappointed with what appeared to be a lack of progress since the Task and Finish Groups on the Housing Allocations Scheme and Homelessness had reported their findings.

The Committee was assured that the Council wanted to help all homeless people in Milton Keynes, including rough sleepers, but the problem was much wider than just rough sleeping, with many families either in temporary accommodation or facing the threat of eviction. The Committee acknowledged that the Council recognised that there was a problem and that it was actively seeking solutions, but it was concerned at the lack of any workable implementation plan. The Council needed to be challenged as to timescales for any proposed solutions and held to account if these were not met

The Committee noted that there was no single cause of homelessness which could be easily solved as it was the result of a range of factors which would need to be addressed using a variety of solutions. Neither was it a 9-5, Monday to Friday issue, and the Committee was concerned that the Council's out of hours provision was insufficient to deal with the current scale of the problem. The Committee further noted that:

- The demand for affordable housing was greater than the supply as there were big problems with the current housebuilding programme;
- The economic growth of Milton Keynes was affecting the lack of housing. People were being attracted to Milton Keynes, particularly people migrating out of the London area, as by comparison house prices (both sale and rental) were much cheaper in Milton Keynes, but new housing was not being built fast enough;
- There were currently 9,000 planning applications for new housing that had been approved by the Development Control Committee but which were not being developed;
- The supply of social housing had been whittled away and what the government and developers defined as "affordable" housing was not actually affordable to many people in need;
- Because of this there was an increase in the number of homeless who were actually in work, with no social problems, and therefore not entitled to any benefits, but who could not afford to buy or rent locally;
- Any increase in lending interest rates might lead to a further spate of homelessness if those on lower incomes could no longer afford their mortgages;
- Although outside of the Council's control, there was a need to change the culture of seeing housing stock as purely an investment proposition for those with spare cash, as many

investors then leased out the properties on short term tenancies at the highest rent possible in that area;

- There was an opportunity for Milton Keynes to be innovative in its approach to tackling homelessness. Despite resource implications it needed to think big to find a solution which if successful could be copied elsewhere;
- The Council was trying to move away from just focussing on those who were statutorily homeless and to trying to help all those in housing need by establishing a systematic, long term investment in housing;
- There was no straight answer to the issues of homelessness and any solutions could have an impact on other services and budgets elsewhere within the Council.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Committee welcomes the Council's plans to develop a Rough Sleepers Strategy, but is concerned that a completion date of March 2017 may endanger the lives of local rough sleepers by not providing assistance soon enough and therefore suggests a completion date of 31 December 2016 as providing a realistic timescale in which this work can be done, and at the same time avoiding the worst of the winter weather.
2. That the Committee overwhelmingly stated its disappointment that the recommendations from the Housing Allocations Scheme and Homelessness Task and Finish Groups do not yet appear to have been implemented and requests that detailed action plans, with proposed completion dates, in respect of these recommendations for consideration, be presented at its meeting on 23 August 2016.
3. That the Committee encourages the Cabinet, in partnership with other groups assisting the homeless, to consider an awareness campaign to raise the understanding of local homelessness issues, the problems involved, and what people could do to assist in the donation of time, goods or funds.
4. That in light of the comments made by many of the organisations present at the meeting, the Cabinet be requested to clarify what constitutes "vulnerability" in homelessness terms and to provide a standardised definition for use by officers and councillors endeavouring to assist those who do find themselves in a homeless situation.
5. That the Committee recommends that the Cabinet, having agreed a standard definition of vulnerability in a homelessness context, considers developing a policy for dealing with such people.
6. That the need, for the Council to review its policies/processes for dealing with the issue of temporary tented encampments erected by homeless individuals on Council / public land to ensure that those concerned are treated with dignity and consideration and provided with help to find more suitable accommodation, be noted.

HAC06

WORK PROGRAMME 2016/17

The Council's Scrutiny Management Committee had approved the Housing and Community Committee Planning Group's request to hold 6 meetings during 2016/17. The Scrutiny Management Committee also requested that that the Housing and Community Committee reviewed its proposed Work Programme and provide clear objectives or outcomes for those items it intended to scrutinise.

