

Democratic Services

Homelessness Task and Finish Group Report

March 2016

www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/scrutiny

**Membership: Councillor Chris Williams (Chair)
Councillors Margaret Burke, Mohammed Khan, Douglas McCall,
Geetha Morla and Catriona Morris**

Overview and Scrutiny Officer: Elizabeth Richardson (Tel: 01908 252629)

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Introduction

The Homelessness Task and Finish Group (the Group) was established by the Scrutiny Management Committee to consider homelessness issues following the conclusion of the Housing Allocation Scheme Task and Finish Group in the summer of 2015.

The Terms of Reference for the Group can be found at Annex E. The Scoping Document is attached as Annex F.

The Group is composed of Councillors Margaret Burke, Mohammed Khan, Douglas McCall, Geetha Morla, Catriona Morris and Chris Williams (Chair). Scrutiny support was provided by Fran Bower and Elizabeth Richardson.

Additional officer support has been provided by Linda Ellen (Head of Housing) and staff in the Housing Management Team.



*Above:
Douglas McCall*

*Left to right:
Catriona Morris,
Mohamed Khan,
Geetha Morla,
Chris Williams,
Margaret Burke,
Elizabeth
Richardson*

Members of the Homelessness Task and Finish Group

The purpose of this report is:

- i. to outline the work the Group has carried out to determine the extent of homelessness in Milton Keynes and to what degree, if any, the problem is increasing;
- ii. to understand the reasons for homelessness, the systems and support structures established to assist the homeless, whether or not these are effective and why some people are not helped;
- iii. to present the Group's recommendations on ways to reduce homelessness in Milton Keynes, contribute to housing policy and the Council theme "Living in Milton Keynes" to the Cabinet on 14 March 2016.

Councillor Chris Williams
Chair, Homelessness Task & Finish Group
March 2016

Summary of the Task and Finish Group's Work

The Group met on a regular basis during the autumn and winter of 2015/16 and considered the following:

Date	Subject
17 September 2015	Scoping, Terms of Reference and Work Plan
8 October 2015	Agree Terms of Reference, establishment of a wider Focus Group/Forum, Work Plan Witnesses: K Higgins (Housing Options Officer, MK Council) O Atunrase (Housing Officer, MK Council) M Murphy (Senior Hostel and Traveller Compliance Officer, MK Council)
22 October 2015	Victims of Domestic Violence, Rough Sleepers, Work Plan Witnesses: S Burke (MK-Act) C Wilderspin (Head of Community Safety, MK Council)
2 November 2015	Site visit to Homeless Hostel, Milton Keynes
5 November 2015	Review of site visit, Work Plan
26 November 2015	Forum Meeting: Issues and Solutions
3 December 2015	Outcomes from Forum Meeting on 26/11, Work Plan
17 December 2015	Site visit to Homeless Hostel, Milton Keynes
7 January 2016	Site visit to YMCA Y-Cube Development, Mitcham
14 January 2016	Forum Meeting: Better Co-ordination of Homelessness Support Services
21 January 2016	Review of Site visits on 17/12 and 07/01, Outcomes from Forum Meeting on 14/01
28 January 2016	Mental Health Support for the Homeless; Report Drafting Witness: T Thompson (Head of Mental Health, MK Council)
4 February 2016	Review of Draft Report
11 February 2016	Forum Meeting: Launch of Draft Report
25 February 2016	Review of Amended Report
14 March 2016	Report Presented to Cabinet, Milton Keynes Council

Work was carried out during early 2016 to prepare this report and to draft recommendations for presentation to Cabinet on 14 March 2016.

The final report was agreed by the Group at its meeting on 25 February 2016.

