

Agenda Item 7- Community Matters: Question regarding Homelessness

Resident Question:

'Perhaps you can let me know where meetings are being held in Aylesbury. I would like to know what Aylesbury is doing about the homeless people on the streets. Already in August we had a very cold spell for a few days. I have noticed that the people who congregate in the town square are looking less fresh, unkempt, than they did during lockdown when they were housed (homed) somewhere). Do you or your team have any thoughts towards a soup kitchen in the town centre'

Written response provided by Julie Oliver, Housing Team Manager (Aylesbury area), Buckinghamshire Council (delivered verbally by Community Board Chairman, Cllr Mark Winn):

Three years ago we commenced our Rough Sleeper Initiative to try and house those sleeping rough and to assist those who are about to sleep on the streets. We work closely with our partners, Aylesbury Homeless Action Group, Oxford Health, Oasis Drug and Alcohol team, Bucks Mind, Vale of Aylesbury Housing Trust and Connections Outreach to ensure that people have the support that they need. Our Outreach Team work alongside our rough sleepers to try and get them to come in to accommodation but where they are refusing to build relationships with them and to ensure we are doing everything we can to safeguard them. We have also employed a dedicated Mental Health Nurse and a trained Counsellor from Bucks Mind to assist with our clients mental health. Drug and Alcohol Workers and Outreach Officers go out at various times of the day to include early in the morning to try and engage with the people we know are sleeping out and to hand out any supplies needed.

We have fortnightly meetings to discuss the clients who we have housed and still need support as well as those that have been housed and gone back out on the streets. By working alongside our project group we can understand the complexities of the clients we are dealing with and can try to put together a package of support and housing to assist them. Sadly, we do have a cohort of street drinkers and people begging that are not actually homeless but state that they are to obtain money from members of the public. I would reassure people that all the rough sleepers have been offered accommodation and have either refused to come in or have been recently been evicted after refusing to follow rules in their agreements.

Even when they have been evicted, we continue to work alongside them to explore other options and ensure that they have food, clothing and that their medical conditions are being dealt with. We are currently considering how food is distributed as we move towards the colder months. I would advise anyone considering a Soup Kitchen to contact me as there are a number of risk issues that need to be considered. There are often safer ways to ensure people have food.

I am very happy to arrange a presentation at a later date as have lots of case studies to show the work of our team and how we have helped people get off the streets, I am so lucky to have an amazing team of people who work tirelessly to help those that are still sleeping outside.