RESOLVED –

That the new dates for the meetings of the Housing and Community Committee be noted, and that the Committee's Planning Group be tasked with reviewing the Work Programme and agreeing objectives as requested by the Scrutiny Management Committee.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 9.25 PM

YMCA Redevelopment Plans

Presentation to Council Homeless Strategy Group

1. Thanks for invite to tell you about our development plans
2. Simon Green – 7 years at MK YMCA – Housing Manager, Director of Operations, soon to be CEO

Who are we

3. ***Building Slide*** YMCA just across the road – consists of 23 bed emergency access homeless hostel and 123 flats used as supported housing for young adults up to age 35
4. Our clients are primarily those in housing need who don't meet the council's narrow definition of being homeless – mainly young single people ***Sophie, Stevie, Daryl slide***
5. For a long time we have been safety net for people who experience homeless in Milton Keynes – in operation since 1981, quietly going about our business
6. Although there are 114 YMCAs in England most are financially independent local charities governed by their own board of trustees – which we are. We are affiliated to the national body but we are essentially an independent local charity.
7. We support an average of 350 young adults per year through our accommodation and estimate that over our history we have housed approximately 12,000 people – if all those people have stayed in Milton Keynes then that is 5% of the population
8. For many years our work supporting young homeless people was part funded by MK Council but that funding has now been withdrawn
9. We now receive no public funding for the work we do beyond Housing Benefit payments towards residents rents

Support Programme

10. Despite the challenging financial climate in which we operate we remain highly ambitious
11. We have spent a lot of time visiting supported housing schemes in other areas – good, bad, and indifferent, and we have developed a support programme designed to have a deep and positive impact on the young people who come to us for help
12. Many of these young people have quite complex needs – poor educational attainment, family and relationship issues, mental health problems, substance abuse and most come to us homeless and unemployed
13. Our aim is to take these socially excluded young people, to house and work with them for a 2 -3 year period and for them to

leave us with a job, a decent home to move on to, and feeling good about themselves and their futures

14. ***Activities slide*** To achieve this we have developed a resident activities programme with 3 main strands - Independent Living Skills, Wellbeing, and Employment
15. This programme is supported by an incentive scheme to encourage good habits and a savings scheme to allow residents to build a fund for a deposit and furniture when it is time to move on
16. As such our services are, and will increasingly be, more about preparing the young people for life after the YMCA than they are about just providing housing while they are with us

Buildings

17. Unfortunately, our buildings are now showing their age - are tired, and don't provide the inspiring environment that we wish to offer. ***Current Buildings Slide*** Also the site is difficult to manage and it is impossible for us to prevent those who would prey on our vulnerable clients - including active criminals - from visiting our properties
18. There are then several driving forces for our development
 - a. To regenerate our buildings
 - b. To create a more manageable site
 - c. To offer more accommodation - currently we can only support approximately 1/3 of the people who approach us for help (and turn away approx. 650 people per year due to a lack of accommodation)
19. We want to create a supported housing project that will be best in class - a flagship project that combines the best elements from elsewhere - provides integrated living and training - and is an inspiring environment from which formerly homeless young people can prepare for a brighter future ***New Buildings Slide***
20. Our new building will have 50 more units - 196 in total
21. It will have a single access point meaning that we can control who comes and goes and keep unwanted and negative influences away
22. We will have a tiered housing structure with residents moving through 3 stages of accommodation within the building. Each stage will provide bigger and better accommodation and a different type of support
 - a. Stage 1 is essentially a re-provision of our existing hostel - 30 rooms where new residents will stay for 3 - 6 months while we get to know them. Support will be about Independent Living Skills - cooking, cleaning, budgeting, managing a tenancy

- b. Stage 2 will be shared accommodation but within our building in clusters of between 7 and 12 rooms with shared living room and kitchen. Support at this stage will be focused on resident wellbeing – addressing issues of confidence, self-esteem and motivation that affect so many of the young people who come to us for help
 - c. As residents move through the building their property gets bigger and better but rents actually reduce. This is designed to incentivise employment.
 - d. Stage 3 will be self-contained Studio and 1-bed flats within the building. In theory residents will have been supported to find employment by Stage 3 and support will be minimal. Rents will be at 80% of the market rate for a similar property and in the range of £100 per week – so affordable to young people in low paid employment. We will be trying to support all the young people who live in our building to leave us with a sense of wellbeing, suitable move-on accommodation, and a job.
23. As well as the accommodation, the ground floor of our building will have a series of social enterprises that will offer employment and training opportunities to our residents as well as other facilities. These will include:
- a. Nursery
 - b. Café
 - c. Shops
 - d. Gym
 - e. Dance studio
 - f. Sports and community hall
24. Income generated from these spaces will be used to fund our residential support programme
25. We expect our building to be vibrant and appealing to young people