The agenda, reports, presentations and minutes for each of the above meetings, including the wider Forum Meetings, are available on the Council's website at:

http://milton-keynes.cmis.uk.com/milton-keynes/Committees/tabid/62/ctl/ViewCMIS_CommitteeDetails/mid/572/id/1049/Default.aspx



Members of the Homelessness Forum at work on the report



Executive Summary

Housing was identified as a key issue for the Council during 2015-16 by those who attended the Scrutiny Prioritising Event which took place in May 2015. The Scrutiny Management Committee therefore requested that research be conducted into how homelessness could be reduced, to sit alongside the scrutiny already carried out on the Council's current Housing Allocations Scheme.

The purpose of the work done by the Group was to consider measures to reduce homelessness in Milton Keynes, including:

- Developing innovative approaches to find housing solutions for homeless people and for those assisting people facing homelessness;
- The advantages of reducing homelessness for those who are directly at risk and the improvements to the health and wellbeing of residents in the Borough that come from appropriate housing;
- How reducing homelessness relates to the Council Theme 'Living in Milton Keynes: ensuring people are satisfied with Milton Keynes as a place to live, and to support them effectively through the provision of high quality and efficient public services';
- Informing the Council's future housing policy.

The members of the Group looked in depth at how and why people become homeless and ways in which their needs could be addressed in future.

The Group undertook this work by holding a series of meetings looking at evidence either presented by witnesses or from relevant papers, hearing from the wider community by establishing a Forum consisting of those who provided both statutory and voluntary support to the homeless, as well as members of the 'homeless community'. Over 20 organisations were involved in the Wider Forum meetings, although not all of them were able to send a representative to every meeting. The members of the Group were delighted with both the number of organisations willing to participate in the Forum meetings and the enthusiasm and co-operation displayed at the meetings. The Group is very grateful for the input into the Forum meetings and for the ideas which emerged.

The Group also undertook site visits to two Council run hostels in Milton Keynes and to the South West London YMCA's innovative Y-Cubes development in Mitcham, Surrey, which is providing accommodation for single people who are in housing need in good quality, affordable and sustainable self-contained housing units.

Background

The term 'homelessness' is often thought to apply only to those people who 'sleep rough', ie those not in properly defined accommodation. However, most official statistics on homelessness relate to the 'statutorily homeless' - those households which meet specific criteria of priority need as set out in current legislation - ie those whom the Council has an obligation to house.

Such households are rarely homeless in the literal sense of being without a roof over their heads, but are more likely to be threatened with the loss of, or are unable to continue with, their current accommodation.

Other people that the Group also defined as homeless are those who are sleeping outside, 'sofa-surfers', ie those staying temporarily with various friends and relatives while attempting to find permanent accommodation and those sleeping in garden sheds or vehicles. Also vulnerable are those facing potential homelessness because of problems such as debt, drug and alcohol abuse, domestic abuse or tenancy issues.

Precise numbers can be difficult to quantify, but the following is an estimate¹ of the number of homeless in Milton Keynes in January 2016:

- Rough Sleepers = 30
- 'Sofa Surfers' etc = 100+;
- Statutory Homeless = around 350;
- Facing potential homelessness = up to 2,500

¹ Based on numbers provided by partners at the Forum meetings

Conclusions:

1. Homelessness is on the increase in Milton Keynes.

The Group, based upon the evidence available to it, has concluded that homelessness is on the increase in Milton Keynes. Milton Keynes Council has seen a significant increase in the past two years in the numbers seeking help with homelessness. All of the organisations the Group met with have recorded increases in the number of those who are homeless.

2. Access to housing, education, employment, food banks and health and welfare facilities can be very difficult, if not impossible, for those who are homeless.

The Group was challenged from many sources about the difficulties homeless people and families face in finding suitable accommodation, and gaining access to medical and other facilities. These problems make it almost impossible to find and keep work or access education.

Being placed in “out of area” temporary accommodation makes these issues complex; however, obtaining housing does not instantly resolve these issues.

