

RESPONSIVE SERVICES AND CUSTOMER CARE SCRUTINY PANEL

POLICY REVIEW 2012/13: REDUCING RE-OFFENDING – TACKLING ACCOMMODATION ISSUES FOR OFFENDERS

20 SEPTEMBER 2012

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide the Responsive Services and Customer Care Scrutiny Panel with background information regarding the organisations attending the Panel meeting.
- 1.2 The debate at the Panel meeting will form the evidence for the Scrutiny Panel's policy review for 2012/13 into Reducing Re-offending.

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- 2.1 At its meeting on 19 July 2012, the Panel agreed the scope of the Policy Review, Reducing Re-offending. One element of the review is to investigate the challenges and opportunities in regard to tackling accommodation issues, one of the Safer Sunderland Partnership's key priorities.
- 2.2 At its last meeting on 10 September, Panel members were provided an overview of accommodation issues for offenders. The discussion highlighted a number of areas for further consideration, including housing and support for armed forces veterans, women and families.

3. HOUSING PROVIDERS

- 3.1 The following organisations will be in attendance at the Panel Meeting:-

Northumbria Probation Service – Approved Premises, Sunderland

- 3.2 Approved Premises provide structured, supervised, temporary accommodation for offenders who would in any case be living in the community. They provide an enhanced level of supervision that might not otherwise be possible. Staff work closely with probation officers and other agencies including the police, prison service and the community to rehabilitate and successfully resettle offenders in the community. Each resident is allocated a key worker who undertakes an initial assessment and induction, followed by an individually tailored, programme of work. This includes work to address offending behaviour, recognise the impact of offending on victims and members of the community, acquire basic skills to change lifestyles, boost employment opportunities and address accommodation needs.
- 3.3 The approved premises, located in the Pennywell area operate to stringent standards in accordance with Ministry of Justice requirements

including enforced rules of residence which contribute to their smooth running and to protecting the public. Offenders who do not comply will receive a warning and can be returned to prison or court. Rules of residence include: a night time curfew (from 11pm) which is rigorously monitored; a total ban on alcohol and solvents, as well as illegal drugs; room searches - staff check offenders rooms weekly at random; behaviour contracts – individually tailored contracts for each offender; and payment of rent.

Norcare

3.4 Norcare is a North East charity that works with and supports people aged 16 and over who are homeless and socially or economically excluded, including offenders. Norcare provide supported accommodation; help people to find the right kind of home; address any issues they may be facing; and develop the confidence and skills clients need to lead independent lives.

3.5 Norcare uses a framework of seven pathways to structure the support it provides, adopted from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). These are:-

- Living and accommodation
- Learning and work
- Health
- Substance misuse
- Managing money
- Relationships and communities
- Attitudes, behaviours and empowerment

3.6 In Sunderland Norcare operates two projects :-

- ***Toward Road Accommodation Project***

Toward Road is made up of seven self-contained flats within shared accommodation, and 11 one-bedroom properties in temporary accommodation. Properties are all situated within the Wearside area. It supports clients aged 16 and over who are ex-offenders or at risk of offending. Referrals are accepted from all statutory and voluntary agencies particularly the Probation Service, as well as directly from individual applicants. It works with all clients to develop a support programme lasting between six and 24 months - providing personalised support and advice and helping the client access education, health and wellbeing support, and counselling services.

- ***Wearside Tenancy Support Project***

This scheme covers the Wearside area and helps up to 26 people aged 16 years and over who have a history of offending or are at risk of offending. Support is provided to enable individuals to gain and/or

maintain their own tenancy. Referrals are received from the Probation Service, the Council, housing providers and directly from individual applicants. Clients are given a support programme lasting between six and 24 months - providing personalised support and advice and helping the client access education, health and wellbeing support, and counselling services.

Stonham Housing (part of Home Group) – Bail Accommodation and Support Service (BASS)

- 3.7 BASS provides accommodation and support services to people who would normally be living in the community on bail or Home Detention Curfew (HDC) but do not otherwise have a suitable address. They have been bailed by the courts or released from prison, initially on an electronic tag, having served a prison sentence. The overall aim of the service is to reduce unnecessary loss of liberty and its negative impacts on family life, employment and housing, and to deter people from re-offending.
- 3.8 Stonham provides accommodation for the period of a person's bail or HDC license. The number of properties nationally is small with around 200 across England and Wales and there is currently only one property in the Sunderland area. The houses are furnished and typically are for two to three sharing. Each person has their own bedroom and shares the communal space, and has normal household responsibilities whilst residing there. Some properties are for single occupancy and others for a parent who can be united with dependent children. All occupants are liable for rent and charges under the terms of their Accommodation License Agreement.
- 3.9 Support Officers visit regularly to effectively manage each property, provide support to each individual and monitor adherence to their bail conditions or HDC licence. Failure to comply with these conditions is acted upon. The support officer will also help each individual to find more stable accommodation to move on to. BASS does not provide accommodation to anyone who has a conviction, caution, a current allegation of or are under police bail for any sexual offences.

