

Glasgow City Centre Homelessness Strategy

The Current Challenge

People facing issues of homelessness are some of the most vulnerable in our communities. Many will have complex health and psycho-social issues with significant challenges accessing help and support to deal with these.

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown in March 2020 presented unprecedented circumstances with significant additional risk to our homelessness communities and the services who provide essential care and support to these communities.

A key aim was to ensure that no individuals were left living on the city centre streets and that all were offered immediate accommodation. This happened at a time when availability of accommodation was also critically affected by the pandemic.

Since March a number of hotels in Glasgow city centre and surrounding areas have been used to provide shelter for homeless individuals. Traditional methods of service delivery were impacted due to the restrictions that were imposed across the country and latterly from region to region.

Partnership working across statutory and third sector agencies has always been a strong feature in collaborative approaches to the development and delivery of services to homeless clients. However, the multi-agency response to the challenges in Glasgow city centre has been exceptional and demonstrates the commitment of all involved, including the hotel staff, in striving to deliver safe, effective and dynamic responses to complex situations and vulnerable individuals.

The City Centre Strategic Oversight Group was formed in July 2020 with all agencies meeting regularly to understand the current challenges and risks and agree the ongoing collective responses to effectively manage these. It is great to be able to share some examples of the work that our teams have been undertaking.

Proudly
Working in Partnership



Homelessness Services ensure that people seeking assistance under homelessness legislation secure the advice, support and accommodation that they require. The onset of the Covid-19 Pandemic and the Scottish Government social distancing measures in March this year saw a radical redesign of the HSCP's Homelessness Services. Staff across a range of teams including; Community Homelessness Services, Prison Casework Service, Asylum & Refugee Support Team, Out of Hour Service, Emergency Temporary Accommodation Development Section and Allocations Team have worked together, and with wider partners, to ensure that they continue to meet the support and accommodation needs of people seeking assistance under homelessness legislation. During the pandemic period the service has continued to see significant levels of demand, receiving over 6400 requests for Housing Options assistance, which has resulted in over 4400 new homeless applications, and made just under 9500 offers of temporary accommodation. The repurposing of a number of City Centre Hotels and the supply of 500 additional properties for use as temporary furnished flats has allowed the service to successfully meet the increased demand for emergency accommodation. As the social distancing measures have eased and housing associations have been able to provide offers of accommodation, casework teams have been able to start to rehouse homeless households into settled housing. Through the coming months the service is committed to ensuring that positive destinations are identified for all households currently accommodated within the repurposed city centre hotels.

The Housing First Service adopted an assertive outreach approach in the hotels. In collaboration with the Housing First Consortium, and with assistance of support partners such as Aspire and Wheatley Care, they have been able to engage with those referred to the service and adopt a fast track assessment. Working with Community Homelessness Teams and the Homeless Health Service they were able to identify 57 people with enduring and complex experiences of homelessness who were staying in city centre hotels that may want to consider housing first as an option. The service provides assessment, one to one bespoke, flexible support of approximately eight hours per week for those moving to a tenancy, and provides a starter package of basics required to set up a home and help get them moved as quickly and safely as possible. 26 people are going ahead with three already moved in and a further 12 matched or awaiting match to a property. Overall tenancies for the service have reached 158 with 83% tenancy sustainment rate and no evictions in two years.



Homeless Health Services encompass a range of services including the Homeless Addiction Team (HAT), the Mental and Physical Health Teams and work closely with partners such as Housing First. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown restrictions, a Red, Amber, Green (RAG) model was implemented in partnership with the Community Homelessness Teams who undertook a risk assessment of every homeless household and individual. HAT, in conjunction with the Mental Health Team, quickly moved from an appointment based model within Hunter Street to the provision of an outreach service to their clients including those in city centre emergency accommodation. HAT work closely with the Sexual Health and Blood Borne Virus teams who are also based at Hunter Street and they work collaboratively to deliver this outreach model. The overall impact has been significant with an additional 180 patients on Opioid Replacement Therapy (ORT) since March of this year.



The Physical Health Team provide a blended treatment room and outreach service and is currently focusing on the Flu Vaccination programme aiming to reach all homeless emergency accommodation including city centre hotels and their staff. 230 vaccinations have been administered by the end of November

The Women's Service which commenced prior to Covid-19 has continued but recently moved its clinic base to an all-female site within the city centre. This also includes the Sexual Health Service. This is provided in partnership with the Routes Out project. Service Users can now access a dedicated facility to meet their needs with dignity and sensitivity. There are approximately 30 regular weekly attendees and 10 women have commenced ORT. Initial feedback from service users is already highly positive.