3. Homelessness, and the underlining issues and risks, affects families and individuals from all backgrounds.

Homelessness is not a subject; it is about real people – families and individuals who, for a variety of reasons, find themselves without a home. The causes of homelessness are many – loss of income, domestic upheaval, drug / alcohol abuse and eviction are just a few of the reasons that many find themselves without a home. The single largest cause of homelessness in Milton Keynes is eviction from privately rented accommodation.

4. There are many organisations and individuals seeking to help those who are homeless in Milton Keynes – however, their work is not always co-ordinated and there is no central place where anyone can seek advice, help or information.

The Group discovered, from e-mails, letters, social media and the workshops, that there are many organisations, both formal and informal, working to help the homeless in Milton Keynes. The Group, however, has come to the conclusion that much of this work is done without co-ordination and co-operation with other organisations and individuals. The Group also realised that many of the willing volunteers have not received any specific training, and that several of the organisations had not arranged for their volunteers to receive a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check.

5. The establishment of an independent ‘umbrella’ organisation is necessary to oversee and co-ordinate the work of organisations dedicated to alleviating homelessness in Milton Keynes.

Based upon the conclusions reached under item 4, the Group formed the view that it is of paramount importance that an independent, umbrella organisation be created to oversee and coordinate the valuable work undertaken by organisations in Milton Keynes. This umbrella organisation should be initially set up, financed and resourced by Milton Keynes Council. A model as to how this might be achieved already exists and is known as the Milton Keynes Advice Network (the Network). Milton Keynes Citizens Advice Bureau (MK CAB) coordinates the Network and it currently has 14 organizations working in partnership. A synopsis of their partnership can found at Annex C.

6. Milton Keynes Council Planning Policy is not always flexible enough to help provide suitable accommodation for the homeless and those on low incomes.

The rigidity of the current planning guidance makes it very difficult to provide innovative schemes for the provision of suitable and affordable accommodation. There are many examples of innovation – these include, to name but a few, converted shipping containers, Swiss-style wooden chalets, homes such as the Y-Cube project, homes adapted for those with disabilities, Council-owned Houses in Multiple Occupation, the provision of flats (above the current limit of 30% affordable housing) and hostels / temporary accommodation for the homeless. The current restraints, however, create often insoluble problems for those who wish to introduce innovative solutions to our current housing crisis.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to the Cabinet of Milton Keynes Council (the Council) as providing innovative and practical measures to reduce homelessness and the causes and effects of homelessness.

1. That an independent ‘umbrella’ organisation be established to oversee and co-ordinate the work of organisations, both formal and informal, to alleviate homelessness in Milton Keynes.

- a) In order to meet the myriad of needs of homeless families and individuals, the Council must be at the forefront of the creation of an independent umbrella organisation solely dedicated to reducing the levels of homelessness throughout the Borough of Milton Keynes.
- b) The Council must commit to being the driving force at the outset, providing finance and other resources to help achieve a fully functioning body before the winter of 2016/17.
- c) Agencies, organisations and individuals, including the Council (the partners), who are seeking to reduce homelessness in Milton Keynes, must commit to co-operate and work together, within the umbrella organisation, to provide a complete range of services and opportunities for those who are homeless or who are in danger of becoming homeless.

Each of the partners will work together to provide essential and appropriate services, including data sharing, to meet individual need.

- d) The umbrella organisation will, by the winter of 2016/17, and with the co-operation of all those involved, including the Council, provide access to housing, education, food and health and welfare facilities, including drug and alcohol advice and / or rehabilitation.
- e) Once the umbrella organisation has been established as an independent and co-operative body, then the Council should no longer be the ‘driving force’ and, instead, become one of many partners working together to eliminate homelessness, and the causes of homelessness, throughout Milton Keynes.
- f) All volunteers, especially those on the ‘front line’, and any members of staff employed by the partner organisations, should be provided with relevant, comprehensive training as well as being subject to a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check.

Confirm: Organisations must, of necessity, be ready to confirm that they will work together to help meet the needs of the homeless in Milton Keynes.

