



**Frontline
Network
Partner**



St Martin's Frontline Network – Coventry Citizens Advice: Coventry Frontline Network forum 5th June 2019

Presentation provided

- FLN to arrange further meetings to discuss the open consultations noted in the presentation

Coventry City Council updates:

Housing First

Coventry City Council provided an update that Whitefriars will be providing some of the accommodation for Housing First clients, but the council is seeking more properties.

The group noted the importance of a fair and transparent process for deciding the cohort of clients for Housing First on Coventry.

- FLN to circulate council Housing First presentation when available
- FLN to note the need to clarify the cohort selection process

Homelessness contracts

Homelessness contracts will be tendered as four items – Multiple complex needs including ex-offenders; families; young people (under 25), and older people (over 55).

New contracts are being tendered from August, with an expected start date of April 2020.

Homefinder review

CCC will be reviewing the [Coventry Homefinder policy](#) via an 8 week public consultation in the coming months. This will include a review of the priority banding given to homelessness cases under the Prevention and Relief duties.

CCC are happy to consult with agencies prior to the consultation being issued to the public; we asked for the FLN to have the chance to participate in this.

- CCC and FLN to share information about how to be involved in the review

Questions were raised about any interim amendments to the Homefinder policy. CCC confirmed there were changes made to support the Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2018 (link above is to this version); nothing should have changed since.

The group discussed the impact on clients who move on from supported accommodation and need to access other accommodation.

- Noted as a topic to consider during the review

Rough Sleeper Initiative

Funding received for Coventry, to fund three members of staff plus a prevention pot of £50,000. This work will be separate from the Homelessness Prevention Team.

DWP update – Universal Credit/other benefits issues

DWP have amended the customer service drop-in at the Cofa Court JobCentre with the aim of supporting more clients to use IT and access their journal there. The group did not feel that the JCP had become more welcoming, with support agencies advised to take their clients away and use agency facilities rather than JCP computers.

There is a UC liaison meeting specifically for frontline workers in Coventry (homelessness or other sectors – advice, HAs, etc) to meet directly with DWP and work coaches and raise operational issues.

- Next meeting is 1st July, 10-12. Email Tina.Wukics@coventry.gov.uk to attend.

DWP have asked for evidence of any **incorrect court fine deductions**.

- All to review, let the FLN or Mark Poultney know if there are any issues

UC deductions and tenancy affordability checks

We discussed deductions made from UC claims, for debts and overpayments. There was general discussion about the deductions being higher than with legacy benefits and causing more hardship to clients.

- The group discussed advance payments for clients facing a five-week wait for their UC claim. We noted some cases of clients taking an advance, closing the claim and reopening later, meaning two sets of deductions were then owed. Important to note any advance is a loan to be repaid.
- The group felt that better questioning by DWP is needed when advances are first agreed, to ensure clients only take the advance they need, not the full amount if not required.

- Grapevine/Ignite are looking into deduction rates and UC impacts on homelessness issues, and invited any input that people can contribute about the effects on their clients.
- Contact Ashley on awest@grapevinecovandwarks.org
- Frontline workers are seeing a number of historic, previously unknown Tax Credits overpayments that surface when the client makes a UC claim, leading to deductions. There can be impacts on Debt Relief Orders.
This is in line with recent DWP stats – Citizen Advice response [here](#).
- The group noted that clients can defer the repayment of a UC advance, but had concerns that this could result in monthly payments being higher when they restart.
- FLN to clarify – DWP have advised “deferral does extend the period of repayment by the amount of the deferral period.” This means a client’s repayments should still be split over 12 payments, not increased to repay the amount within 12 months of taking the advance. If this is not happening, please get in touch.
- We noted that many Housing Associations request a month’s rent in advance. Where a tenant pays weekly, they may only be asked for one week in advance.
- Deductions are impacting on clients being able to pass affordability checks for new properties.
- The group noted a case where a deduction of £5/week was set up so a client could build up credit on their rent account, but this led to the client failing the affordability check for the property.
- There was good feedback for the Pre-Tenancy Interviews that staff had observed.
- We discussed [Housing Benefit run-on](#), where a client already in receipt of HB who moves to UC will have two weeks of HB paid. This is going to be introduced for other legacy benefits such as JSA, but is not yet in place (unless client is part of the Managed Migration pilot).