The Young Person's Team was established during the pandemic and, working closely with Homeless Casework Team, aims to engage those under 25yrs and particularly under 21yrs. This has also been implemented using an outreach model. Primarily focused on the city centre hotels but has now developed to include other homeless and Young Person's supported accommodations. Engagement is increasing and the team already hold an exceptionally complex caseload highlighting the additional vulnerabilities of this group.

The Homeless Addiction and Mental Health Teams continue to demonstrate the value in their outreach approach. Invaluable support continues to be provided to the committed hotel and security staff who have adapted to a complex and vulnerable client group, providing an outstanding response and level of service in circumstances they could not have envisaged. Practical training and support for the staff's health and well-being has been a key feature of the collaborative approach taken across all the hotel teams. Clients residing in the hotels have responded well to treatment, support and advice. Outreach has removed some of the barriers clients face when accessing services and have responded positively to services which are now provided within the city centre hotels with significantly higher engagement, compliance with treatments and uptake of a range of support and advice. DNAs (Did Not Attend) and restart rates of OTR have been significantly reduced. Overall, and in response to the efforts of all teams involved in the provision of services to this client group, there are strong indications that drug related deaths have reduced amongst this particular population when compared with previous years

Alcohol Drugs & Recovery Services (ADRS) continue to play a vital role in supporting homeless clients. The city centre outreach team has continued to engage fully throughout the COVID response ensuring there is no reduction in service during this critical period. Staff continue to see people via Abbey Pharmacy as well as out on streets and importantly in hotels where the majority of clients are now based. They are continuing to provide a range of interventions including the supply of Naloxone, Blood Borne Virus testing, wound care, physical and mental health assessments and treatments and ensure onward referral where required.

The Enhanced Drug Treatment Service provides heroin assisted treatment and intensive support to individuals with opiate dependency and complex needs who are at significant risk of harm. The service was implemented in December 2019 and is the only one of its kind in

Scotland. It was suspended for a short period at the start of the pandemic but retained all patients. In recent months, the team re-established heroin assisted treatment and have initiated new patients into the service. The service works closely with co-located partners such as the Homeless Addiction Team, Homeless Health GPs and Housing First, and also with Welfare Rights and third sector colleagues ensuring vulnerable clients continue to be identified and receive the range of health and social care support they require. The service is currently undergoing a two year evaluation.



Injecting Equipment Provision (IEP) services are a vital element of the city's harm reduction response. People who prepare and inject their drugs in public places are known to be amongst the most vulnerable and marginalised in society. The chaos that often comes with this injecting culture makes it difficult for individuals to maintain contact with Alcohol and Drug Recovery Services. The IEP service is both confidential and non-judgemental. The numbers of visits and equipment provided are testimony to the confidence and trust people have in the programme. As well as providing the person with needles and syringes they provide a full range of paraphernalia, including foil as an alternative to injecting. The service also provides low threshold access to wound care, naloxone, blood born virus testing and access to a range of supporting services.

The introduction of the mobile IEP van two years ago added another dimension to the service and has helped engage many harder to reach individuals. During the lockdown period the van recruited volunteers to ensure the service continued throughout this challenging period.

The IEP programme was the main driver for the biggest coordinated harm reduction drive the city has seen. The commitment and partnership working helped produce some phenomenal results over the past year including;

- ❖ 3,518 individuals have accessed the city centre IEP outlets
- ❖ 24,745 visits have been made
- ❖ 376,200 needles or sheets of foil have been provided
- ❖ 1,563 individuals were supplied with life-saving Naloxone
- ❖ 711 individuals were tested for blood borne viruses including HIV and Hepatitis C

The PHOENix Team (Pharmacy Homeless Outreach Engagement Non-medical Independent prescribers) is a collaboration between NHS Pharmacists, the Simon Community and the Marie Trust link workers. The team of four pharmacists and link workers provide assertive outreach daily covering venues across the city centre. They follow patients wherever it is safe to do so including: Simon Community Hub, Marie Trust, hotels and hostels, the streets, Emergency Departments and Pharmacies.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the team have adapted in order to meet the dynamic needs of the homeless community providing in-person support and services when many other services were unable to do so. The team provide a vital link between HHS, EDs, the hotels and street teams. Using technology provided by the team, clients are supported to contact or attend remote appointments and speak with other healthcare providers. They have administered naloxone to patients in hotels and on the streets, located those



with suicidal intent and been able to get them safely into hospital for assessment and continue to work closely with addictions services to start or help maintain patients on prescriptions for ORT. Patient engagement with the service and outcomes are excellent with new clinical issues identified in 69% of patients and 85% going on to attend either a follow-up with the Pharmacist or another referred service.