Build Programme and funding

26. The new YMCA building will be built on the site where our hostel and staff offices are currently located on land owned by Milton Keynes Council and Milton Keynes Development Partnerships. We are buying this land at full market rate.
27. The build is made possible through the value to be created from a private development of 260 flats on the land currently occupying our flats – this will fund approximately half of the development costs for the new YMCA

28. For the remaining half we have obtained a grant of £2.5 million from the HCA, and we are borrowing £4.5 million to complete the build. This is somewhat scary but necessary to complete the project.
29. Even after this there is still currently a £300k shortfall in costs to complete the building, and we cannot currently afford to build the sports hall, fit out the meeting and training rooms, gym and dance studio, or to furnish the bedrooms.
30. We are also borrowing to the absolute maximum we can afford and are doing so against a backdrop of welfare reform that is threatening to cap rents for supported housing at a rate that makes us unviable.
31. This is an enormous undertaking for MK YMCA and will take all our resources and more. However, we are doing so because we think a bold solution is needed to the housing crisis affecting so many young people in our city. And, following our funding cut, we cannot afford to do nothing.
32. The result should be an outstanding facility to support young people in Milton Keynes who cannot find a home, and who need help to get their lives on track.
33. The planning application for our building was submitted and paid for on Tuesday – immediately following the approval of our land purchase from the council. We expect to start the demolition of our existing hostel building and the construction of the new YMCA by January of next year.
34. Our programme is for a 60 week build and the YMCA should be completed ready for occupation in March 2018.
35. We then look forward to being part of a more joined up approach to tackling housing issues in Milton Keynes, particularly for young people.

I don't know if there is scope for me to take questions?

The Homeless Landscape in Milton Keynes

Hello my name is Daniel Haydon

Thank you for opportunity and inviting me to speak, I am currently working with The Church of Christ the Cornerstone as a homeless support officer.

I have been working with the homeless of Milton Keynes for the last 3 years- - with organisations such as MK YMCA - Winter Night Shelter - and various other community projects.

This Experience has given me a very good understanding of the homeless landscape and the barriers we face as a city.

I am extremely passionate about this issue and I have a real hunger to work towards a holistic solution. Which is why I am here today.

- I am going to share some of my ideas and experiences of working with the homeless in Milton Keynes and address some of the solutions that have been proposed.

Before I start, I would also like to say Thank you to all councillors involved in the recent task and targeting group.

I have met with some of you and it's nice to see that there are genuine individuals amongst you who are working hard to push through a solution.

Peter Marland, on Tuesday's cabinet meeting reacted to statements made by various counsellors about homelessness not being taken seriously by the Council.

He stated 'that **we** as a council are not able to solve **all** the issues of homelessness'.

Which I completely agree with. The council alone is not able to resolve this issue. but.....

There are steps that the council can take to relieve the problem as well as support those within the community who are making a difference, instead the reality is;

- Reports written year on year that recognise the impact and growth of homelessness in Milton Keynes with suggested solutions that don't lead anywhere.
- Homelessness seems to be brought to the top of the agenda – then swept back under the carpet again.
- Strategic meetings are held that lead to no change and most of time don't even have the right people in the room with the right understanding.
- Instead of solutions we find Funding cuts to lifeline services in Milton Keynes supporting the homeless.

These are NOT the signs that Milton Keynes council taking homelessness seriously.

We are all aware that Homelessness is a huge problem – both nationally and locally.

It is very complex and is composed of many different layers.

Some of those layers have been identified in the report and various solutions have been proposed but all we have at the moment is ideas.

It is important that we reach some clarity and kept the same momentum to turn strategy into Action. Homelessness needs to be taken seriously and stay top priority.

Beyond those you see in the city centre begging, is a hidden world of extremely vulnerable individuals who are left with no options and are rotting on our streets, sleeping in tents and bin cupboards, in cars spread throughout the city.