Reform: Organisations must be ready to work together to reform the current mixed responses to homelessness and to provide an innovative, different and radical approach to homelessness.

Transform: Organisations, by working in co-operation within an umbrella organisation, will see a transformation by the winter of 2016/2017 which will bring a unified and holistic approach to the provision of services to those who are homeless or who are in danger of becoming homeless.

2. That the Council adopts a much-needed more flexible approach to planning and planning policies.

- a) The Council's planning policies are not always sufficiently flexible to help provide affordable and suitable accommodation for the homeless and those on low incomes. A new approach to planning, along with changes to policy, is required if Milton Keynes is to become a community where we seek to end the spectre of homelessness. Planning policy should reflect the need to provide innovative solutions to our housing problems by ensuring that new developments, especially on council-owned land, embrace the potential for alternatives to 'standard' homes. Possible alternatives include, but not exclusively, the construction of hostels, permitting converted shipping containers, Swiss-style wooden chalets, homes similar to Y-Cubes in style, homes especially adapted for those with disabilities and even the provision of council owned / managed houses in multiple occupation! Homes which are both innovative and affordable should be incorporated into development plans at the outset – and not simply be viewed as impossible afterthoughts!
- b) The Council must strictly enforce a minimum of 30% affordable housing in every new development, especially in developments on council-owned land. Planning policy must be changed in order that this 30% is seen as a minimum and not a maximum aspiration.
- c) The Council must seek ways for its Housing and Planning Teams to co-operate much more closely, in order to determine, before homes are constructed, exactly what is needed in each new development.
- d) The Council must examine the land it currently owns to see whether or not there is already the ability for it to provide much-needed and alternative forms of affordable housing. An example of this is that when the Task and Finish Group visited a council-managed hostel in the south of Milton Keynes, they were impressed, not just with the hostel itself and the care provided by the Council's housing officers, but also the huge, unused tract of land on which the hostel sat. The land was easily large enough to provide a second hostel at least as large as the one already there!
- e) When this report recommends more flexibility in planning policy, it must be seen as including the Milton Keynes Development Partnership (MKDP) in these comments. MKDP must, in order to facilitate the provision of housing solutions for the vulnerable and homeless, be able to provide the land at no or very little cost. The loss of the value of the land should be considered against the considerable value of providing hope and security to families and individuals who otherwise could not afford to buy a home of their own. Additionally, of course, the savings accrued by the discontinuation of the need to send these same families to live in temporary accommodation outside Milton Keynes should not be underestimated and should be set in context against the reduction of income from land values.

Confirm: Milton Keynes Council must confirm and demonstrate that it is willing to embrace the flexibility required to create innovative and affordable solutions to our current housing crisis.

Reform: Milton Keynes Council must be prepared to reform its way of thinking and its planning policies with regard to providing homes and accommodation that are low-cost, sustainable, well designed and purpose-built.

Transform: Milton Keynes needs communities, not just houses – communities that include hostels, residential homes and homes adapted for those with disabilities, to name but a few.

Acknowledgements

The Group would like to thank all the witnesses who gave up their time to attend meetings, answer questions, host site visits, and for their co-operation with the work being done by the Group and the honesty and frankness with which they answered any questions put to them by the members of the Group.

The Group would also like to record its appreciation to all the groups and individuals who participated in the wider Forum meetings held at the Windmill Hill Golf Centre. Their contribution and input into the work of the Group and their wider experience of homelessness has been a valuable contribution to the work of the Group and is reflected in this report. A list of the organisations which took part in the Forum meetings is included as Annex B of this report.

In particular, the Group is grateful for the diligence and patience of Fran Bower and Elizabeth Richardson in managing the Group through an intense workload, Jennie Vucelic for making the external arrangements for the Forum Meetings and arranging transport for the trip to Mitcham and to Linda Ellen (Head of Housing) and the Housing Management team for technical support.