Police Scotland remain a critical partner in the supportive approach to both homeless and asylum seeking communities and all of those involved in the broader provision of services across the city centre. Regular engagement was established with the senior management team in Glasgow City HSCP. Data sharing on drug trends, associated anti-social behaviours, crime and fear of crime in the city centre continues to inform the strategies deployed by all agencies involved. On-site support, single point of contact and coordinated patrols across the city centre hotels have focused on personal safety for residents and hotel staff, crime prevention and real time responses to incidents as they emerge. Enhanced support has been provided by British Transport Police in response to increased footfall and activity around Central Station with additional officers deployed in Gordon Street/Union Street between the hours of 14.00 – 02.00. This highlights the responsive, intelligence based approach taken by our colleagues in Police Scotland and British Transport Police.

Strong partnership links have been in place between the Mears Group and Police Scotland, supporting the asylum seeking community since the start of the lockdown period in March. This established relationship allowed for any community impact factors to be addressed quickly. Following the Park Inn incident in June there has been excellent partnership working undertaken including: engagement meetings with key partners to share ongoing work and hear the views of this community and those supporting them; the establishment of an Asylum Seeker Liaison Officer providing a single point of contact for all agencies; safety briefings for all hotel staff and enhanced signposting to mental health services.

Simon Community Scotland provides vital support and assistance to the most vulnerable people affected by homelessness and the pandemic. Their activity and service provision during this critical period includes:



- ❖ A mobile information hub providing street outreach and surgeries in four of the busiest hotels. 8080 supports have been provided to 1117 individuals who were supported in the hotel hubs. 6732 individual supports have been carried out by members of the Street Team, supporting a total of 1135 unique individuals
- ❖ Intensive support has been provided by the complex needs team to over 109 individuals identified as particularly vulnerable
- ❖ The volunteer street cycle team have provided 884 hours of support delivering vital supplies to individuals across the city
- ❖ Specialist support and advice for those with no recourse to public funds via commissioned services from Shelter and Just Rights Scotland
- ❖ Investment in audio-visual equipment and mobile phones to support clients in maintaining contact with family, friends and other services



- ❖ Significant investment and coordination to ensure provision of hot meals and essential items across the hotels
- ❖ The opening of a multi-agency advice and support hub for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness



Aspire have provided dedicated temporary accommodation with wrap around support for clients in hotels. This is ongoing, works across other agencies and supports clients during the period of homelessness and into settled accommodation. Examples of the transformational impact the service has is shared via client and staff feedback:

T resides within one of the hotels and is also now supported by the PHOENix Team. T has had support with medications and bloods taken which resulted in the Hunter Street team organising emergency admission for a blood transfusion. If it wasn't for the PHOENix team partnership in the hotel T may not have received the emergency treatment she required. An amazing example of partnership working & supporting individuals within the hotel.

D has suffered with PTSD and anxiety and was not coping in his initial hotel environment. Following transfer to an alternative hotel and supported by Aspire, D was offered a temporary furnished flat. Support is in place with Turning Point Scotland and he gets on well with his neighbours who have welcomed him and shown him about the area. D had a job interview arranged, which he could not have contemplated without the stability he now enjoys and attributes to Aspire.

I find the Aspire staff very helpful, supportive and caring. I took not well and collapsed and if it wasn't for the staff getting me to the hospital at the time I would have lost my leg and possibly my life. So I find them very caring and helpful. They deserve a medal for what they are doing for people here at the hotel.

Turning Point Scotland continue to deliver direct services whilst working collaboratively with other agencies such as the IEP and Housing First. The Flexible Homelessness Outreach Support Service (FHOSS) has been vital in supporting clients across the city centre hotels. Examples of service provision includes:

- ❖ Working with increased number of people, particularly in hotels and B&Bs
- ❖ Support and assistance , provision of supplies including microwaves in B&Bs
- ❖ The distribution of quality food in partnership with Fareshare Glasgow
- ❖ Distribution of mobile phones and credit ensuring vulnerable people can stay in contact with friends, families and vital services

As a key partner in the Housing First consortium, Turning Point Scotland work alongside HSCP teams providing specialised support to individuals in relation to assessment of needs and onward support into placement in a settled tenancy.

