



# MJ Awards

Best Social Housing Initiative



# Introduction

Making a real and lasting difference to real people's lives is at the heart of the work carried out by Canterbury City Council's Housing and Community Services team.

Facing the same challenges around increased demand, squeezed finances, scarce resources and political priorities as teams the length and breadth of the country, putting an overwhelming desire to deliver better outcomes for the people who need their help at the heart of their work has allowed them to become more much more innovative, work more closely with partners and attract government funding.

Just like similar teams across the country, Canterbury City Council's Housing and Community Services team has recognised people's housing needs are increasingly complex and that, in some ways, it was already too late when they arrived in our front office needing urgent help.

In the absence of a magic wand and magic money tree, they recognised they needed a number of locally-crafted projects that would catch people before they fall and pick them up if that failed.

They also stood ready to react to new opportunities and constantly rethink their approach.

Below we explore a number of the innovative projects the team has been involved in.

# Assisted Moves Project

## Challenges

- Homeless applications have doubled in last year
- 1,982 people on the Housing Needs Register
- The district has seen a 47% reduction in the turnover of social housing
- Uneven balance between the stock available and people's needs including a high number of sheltered voids and a low number of larger family homes becoming empty
- The need to make best use of the stock we have by helping people to 'right size'
- Lots of single occupancy of family accommodation
- Arrears preventing people from moving
- Hoarding and other health issues preventing people from moving
- People needed practical help rather than a cash incentive

## Innovation

- We engaged dedicated officer to give practical help with moving from how to apply to move, to changing address with utilities and setting up direct debits and supporting hoarders to rationalise their prized possessions

## Outcomes

- In the first year we will have achieved 13 moves against an original target of 10, releasing family social housing homes ranging in size from two to three-bedroomed properties
- All of those helped to move reported a significant improvement in how they feel, are looking after themselves and enjoying improved housing

## Case study

Mrs E is a 73-year-old woman who was living in a top floor three-bedroomed maisonette.

She suffers from arthritis, PTSD and depression and was socially isolated.

Mrs E rarely left her property as she found the stairs difficult to manage. She slept in the downstairs rooms.

The property was full of possessions which were of sentimental value to Mrs E and she would become distressed at the thought of getting rid of them. She described herself as a "collector".

Mrs E described the thought of moving and sorting her belongings as "overwhelming".

Simon worked with her over the course of five months sensitively enabling Mrs E to begin letting go of some of her belongings.

Throughout this period Mrs E would become highly anxious but was able to contact Simon and without his support would likely have withdrawn.

Simon went with her to visit a former client who had moved into a sheltered one-bedroomed bungalow and who was happy to show her around. Simon and Mrs E then bid on a similar property.

Simon worked with Age UK and a team of volunteers towards the end to ensure the move could go ahead.

Simon arranged the remaining belongings to be packed, removals and waste disposal and was present throughout the move to ensure all went smoothly.

Simon helped with utilities including arranging for a £1,000 overpayment to a water company to be repaid to Mrs E. He helped with her change of address for housing benefit and with the DWP.

## Film

<http://bit.ly/assistedmoves>

# Community Support

## Challenges

- Recognised need for more focus on homelessness prevention and had an issue locally with revolving homelessness especially those living in privately-rented sector
- 45% of clients now have complex needs compared to two years ago when it was 25%
- Reduced amount of supported housing and Kent County Council changes to the way that floating support was provided left a local gap

## Innovation

- Restructured using existing resources to create a community support team to do some of the upstream work with people to help them sustain their tenancies
- Support is tailored to meet needs of the individual, but the focus is on enabling people and building their capacity to deal with things themselves rather than reliance on service providers
- Focused support towards those who had been homeless, had a tenancy with our social lettings agency (see below) or who the housing team had helped into privately-rented accommodation

## Outcomes

- 100% of clients sustaining tenancy for over 12 months,
- 74% client outcomes achieved including income maximisation, accessing support for health issues, managing debt and entering into employment

## Case study

Client B was a young gay man who approached the council as homeless because his relationship with his mum had broken down.

He was experiencing depression and anxiety, manifesting in self harm and a suicide attempt.

He was also socially isolated as he found it difficult meeting and being around people and had some outstanding debts.

