

Social Fund Replacement Task and Finish Group

Witness Summary: Salvation Army (SA)

The Salvation Army offer practical help and support to all members of society regardless of race, religion, gender or sexual choices. In Plymouth there are two elements to the services they provide –

- Church and Community
- Devonport House for the Homeless

Church and Community

The SA operate out of three church/community centres in the City; Morice Town in Devonport, Whitleigh and Plymouth Congress Hall. Each provides pastoral and practical support to all sectors of the community including the young, elderly and homeless.

Activities include –

- Clothing recycling service
- Daily soup run to homeless people
- Pastoral care for the bereaved and those in distress
- Advice, information and referral point for people in need
- Coffee mornings

Morice Town has its own annual budget of £5k which is generated by donations from within its membership, the profit from a small charity shop located in Albert Road and its Christmas carol service. The charity shop produces an income of approximately £1,500 per annum and provides items such as cheap clothing, household items, furniture and toys.

The SA often deals with people who have fallen between benefit agencies or who present at a time when other agencies are not open. They raised concerns about the impact of Welfare Reform changes and particularly the establishment of Universal Credits suggesting that people with budgeting problems will spend the money very quickly and then be left with nothing. As a result, the number of people needing assistance from organisations such as the SA and Plymouth Foodbank will increase.

Whilst the small budget does mean that financial assistance can be provided, this is rarely distributed in the form of cash and is never given to those presenting with drug or alcohol problems who are signposted on to other agencies. The SA are pleased to work with both the Plymouth Credit Union and encourage the young mums attending their coffee mornings to save with them.

Devonport House for the Homeless

Devonport House is a 60-bed residential unit providing accommodation for single homeless men. It is more than a hostel or shelter for the night, it is a lifeline where people can get their life back on track. The average length of stay is between 6-9 months but can be for as little as one night or for as long as 2 years. The SA work with residents and other agencies such as Plymouth Access to Housing (PATH), Zion House and Devon and Cornwall

Housing Association, to facilitate planned moves into more permanent accommodation, 93% in the last twelve months. Access is via referral only, the majority of which come through The Ship and The Gate. Residents are charged £28 per week and this provides a fully furnished room with a washbasin, breakfast and evening meal Monday-Friday and full board at weekends.

All residents have to sign up to the house rules and policies and participate in a programme of support. No alcohol or smoking is allowed on the premises.

Many residents have no money for the deposit required by private sector landlords and many apply for crisis loans and community care grants. In addition, some are in a situation where they have not had access to any form of benefit for some time and when they do apply it can take up to three months to come through. Devonport House has two emergency rooms for this very purpose.

This facility works closely with all of the City's churches to provide and co-ordinate a soup run seven days a week and with the Shakina Mission on a Saturday and Sunday evening, feeding up to 90 people per night. In addition to soup, volunteers hand out blankets and clothes and take the opportunity to offer support and advice.

Whilst Devonport House is purely a hostel for men, refurbishment work is shortly to be undertaken to one of the wings in order to provide mixed accommodation. The facility also takes into account that many homeless people have dogs for companionship and safety whilst living on the streets and is happy to accept these pets knowing that many will not enter into the programme without them.

Highlighted need for cross-agency data sharing to ensure people aren't abusing the support that is available.

Identified that there are currently 17 homeless people living on Plymouth's streets but emphasised that there are many more 'sofa-surfers' whose numbers are more difficult to quantify.