Regardless of whether the council have a duty to house someone or not. Access to some sort of Emergency accommodation should be a top priority and needs to be available immediately.

It is not good enough to just wash your hands of human beings in need.

The development of the YMCA is a big step forward for Milton Keynes but this is not enough. There are still too many individuals who cannot access accommodation and are forced to sleep rough because of various circumstances.

Which --The council will not even provide the bear minimum of tents and sleeping bags – it is our community that is doing this.

Regardless of the support needs - the very first step to recovery is a suitable and safe place to put your head down at night – even if this is a very basic night shelter – where you turn up, sleep and leave in the morning. Something that is not reliant on Housing benefit as there are many homeless individuals with no recourse to public funds.

If we break down Homelessness in Milton Keynes, it is a housing crisis intertwined with an absence of care pathways and emergency accommodation.

There needs to be a clear strategy in place for both, working hand in hand because one will not work without the other.

Housing;

- We have a shortage of available social and affordable housing.
- Each year we find fewer private landlords are accepting Housing benefit and charging rents way above the DSS entitlement.
- We find that IF..... the council decide that they have a duty to house you then that will be temporary accommodation miles away from Milton Keynes.

Homeless;

On one end of the scale – you have those in threat of being homelessness (Individuals being evicted- issued section 21's) Then going right to the other end of the scale where you have long term rough sleepers with complex needs) and then everyone else in between.

Each one of those categories has specific issues and barriers that need to be addressed.

Some examples are;

- Mental health (A target that was mentioned as a priority by our new Primeminister Traza May)
- Lack of services for substance addiction. (which is rampant within the homeless community)

- Issues with accessing health care. GPs - (Milton Keynes Hospital are also discharging homeless after operations and broken bones who are then returning the streets in their condition)

This now brings to me to some of the suggested solutions in the report and I'm going to start with the one stop shop.

The One stop shop is an ideal concept and I think we all agree with that – IT has been a goal for many years and is NOT unique to this report... but there needs to be some realism about how it is going to work.

What has been proposed is a purpose built building (which could take years and will involve huge costs)

You then want to bring everyone from the homeless scale all under one roof so that we have a service - that deals with everything from prevention to extremely complex needs...

This Sounds great in theory but I do not feel that it has been considered how much hard work and cost is going to be involved to make this happen – we need;

- Numerous support workers
- dedicated mental health workers
- substance misuse workers
- as well as various specialist care that currently doesn't exist in Milton Keynes.

I do not have confidence that the council is going to invest hundreds of thousands of pounds to make this happen.

Instead I feel the council should look at what is currently in place and use that as a platform.

Examples of this are;

Richard Whiteman – The head of Winter night shelter has just put in a bid with the Milton Keynes Development Partnership to take on the Busy for 5 years. He is planning to use this building with Open Door and other relevant agencies.

These are all agencies that have a proven track records at supporting the homeless.

I would suggest that the council supports the winter night shelter by pressure on the MKDP to release the building.

Bev Syme - The new chair of open Door (who is taking over from Brenda Mosedale at the end of the month) comes from the citizen advice and also has a track record, she is hungry and understands the needs of the homeless. If Open Door received some funding from the council they can increase the support work they do and reach their goal of becoming an all week service instead of a 2 days a week.

Together this essentially is the foundation for the one stop shop. One you have the foundation you can then look at the other barriers and build it up from there

Homeless Prevention was also brought up as a priority need. – If we look at who is doing this well in Milton Keynes .You have the C.A.B - again with extremely good track record of support individuals in threat of homelessness. If the council worked with CAB and funded a full time member of staff who is dedicated to this area - - a lot can be achieved In this – raised awareness and campaigns to prevent a lot of the homeless traffic which would in turn save the council money in long run.

Most of the work in homelessness is done by Community of Milton Keynes – they are feeding, clothing, supporting and providing tents and sleeping bags and lots more. Various agencies across the city are also stepping up to meet the unmet need.

We also have lots of people want to get involved but don't know how they can help.

What we need from the council is a clear plan of Action – we need to know exactly what you are willing to commit to in the near future----so those proactively working to help know where they stand.

This report and lengthy process is actually holding people/organisations up from taking action.

Before I close I want to quickly summarise my suggestions for the council.

