



**Frontline
Network
Partner**



St Martin's Frontline Network – Coventry Citizens Advice: Coventry Frontline Network forum

18th September 2019

Presentation provided

Crisis

Kimberley Sysum provided an overview of the Crisis Skylight services in Coventry.

The services are available to any members (clients) who are homeless or facing an immediate threat of homelessness, including those with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF).

Crisis deliver courses and support from a new central hub in Cheylesmore, including Progression coaching and Learning courses. Courses available include housing (managing a tenancy, priority bills, reading meters) and employability – CVs, placements.

Crisis are working with local business to offer courses relevant to vacancies, and have close links to JobCentre Plus.

English as a foreign language (ESOL) is not offered but there is a directory of existing services. DWP also have a list of providers. [Coventry City Council ESOL information](#).

Crisis recognise there are issues finding private sector landlords who will offer tenancies, but Crisis can provide funding for deposits, starter packs, social activities.

Crisis are available at Steps for Change every Tuesday and Thursday, 11-1.

The new timetable starts from 23rd September. See [online](#).

- To refer clients to Crisis:
- Signpost clients to Crisis offices at the Canal Basin (Office 1, James Brindley House, Canal Basin Coventry, CV1 4LY)
- Call Kimberley 024 7708 7418 or email Kimberley.Sysum@Crisis.org.uk

- Crisis offered to present at team meetings – contact Kimberley to arrange.

Frontline Network

The Coventry FLN has been funded to continue until 2022. We will be expanding our work into the wider Midlands area.

- If your organisation has operations or colleagues outside of Coventry, please invite them to join future meetings or to contact us at ztitchener@coventrycab.org.uk

Nationally, the FLN ran a survey to collect frontline views about abolishing Section 21 evictions, along with a short poll.

- Update: read the [response the FLN submitted](#) to the consultation following frontline input.

Homelessness Reduction Act

National government have published a **Call for Evidence** about the first year of the HRA.

The group discussed the **Duty to Refer**. Referring agencies receive an email to advise that a referral has been received, but do not receive a copy of the Personal Housing Plan created for referred clients. It would be useful if they could receive this.

We were not aware of any published timescales for how quickly a client would be contacted by the Local Authority after a referring agency used the Duty to Refer pathway.

A referral generates a reference, but agencies have found that this is not recognised by the council's Homelessness Prevention team at Broadgate House. Is the reference stored or used?

We noted the difficulties caused by **Friday prison discharges**. Clients can be travelling to Coventry upon release from a wide geographical area, depending on which prison they were in; this can lead to long travelling times meaning they present as homeless late on a Friday afternoon and cannot be seen in time.

Friday releases can also be a problem for DWP, when those clients need to make a UC claim. Clients in prison have no internet access and cannot apply for UC until release. We noted that probation areas do not map to DWP areas. Update – DWP have a [UC guide for prison leavers](#).

There can be poor communication within the prison service between HMPS (Prison Service) and the CRC (Community Rehabilitation Company) about release dates, leading to lack of support and clients being released with No Fixed Address (NFA).

The group considered whether a weekend HRA service would be helpful.

We noted the FLN **Shadowing Fund** that can pay for visits to agencies around the country and learn from their processes.

DWP update

DWP advised that 800 people a month are moving onto UC in Coventry, and 47% of benefits in Coventry are now through UC. In most areas, this caps at about 65% as remaining legacy benefits stay as they are, unless there is a change of circumstances.

Those remaining on legacy benefits with no change of circs will eventually transfer to UC through "Movement to UC" (aka managed migration). This is being piloted in Harrogate until 2020. Until this pilot is completed, "Movement to UC" will not take place anywhere else.

Update: DWP asked us after the meeting to note that claimants moving across from JSA, ESA or IS in this pilot will get an additional payment of two weeks of their existing benefit to support their transition to UC. At the moment this applies to the Harrogate pilot ONLY.

UC deductions – there is currently a cap of 40% of the Personal Element of UC that can be deducted to repay debts. The cap only applies to debts. Ongoing payments such as monthly gas and electric charges can be deducted at a rate that exceeds the cap.

- The 40% cap will reduce to 30% in October 2019 – date to be confirmed.

DWP will set deductions to repay fines at the maximum allowed (ie 40%/£108, moving to 30% in future).

- Note: If this causes a client hardship, Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) have a template letter to challenge deductions being taken at the maximum cap – see [JR55](#) here.

We noted that Coventry used to have a court office where fines and deductions could be discussed; this has now moved to Birmingham and is accessed by phone. Details are [online](#).

Existing deductions from legacy benefits should remain in place when moving to UC, but this could depend on who the third party is. The current [Deductions guide](#) was provided in the last DWP Partnership newsletter.

- To sign up for the DWP newsletter: contact Jane Holmes on Jane.Holmes5@dwp.gov.uk

The UC homelessness guide has been updated, [latest version](#) online.

"Housing spotlight" information is provided to work coaches, and will highlight JCP obligations, easements, repayments etc.

DWP advised that they are undertaking a review of vulnerability.

- If agencies are supporting clients with a UC claim, please highlight vulnerabilities and risk of homelessness, via a letter or a note on the UC journal.

DWP highlighted the ability to make a phone claim if unable to make or manage a UC claim online. Also note that clients with an existing online claim should be able to request for it to be converted to a phone claim if they cannot manage the online system.

