

New Walk Project Update

Background

The Council's Housing Options Service fulfils the authority's responsibilities under homeless legislation. This includes the provision of temporary accommodation to anyone whom is deemed as being potentially homeless and with a 'priority need' in respect of vulnerability. However under homeless legislation most of the residents of the New Walk project would not normally be eligible for assistance by the local authority – so if they approached the Council they would only be provided with housing advice and a list of B and B establishments.

The town Centre/Parkfield areas of Stockton have a high number of B and B establishments as large Victorian terraced properties that are ideal for this type of provision, are in abundance in these areas.

Since the contracting arrangements for asylum seeker accommodation changed a few years ago there has been a dramatic increase in the number of B and B units in Stockton as the properties owned by the previous contract holders were sold on the open market and most were bought by our largest B and B provider in the Borough.

This increase in B and B provision has met a growing demand in the Borough brought about by changes to Housing Benefit regulations which increased the age criteria for shared accommodation entitlement from 18 to 25 years to 35 years of age. This effectively means that any single person who is in receipt of benefit will only be able to receive approximately £56 per week towards their rent in the privately rented sector. This is insufficient to access self-contained accommodation of any quality. The 'under 35 rule' does not apply in social housing but 1 bedroomed accommodation is in short supply across the Tees Valley so this is not a viable option to many especially those who have other issues such as failed previous tenancies, drug / substance misuse or a history of offending.

Current Situation

All of these factors have resulted in Hartington Road having an unnatural concentration of single people who are aged between 18 and 35 years of age – most of whom have chaotic lifestyles and complex issues. ASB is a major issue and as this type of accommodation is in short supply elsewhere, it attracts people from out of the area and is seen as an easy housing solution for prisoners on release from Holme House prison – whether they have a connection to Stockton or not.

Whilst as a housing service we have no duty to provide assistance to these residents it is recognised that to do so would benefit the Borough as a whole not just the residents themselves.

Earlier this year one of the owners of the largest portfolios of B and B establishments in Stockton entered into a partnership with an organisation called New Walk. New Walk had recently attained Registered Provider status with the Government's Home and Communities Agency. This is the governing body for Registered Providers of accommodation such as Thirteen Group, Endeavour etc. The B and B owner has 'leased' his properties to New Walk and has himself become an employee of New Walk with a role of managing the properties in Hartington Road (84 units).

This partnership is driving up the standards of accommodation in the private rented sector - Registered Provider status allows higher rents to be charged - the owner of the B and B's had limited rental income capacity as most residents were affected by the 'under-35 rule' on Housing Benefit. It also comes with an expectation for provision of good standard accommodation both in respect of bricks and mortar and service provision/management.

These new 'Registered Provider' arrangements have also provided an opportunity for the Housing Service to explore opportunities to work in partnership with New Walk and engage with the residents and address the barriers to them moving into more secure accommodation.

A successful funding bid to Public Health has enabled us to second a senior officer within the Housing Options Service to work alongside New Walk and actively engage with the residents residing in the properties. The aim is to encourage and support residents to engage with treatment services, challenge behaviours and work with individuals to help them achieve better outcomes in respect of health, well-being and future prospects by effective sign posting and multi- agency working.

The longer term aim is to dilute the concentration of such vulnerable people in such a small area and it is hoped that a further years funding can be secured to continue with the project.

The attached Action Plan details the activity and outcomes to date.

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Housing Options and New Walk Partnership Project – Action Plan

Objective	Task	Target Date	Comments
Gain Control over access to New Walk property Stop out of area HCC's and PPO's accessing New Walk property Stop agencies in Holme House prison accommodating released prisoners who have no local connection to Stockton, in New Walk properties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Get agreement with New Walk that all referrals to the project are via Housing Options 	June 2014	Completed
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet with New Walk and get agreement to not accept self-referrals from out of Borough residents 	June 2014	Completed
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish joint 'assessments' with Police regarding vetting of proposed residents in the project 	July 2014	Completed
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss with 'Thru the Gate' and Shelter the new partnering arrangements and restricted access to New Walk properties 	July 2014	Completed
Establish a mutually beneficial professional partnership between Housing and New Walk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet with New Walk and share aims and desired outcomes for the project 	June / July 2014	Completed
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish protocols and procedures for information sharing and referrals 	June/ July 2014	Completed
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish Housing Options as one point of access for referrals 	June / July 2014	Completed
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agree criteria for accessing project including engagement with treatment services 	June / July 2014	Completed
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arrange and provide for all New Walk staff at the project to receive Safeguarding vulnerable adult and children training. 	July 2014	Completed
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arrange and provide brief intervention around drug and alcohol mis use to all New Walk staff 	July 2014	Completed
		August 2014	Completed –