The Cyrenians – Adults Facing Chronic Exclusion (ACE) Project

- 3.10 Funded through the Homeless Transition Fund, a Department for Communities and Local Government programme administered by Homeless Link, this project develops a personalised approach to help rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping into sustainable accommodation. The Cyrenians received approximately £250k, for a two year project.
- 3.11 The project employs individuals who have direct experience of rough sleeping to provide peer support to homeless people to access services, typically accompanying them to appointments to ensure this

happens. Three case workers typically have a caseload of six to eight clients at any one time. The group of clients ACE targets differ in age, gender, ethnicity and background but have a multitude of needs in common in addition to homelessness. These can include offending, substance addictions and physical and mental health problems.

- 3.12 Assertive outreach workers locate and engage with homeless individuals at street level, within complimentary day services and supported accommodation throughout the city.

Bernicia - Ashkirk Homeless Household Project

- 3.13 This project aims to support clients to develop skills and confidence that will help them secure and maintain long term accommodation. Ashkirk is an accommodation based support service providing practical housing related supported and advice to families who are homeless. Each household is provided with a tailored support package and action plan that specifically addresses the needs of the family. New clients may move into one of the core properties and may, subject to progress, move on to a satellite unit as a stepping stone to achieve independent living.
- 3.14 The project is open to families who are homeless or threatened with homelessness and who have housing related support needs. The service is in demand, and so a waiting list is operated and places are allocated in order of priority need.
- 3.15 Referrals to the project are received by a variety of agencies including Children's Services, the police, Probation or health services. Referrals are processed through the Council's Supported Accommodation Gateway.

Shelter

- 3.16 Shelter is a charity that works to alleviate the distress caused by homelessness and poor quality housing. It provides advice, information and advocacy to people in housing need, and campaigns for change to improve housing issues.
- 3.17 Shelter provides advice services to a total of eighteen prisons in the North East and North West regions, and last year provided 1,660 offenders with advocacy, support, specialist housing advice and information to help them reintegrate into the community. It also works with Probation Trusts to offer housing advice to those offenders living in approved premises who will require permanent accommodation once their stay at the approved premises has ceased.

Gentoo

- 3.18 Gentoo deliver a number of specialist services in relation to supported accommodation, community safety and safeguarding. Some of these services include:-

- ***Allocations' System***

Gentoo's current allocations system includes a direct allocation element which can be used to re-house customers in exceptional circumstances. Gentoo are leading a pilot scheme whereby ex-offenders who are deemed by all key partners to be ready to successfully manage a tenancy, are considered for direct allocation. Other partners involved in the scheme are the City Council, Probation and Youth Offending Service.

- ***Positive Engagement Service***

This service supports perpetrators of anti-social behaviour (ASB) in an attempt to address the root cause of the ASB and prevent re-offending.

- ***Safeguarding Service***

Gentoo have a specialist safeguarding team to ensure all referrals from staff relating to vulnerable children, young people and adults are dealt with in the most appropriate way.

- ***Drug and Alcohol Support***

Gentoo employ a support officer to work with customers who specifically have drug and/or alcohol problems.

- ***Supported Accommodation***

Holmewood

Based in the City Centre, Holmewood provides supported accommodation to clients aged between 16 and 21 who are homeless. Primary referrals are made by SCC Gateway. The service is staffed 24 hours per day, 365 day per year and accommodates 6 female and 6 male clients at any one time. Between January 2012 and August 2012, 15 referrals were made, of which 6 had a history of offending. All referrals were accepted by the team.

STEPS

'STEPS' is Gentoo's floating support service to young people between the ages of 16-25 who require support to sustain their tenancies. There are 29 self contained flats owned by Gentoo (Core Properties) and 90 supported tenancies (cross tenure). Between January 2012 and August 2012 a total of 80 referrals were made into the service of which 10 had a history of offending. Again, all referrals were accepted into the service.

Managing Agents

Gentoo provide 169 units to a range of support agencies to use as temporary accommodation for their service users which include ex-offenders.

Home Group

- 3.19 Home Group is a social enterprise, providing affordable rented homes and supported housing for people in the UK. Home manages 55,000 homes and provides support and services to more than 120,000 people every year. Home has 1468 properties in the city, with around 900 in Plains Farm. It also has properties in Grindon, Ryhope, Hylton Lane, Ford and the Coalfields area.
- 3.20 Home operates within the local communities in which it has properties in Sunderland. As well as an office based in the area, with staff on hand and available for tenants, it also has an anti-social behaviour team which works closely with the Police, the Probation Service and other agencies to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour and to assess prospective clients' suitability for a tenancy within that community.
- 3.21 Home faces a number of challenges and opportunities in light of the recession and current and future policy and legislation changes, including welfare reform. It is therefore focusing on the needs and desires of customers and clients with choice and 'personalised' services being paramount.

4. RECOMMENDATION

- 4.1 That Members note the information provided and utilise it in the debate at the Panel Meeting to be held on 20 September 2012.

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