- First → We need emergency accommodation above all else; not 2017/2018 but now. (Otherwise we are going to find there are a lot more deaths on the streets.)
- Second → lets gets the Council to work in partnership with front line agencies and supporting them in meeting the needs of the people. (Prime example here is the winter night shelter / open door partnership).
- Third → We need serious commitments to develop housing in Milton Keynes and a clear strategy in place is needed for the future. Ian Revel the CEO of Community Foundation suggested that Milton Keynes council pay for a feasibility study for affordable and alternative accommodation. We need to start thinking outside the box and start turning theory into Action.

Daniel Haydon
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Campaign for a Wellbeing Centre

Milton Keynes People's Assembly:

Campaign for a fully funded “ Well-Being Centre” in Central Milton Keynes.

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1. Tragedy on the streets of Milton Keynes

The extent of the homeless crisis in Milton Keynes was brought into sharp focus in the public eye following the tragic deaths of two homeless people at the beginning of 2016.

In the past 6 years many voluntary organisations have been formed to provide assistance and support to homeless people in Milton Keynes. Public concern, already at a high level due to the increase in the number of visibly homeless people, has turned towards outrage that such tragic loss of life is possible in one of the richest nations on the planet. Many people are of the view that this a humanitarian crisis and that it should be treated as such.

The number of people who are homeless in Milton Keynes has increased dramatically since 2010. A similar increase has been seen up and down the country as rents rise faster than wages and a wider housing crisis unfolds. Between 2010 and 2013 the “Crisis Homelessness Monitor” saw a national rise of 37% in rough sleepers (Crisis, 2015). The total increase from 2010 to 2015 is widely estimated to be 50%.

Milton Keynes Council, in their pre budget report of 2016, attributed the main cause of the rise in the number of homeless people as resulting from private landlords ending tenancies in order to raise rents.

“The single largest cause of homelessness in Milton Keynes is eviction from privately rented accommodation.” - Homelessness Task and Finish Group Report 2016. (Milton Keynes Council, 2016)

Rents in the UK continue to rise making private rental unaffordable for many in the absence of an increase in wages in real terms. Average rents in the 3 months to April 2016 rose by 5.1% in the South East (Home Let, 2016). Rising private sector rents coincided with a fall in median real wages of 10% (12% for men and 7% for women) between 2008 and 2014. (IFS, 2015)

To put the growing scale of the problem into a local perspective 1250 people were recorded as homeless in Milton Keynes in 2014 compared with 350 in 2013. (Community Action MK, Vital Signs Publication, 2015)

In January 2016 the council **estimated** the number of “street” homeless people in Milton Keynes as being 30. However, other agencies, including Open Door, Winter Night Shelter and Help Our Homeless suggested that this number was likely to be higher. Additionally, according to the council, in January alone more than 100 people were classed as “sofa surfers” with around 350 more classed as statutorily homeless. (Milton Keynes Council Homelessness Task and Finish Group Report, 2016)

2. A Complex Situation.

A lack of suitable, genuinely affordable, housing is clearly a major factor in the increase in the number of homeless people in Milton Keynes. This will be compounded by the government’s Housing Bill which requires local authorities to sell off high value council houses and Housing Associations to sell their housing stock under the “Right to Buy” scheme. The short supply of council housing is likely to create more insecure renters, subject to market forces.

“Milton Keynes already has the highest percentage of ex-council homes being rented out on the private market at a staggering 69.6%. The national average is 40%.” (Inside Housing, 2015)

In addition, the private sector offers little or no protection to renters. Tenancies can be ended at the end of 6/12 month terms with two months notice and with no right to appeal. This is a serious issue that must also be addressed to prevent the continued increase in homelessness and to provide renters with long term security of tenure.

Homelessness is growing fast as the housing crisis gets worse. The Local Government Association has raised concerns that the Housing and planning bill, now an act of parliament has the potential to reduce the amount of affordable rentable accommodation. (LGA, 2016)

We need much more council housing urgently. However, for many street homeless people, adequate housing is only one part of the problem.

Some people who have lived on the streets for many years have very complex needs. These may include medical problems, mental health difficulties and drug and/or alcohol dependency. Many will have suffered traumatic experiences that will have been compounded by the fear, isolation and lack of security that homelessness brings. Others will have become homeless after the breakdown of relationships, including divorce, or having lost their job.