Other benefits issues

The group noted that Community Support Grant (CSG) applications were taking 6-8 weeks to order and deliver white goods and other furniture. Suggestion that holding some stock in storage based on average applications would help reduce delays.

[Caritas](#) have a stock of camp beds, gas burners etc, which are kept in stock and provided to people starting a tenancy, but are only loaned and collected later. This has the additional benefit of continuing contact with the tenant.

[Glasspool](#) were noted as a good source of support. Note the Frontline Network administers the [Vicars Relief Fund](#), issuing grants of up to £350 to help sustain or access a tenancy.

Experts By Experience

The group discussed how inviting previous clients back to speak to current clients about how they saved for their new tenancy, can be more effective than support workers giving the same advice. Some groups are pleased to have welcomed previous clients back as volunteers within their service.

CCC advised that there is a Strategic Housing Board within the council, overseeing housing and homelessness work, and that Experts By Experience (EBEs) were sought to sit on this board.

- All to be aware of opportunity to involve EBEs

We noted that Co-Production Week is in July.

- Let us know about any events you would like to share with the network

Rough Sleeper Count

The group discussed the annual rough sleeper count, which in Coventry had a return of 8 in 2017 and 25 in 2018.

The group agreed the figures were likely to under-report the true position. Attendees from other LA areas had experience of taking part in the count and noted the difficulties of accessing people in rural areas or who were very hidden. We noted the risk that councils can increase inappropriate enforcement prior to a count.

We discussed whether a count was preferable to an estimate gathered from various agencies, foodbanks etc. The group supported the idea of pooling agency information to create an estimate.

We discussed how data could be shared in line with data protection rules. CCC advised that a system called i-CAT is used in Birmingham (and other LAs) which helps accommodate inter-agency working, but there is a cost involved and the council are considering whether to pursue using it. Note also that Housing First and the Rough Sleeper Initiative may impact on the position.

The rough sleeper count could be reviewed from various perspectives:

- 1) Do we support the current guidance or is it too prescriptive?
 - 2) Is the guidance applied correctly, eg should a deep doorway be counted as shelter?
 - 3) What can the frontline add to the count/estimate process within the existing guidance?
- FLN to organise a meeting to discuss how frontline data could be collected for an estimate, to include CCC and homelessness providers
 - CCC to keep group updated about i-CAT
 - CCC to explore using a map to collate information on rough sleeping

Streetlink

We discussed [Streetlink](#), an app and online system to report rough sleepers. The group did not believe that Coventry alerts fed anywhere.

Note the CCC website does list Streetlink as a way to advise the council of someone sleeping rough: <http://www.coventry.gov.uk/info/85/homelessness/3114/homelessness/9>

- FLN to investigate what happens to Coventry Streetlink reports

“Moving on” support – social isolation

The group discussed the challenges faced by people moving into accommodation after being street homeless or living in TA, especially isolation, and the need to prepare clients for this when moving on. We noted sources of social support that agencies and clients could make use of:

Libraries http://www.coventry.gov.uk/info/126/libraries/3216/whats_on_in_libraries

Crisis Skylight <https://www.crisis.org.uk/get-help/coventry/timetable>

Wellbeing for Coventry (Coventry Mind) <https://wbc.cwmind.org.uk/>

Coventry Information Directory: <https://cid.coventry.gov.uk/kb5/coventry/directory/home.page>

Outstanding actions from March 2019 meeting:

- FNL to arrange meeting with HRA team – it has proved difficult to find a mutually convenient time. We will continue liaison with HRA team and seek a meeting date.

A reminder that joining the Frontline Network is **free**, and gives members **access to funding** for hosting events and developing ideas, up to £10,000.

Join at: www.frontlinenetwork.org.uk/frontline-account-management/register/

Events fund: www.frontlinenetwork.org.uk/community/whats-on/

Ideas fund: www.frontlinenetwork.org.uk/funding/ideas-fund/

NEW Shadowing fund: www.frontlinenetwork.org.uk/funding/shadowing-fund/

The FLN also administers the Vicar’s Relief Fund, which can make grants to clients of up to £350 to assist with rent arrears, deposits, gaining ID documentation.

www.frontlinenetwork.org.uk/funding/vicar-s-relief-fund/

Next meeting will be September – date TBC