

ANNEXE SEVEN

HOMELESSNESS AND COMPLEX NEEDS SURVEY

HOMELESSNESS AND COMPLEX NEEDS IN DEVON

Introduction

This investigation was instigated as a result of the supporting people service review process consistently highlighting the gaps in service provision for people who are homeless and have 'complex needs'. The particular client group we are talking about have a combination of support needs but they generally fall below the threshold level for access into specialised services such as mental health, drug and alcohol services, learning disability services etc.

A combination of 'below the threshold' support needs in two of these different areas can culminate to create a complex situation where the client's ability to live independently and sustain a tenancy is put at serious risk. The client's original problems can be exacerbated by inappropriate accommodation, which further reduces the likelihood of them being successfully housed in the future.

It is hoped that this investigation will identify:

- Approximate numbers of people with complex needs who approach the Local Authority Housing Departments and Voluntary Sector organisations as homeless;
- What services are available that can, and do, provide support for these clients;
- Where the gaps in provision for these clients are.

The results will be used to inform decisions around the development and commissioning of appropriate types and levels of services for this client group. It is hoped that services providing appropriate support at the point of contact with Local Authority Housing Departments or the Voluntary Sector can be developed and that this should go some way to enabling clients to have successful tenancies preventing the 'revolving door' situation and repeat homelessness.

Methodology

Complex needs was defined through Social Services and the Homeless Stakeholder Project Group as:

Someone with **COMPLEX NEEDS** has been defined as someone with at least TWO of the following:

- Uses over 30 units of alcohol per week
- Occasional use of class A drugs
- Has recently received or is receiving treatment for acute anxiety or depression
- Have attended special education or provision in the past
- Has a history of self harm
- Has a history or repeat offending
- Has a history of sleeping rough/sofa surfing

Due to the short timescale for the work it was decided that information would be collected through two short questionnaires.

1. The first questionnaire focussed on the 8 New Devon Local Authority Housing Departments. It aimed to indicate the total number of people who come through the door with accommodation issues and complex needs, the level of these clients who are actually housed through the council, and those who are deemed ineligible, non priority or intentionally homeless and are therefore not housed. It

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also asked what other services there were available to the council that provided support to people with accommodation and complex needs.

2. Local Voluntary and Community agencies working with homelessness were also asked to complete the second short questionnaire. Again this aimed to identify levels of homeless people with complex needs accessing their services, how these clients get access to their services, and whether there are any other services available that provide support to people with accommodation and complex needs.
3. In addition to this, countywide agencies that collate information around their service users were asked for information on levels of clients who are homeless and have complex needs. These agencies were Connexions, Probation, and Homemaker South West

Limitations

There is a lack of information recording at a Local Authority level on the types of clients making homeless approaches. These meant that the figures provided are estimations, this highlights the need for more clear monitoring information for needs analysis and service development in the future.

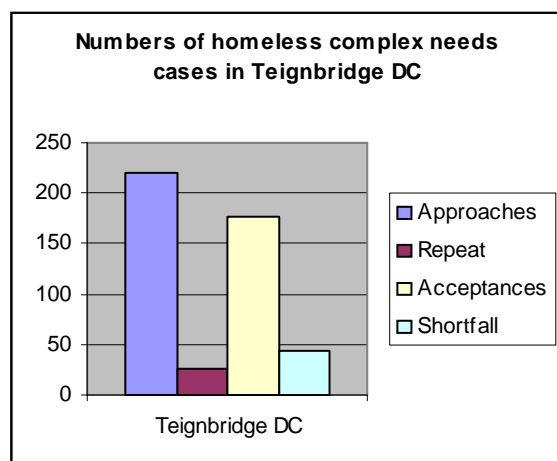
There is no way of knowing whether the people recorded as approaching the Local Authority Housing Departments also approached the Voluntary sector for help. An element of duplication when counting numbers of homeless people with complex needs should be born in mind when considering the levels recorded in this report. Again this highlights the need for consistent monitoring between Local Authority and Voluntary/Community sector to clearly highlight levels of need for services.