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce the Safeguarding Vulnerable Adult team to the project • Work with New Walk to 'persuade' and agree to having regular inspections of their property by the Council's Private Sector Housing team (this had been a statutory requirement when the property was a B and B HIMO) It is not enforceable for Registered Provider accommodation 	November 2014	<p>and ongoing in respect of introductions to Treatment services and mental health services.</p> <p>Achieved. Regular inspections agreed to be undertaken to maintain acceptable housing condition standards</p>
Assist in reducing ASB and criminal activity in Hartington Road generally as well as amongst residents of the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forge links with Community safety Teams and Police to share intelligence • Facilitate the meetings with ASB team and recipients of ASB notification and warning letters to increase take-up of intervention. • Introduce / encourage New Walk management team to attend JAG • Introduce and engage in targeted joined up work-enforcement and support/prevention for residents considered amongst the top twenty ASB perpetrators in the town centre area • Contribute to the Hartington Road Multi-Agency task group • Forge links with A Way Out to work alongside residents in New Walk to 	<p>June / July 2014</p> <p>July 2014</p> <p>September 2014 and ongoing</p> <p>July 2014 and ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>October 2014</p>	<p>Completed</p> <p>Completed</p> <p>Completed</p> <p>Completed and ongoing. Also Looking to identify 8 high end need residents to adopt a structured support pathway</p> <p>Achieved. A Way Out based in New Walk on an evening to provide advice and support. Recent update</p>

	<p>ensure where possible that vulnerable females are not targeted for prostitution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all proposed residents of New Walk are checked on the Council's 'FLARE' system so that any previous ASB issues can be identified and the ASB team advised of their whereabouts if reengagement is required. 	<p>August 2014</p>	<p>1/12/14 confirmed no apparent prostitution activity at New Walk currently</p> <p>Achieved and ongoing</p>
<p>Enhance service provision and delivery to residents of the project</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forge links with Tees Achieve- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop questionnaire to ascertain what the wants and needs are of residents in terms of education, skills and training ○ Deliver a tailored programme of educational and training opportunities to residents including accredited courses. • Forge links with SDAIS (CAB) to assist with money and benefit problems-rent arrears-sanctions etc. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Arrange weekly surgery to be held at project. • Increase housing options for residents of project by developing robust relationships with accommodation providers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Create 2 way referrals process 	<p>October 2014</p> <p>To be confirmed, but within the life of the project</p> <p>July / August 2014</p> <p>Ongoing throughout life of project July 2014</p> <p>July 2014</p> <p>Ongoing throughout project</p>	<p>Achieved</p> <p>Tees Active analysing questionnaire responses and developing a proposed programme</p> <p>Completed – increased to twice weekly due to demand</p> <p>Completed</p> <p>Completed</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> with Sanctuary Housing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Coordinate training event by Sanctuary to the project staff 	October 2014	Achieved. CRI attend twice weekly to provide informal Engagement surgeries. Well attended. Minimum of 4 clients per session
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop bespoke move on pathways with residents of the project 	December 2014	Completed and ongoing. Awaiting Lifeline to confirm a proposal
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forge links with CRI to influence surgeries at the project regarding engagement with treatment services 	December 2014	Achieved. Discussions and two way communication established with the Practice Manager
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forge links with Lifeline to influence service delivery to New Walk residents 	November 2014	Achieved and ongoing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish robust communication links with Birchtree Practice regarding issues raised by residents from New Walk 	November 2014	Achieved and ongoing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish robust links with Credit Union for residents of New Walk 	January 2015	Ongoing – in discussion with treatment services and other stakeholders
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish links with the Navigation Project for referrals from residents of New Walk – this organisation provides workers to hand hold residents to actively encourage to attend appointments etc 	February 2015	Discussions with Little Sprouts a CIC who promote healthy eating etc to develop a proposal for
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and deliver service provision / activities for nights and weekends (peak offending / ASB 		

	<p>periods)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore options for food provision to residents of New Walk that involves the residents themselves Work with CRI to identify training and employment opportunities and initiatives Develop a Passport to Housing for New Walk residents - evidencing modification of behaviour and addressing barriers to housing 	<p>July 2014 and ongoing throughout project</p> <p>April 2015</p>	<p>teaching how to budget, shop and prepare food, Identifying funding opportunities to develop a rolling programme for residents</p> <p>Several opportunities being explored including work experience</p> <p>Work underway. Ultimate aim is to have the Passport recognised by the Compass CBL Partnership – the largest partnership of registered providers of accommodation across the Tees Valley</p>
<p>Provide robust performance monitoring and project evaluation reports on a quarterly basis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a performance reporting template for collation of hard and soft outcomes Provide first quarterly report for submission to Public Health DAAT (for performance from July 2014 – September 2014) 	<p>September 2014</p> <p>October 2014</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>