Thanks also to the staff at the Windmill Hill Golf Centre for their assistance during the Forum Meetings which were held there and to Simon Tanner from the South West London YMCA for hosting the visit to the Y-Cube development in Mitcham and for the comprehensive supply of information about the development.



YMCA Y-cube development, Mitcham, Surrey

Annex A: What is Homelessness?

Statutory Homelessness

Each local housing authority is required to consider housing needs within its area, including the needs of homeless households, to which local authorities have a statutory duty to provide assistance.

The Housing Act 1977, Housing Act 1996, and the Homelessness Act 2002, placed statutory duties on local housing authorities to ensure that advice and assistance to households which are homeless or threatened with homelessness is available free of charge. However, this does not include households found to be ineligible for assistance (some persons from abroad are not eligible for assistance).

A 'main homelessness duty' is owed where the local housing authority is satisfied that the applicant is eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and falls within a specified priority need group.

The 'priority need groups' include households with dependent children or a pregnant woman and people who are vulnerable in some way e.g. because of mental illness or physical disability. In 2002 an Order made under the 1996 Act extended the priority need categories to include applicants:

- aged 16 or 17;
- aged 18 to 20 who were previously in care;
- vulnerable as a result of time spent in care, in custody, or in HM Forces;
- vulnerable as a result of having to flee their home because of violence or the threat of violence.

Where a main duty is owed, the local housing authority must ensure that suitable accommodation is available for the applicant and his or her household. The duty continues until a settled housing solution becomes available for them, or some other circumstance brings the duty to an end. Where households are found to be intentionally homeless, or not in priority need, the local housing authority must make an assessment of their housing needs and provide advice and assistance to help them find accommodation for themselves.

Figures are collected on the number of households in 'temporary accommodation' on the last day of each quarter, as arranged by local housing authorities. In most cases, the local housing authority is discharging a main homelessness duty to secure suitable accommodation until a settled home becomes available for the applicant household.

However, the numbers also include households provided with accommodation pending a decision on their homelessness application, households pending a review or appeal to the county court of the decision on their case, or possible referral to another local authority, and households

found to be intentionally homeless and in priority need who were being accommodated for such period as would give them a reasonable opportunity to find accommodation for themselves.

Rough Sleepers

Rough sleepers are defined for the purposes of rough sleeping counts and estimates as:

- people sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments);
- people in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or 'bashes'²).

The definition does not include people in hostels or shelters, people in campsites or other sites used for recreational purposes or organised protest, sofa-surfers, squatters or travellers.

Bedded down is taken to mean either lying down or sleeping. About to bed down includes those who are sitting in/on or near a sleeping bag or other bedding.

Homelessness Prevention and Relief

Under the Homelessness Act 2002, local housing authorities must have a strategy for preventing homelessness in their district. The strategy must apply to everyone at risk of homelessness, not just people who may fall within a priority need group for the purposes of Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996. Authorities are also encouraged to take steps to relieve homelessness in cases where someone has been found to be homeless but is not owed a duty to secure accommodation under the homelessness legislation.

'Homelessness prevention' means providing people with the ways and means to address their housing and other needs to avoid homelessness.

'Homelessness relief' is where a local housing authority has been unable to prevent homelessness but helps someone to secure accommodation, even though the housing authority is under no statutory obligation to do so.

² A 'bash' is a makeshift shelter often comprised of cardboard boxes.

