



**Frontline  
Network  
Partner**



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

11<sup>th</sup> March 2020

### Previous meeting actions

FLN to continue liaison with HRA team to discuss issues and look for possible meeting dates – dates were suggested for January/February but we were unable to arrange a suitable day. Ongoing; the group agreed it would still be helpful to meet with the HRA team and increase understanding of homelessness processes.

FLN to invite Housing First to speak at the next forum – carried forward. We noted that Housing First in Coventry is currently at capacity.

Mismatch between UC housing costs paid monthly and Housing Associations charging rent 4-weekly with a payment holiday.

We discussed this point further and noted:

- Agencies see cases where UC is in place to cover the rent, but the payment schedule mismatch causes automated rent arrears letters from the landlord, leading to anxiety for clients.
- We noted the impact on living costs as the personal element of UC has to be used to cover the additional £5 top-up requested by Registered Social Landlords.
- Agencies have requested to see the policy from the RSL and have found they will be flexible with the £5 top-up.
- The group raised concerns that someone unable or unwilling to make an additional £5 payment could be skipped for a new tenancy.
- Crisis may be able to fund the week's rent in advance for new tenancies.

- Please send examples of this policy impacting tenants to Ed Hodson at [EHodson@coventrycab.org.uk](mailto:EHodson@coventrycab.org.uk)

- The group discussed whether welfare reform was affecting affordability tests; it was felt that it does prevent some clients being accepted for a tenancy.
- Deductions for advance payments cause hardship when combined with an additional £5 top-up.
- Sanctions can also reduce a client's income.
- We noted the further hardship faced by young people with the reduced under-25 rates.

The above pressures combine to cause a repeat cycle of homelessness.

Confirm what happens to those currently affected by a sanction longer than 26 weeks – will it end or run its course?

- The change included transitional provisions so these sanctions end once a claimant's award has been reduced for at least 182 days or 26 weeks from the date that the reduction took effect.
- ie anyone who had been given a sanction for longer than 26 weeks would have seen it lifted when they had "served" 26 weeks, or when the legislation changed (November 2019) if they had already served 26 weeks by then.

### Upcoming key meetings

**Post meeting note: Many have been cancelled following the COVID outbreak:**

- Coventry Homelessness Forum Friday 20th March - CANCELLED
- UC Liaison Group Monday 6th April - CANCELLED
- Frontline Network annual conference Wednesday 24th June - CANCELLED

Birmingham HomelessLink Community of Practice Friday 24th April (pending link) (subject to COVID impacts)

There was a DWP Homelessness "marketplace" event on 18<sup>th</sup> March at Cofa Court Jobcentre in Coventry – SINCE CANCELLED.

It was unclear whether this was by invitation only and which agencies had been invited.

- FLN to confirm with DWP if there is an open invitation to share – it was by invite only due to capacity.
- Note the event has been postponed following the COVID outbreak; it may be rearranged in future.

## Local and national updates

Coventry City Council confirmed over £400,000 of funding has been awarded for Rough Sleeper services over five years, including a nurse.

Coventry Change into Action had its launch on 28<sup>th</sup> February. This is a direct giving scheme where the public can donate; the scheme is looking at ways to facilitate this, such as contactless points or local businesses putting 1p on prices. Liaison with the Business Improvement District (BID) is underway.

Agencies will be able to access the funds, but will need to register and be approved first.

- Sign up information to come from CCC

New homelessness support contracts start from 1<sup>st</sup> April. A Meet the Providers event was planned as part of the Homelessness Forum on 20<sup>th</sup> March – SINCE CANCELLED. CCC advised that they will “ensure that the information that would have been shared at the forum is circulated.”

Homefinder changes have been approved by Cabinet.

These will change eligibility and the application process; everyone on the waiting list will need to reapply. It was confirmed that people will retain their initial registration date. We noted the potential impact on advice and support services if there is high demand for help to reapply.

- FLN to share summary of the changes:

The summary document on Let's Talk shows the original proposals and some changes were made before Cabinet approved the policy. For information: , the original proposals are here: <https://letstalk.coventry.gov.uk/homefinder2019>

- We will request and circulate an updated version

## Temporary Accommodation charges proposal

Cabinet was taking the decision about introducing a charging policy for TA the day before this meeting, so we were awaiting the outcome. Note that the new policy will take place in a short timescale if approved, with charges expected to start April – May 2020.

- CCC to provide decision when known:

Decision made at Cabinet on 10<sup>th</sup> March to approve new policy.

## Feeding Coventry's Coventry Social Supermarket

A new social supermarket is opening on 13<sup>th</sup> March, operating at Foleshill Community Centre. There may be an opportunity for clients to take up volunteering roles there.

- FLN to share information – emailed to FLN distribution list
- For more details, contact Helen Needham at [feedingcoventryopsmanager@gmail.com](mailto:feedingcoventryopsmanager@gmail.com)

## Local agency updates

**Help to Claim** – DWP-funded, Citizens Advice-delivered service to help UC applicants. The scheme was funded for one year, running to the end of March 2020. There are no further updates known yet.