The short timescale for the work meant that Local Authorities and Agencies found it difficult to complete and return questionnaires in time, there may therefore be gaps in the information provided and this should be considered when reading the results.

Local Authority Housing Departments record approaches for help in different ways e.g. some will include advice sessions in the figures provided and others will only include those who have applied the Local Authority as homeless.

LOCAL AREA RESULTS

Teignbridge:



The graph shows that approximately 218 homeless people with complex needs approach Teignbridge District Council for help during a 12-month period, this is around 30% of the total client group. Approximately 26 of these are repeat homeless cases. The Council accepts a full duty to house approximately 176 of the complex needs cases approaching them which leaves a shortfall of 44 people with complex needs who are discharged with continuing homeless issues. There is little support available in Teignbridge to help these clients access their own housing.

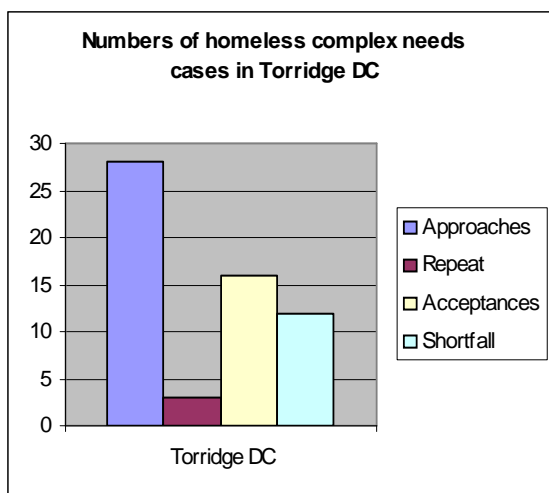
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The Parkview Society provides floating support in the Newton Abbot area for people with complex needs referred through Teignbridge District Council. They have the capacity to support 30 people. This leaves approximately 146 of the complex needs clients that Teignbridge District Council accepts a duty to house with little support within their accommodation.

GAPS: As well as the little support available for accessing and sustaining accommodation some of the other comments around gaps in provision in Teignbridge include the need for multi-agency responses at an early intervention point when support needs may still be at a low level. This is important because a client with complex needs often straddle a number of the traditional services, which means they don't necessarily fit in particularly well with anyone. Without this early intervention support needs go unmet and further difficulties can develop quickly creating a very complex situation. Other comments included the need for services providing accommodation and support for those with drug/alcohol issues. The need for accommodation based services was highlighted as there is limited stock available and Housing Associations can be reluctant to take nominations for clients with complex needs.

Torridge:

The graph shows that approximately

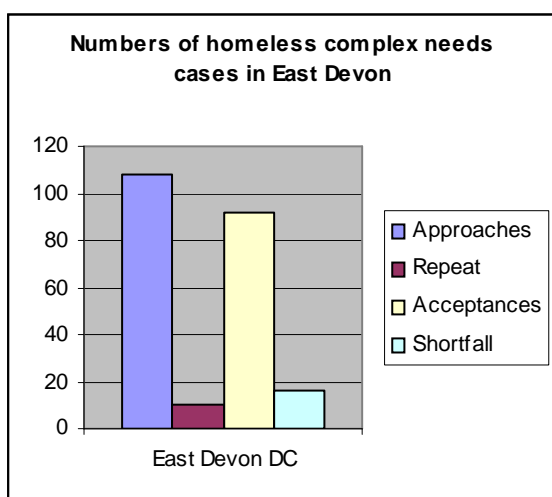


28 people with complex needs approach the council as homeless a year, this is around 30% of the total client group. This number excludes the cases that are dealt with on a purely housing advice premise, as there is no way of recording these in Torridge currently. Approximately 3 complex needs cases a year are repeat homeless. Over the last 7 months Torridge DC have accepted a full duty to house 8 households with complex needs. A projected number over a 12-month period based on this would indicate that they would permanently house approximately 16 people with

complex needs. This leaves approximately 12 clients with complex needs that are discharged with continuing homeless issues in the Torridge area per year. Torridge Poverty Action Group can provide support for these people and they estimate that there are 20 rough sleepers in the Bideford area (awaiting completed questionnaire).

