

Hull City Council – Strengthening partnerships



Case Study

Introduction

It was identified through the RSI Advisor and MEAM Partnership Manager that co-production was a challenge for Hull City Council. Hull CC also self-identified this as a gap and identified an overall need to improve their engagement with the voluntary, community and faith sectors.

Homeless Link's Partnership Manager reached out to Hull CC via the Advisor and offered to meet alongside an offer to support with the upcoming RS15 stakeholder self-assessment process. At the meeting, the LA raised concerns that there were many third sector organisations, such as soup kitchens and faith and community groups who did not attend the existing partnership forums and therefore had less strategic engagement. They identified that on a one-to-one basis, organisations generally had a good relationship with the LA Officer and felt comfortable in calling him. However, there were certain issues which they did not always see eye to eye on, for example social media conduct with regards to people experiencing homelessness.

The LA were keen for Homeless Link to help explore opportunities for strengthening the relationship and understanding between non-commissioned organisations and Hull CC.

Change Needed

Hull had already planned for their RS15 stakeholder self-assessment event and were aware that many individuals and groups from the voluntary, community and faith sectors would not attend and therefore their voices would not be heard. The LA were keen to ensure that they had input into the process and asked for Homeless Link's support with this. An independent space was needed to allow the grassroots organisations to take part in the self-assessment process. The Partnership Manager offered to reach out to the organisations and invite them to a separate, specific event to discuss and provide input into the self-assessment, with a further view to continue building on strengthening the relationship with the local authority.

It was agreed that Homeless Link would;

- Plan, co-ordinate and chair an online or live event for non-commissioned stakeholders to discuss strengths and weaknesses within the existing rough sleeping services and pathways.
- Make contact, invite and build relationships with a list of individuals identified by Hull CC.
- Compile a report for Hull CC after the event.
- Follow up with Hull CC after the event and agree next steps to strengthen relationships.

Impact of Homeless Link involvement

The event was successful as it engaged with those organisations who had previously been hard to engage with by the LA and would not have attended the main stakeholder event which Hull had already organised the previous week. Initially the LA had predicted that an online event wouldn't work for those organisations, but all of the invited members attended and were keen to have further discussions on how to work more collaboratively with the LA.

Voluntary and faith sector organisations were able to have their voices heard and incorporated into the bid. They were able to identify some workable solutions to enable better outcomes for those rough sleeping.

The event highlighted that there were many initiatives within the LA that these organisations were completely unaware of. This meant that they were unable to effectively signpost or access for those who could potentially benefit from those services or initiatives.

Attendees identified a number of barriers they faced in being able to fully support people who are street homeless. These barriers included:

- Access to Housing Options Team - not always able to get through due to long phone waiting times. Often required to leave the person with no where to stay.
- Some immediate accommodation options not fit for purpose - rough sleepers do not want to access some supported accommodation as there are no white goods or furnishings available.
- Not enough information of council initiatives available for signposting.
- Lack of safeguarding procedures and guidance when supporting women who are at risk at night. Need something in place to avoid referring women to hospital just so they have somewhere safe to sleep.

They also suggested possible solutions as a way forward:

- Easier direct referral process to be available to non-commissioned services and for them to have referral routes into hostels.
- More information to be made available to grass roots organisations for appropriate signposting.
- Better engagement, communication and information sharing between LA and voluntary and grass roots organisations.
- Improved connections between Adult safeguarding and grass roots organisations.

This learning was included in a short report written by Homeless Link's Partnership Manager for Hull CC alongside the outcome of the session.

Recommendations

- Homeless Link to support the LA in developing a workable process so that non-commissioned organisations and the LA are able to have greater communication.
- Homeless Link to work with HCC to take forward the solutions identified at the event.

- Hull CC are interested in understanding the process for the development of a Homeless Charter to strengthen relationships. Homeless Link to lead on the development of this.
- Work alongside the HCC to utilise the intelligence from grass roots organisations to help them with future designs around commissioning, pathways and communications. These organisations have direct access to those sleeping rough and have a good insight in to some of the barriers they face in being able to find the appropriate support.

Immediate actions taken

Since the event with grassroots organisations, Hull CC worked quickly in identifying some immediate solutions to address some of the recommendations from Homeless Link. This included:

- An allocation of an outreach provider to set up regular 'clinics' at soup kitchens and develop closer working relationships with organisers.
- Links were made between the LA welfare rights team and soup kitchen organisers – organisers said that many of those using the kitchens were doing so as a result of benefit sanctions. Soup kitchen organisers now have a dedicated referral/access route to the HCC welfare rights team in order to assist this group of their service users.
- Soup kitchen providers are now attending an independent hostel forum. This will enable further development of links to the broader homelessness sector in Hull. Hull are also liaising with HCC's property team with regards to obtaining a premises to operate from.