Annex B: Homelessness Forum

The following groups and individuals contributed to the work of the Group at the Forum meetings held at the Windmill Hill Golf Centre on 26 November 2015, 14 January 2016 and 11 February 2016:

- AgeUK Milton Keynes
- British Red Cross
- British Transport Police
- Church of Christ the Cornerstone
- Community Action:MK
- Compass Drug and Alcohol Service
- Defend Council Housing
- Help Our Homeless MK
- Independent Volunteer Street Pastors
- Members of the 'homeless community'
- Milton Keynes Council
- MK Akaal Sewa (MK Sikh Community)
- MK Citizens Advice Bureau
- MK Food Bank
- MK People's Assembly
- MK Storehouse
- MK Winter Night Shelter
- MK-Act (support for victims of domestic violence)
- MKFM (local radio station)
- Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub
- Office of Mark Lancaster MP
- Open Door, Milton Keynes (part-time drop-in facilities for the homeless)
- Salvation Army
- Soroptomists (action to transform the lives of women and girls around the world)
- St Mungo's Broadway
- The Mix (Mental Health Support Group)
- YMCA

Annex C: Milton Keynes Advice Network Partnership

The Milton Keynes Advice Network Partnership (the Partnership) is coordinated through the Milton Keynes Citizens Advice Bureau and provides information, advice and support on debts, benefits, parenting and relationships.

The Partnership has created a one-stop referral system, so by using the services of one of the agencies, clients can, if necessary, be referred onto one or more of the partners.

The Partnership was established to help the residents of Milton Keynes receive the best service possible through agencies working together. This means that their clients only have to register once in order to access a wide range of information, advice and support.

The following organisations are members of the Milton Keynes Advice Network Partnership, and provide advice as follows:

Citizens Advice Bureau	General Advice
Mind BLMK	Mental Health
Community Action:MK	Community Support
Bastian Lloyd Morris	Legal Advice
Carers MK	Carers
MK Community Bank	Money and Savings
MK ACT	Domestic Violence
Connection Floating Support	Tackling a Crisis
Works for Us	Employment
Relate	Relationships
MK Dons SET	Parenting and Families
Q:Alliance	LGBTQ Issues
Council of Faiths	Community Cohesion
citizens:mk	Local Participation

Annex D: Alternative Styles of Accommodation

Modular Buildings

- <http://www.terrapingroup.co.uk/>
- <http://www.portakabin.co.uk/living-accommodation.html>
- <http://www.ymcalsw.org/ycube>
- <http://www.rsh-p.com/projects/ycube/#>

Log Cabins / Swiss-Style Chalets

- <https://www.simplylogcabins.co.uk/>

Container Conversions

- <http://www.container-housing.co.uk/>

One-Stop Shop – Chester Model

- <http://www.shareaid.co.uk/>

Annex E: Terms of Reference

1. To determine the extent of homelessness in Milton Keynes and whether/to what extent the problem is increasing.
2. To research:
 - (a) the reasons for homelessness; and
 - (b) why some people are not helped.
3. To suggest measures that the Council might put in place to reduce homelessness in Milton Keynes, to contribute to housing policy and the Council theme 'Living in Milton Keynes'.

Annex F: Scoping Document

HOMELESSNESS TASK AND FINISH GROUP SCOPING DOCUMENT

Review Topic	
Homelessness	
Origins of Review Group	Review Group Membership
On 24 June 2015, the Scrutiny Management Committee established a Task and Finish Group to consider wider homelessness issues following the conclusion of the Housing Allocation Scheme Task and Finish Group.	Cllr Burke Cllr Khan Cllr D McCall Cllr Morla Cllr Morris Cllr C Williams (Chair)
Overview & Scrutiny Officers	Initial Scoping of Review
Elizabeth Richardson Fran Bower	September 2015
1. Purpose	
<p>What is the purpose of the Review?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To suggest measures that the Council might put in place to reduce homelessness in Milton Keynes. 	
2. Rationale	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What does the Review hope to achieve? Solutions for homeless people and innovative approaches for those assisting people facing homelessness. - Why is the Review taking place? The Scrutiny Prioritising Event identified housing as a key issue for the year, and the Scrutiny Management Committee has asked for research to reduce homelessness to sit alongside the existing research on the Housing Allocation Scheme. - What is the community importance and benefit? Reducing homelessness will benefit those who are at risk of it directly and will also have knock-on effects on health and wellbeing in the Borough. - How does it fit in with the Council's corporate priorities / scrutiny priorities? Relates to the Council Theme 'Living in MK': Ensuring people are satisfied with Milton Keynes as a place to live, and to support them effectively through the provision of high quality and efficient public services. - What opportunities to make a distinctive impact? The Members of the TFG will be able to look in depth at how and why people become homeless and how best the Council can address their needs. - How will the review influence what the Council does? It will inform housing policy. 	
3. Proposed Outcomes	