GAPS: The District Council and Homemaker South West have both identified that there are gaps in provision of both emergency accommodation and support for clients with complex needs in Torridge. This is particularly in relation to those with mental health problems, learning disabilities, and drug/alcohol problems.

East Devon:



The graph shows that approximately 110 people with complex needs approach the East Devon District Council as homeless per year, this is 40% of the total client group approaching the council.

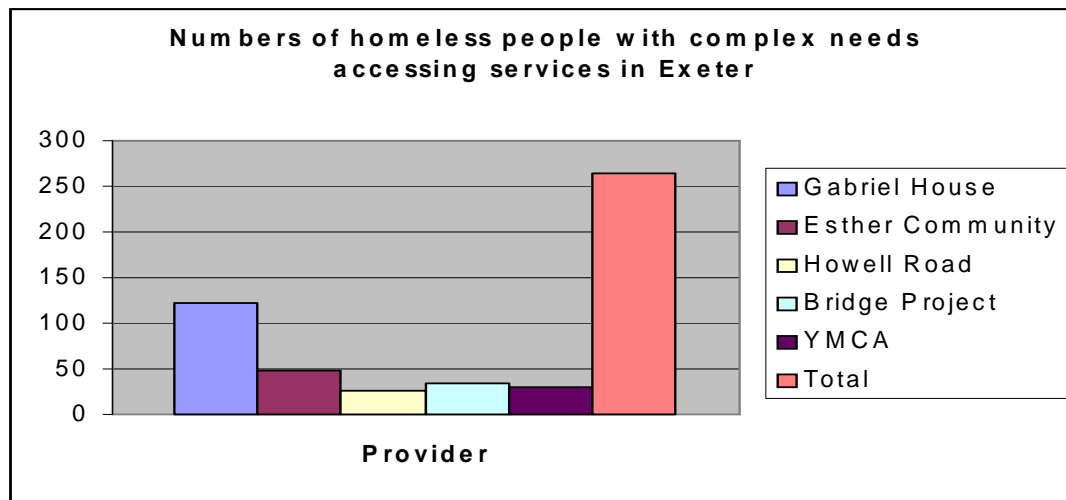
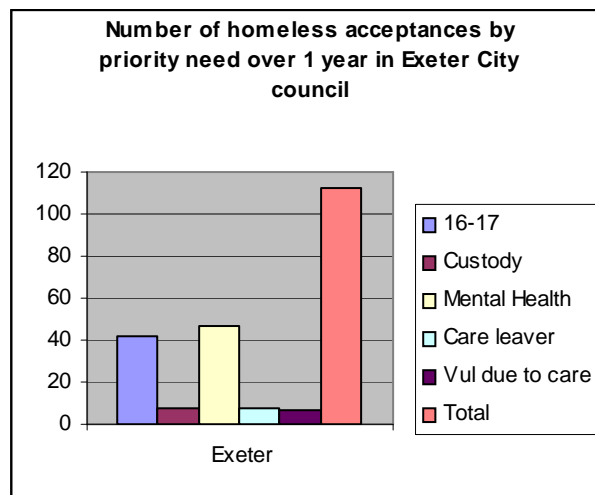
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Approximately 10 of these are repeat homeless cases. East Devon District Council accepts a full duty to house approximately 92 clients with complex needs, this therefore leaves a figure of approximately 12 cases a year are discharged with continuing accommodation issues. There are various supported accommodation providers in the East Devon district and the Council utilises these for both temporary and permanent accommodation options although it is noted that access can be difficult due to support criteria (Alexandra House note that they cannot accept referral from people with low level complex needs due to the need for statutory referral) and limited numbers. The Open Door Centre runs a drop in service two days a week in Exmouth. They have the capacity to assess homeless clients for the Homelessness Act 2002 criteria and will refer to East Devon District Council wherever possible. Finding accommodation through the private sector is very difficult, especially where additional tenancy support may be required. The Open door Centre records that they advise approximately 23 clients per year with homeless issue and complex needs.