Housing individuals with complex needs will not, in itself, solve a persons underlying difficulties. Mental health and addiction issues significantly affect a higher percentage of homeless people than those who are not homeless.

“All studies, internationally and in the UK, report a higher prevalence of mental disorder in the homeless population in comparison to the general population. The prevalence of serious mental illness (including major depression, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder) is reported as being present in at least 25-30% of the street homeless and those in direct access hostels” (Folsom 2002; Scott 1993; Fischer 1991; Craig 1995; Buhrich 2003). (Crisis, *Mental Ill Health in the Adult Single Homeless Population*, 2009)

At the same time the number of people with mental health issues is on the increase. (BBC News, 2014).

In the absence of intensive support, led by experienced professionals, individuals are likely to end up back on the streets, still suffering from the same problems. It is the view of this campaign that all human beings, particularly those with complex needs, must be treated with dignity and compassion and that those who would like support should have unqualified access to it.

Unlike some other areas Milton Keynes does not have a dedicated service for homeless people with complex needs. Those who fit into the government's statutory criteria account for only a proportion of those who are actually homeless. Milton Keynes needs a place where people with complex needs can receive the level of support they need. A place where no-one is turned away.

If we are to prevent more deaths on the streets of Milton Keynes we must ensure that the council act now leading the way in partnership with other organisations. In light of recent tragic events it is vital that grass roots organisations make this happen and that any plans must take into account the scale and complexity of the issue both now and in the future.

Peter Marland, Labour leader of the council, has stated explicitly that there will be no further cuts to the voluntary sector and that mental health is a high priority. However, it is not clear how support services operated by the council will be protected with further cuts to council budgets of £59 million due to take place until 2020. Nationally figures suggest that mental health trusts have already seen their budgets cut by more than 8% in the last parliament. (BBC News, 2015)

3. Milton Keynes Council

The council's Homelessness Forum met throughout the winter of 2015/2016, reporting back in mid March. The consultation included 20 agencies, charities and community groups and a total of 50 individuals who met together 3 times over the course of the consultation.

The findings of the Forum were presented to the council in March 2016. The recommendations of the report can be summarised into 4 key points:

- 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.
- The Council must commit to being the initial driving and organising force, providing finance and other resources to help achieve a fully functioning body before the winter of 2016/17.
- All agencies involved in working with the homeless must commit to working together.
- Milton Keynes Development Partnership 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 council report found that around 50 people in Milton Keynes are street homeless. Some choose not to have a fixed address. Others, however, do not wish to be homeless. A significant number suffer with mental health and substance abuse issues.

However, the council turns away around 1800 people every month who ask for help with housing issues. Although a statutory duty exists based on key criteria, a system of priority need, introduced 40 years ago, means that many vulnerable, single people are

still turned away. Although the YMCA in Milton Keynes offers support to people under the age of 35 there is little on offer to support older, vulnerable people with complex needs. YMCA, which helps 500 people each year, had to turn away more than 600 people in 2015.

4. We Already Own the Land

The report recommends that Milton Keynes Development Partnership provide land to address the homeless crisis at no or very little cost. (Milton Keynes Homelessness Forum Task and Finish Group Report, 2016). MKDP is wholly owned by Milton Keynes Council and the people of Milton Keynes. MKDP has a portfolio of land in the city centre including existing buildings. In the unlikely event that Milton Keynes Council is unable to secure its own land from MKDP there are also many buildings in the city centre that have been empty and unused for a very long time. Milton Keynes People's Assembly recently published a list of almost 500 properties that have been empty for 12 months or more on its website. The document can be found here:

<https://peoplesassemblymk.org/homelessness/>

Milton Keynes Council owns a number of these buildings and could easily identify one or more of these to use to support homeless people on a permanent basis. The council could also use compulsory purchase powers to tackle the wider housing crisis.

5. Support From the Cabinet

Councillor O'Neill, Cabinet Member for housing at the time of the launch of this campaign, has previously indicated a willingness to take such action saying:

“I’m even investigating turning unused office blocks in areas such as CMK into places for the homeless. We would consider anything.”

She added: “It is a massive problem and it’s only going to get worse. Milton Keynes needs to think outside the box to resolve this.”