He has found it hard to engage with mental health services and, as a result of threatening someone with a knife, had become criminalised.

The community support worker built up an effective working relationship with him, supported him to visit his GP and helped him to engage with a mental health help.

He was diagnosed with unstable emotional personality disorder. He is now receiving and engaging with effective medication and counselling.

His community support worker also helped him to identify his debts and take control back by engaging with Step Change.

Given B's mental health diagnosis and issues, his community support worker referred him to specialist mental health supported housing which he has now moved in to.

# Social Lettings Agency called Canterbury Lettings

## Challenges

- Private rented sector accounts for 19% of the local housing market
- Average private rent for a two-bed is £895 per month and the maximum amount of housing allowance that can be claimed for a two-bed is £690 per month - affordability is an issue
- The district is reaping the benefits of change in planning policy to build more purpose-built student accommodation leaving landlords with what were previously student houses of multiple occupation (HMOs)
- Those on welfare benefits or lower incomes, and those with debt who find themselves homeless, were predominantly excluded from the private-rented sector
- Revolving homelessness with some households living in the private-rented sector

## Innovation

- Established our own social lettings agency
- Realised that it would not be profit making but the financial savings that could be made on our temporary accommodation spend far outweighed the cost of the model
- Prioritised homeless families so they spent less time in temporary accommodation but also they were able to recover from the impact of being homeless quicker
- Linked this project in with community support so that we were setting people up to succeed rather than fail
- Let properties at affordable rents, at Local Housing Allowance rates (LHA) or as close to as possible, in agreement with the landlord. This enables low to low middle income households to access the private-rented sector.
- Offer landlords guaranteed rent but the council also receives income from landlord fees that we charge
- In a recent survey, 100% of landlords said they would recommend us to other landlords

## Outcomes

- More than 20 properties secured to date
- All those accommodated were previously homeless
- £150,000 net saved in spend on temporary accommodation

## Case study

Miss A is a single mother with five children. She approached us when she was fleeing domestic abuse.

She was placed in temporary accommodation and was there for over a year long before the agency was live.

We found her a four-bedroom property and secured it at the Local Housing Allowance rate ensuring it was affordable for her.

Her and her family have settled in really well and have been there for over a year.

The landlord agreed to issue her a new tenancy when the initial 12-month tenancy ended.

## Film

<http://bit.ly/sociallettings>

# Rough Sleeper Initiative

## Challenges

- Canterbury has historically seen higher levels of rough sleepers than other Kent districts
- Significant community of entrenched rough sleepers
- A number of deaths on the streets
- Increase in IV drug users among the customer group
- Number of charities working with rough sleepers with different approaches
- No coordination and limited collaboration
- No understanding of the local profile of the rough sleeping community so hard to establish what services were being accessed and which were not
- No consistency in tracking of outcomes to measure the impact to individuals
- Limited housing accommodation for those wanting to move off the streets
- Where rough sleepers were accommodated, had revolving homelessness issue because lack of support once they were in settled accommodation
- Lack of outreach in the coastal areas
- Clashing agendas of engaging with and supporting rough sleepers and the street enforcement arm of the council/ police
- Street beggars and street drinkers often mistaken for rough sleepers

## Innovation

- Funding made available for Rough Sleeper Initiatives nationally through MHCLG. We successfully secured £550,598 (over two years)

- Co-production exercise to design the project with the key charities working in our district
- Engaged a rough sleeper coordinator to lead the project and seconded outreach workers from charities already working with rough sleepers
- Built up profile of each rough sleeper so support could be targeted at specific needs and was personalised
- Established a multi-agency partnership involving public, private and voluntary sectors to ensure there was a collaborative approach, interventions were targeted and coordinated and the sharing of intelligence especially around safeguarding of very vulnerable customers
- City centre Business Improvement District team closely involved
- Focus on working with sofa surfers with more upstream interventions to prevent them losing accommodation or help them find a home sooner to avoid them becoming a rough sleeper

## Outcomes so far

- Numbers worked with: 260
- Total number of housing outcomes: 198
- 16 have completed education courses
- Nine have gone in to employment
- 154 supported to access substance misuse help
- 51 supported to access mental health services
- 157 supported to access other services
- Four have become volunteers

## Case study

Client A had slept rough for more than 10 years was likely to be out for the winter period and was not engaging with existing services.