GAPS: Gaps identified through questionnaire included a need for direct access hostel provision and general support services.

Exeter:

Exeter City Council were unable to provide figures regarding the number of clients that approached the council as homeless and with complex needs due to their recording systems. However they provided numbers of clients they accepted in various priority need categories shown in the graph opposite. These figures only include those that the Council has a full duty to accommodate. There is also no way of knowing whether these clients also have other issues making their situation 'complex' but it gives an indication of the numbers of people who fit at least one of the categories in the complex needs definition. In addition to this information the voluntary sector also provided some figures (see below) around numbers of homeless people with complex needs accessing their services (awaiting completed questionnaires from EHAG, SHOT).



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The graphs show that there is almost double the amount of people with complex needs being accepted into provision via the voluntary sector than are being accepted by the Homeless Unit. This highlights the discrepancy between statutory homelessness and the very real problem of hidden homelessness and indicates a need for effective measurement tools to identify demand for services.

GAPS: The gaps in provision identified through the completed questionnaires included a lack of move on accommodation, a need for more accommodation based provision for males with chaotic lifestyles but without drug/alcohol issues. Other gaps included a need for out of hour's provision from mental health services and probation.

Mid Devon:

The graph shows that approximately 40 people with complex needs approach Mid Devon District Council as homeless per year, this is 10% of the total client group approaching the council. Approximately 14 of these are repeat homeless, there is no extra support provided for people with complex needs in temporary accommodation so often repeat homelessness occurs because a client may lose temporary B&B accommodation while a homeless investigation is being carried out. Mid

Devon District Council accepts a full duty to house approximately 26 clients with complex needs, this therefore leaves a figure of approximately 14 people with complex needs who are discharged with continuing accommodation issues. The main advice and support agency for homeless people in Mid Devon is CHAT (awaiting completed questionnaire).

GAPS: There are no high support providers of accommodation in Mid Devon and often the low support providers are unwilling to take on people with complex needs. This means that clients with complex needs are often housed in general needs accommodation with no support. Other gaps in provision are around young people services for clients with complex needs and whose support needs lie across mental health and drug/alcohol issues.

North Devon:

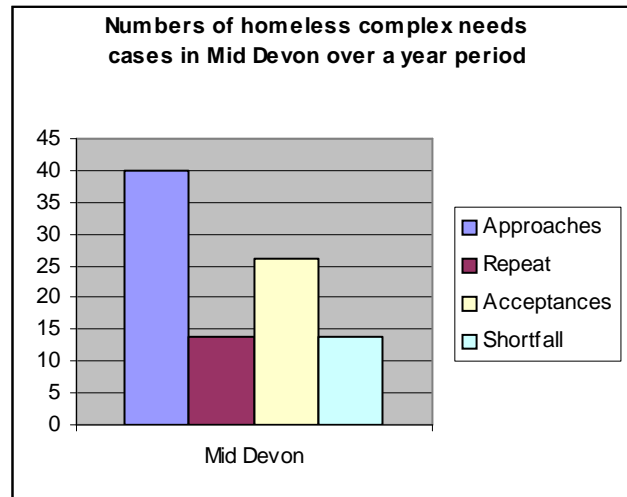
Awaiting completed questionnaire from North Devon District Council, North Devon Housing Society and Barnstaple Poverty Action Group.