The full article can be found online here:

<http://www.miltonkeynes.co.uk/news/community/community-news/homeless-crisis-we-got-it-wrong-1-6937201#ixzz43BeDOu9E>

When considering options the importance of a central location cannot be overstated. It must be accessible by bus & train from all areas of Milton Keynes. The council report highlights the difficulty that homeless people have in accessing services. The Buszy, for example, owned by MK Council through MKDP, is ideally situated and would be able to provide accommodation and support services. It also has the advantage of parking spaces that could be used to fund some of the activities. The building currently stands empty, since December 2015, with the car parking spaces now run for profit by a private operator. Such a financing arrangement could also be made with another centrally located building.

6. Intensive, Holistic Support for Individuals with Complex Needs.

Providing intensive support for people with complex needs is not a new idea. It is being done successfully elsewhere in the UK and in other countries. Many of the individuals accessing such services are alcohol and drug dependent. In many cases the lack of provision of a “wet” hostel means that individuals are excluded, making it difficult to meet their support needs. In order to offer a truly holistic service it may be necessary to seriously consider a “wet” provision. The models for such services exist although they are fewer and further between.

Two councillors who spoke to present the Homelessness Task and Finish Group Report suggested that a “One stop shop” or “Hub” was needed. The, perhaps unintentional, connotation of “one-stop-shop” is that a person might access the service briefly.

The complex support needs of individuals most at risk on the streets on Milton Keynes are unlikely be met by such a hub alone. However, it may be possible to provide a service that includes “temporary” accommodation on site coupled with a holistic, person centred approach in terms of support services. These services must include integrated medical, mental health and addiction services in the first instance as well as counselling, housing, training and other support services. The YMCA already offers these services to homeless people under the age of 35, however, the service is already heavily oversubscribed as noted above in Section. 3.

7. Our Campaign

This campaign calls for Milton Keynes Council to take control of a building of suitable size from Milton Keynes Development Partnership for the purpose of providing immediate day support for homeless people in Milton Keynes.

This campaign takes into account the thoughts of the homeless people of Milton Keynes, the community and charitable organisations that work to help homeless people and the careful work of the Homelessness Task and Finish group. In doing so we recognise that homelessness is a complex issue with no single solution. Providing homeless people with the opportunity to meet with experienced staff to discuss their individual support needs - should they wish to - must form the basis of any way forward.

People in Milton Keynes and elsewhere in the country become homeless for a wide variety of reasons. Many people are no longer able to maintain tenancies due rent rises or the lack of secure work. The breakdown of relationships with friends and family is another factor. Others, having experienced trauma, suffer from mental health difficulties that make it impossible for them to simply “get a job”. 1 in 10 homeless people are ex-service men and women (Mirror, 2013).

Many homeless people choose to live outside of the norm, However, all of these human beings need the option of long term support, advice and the opportunity to work towards feeling well again in safety and security. No-one should be forced to sleep on the streets. In a civilised society we should be proud to offer support those who are in need.

The recommendations of the Homelessness Task And Finish Group Report have been accepted by the Cabinet at the Council. It is now up to those who care passionately about the plight of homeless people in our community to make sure the council act quickly and in a way that will prevent any more deaths on the streets of Milton Keynes. Public awareness of the issue of homelessness is at an all time high and there is real energy for change.

8. Campaign Objectives

The initial objectives of this campaign have been arrived at through detailed discussions as part of the Homelessness Forum, the findings of the Task and Finish Group Report and with organisations working with homeless people in Milton Keynes.

This campaign requests that Milton Keynes Council:

1. Provide a building in a central location that is already owned and maintained by Milton Keynes Development Partnership/Milton Keynes Council at no charge for

the purposes of a setting up a well being day centre with immediate effect.

