

FENLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

PRESS RELEASE

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Life after lockdown: Rough sleepers rehoused during pandemic find settled homes

Rough sleepers which have been helped off the streets in Fenland and given emergency accommodation and support during the coronavirus pandemic are beginning to be rehomed into safe, long-term housing.

Fenland District Council and its charity partners, the Ferry Project and Change Grow Live (CGL), have worked together to support eight homeless people out of emergency bed and breakfast facilities and hotels into settled homes.

They are also being provided with additional support services, along similar lines to the national 'Housing First' approach, to help ensure they don't end up back on the street.

A total of 57 rough sleepers have been temporarily rehoused as part of the Council's response to the coronavirus crisis, with 49 remaining in emergency accommodation.

Cllr Samantha Hoy, the Council's Portfolio Holder for Housing, said: "There has been a momentous effort during the lockdown period to get rough sleepers off the streets and into safe accommodation to help protect them from the spread of COVID-19.

"The outreach team and the Ferry Project has then continued to engage with them, with the aim of getting them into long-term homes. Once settled they can continue to access support they may need for substance dependency, benefits, healthcare, skills and getting work.

"It has been a fantastic partnership effort and we're proud of what has been achieved so far. Central Government has also provided feedback that the response to the coronavirus emergency from the Council, the Ferry Project and CGL has been excellent.

"But there is more work to be done. This is a once in a generation opportunity to change the lives of our most vulnerable residents for good. We are determined to do everything we can to ensure nobody has to return to the street but need further financial support from Government to make that happen."

As well as rehousing rough sleepers into temporary accommodation, the Council and its partners have also provided over 12,000 meals since the start of lockdown, and over 400 weekly food parcels to those in bed and breakfasts.

They have also registered all rough sleepers with GPs as part of the support package, something widely recognised as best practice by the region's health partners, and worked with GP surgeries to organise prescription collection and delivery services.

All those moved into accommodation are also receiving regular health checks to ensure their wellbeing and frequent calls offering support.

“We are seeing people engaging now when they haven’t previously, including some who we have been trying to get off the streets for some time,” said Cllr Hoy. “There is a marked improvement in their health and wellbeing, so we want to get as many off the street permanently and into long-term accommodation as we can.”

Keith Smith, Director of the Ferry Project, added: “Ferry Project has spent the last 21 years working with Fenland District Council, helping homeless people off the streets of Wisbech.

“During the lockdown period we have worked closely with the local authority to support over 50 people into temporary accommodation, helping them with food, medical support, prescriptions and employment advice. Now, working with our partners, we are looking to support these homeless people into permanent accommodation enabling them to make a lasting change in their lives. Ferry Project is committed to working hard to make our dream that no one needs to spend a night on the streets of Wisbech, a reality.”

Meanwhile, Fenland District Council continues to work with Cambridgeshire County Council, Clarion Housing and Living Plus on bringing the internationally acclaimed ‘Housing First’ approach to the district.

The county council has received funding to develop the approach and work with partners to implement the model jointly for the first time across both Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

Housing First aims to support people with complex needs who are caught in a pattern of homelessness or rough sleeping. It puts the provision of an independent home first, followed by personalised, intensive support to address their other needs.

Research suggests having a place to call home also leads to improvements in health and wellbeing and it’s from this stable platform other issues can be addressed.

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For more information contact Fenland District Council press office on 01354 622226