For ESA claims moving to UC – previous work capability assessment should carry over.

If a client does not have a bank account there has been a workaround to input a dummy account number into the online system, but this is not working.

- DWP advised will need to input dummy bank account info **three times** before it will be accepted.

The Payments Exceptions Service is still available to pay claimants in vouchers if they do not have a bank account.

- FLN to arrange further meeting to walk through UC, ID and banking issues.
- We noted the Coventry UC Liaison meeting for frontline workers to raise specific issues with DWP. Next meeting 30th September. Contact Tina.Wukics@coventry.gov.uk

Rough sleeper outreach

Rob Hopkins and Paul McGinn provided an overview of the CCC rough sleeper team, funded through central government Rough Sleeper Initiative funding. John Toman leads the team.

Paul is based at the Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre (CRMC) and is already seeing successes with the EU Settlement Scheme helping NRPF clients access benefits.

The RSI team are working with the CCC Homelessness Prevention team. They have been able to arrange for HRA staff to visit off-site locations such as Steps for Change and carry out homelessness applications there instead of Broadgate House.

Streetlink alerts in Coventry will go to the RS team.

- Anyone can use this app/website to highlight someone rough sleeping:
www.streetlink.org.uk

As the Rough Sleeper team now carry out regular additional counts combining local intelligence with a physical count, the group agreed that this should result in a more accurate rough sleeper figure without the need for an alternative frontline estimate.

Rapid Rehousing

Laura Bolton gave an overview of the Rapid Rehousing scheme. This is within the council's HRA work, helping clients at risk of rough sleeping to access the private rental sector. PRS can be unaffordable due to Local Housing Allowance caps, especially for the under-35s. The team has access to some financial support to help clients access the sector.

- Referral form has been shared, get in touch with Laura if you need a copy laura.bolton@coventry.gov.uk

Coventry Homefinder

Coventry City Council is reviewing the Homefinder policy. This includes a review of the priority banding given to homelessness cases under the Prevention and Relief duties. Agencies have been able to contribute to the proposals; they will go to public consultation later this year.

There is a steering group for this work, made up of registered social landlords (RSLs) plus a representative from the Welfare Reform Working Together Group (WRWTG). Part of this work involves trying to define when someone qualifies as "tenancy ready".

Gemma Tate provided a **draft proposal for a tenancy ready definition** and the group discussed this. Points raised:

- We asked whether RSLs are able to give reasons for every bid they skip – if not, it is difficult to formalise reasons in advance. We also considered whether RSLs should be able to provide reasons for each skipped case, to ensure discrimination wasn't taking place. It would be useful to have some supporting stats around current skipping reasons.
- We would like more transparency around what level of rent arrears will cause skipping.
- It was suggested that a broad definition of tenancy readiness would be an applicant having a sustainable way of paying the rent, and being willing to engage.
- We recognise the costs to RSLs of evicting tenants, but there was a view that additional requirements beyond paying the rent and adhering to a tenancy agreement (no ASB, illegal behaviour etc) should not be applied. I made a note about starter tenancies – these are designed to give tenants a trial period and give HAs flexibility to evict a new tenant fairly quickly.
- Setting up direct payments to the landlord would show willing to maintain rent.
- We discussed whether the expectation for applicants to be aware of all their rights, priority vs non-priority bills, how to deal with problems etc, was too demanding. The tenancy agreement or some supporting leaflets could provide the applicant with their rights and responsibilities and routes to address problems with neighbours etc. The applicant could sign something to say they had read and understood these requirements.
- We noted existing courses such as the Crisis "Renting ready" course.
- We considered cases involving addiction or learning disabilities, and had concerns that applicants might fail the draft requirements.

- There were concerns about the expectation of applicants to loan furniture or other goods; being in a position to “source” furniture was suggested as an alternative. We felt that the full range of existing support (DHP, CSG, flexible support fund, charitable grants etc) could be publicised to applicants to help with these costs.
- We considered how to define being a “good neighbour” and questioned what support was available for someone being affected by bad behaviour.

Further comments were invited, to be provided to Gemma.Tate@coventry.gov.uk

Council update

CCC noted that there has been an increase in single people presenting to the Homelessness Prevention Team.

Homelessness services will be recommissioned from April 2020; CCC have received tenders for the contracts and are now reviewing these.

Frontline Wellbeing

Coventry FLN would like to support frontline workers in their own wellbeing. The national FLN conference focuses on this topic each year, related resources are [here](#). Our FLN Partner in Brighton ran a Death on the Frontline event, recognising the impact this can have on frontline workers.

- FLN to draw up a menu of topics to cover.

Coventry Winter Night Shelter

Volunteer recruitment and training will be underway from October. The night shelter will open from 1st December – comms to come.

Outstanding actions from previous meetings:

FNL to arrange meeting with HRA team – it continues to be difficult to find a mutually convenient time.

- FLN to continue liaison with HRA team to discuss issues and look for possible meeting dates.

Frontline Network overview

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: <http://www.frontlinenetwork.org.uk/community/whats-on/>

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

NEW Shadowing fund: <http://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, etc.

VRF info: <http://www.frontlinenetwork.org.uk/funding/vicar-s-relief-fund/>

Next meeting – we suggest late November and welcome any offers to host the forum!

Wednesdays have been the preferred day but if you have any feedback or suggestions about suitable days/times, please get in touch.