2. Fund the centre with a minimum of 6 full time, experienced and professional staff. One member of staff could perform the role of an ambassador for the centre, responsible for liaison with support agencies and the day to day running of the centre. One could be a team leader and four could be project workers: 2 based “in-house” and 2 working in an “out-reach” capacity. This model is based on the experience of Open Door, an organisation that currently works to provide assistance to homeless people on a part-time basis.
3. Secure a building of a sufficient size to allow guests the opportunity to access services including, but not limited to, the following:
 - Private rooms to meet with support workers and agencies
 - Shower facilities
 - Large kitchen and cafe style space where guests can eat, drink, socialise and have opportunities for inclusion as part of the community.
 - Internet access
 - Large communal space for activities such as workshops, yoga, art, education and training opportunities.
 - Quiet space for reflection and for individuals in “crisis”.
 - Ideally, the possibility for expansion into a permanent residential well-being centre.
 - Drug and alcohol interventions
 - Medical support

Support services from the centre should be accessible 5 days per week in the first instance with a view to offering a 7 day/24 hour service before the winter of 2016/17 as per the recommendations of the Homelessness Task and Finish Group Report. The space should also be made available to voluntary groups agencies working with vulnerable people.

9. Cost.

The financial cost of homelessness far outweighs the level of investment required to provide assistance to homeless people both in terms of housing and other support.

This document from Crisis details the financial cost of homelessness:

http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/publications/CostsofHomelessness_Finalweb.pdf

Many councils across the UK are aware of this data and this has helped to bolster the financial case for action in terms of both support and housing.

The figures below are based on the recommendation by the Homelessness Task and Finish Group that MKDP provides a building at no cost.

All other furniture and equipment will be donated by local organisations and individuals.

Indicative costings:

| STAFF | Salary | N.I. | Pension | Total |
|----------------|---------------|-------------|----------------|--------------|
| Manager | £34,631.73 | £3,717.13 | £2,077.90 | £40,426.77 |

| | | | | |
|--------------------|------------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Team Leader | £25,011.81 | £2,389.58 | £1,500.71 | £28,902.10 |
| Support x 4 | £68,032.12 | £7,264.34 | £2040.96 | £77,337.42 |

Homelessness Support Service (excluding items marked “?”)

EXPENDITURE

| | | |
|---|------------|---|
| Salaries | | £127,675.66 |
| Employers NIC | | £13,371.05 |
| Employers Pension Contributions | | £5619.57 |
| Health Care | | £0.00 |
| Staff Training | | £0.00 |
| Recruitment | | £500.00 |
| Premises - utilities | | £2,000.00 |
| Activities | | ? (Counselling/Yoga/Support etc) |
| Staff Travel | | £360.00 |
| Office costs | | ? |
| Telephone costs | | £1,200.00 |
| IT Costs | | ? |
| Stationery Costs | | ? |
| Total Expenditure excluding overheads | | £112,057.57 |
| Overheads | 15% | £16,808.64 |
| Total Expenditure including overheads | | £128,866.21 |
| Set Up Costs | | ? |
| Laptop inc software and installation | | ? |
| Total Expenditure Including Set up Costs | | £128,866.21 |

10. Moving Forward. The Bigger Picture in Milton Keynes.

Providing support alone will not deal with the underlying issues that many homeless people face. The complex and inextricably linked nature of homelessness, mental health and addiction can only be helped by joined up cross agency working and, critically, somewhere that can offer this support in a residential setting. The YMCA already provides this service in Milton Keynes, however, it's main focus is working with people under the age of 35. This leaves a huge gap in the level of residential support available for adults with complex needs.

The establishment of a well being day centre for homeless and vulnerable people is the first step in providing the truly holistic support that a large number of street homeless and vulnerable people in Milton Keynes need. These individuals' support needs are many and varied. As such this campaign group will continue to hold our elected representatives to account until a permanent and fully funded residential centre that takes into account the complex nature of homelessness is established. Plans for such a residential well-being centre should recognise the continued increase in the number of homeless people and that government policy is likely to exacerbate

this. Whilst plans to build some council houses are welcomed a greatly expanded council house building programme is needed. This is necessary in order to provide suitable housing for homeless people to move onto and to tackle the wider and ever-deepening housing crisis in Milton Keynes.

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12. Additional facts and figures:

- **Statistics from MK Foodbank show the major cause of food bank use as being due to benefit problems on an average of almost 51% over the period 2012 to 2015 inclusive.**

<http://mkfoodbank.org.uk/about/stats-food-bank-facts-figures/>

- **Between 2008 and 2013 the number of private landlords in receipt of housing benefit increased by 46%.**

<http://www.miltonkeynes.co.uk/news/massive-rise-in-milton-keynes-buy-to-let-landlords-paid-from-public-purse-1-6027000>