West Devon:

Awaiting completed questionnaire from West Devon District Council

South Hams:

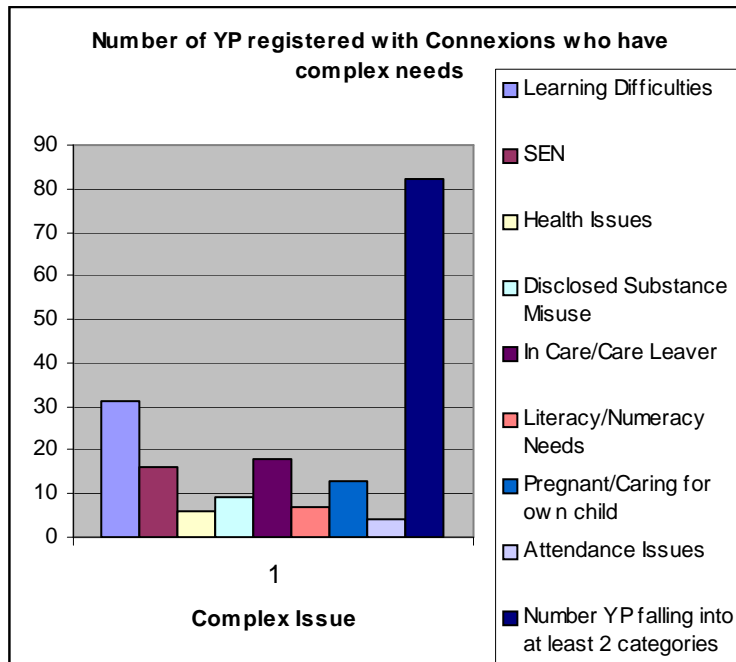
Awaiting completed questionnaire from South Hams District Council.



COUNTY WIDE RESULTS

Connexions Cornwall and Devon Ltd:

There are currently 82 young people registered with Connexions who have a combination of support needs that would indicate a complex situation.



Homemaker South West:

Homemaker South West provide service for homeless people across the whole of Devon. They estimate approximately 120-150 homeless people have complex needs across the county.

Devon and Cornwall Probation Service:

Information taken from the OASYS database around the support needs of offenders with no fixed abode showed that there were actually very few clients with genuine complex needs as per the definition for this piece of work i.e. 3 out of 66 clients. This is because the clients generally had significant problems in one or more of the categories, which would make them eligible for support through specialised services. During a small focus group session with some probation officers the main points below were raised.

- 1) Problems with **access** to appropriate accommodation, especially stop gap or emergency accommodation
- 2) Lack of appropriate **support** for ex offenders in accommodation
- 3) Lack of **multi-agency** working to support ex offenders
- 4) Difficulty in getting the **homeless units** to accept an ex offender is vulnerable and therefore in priority need for housing

Probation Officers see settled accommodation as essential for ex offenders to meet licence conditions that require attendance at structured appointments and often work beyond their probation officer remit to achieve this for ex offenders.

COMPLEX NEEDS DEFINITION

All people who participated in this investigation were asked to comment on the definition of complex needs used for the purpose of this investigation. Over half of the people completing questionnaires agreed with the definition, however, some other suggestions for inclusion in the definition were; binge drinking, drinking in conjunction with prescribed medication, use of some class B drugs, wider mental health issues, antisocial behaviour, verbal/physical aggression, general chaotic behaviour, debt/gambling issues, and asylum seekers.

It was suggested that the definition was clearer when terms such as “recent use” and “history of” were used. It was also commented that the definition does not fit particularly well with the priority need categories that homelessness staff are currently working with.

SUMMARY

Although the limitations of this investigation that were discussed at the beginning of this report need to be considered when summarising the results, there are some interesting points to highlight:

- There are considerable differences between districts in terms of the numbers of people with complex needs who approach the council as homeless although the figure is generally between 10-40% of the total client group (on average 27.5%).
- There is considerable difference in the services available for clients with complex needs between districts and therefore gaps in provision vary. However, suggestions for service development included: multi-agency responses and intervention, lack of bricks and mortar accommodation for move on, drug and alcohol services, emergency accommodation and support provision for people with chaotic lifestyles, out of hours services, need for high support service provision, improve access to accommodation for people with complex needs.

Recommendations for future work:

- There is a need to collect more accurate figures around the support needs of homeless people who both approach and apply to the Council as homeless;
- There is a need to correlate these figures with information around the levels and types of Supporting People commissioned services across the Districts;
- There is a need to develop a recording system that incorporates figures from the voluntary sector without duplication.