He has multiple and complex needs including physical health and substance misuse issues - mainly heroin and crack.

He lacked many of the life skills that he would need in order to be able to maintain his own accommodation.

He was malnourished and type 1 diabetic, with no access to insulin.

His diet was very poor with only the food he was given by the passing public. He spent time in hospital after falling into a diabetic coma on the streets.

His only thought was his next fix of heroin.

We worked very intensely with him and built up trust. Any actions we agreed we followed through and we supported him to take these actions.

We organised a multi-agency meeting and was put in touch with social services, the mental health team and the enablement team. We provided him with a phone to keep in contact,

He agreed to go to Forward Trust to talk about going onto methadone which he attended and is now scripted. We helped him to claim benefits.

We found him an emergency bedspace in a hostel to prepare him for more settled accommodation.

## Film

<http://bit.ly/streetpopulation>

# Prison Navigator Project

## Challenges

- Increasing number of homeless offenders approaching our housing options teams across Kent, usually on the day of release without prior contact
- Large population 45% of rough sleepers are ex-offenders
- Many have specific licence restrictions meaning that it was incredibly difficult to provide temporary accommodation
- Risk of reoffending significantly higher if become rough sleeper on release from prison
- Significant changes due to budget pressures at county council level meant loss of just under 80 bed spaces in the county for prison leavers, especially affecting higher risk offenders

## Innovation

- Collaboration between districts secured £313,368 for the first year.
- Created team of navigators to work with district housing teams and offenders while still in prison and prior to release, the main purpose being to help them secure accommodation to prevent becoming street homeless
- Originally covering Canterbury, Thanet, Maidstone and Medway - Canterbury took the lead
- New funding to expand to also cover Dover, Folkestone and Hythe, Swale and Gravesham,
- Looking at having a dedicated officer to support with multiple and complex needs and safeguarding

## Outcomes

- 27 people places into suitable accommodation with 14 in supported accommodation

## Case study

Mr T is 42 and has a history of rough sleeping, drug and theft offences, substance misuse issues, mental and physical health problems. He was due to be released from prison.

The team worked with Mr T beforehand and had a space at the new pathways hub in Ramsgate that they deemed would be suitable.

The team arranged to pick him up from custody and take him directly to the hub.

The Prison Navigator liaised with the NACRO worker and CRC in custody so they could inform Mr T of this offer of accommodation and plan to pick him up from custody.

He was collected from custody and housed successfully in the hub where he still lives and is engaging with appropriate services to help him find more permanent housing.

# Cuckooing Project

## Challenges

- Recognised emerging threat to our communities
- Cross district and cross boundary issue
- Inconsistency in the way cases dealt with
- Challenge of victim or willing participant
- Canterbury had higher incidences than neighbouring districts of Dover and Folkestone & Hythe

## Innovation

- Worked with neighbouring districts, the police, our East Kent Housing arms-length management organisation and Kent County Council's Safeguarding team Task and Finish Group
- Developed consistent approach to deal with cases
- Produced multi-agency guidance, a leaflet and social media messages
- Raise awareness for frontline staff and the community to increase reporting

## Outcomes

- New process in place improved wraparound support for victim and better collaboration
- Guidance being used across Kent, and MHCLG interested in how could be used elsewhere

## Case study

Miss A was an owner occupier living in a rural village, had been in abusive relationships, was incredibly vulnerable, had some addiction issues and had also been the victim of financial abuse.

There was some self neglect and, as a result of water damage to the property, her insurers rented a property in the city centre.

Police from the community safety team were aware of Miss A and witnessed her around the city with younger men some of whom were seen to walk her dog. These concerns led the police to believe her home was being cuckooed.

As a result of using the multi-agency guidance and pathway that had been developed, a vulnerable tasking group meeting was called and representatives from all of the agencies working with Miss A was held.

What became apparent was that Miss A had stopped engaging with some services, but from a visit her mental health worker had seen what looked like an iron burn to her face.

The police and other agencies coordinated support to try and safeguard Miss A.

At the same time, the police raided her home, made a number of arrests and disrupted a county line operating from there.

Miss A has moved back to her own home, and the wraparound support was put in place to help her resettlement.

## Film

<http://bit.ly/cuckooing>