Glasgow Night Shelter for Destitute Asylum Seekers (GNS) is a person-centred accommodation charity, preventing homelessness since 2011. The team ensure that people who are seeking asylum and find themselves destitute have somewhere safe to stay and support to access vital services like legal casework while they make informed decisions about their future. They are the main provider of emergency and temporary accommodation for destitute asylum seekers in Scotland and have historically never had the capacity to fully meet the need for this service. In the face of the pandemic, and directly funded by Scottish Government, GNS ran a 24/7 city centre hotel-based service to meet the additional need for safe places to stay. In this setting they have supported 162 different destitute asylum seekers with dignified en-suite accommodation. Every individual supported has been enabled to engage with advocacy and casework, seek legal support to review their case, apply for destitution grants and access wellbeing services. GNS undertake all of this in partnership with the Scottish Refugee Council, the British Red Cross, the Refugee Project, the Govan Community Project and the Refugee Survival Trust. More recently, they have also been able to support everyone to access flu vaccinations, thanks to collaboration with Glasgow City HSCP.

The GNS hotel-based project closed on 1 December 2020 and the team are currently focusing on their new service outside the city centre. Here, folks can still immediately access private and dignified accommodation with the holistic support they require but in a less corporate setting than a hotel.



Wheatley Care continue to deliver direct services whilst working collaboratively with Housing First. The North East Flexible Homelessness Outreach Support Service (FHOSS) has been re-designed in response to the covid-19 crisis and has been central to providing critical support to over 140 individuals in their successful transition from the Alexander Thomson Hotel to their next destination, directly supporting the closure plan for the hotel.

FHOSS have also continued to:

- ❖ Support over 1000 individuals across the North East of Glasgow
- ❖ Provide technology and mobile phones via the Wheatley Foundation to enable children to continue with their on line education, to help families and friends to keep connected reducing isolation, and enabling individuals to contact essential services.
- ❖ Distribute a significant number of food packages via the Wheatley Foundation

City Centre Hotels: Jim McBride, Head of Adult Services, Homelessness & Criminal Justice highlights the significant role that all hotels and their staff have played in supporting the homeless community throughout this period. In particular, Jim states: “I would wish to recognise the considerable effort made by Homelessness Services and key partners in recently exiting from the Alexander Thomson Hotel. I personally wish to acknowledge the significant contribution that the Alexander Thomson Hotel has made to ensuring that some of the city’s most vulnerable and isolated citizen’s remained safe and secure from the onset and throughout the pandemic. I cannot underestimate the crucial part this hotel played in accommodating those large numbers presenting as homeless. The owners, staff and security

demonstrated a real desire to help those in need and work hand in hand with Glasgow City HSCP, Police Scotland and our Third Sector partners to ensure residents were fully supported and in some instances, actually saving residents life's. Given the uncertainty of the level of risk to health, I am truly grateful that hotel management and staff selflessly ensured that they were willing to come into work every day to keep people accommodated."

Harin Bassi, RMG Hotel Group which includes the Alexander Thomson Hotel, stated: "It has been really impressive the way all key groups have worked together and with the hotels to ensure support was in place to immediately accommodate all homeless individuals and families during these unprecedented times. Liaising regularly with Glasgow City HSCP teams, all the critical support services and working in conjunction with Police Scotland, has ensured appropriate care was given to the residents whilst also supporting our teams through challenging situations. This was a collective effort focused on providing appropriate solutions for all individuals. It has been rewarding to work in partnership and play our part in ensuring residents move into a more permanent residence.

Looking Ahead - The oversight group continues to meet and the exemplar efforts of staff across all agencies continues at pace. Everyone involved recognises that the availability of settled accommodation is critical to reducing risk for our clients and ensuring safe and sustainable futures. The great news is that the number of available lets is significantly increasing. By the end of December 2020 the number of clients in temporary Bed & Breakfast accommodation has fallen from 617 clients at the peak of the pandemic to 467 clients. All clients have now been supported to move on from the 125 room Alexander Thomson Hotel. Alongside the ongoing support to our homeless and asylum seeking communities in Glasgow the key area of focus is to ensure that each individual is offered suitable housing and the invaluable support to make that transition and thrive. Teams will continue to work together to ensure that even over the challenging winter months the number of clients supported into settled accommodation will steadily increase.

"This is the first briefing since the City Centre Risk Management Group was established in July this year in direct response to the public health crisis and the subsequent impact on our homelessness population. This briefing validates the strength of partnership working and the exceptional commitment towards continual improvement despite unprecedented challenges. I would like to convey a personal thank you to all colleagues for your ongoing resilience and hard work."

Pat Togher, Assistant Chief Officer, Public Protection & Complex Needs