

Glasgow's Annual Homelessness Conference [Report 2010]

Prompt Question: Was hostel closure good for 'ring-fenced' residents but bad for other single homeless men in Glasgow?

- Outcomes for the men leaving the hostels reinforces that it was the correct decision.
- Positive findings in relation to people's self-reported outcomes and their own views that their life is better now that they have moved on from hostels. Shows that multi-disciplinary assessments and appropriate support provision can help people sustain tenancies.
- Hostel closure has led to challenges for people accessing accommodation now, with people being turned away.
- The success of hostel closure was largely assisted by a clear political priority alongside realistic financial commitment. This is an important reminder for current challenges.
- Do we have the same multi-disciplinary approach to meeting the needs of people experiencing homelessness now that the GCC hostels have closed?

BIG QUESTION 5:

How can we reverse the 92% rate of people not working while homeless?

Speaker:

John Hinton, Executive Director, Move On

Overview of Presentation: John provided an overview of the most common barriers to people affected by homelessness accessing learning, training, or employment and research evidence that highlights people's aspirations to work in the future. He then questioned whether we are really serious about our aim to support homeless people towards and into employment, identifying the lack of strategic focus on homelessness and the gaps identified through the hostel closure evaluation and attitudinal barriers amongst professionals as barriers to achieving this. John went on to consider 'what works' in supporting people into employment and the potential impact of the proposed welfare reform.

Prompt Question: In an environment of reducing funding, how can we ensure that the resources which are available are targeted at those services which have the best chances of supporting homeless people towards and into employment? And, how can we make employability considerations central to the variety of supports we offer homeless people and ensure that in the future we don't miss another opportunity like hostel re-provisioning to substantially increase employability options?

- Train staff to embed employability agenda into service provision and ensure wider services fully understand the barriers created by experiencing homelessness.

- Can we build employability into support needs assessments?
- In the current climate of fewer jobs and college places how do we manage expectations?
- Is the current situation an opportunity to take a longer term approach on building the skills of those furthest from the labour market in time for the economy picking up again?

key themes

A number of recurrent themes arose from delegate's discussions and interaction throughout the day:

- Important recognition of the positive outcomes of the hostel closure programme and the need to learn from the successes.
- The need to improve on our crisis response systems to ensure people are not turned away without accommodation.
- That we need to fully understand the current picture of rough sleeping in the city and work together to scope the scale and causes of rough sleeping and street homelessness.
- That enduring solutions require the independent links to mortality, morbidity and employability to be adequately addressed and tackled.
- That the impending cuts to the direct funding of homelessness services will interplay with the impacts of the current economic climate to create new homelessness risk and exacerbate current homelessness experiences in Glasgow.

evaluation

140 delegates attended on the day, of whom 51 returned evaluation forms. All speakers and panel members received consistently high ratings, with specific regard given for the presentations provided by Dr David Morrison, Professor Suzanne Fitzpatrick and Willie McBride.

Other feedback included:

"The speakers were informative and all presented information that was relevant at the moment. This resulted in good discussions at the round tables."

"I felt the content of the conference and its tone was interesting and dynamic."

"Varied, interesting and informative."

"Overall, excellent programme."

"Probably the best GHN Conference I have attended"

THE BIG QUESTIONS



conference aims

This year's conference recognised the key progress made in homelessness over recent years, but acknowledged that there remains a number of challenges, often familiar and recurring challenges, to be addressed in order to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness in Glasgow.

The conference brought together a range of expert practitioners and academics to explore the core issues and the contemporary evidence around 5 'Big Questions':

- Why do homeless people die younger than their non-homeless peers?
- Why is rough sleeping in Glasgow no longer on a downward trend?
- Why are there blockages in accessing permanent accommodation for homeless households in Glasgow?
- What have we learned from the Hostel Closure Programme?
- How can we reverse the 92% unemployment rate of people not working while homeless?

format of the day

One keynote speaker set the scene for the day and was followed by five speakers providing evidence and context on the 'Big Questions'. The conference delegates at round tables discussed the evidence and context provided and arrived at questions, statements or proposed solutions which were put forward to the Big Questions Panel at the end of the day. The conference was expertly chaired by Jim Strang, the CEO of Parkhead Housing Association and the Chair of the Scotland Board of the Chartered Institute of Housing.

civic reception

The conference was opened by Councillor Matthew Kerr, Glasgow City Council's Executive Member for Social Care. Councillor Kerr reiterated the city's commitment to addressing homelessness and noted that, as 2012 draws nearer, homelessness observers across Europe will pay significant attention to the achievements made in Scotland, with a specific focus on Glasgow as the largest city with the largest homelessness population.

