

Question to the Leader of the Council

By Councillor Lynnie Williams

Question

Given the freezing temperatures we have had recently, can the Leader of the council say what provisions were made and have been made to help rough sleepers in Liverpool.

Can he also tell me which options were explored to provide help for rough sleepers and what was the outcome in each case?

Answer

There are initiatives in place all year round to reduce rough sleeping within the city. One such initiative is an outreach team which targets rough sleepers and supports them to move indoors. This winter we have complemented existing services by providing a two tiered severe weather provision. Tier One is an overnight centre which only opens on nights which are defined as severely cold (Communities and Local Government define severely cold as when the temperature is predicted to drop to 0 degrees for three or more consecutive nights). To date we have had two episodes of opening: one three day episode in early December 08, and a recent episode where the overnight centre opened on the 27th December 08 for 15 nights. Between 10 and 28 people have used the centre on any one night.

This overnight centre is currently based in a council building in the north of the city. It is not a sleeping area, but is a place where rough sleepers can get warm, have food and have their needs assessed and help to get them into hostel accommodation wherever possible.

The second tier of the service is an additional support team which has been in place from 1st December and will be in place until the end of March 09. This team has the remit of proactively seeking out rough sleepers and supporting them to get into hostel accommodation, thus reducing the numbers using the overnight provision. This team has access to hostel beds which will have been specifically purchased by the City Council for this purpose. To date, 25, very entrenched, rough sleepers have been supported to move into hostel beds.

To agree what type of cold weather service was required in Liverpool during this winter, a multi-agency group (comprising the city council's homelessness service, Supporting People, and various voluntary and charitable agencies) met in March 08 to consider the options. Best practice from around the country was researched and three options were considered: firstly the two

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tiered model described above, secondly, a night provision that opened from Dec through to March and thirdly, night provision that only opened when it was severely cold (without any additional support). It was felt that option one would provide the most support to rough sleepers and achieve an overall reduction in rough sleeping within the city. Option two was discounted as although it would provide shelter for rough sleepers it would not provide sufficient support to enable rough sleepers to break the cycle of rough sleeping and move into appropriate accommodation. Option three was discounted as it provided less support than the other two options.

The service was then tendered out through the council's procurement process. The city council initially provided premises in the north of the city for the overnight provision, pending the outcome of a planning application for the use of a church on the edge of the city centre (St Stephen's, Crown Street, L8). This planning application was granted in early January and the church is now the base for the overnight provision when the temperature drops to the trigger temperature.

A prior planning application for using a community centre in St Michaels ward was withdrawn on the advice of the Planning Department following opposition from local ward Councillors.