- Citizens Advice to share updates when available.

**Fry Accord** provide supported accommodation and community support services to people with convictions or homeless people at risk of offending.

They advised that their services in Coventry are changing from 1<sup>st</sup> April. Clients will be restricted to low/medium risk. Support hours may change – tbc.

**Kairos** have a scheme called Feeling Safe, which can support women aged 18-24, and a new project called A Home of her own focussing on housing.

- Referral process and leaflets to come from Kairos

**Steps for Change** are holding a volunteering day on Monday 16<sup>th</sup> March for people interested in volunteering at the drop-in centre – SINCE CANCELLED.

**Bardsley Youth Project** are a member of Centrepont, who will provide analysis of the Budget to their members, from a youth homelessness perspective.

- Bardsley Youth to share Budget analysis if available to non-members
- Centrepont national conference in Coventry on 19<sup>th</sup> March (£90 approx to attend) – SINCE POSTPONED UNTIL OCTOBER.

## **Guest overview: Mayday Trust**

Mayday Trust are a Partner of the national St Martin's Frontline Network. Sarah Hughes from Mayday presented an overview of Mayday and the Personal Transitions Service (PTS), a strengths-based approach.

Mayday developed their approach using input from people who had used their services, creating "[Wisdom from the Street](#)". Feedback included the pace of support was being driven by services instead of the people they were supporting, and that services were being "done to" people.

Mayday changed their way of working, exiting contracts that didn't align with the approach, and separating PTS from housing provision.

The new way of working highlighted systemic barriers, leading Mayday to champion Systems Change.

Mayday work with an Innovation Partnership of like-minded organisations, which agencies can express an interest in [here](#).

They are also working on an accreditation scheme with Coventry University.

There are "System Reflect" events – one is planned in Birmingham in July that will be free to attend for FLN members.

More information can be found at [www.Maydaytrust.org.uk](http://www.Maydaytrust.org.uk) and Sarah can be contacted at [Sarah.Hughes@Maydaytrust.org.uk](mailto:Sarah.Hughes@Maydaytrust.org.uk)

## **Coventry Winter Night Shelter**

Bernardo Canas presented an overview of the CWNS 2019-20. Hope Coventry partners with local churches to provide a night shelter each year from 1<sup>st</sup> December to 31<sup>st</sup> March.

The night shelter has no criteria so can accept people with no recourse to public funds (NRPF). A police check is carried out for all guests to assess for risk to volunteers and other guests.

CWNS are a member of Housing Justice and are undergoing re-accreditation.

EU Settled Status is helping some guests gain access to benefits. Some guests have previous convictions which can prevent them from accessing Settled Status.

### **An overview of guests 2019-20 to date:**

58 approached, 45 of whom were new to the shelter

42 individuals accepted as guests; mainly single males between 25 and 50.

- 19 alcohol misuse
- 14 substance misuse
- 21 mental health difficulties
- 12 physical health difficulties
- 9 had experienced a relationship breakdown

(Categories will overlap)

CWNS will issue a report to Coventry City Council after the shelter closes.

There is a challenge to find support and accommodation for the guests when the night shelter ends. Salvation Army hostel accommodation is only open to those with a local connection and recourse to public funds.

- Agencies were invited to suggest support available for next steps

This could be accommodation but also activities for the daytime

- Please contact Bernardo if you can help at [cwnsbernardo@hopecoventry.org.uk](mailto:cwnsbernardo@hopecoventry.org.uk)

### **Ask the Minister – Universal Credit**

“Centrepont will have Will Quince, MP, Minister for Welfare Delivery (responsible for Universal Credit) and James Murray, MP (former London Deputy Mayor responsible for Housing) speaking at their conference (March 19th).

They have both agreed to take questions.

This is your chance to ask those questions you have always wanted to ask about Universal Credit and housing policy.”

We discussed any questions the group wanted to ask.

Agencies generally find UC and other welfare reforms (benefit cap, low LHA rates) increase the risk of homelessness, affecting the affordability of accommodation.

The five-week wait causes hardship, and the advance payment that can mitigate the wait is a loan and has to be repaid, which further decreases available income in future months.

- Post meeting update: the Work & Pensions Committee is looking into the five week wait for UC, considering how it could be mitigated or even removed.
- Submissions to the inquiry can be made until 17<sup>th</sup> April [here](#).

We noted that under-25s receive lower amounts through UC, although their housing costs and other living costs might not be expected to be lower than someone over 25. We felt that this would already be a frequently-raised point from agencies attending a youth homelessness conference.

The group commented that benefits letters state an amount which is “the minimum the law states you need to live on” and questioned how this figure is calculated and how realistic it was.

- FLN to submit a question on this topic to the conference panel – complete

Update: Centrepont conference is postponed until October 2020 but they have noted our question and passed it to their policy team.

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**Next meeting – not being organised at present due to the current COVID situation – we will keep you informed when this changes**

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