However, our work to tackle homelessness in the city remains first and foremost an ambitious programme of work to meet the needs of the people of Glasgow.

keynote speaker

- **The Current Context, Challenges and Aspirations**
Susanne Millar, Head of Practice Audit/Children and Families, Glasgow City Council

Susanne Millar took the opportunity to introduce herself to conference delegates as the Head of Children and Families in Glasgow City Council with the new area of responsibility around homelessness and asylum. Susanne noted that, while she was new to the field of homelessness, she offers extensive experience of working with social work services in Glasgow and looks forward to applying this experience to tackling homelessness.

Susanne set out the way forward for homelessness services in the current financial climate, including a focus on (i) how we provide crisis response services, (ii) how we increase our focus on homelessness prevention, and (iii) how we provide services for young people, ensuring we work together to ensure the best possible outcomes for service users within the context of decreasing budgets.

roundtable discussions

Five thematic speakers outlined the current context and evidence in relation to the 'Big Questions'. Each speaker concluded with a question or statement to prompt roundtable discussions. An outline of each key question, and the collated roundtable discussions, is as follows:

BIG QUESTION 1:

Why do homeless people die younger than their non-homeless peers?

Speaker:

Dr. David Morrison, Director, West of Scotland Cancer Surveillance Unit, University of Glasgow

Overview of Presentation: Dr. Morrison presented the findings of a study that followed over 6000 homeless people in Glasgow over a five year period and found that homeless people were over 4 times more likely to die compared to their non-homeless peers and that the average age of death was 12 years younger if you experienced homelessness.

Prompt Question: What is your service doing to reduce deaths amongst homeless people?

- Do we have a common approach across services to assessing health and wellbeing needs?
- Specialist homelessness health services such as Hunter Street well evaluated and providing high quality, barrier free services.

- Recognition of mainstreaming agenda and the provision of health care in communities rather than in a specialist setting.
- Could the research methodology used by Dr. Morrison be periodically replicated to measure the ongoing impact of service interventions?

BIG QUESTION 2:

Why is rough sleeping in Glasgow no longer on a downward trend?

Speaker:

Willie McBride, Manager, Glasgow Street Service

Overview of Presentation: Willie provided an overview of the work of Glasgow Street Service and considered the available data on rough sleeping in Glasgow. He noted that GSS worked with more people in 2009-10 than the equivalent services in the city in 2004-05, at which point there had been a measurable 50% decrease in rough sleeping. Also, GSS reported that they worked with 225 individuals in the first six months of 2010-11 who had slept rough at least once and that ongoing activity map rough sleeping/skippering sites has shown that there are at least 78 known sites in the city, 13 of which are in use all-year round.

Prompt Question: Is the on-going rough sleeping situation given the prominence/priority it deserves within (a) the homelessness strategy, (b) our service responses, and (c) the broader network priorities? Also, with winter fast approaching, what might be done for those that otherwise might need to sleep rough in the period?

- People still reporting to services that they would rather sleep rough than go into some of the remaining hostel accommodation.
- People are still being turned away from statutory services without accommodation.
- The length of time taken to access permanent accommodation creating blockages and leading to rough sleeping.
- Need to improve on crisis response services to prevent rough sleeping.
- We need to utilise and analyse all available data on rough sleeping in order to fully understand the scale of the problem and plan for appropriate solutions.

BIG QUESTION 3:

Why are there blockages in accessing permanent accommodation for homeless households?

Speaker:

Norman Fitzpatrick, Depute Director, New Gorbals HA

Overview of Presentation: Norman noted the current backlog of homeless households awaiting permanent accommodation as well as the recent increase in homeless presentations in the city. He recognised the specific pressures in relation to this and the role of RSLs in addressing it. However, attention must also be paid to the wider work of RSLs, calculating that approximately three quarters of people housed by his association from the waiting list were at direct risk of homelessness.

Prompt Question: Even given their legal duties and local responsibilities, is it easy for RSLs to significantly increase the number of permanent lets it makes to homeless households via the Section 5 referral route?

- RSL contribution to homelessness prevention has to be taken into account when judging success.
- We need to get better at assessing what people need, while acknowledging that homeless households are those most in housing need.
- Community Controlled Housing Associations should have opportunities to contribute to the homelessness strategy and review of the current protocol with the City Council.
- In setting Section 5 referral targets, specific local circumstances such as demolition and clearance need to be properly considered.

BIG QUESTION 4:

What have we learned from the Hostel Closure Programme?

Speaker:

Professor Suzanne Fitzpatrick, Heriot-Watt University

Overview of Presentation: the findings of the longitudinal evaluation examining the resettlement outcomes of men leaving Peter McCann and James Duncan House were presented by Professor Fitzpatrick.

A number of positive findings arose from the research including (i) only a minority of people having a further experience of homelessness, (ii) 60% of people in permanent accommodation reported no problems with running their own home, (iii) significant self-reported improvements in physical and mental health, (iv) self-reported reductions in drug and alcohol use, (v) improvement in people's financial situation. Identified gaps included lack of attention to work and other structured activity and the continued existence of loneliness and boredom.