



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
Subject:	Homelessness in Belfast City
Date:	23 rd January 2015
Reporting Officer:	Siobhan Toland, Head of Environmental Health Service
Contact Officer:	Una Lappin, Health Equity Project Manager (3777)

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	<p>Following on from discussions at both the Health and Environmental Services Committee meeting and that of the Budget Panel in December 2014, a report for information was requested in relation to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ On-going work regarding Homelessness in the City, ▪ Belfast City Councils engagement with the relevant agencies, and ▪ How the Council could co-ordinate initiatives with other public bodies and private sector businesses in the City to provide short term support and longer term assistance in tackling homelessness in the City
1.2	<p>According to the Northern Ireland Housing Statistics Department for Social Development, 18,862 households presented themselves as homeless in 2013/2014 in NI.</p>
1.3	<p>More specifically, from 1st April 2014 to 6th January 2015:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Across the Greater Belfast Area (including East Belfast Housing, Homeless Services Unit*, North Belfast, Shankill, South Belfast and West Belfast), the number of households presenting as homeless to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive was 4,056 ▪ Across the outlying areas (Castlereagh, Lisburn Antrim Street and Lisburn Dairy Farm) the number of households presenting as homeless to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive was 1,712 <p><i>* The Homelessness Services Unit is located in Belfast. They will normally deal with clients who present in Belfast but do not have a fixed address in the Belfast area, e.g., no fixed abode, people from outside NI etc. People who are homeless from a previous Belfast address will normally present to the District in which their former home was situated.</i></p>
1.4	<p>The Northern Ireland Housing Executive Homelessness Strategy for Northern Ireland, 2012 -2017 states:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Homelessness continues to be a significant challenge in Northern Ireland and a problem that afflicts the lives of many of our citizens. ▪ There are numerous reasons for homelessness; family dispute, breakdown in living arrangements, addiction, mental ill health, debt and tenancy breakdown and so on.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The effect of homelessness impacts on individual lives for years and this influence goes beyond the immediate lack of accommodation. ▪ It impedes an individual's health, financial and social well being. For this reason, no one organisation or agency can address these issues in isolation. ▪ There is now a greater need than ever to respond to homelessness in a coordinated multi agency approach as required in the legislation** and for each partner to contribute their expertise and resources to promote social inclusion. <p>** <i>The Housing (NI) Order 1988 (as amended)</i></p>
1.5	<p>The Lord Mayor, Councillor Nichola Mallon, has established and chaired a multi-agency planning group with key organisations, statutory and voluntary representatives, which had its first meeting on 30th October 2014 to discuss her priorities for her term regarding homelessness. This was the first of its kind. Her priorities included the delivery of two events for homeless individuals:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A Christmas Lunch for single adults (19th December 2014) 2. A Shrove Tuesday event for families (17th February 2015)
1.6	<p>The organisations involved in the events include: Council for the Homeless Northern Ireland, The Northern Ireland Housing Executive, DePaul, Welcome Organisation, Extern, The Salvation Army and The Simon Community. They have all welcomed the focus on homelessness and the two events being organised, and are supportive of the focus that Belfast City Council and the Lord Mayor has brought to opening up of the City Hall to homeless people.</p>
1.7	<p>At the City Hall Christmas Lunch on 19th December, the Lord Mayor welcomed 80 homeless people from across Belfast and hosted a Christmas lunch for those facing Christmas alone or on the streets.</p>
1.8	<p>This planning group, under the Chairmanship of the Lord Mayor, will co-plan and co-deliver the second event, a Shrove Tuesday event on February 17th 2015 and will once again engage with those who are homeless in Belfast, working in partnership with the organisations. Families will be the target audience for this event.</p>

2	Key Issues
2.1	<p>The Lord Mayor has given her commitment to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support the forgotten citizens of the city and shine a light on the issue of homelessness ▪ Remind everyone of the issue of homelessness especially the statutory agencies and their duty of care ▪ Make the City Hall accessible for all of the citizens of Belfast City so everyone has a place.
2.2	<p>There is now a greater need than ever to respond to homelessness using a coordinated multi agency approach and it is proposed that the planning group established to deliver the Christmas and Shrove Tuesday events continues to meet to take on this role. The statutory and voluntary partners involved have considerable expertise and resources to promote social inclusion in tackling this issue of homelessness and it is recommended the Council continues to support this group.</p>
2.3	<p>At the most recent multiagency planning meeting hosted by the Lord Mayor on 15th January the members confirmed the positive benefit of continuing to meet around this</p>

	agenda, the benefits of a civic lead focus, and their willingness to look at a more strategic approach to tackling the issues in Belfast . One of the initial pieces of work will be to look at the gaps in service provision in the city and look at best practice elsewhere. The Lord Mayor is intending to visit Dublin to look at the recent challenges that city has faced and to look at what initiatives have been put in place. The role of the Council will be in the first instance to facilitate the discussions and this will be supported by staff within the Environmental Health Service.
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3	Resource Implications
3.1	Una Lappin, the Health Equity Project Officer will continue to support the Shrove Tuesday event in partnership with the Lord Mayor and all of the key organisations. Post the February event, officers will continue to support the BCC focus on the issue of Homelessness, with other relevant services/units within Council.

4	Equality and Good Relations Implications
4.1	There are no relevant equality and good relations implications

5	Recommendations
5.1	Belfast City Council to continue to co-ordinate and facilitate the planning group of key organisations to address homelessness issues in the City.

6	Decision Tracking

7	Key to Abbreviations
	No abbreviations were used.

8	Documents Attached
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Christmas Lunch 19th December 2014 Press Release

Press Release 19th December 2014

Lord Mayor opens City Hall for Christmas Lunch

Belfast Lord Mayor, Councillor Nichola Mallon, today welcomed 80 homeless people from across Belfast along to City Hall to enjoy a traditional Christmas lunch with all the trimmings.

Councillor Mallon joined together with a variety of charities and organisations who work with homeless people, to put on the Christmas lunch for those who are facing Christmas alone or on the streets.

The lunch was organised in partnership with Council for the Homeless NI, NI Housing Executive, DePaul, Welcome Organisation, Extern, Salvation Army and Simon Community.

The guests enjoyed the three course lunch which was provided for free by the catering company Posh Nosh Ireland. Waiting staff came in the form of volunteers from the charities and organisations involved, as well as staff from Belfast City Council.

Guest also received Christmas presents and a take home sweetie treat, donated by the NI Housing Executive and enjoyed music by Salvation Army band.

Speaking at the event, the Lord Mayor said: "I'm so pleased to come together with organisations and charities who work so hard all year round in their plight to tackle homelessness on our streets and be able to provide what we hope is a really enjoyable afternoon for our guests.

"It's important to remember that at Christmas, while we are at home with our family and friends, it's very different for those who are alone or without a roof over their heads. Throughout my term in office I have worked to highlight the issues faced by what I term 'our forgotten citizens', people who are on the margins of our society.

Councillor Mallon continued: "Nobody should have to face long term homelessness and it is vital that homeless services have the capacity to reach out and be responsive to the needs of those who, for a variety of reasons and circumstances, are in need of help and support. The acid test of a society is how it cares for its most vulnerable members and I never cease to be amazed by the compassion and generosity of people and organisations right across Belfast".

Organisers also ensured that no food was wasted as guests were able to bring home leftovers in the council's 'Take Home Boxes'.

For more information or advice on homelessness visit www.belfastcity.gov.uk/buildingcontrol-environment/housing/homelessness

RELEASE ENDS

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