

## Housing and Community Committee

### Site Visit to the Emmaus Community, Carlton, Bedfordshire 4 August 2016

#### Host

- Colin Bramall- Trustee and Treasurer, Emmaus Carlton

#### Attendees

- **Councillors:** Margaret Burke, Jenni Ferrans, Chris Williams,
- **Officers:** Elizabeth Richardson, Dwight McKenzie, Julie Nokes

#### Overview

Visit included a tour of Emmaus' site facilities, a brief film presentation followed by a discussion with Colin Bramall and Emmaus companions. Issues discussed revolved around the work being done by Emmaus with homeless people, and what if any assistance could be provided by Milton Keynes Council for Emmaus activities in the borough.

The site visit including discussion provided the following information:-

#### Emmaus History

1. First established in France by Father Henri-Antoine Grouès, better known as Abbé Pierre with a grant, and now exists in approximately 70 countries.
2. Established in the UK 25 years ago (1991), and in Carlton 14 years ago.
3. There are 28 Emmaus communities in the UK, and each community is a standalone charity.

#### Emmaus Facilities

1. Emmaus Carlton is the most successful of the communities in the UK, and is unique in operating from a single site.
2. Emmaus Carlton currently has a 50 year lease for which it pays £1 annually.

#### Emmaus Organisation and Structure

1. Emmaus Carlton currently has 35 companions (former homeless people but now community residents) who range in age from 19 - 65 years.
2. The average length of stay at Emmaus Carlton is 9 months, however residents are able to stay for as long as they choose.
3. Emmaus helps people who have suffered from a range of issues (eg drug, alcohol, and mental health issues) which had caused them to be homeless (sleeping rough, sofa surfing), but who want to transform and improve their lives.
4. Emmaus is not merely a shelter. It helps those who want to work towards independent living, and provides a respite from the "pressures of society" allowing individuals the time and opportunity to re-align their lives.
5. Building self-esteem, solidarity, hard work and independent living are key to the ethos of Emmaus Carlton.

### **Emmaus Operating Practices**

1. Homeless individuals can refer themselves to Emmaus. However prior to being accepted by Emmaus, individuals have to discontinue any substance abuse. A detailed referral form with 2 referees is also used to vet individuals.
2. Emmaus also accepts referrals of homeless people from Agencies.
3. Once accepted, individuals become companions.
4. There are very few restrictive rules on behaviour except there is zero tolerance of substance abuse.
5. Companions work 40 hours per week, for which they are provided basic essentials including food, clothing, toiletries and shelter (each companion has his/her own room).
6. For Emmaus Carlton, GP medical services are available from a nearby village.
7. Emmaus utilises a system of division of labour with companions allocated tasks on a rota basis.
8. Companions are paid a living wage of £41 per week, an £8 learning fund, and a £3 leisure fund.
9. Travel expenses incurred by companions for “official” appointments such as for training or medical visits are reimbursed by Emmaus.
10. Companions are eligible to claim housing benefits from the government.
11. Emmaus Carlton provides some voluntary services to the community through a “soup run” in Bedford with the approval of Bedfordshire Council. Items are also donated to refugee camps and to communities in Romania.
12. Emmaus Carlton provides tailored training opportunities for companions internally and externally such as in money management.
13. Each companion has a support worker who can arrange individual training courses for their development.
14. Emmaus Carlton is reviewing how it can best help companions who are elderly (eg over 65) and cannot necessarily do demanding tasks.
15. Companions are allowed site visits from friends and family.
16. In the wider community companions still face the social stigma associated with homelessness which they are determined to overcome.

### **MK Council & Emmaus Carlton**

In the concluding discussion, the following was made clear:-

1. Members and officers felt that it was inspiring how Emmaus on a whole, and Emmaus Carlton in particular, operates.
2. Emmaus Carlton is receptive to having satellite sites in Milton Keynes if this is made possible by the Council.
3. Emmaus Carlton currently has 2 van runs (collecting donations) weekly into Milton Keynes which is indicative of the high demand for its services in the borough.
4. Milton Keynes Council can potentially help Emmaus Carlton by making property available within the borough for activities.

5. Working capital, and retail space (eg Sainsbury building, Waitrose building and the Tesco site in Kingston) are preferred options by Emmaus Carlton for operating in Milton Keynes.
6. Emmaus Carlton is unwilling to take funding for places from Milton Keynes Council so as not to undermine its independence in selecting companions.
7. Support from Milton Keynes Council would need to be on charitable basis.

**Agreed Actions Going Forward:-**

1. A soft enquiry will be made by the Housing and Community Committee as to the availability of free retail space at the Sainsbury building.
2. Information gathered from the site visit will be further discussed by Members.
3. Arrangements are to be made for a 2nd visit in the near future for Committee Members who were unable to take part in the first site visit. Cllr Williams is to liaise with Cllr Jenkins on this matter.
4. Cllr Williams on behalf of the Committee will keep in contact with Colin Bramall.