- **What are the proposed outcomes of the review?**
To make recommendations that will inform Cabinet when it makes decisions on housing.

4. Background

- **Is the review looking at existing policy or a new policy?**
It will consider existing policy, some of it quite new, for example the outcomes of Cabinet 14 September 2015 on a choice-based lettings policy.
- **How does it relate to existing policy?**
See above
- **Has the need for the review come about from an issue arising from national or local events?**
Homeless has been increasing at a national level.
- **How does the issue relate to the Scrutiny Work Programme?**
Housing has been identified as a priority for Scrutiny in 2015-16, and this TFG will build on the research of the Housing Allocation Scheme TFG earlier in the year.
- **Are there any relevant community views to refer to? e.g. any previous consultation?**
There has been nothing recent in relation to homelessness.
- **What is the gap between provision and need?**
There is a very large, and increasing, gap between housing demand and supply.

5. Timetable

- **How frequently will the Task and Finish Group need to meet?**
Every three weeks until the end of 2015, with report writing in January and February 2016.
- **What are the key deadlines?**
The end of the Council year; however, to ensure that Cabinet has the time to allow adequate consideration of the report, the completion date should be earlier rather than later.
- **Who needs to see the analysis and who needs to contribute to the report?**
The TFG will receive the analysis and write the report, for which witnesses will provide information.
- **When will the Task and Finish Group report back to the Committee / Cabinet / Council?**
At the latest, March 2016
- **Proposed End date?**
February 2016

6. Methodology / Approach

What method of enquiry will be most suitable for the review?

Consider some of the following:

- Desk-based review of papers.
- Site visits / observations.
- Comparisons with other authorities.
- Workshops / Focus Groups:
With staff, to understand their point of view, perhaps talking through anonymised case studies?
- Interview officers:
From each of the three housing teams: prevention, assessment and allocation?
- Calling witnesses to give evidence.

7. Evidence Sources

What types of evidence will be needed. Consider some of the following:

- Government guidance / legislation?
Housing Act and Code of Guidance on Homelessness
- Performance Indicators?
Yes
- Evidence from other reviews?
Housing Allocation Scheme TFG
- Independent research articles and papers?
FB to seek

Are there any stakeholders or interest groups the Task and Finish Group wants to hear from in addition to inviting them to the meeting?

Other LAs and national organisations, as well as those working in Milton Keynes, for example:

- Open Door
- YMCA
- Orbit
- St Mungo's
- Homeless individuals including those who do not want to take up assistance from the Council

Ensure there is a balance in the evidence collected e.g. views of activist groups weighed in consideration of an independent audit report.

8. Witnesses

Who would the Group wish to invite to its meetings?

A potential witness list might include:

- Service users.
- Stakeholders / Interest Groups.
- Cabinet Members.
- Frontline staff.
- External partners.
- Professional experts.

See 7 above

9. Site Visits / Observations

Is there scope for potential site visits / observations?

Yes, for example during the Rough Sleeping count, which takes place in November each year.

10. Public Meetings

Should the meetings be held in public / private / mixture of both?

By default and wherever possible, in public.

11. Officer Support

Identify Scrutiny Officer and any other officers that will be influential in the review process.

Overview and Scrutiny Officer

Head of Housing

Service Director Housing and Community

12. Resource Requirements

Estimate the amount of 'person' time required and the potential costs involved.

13. Risk Assessment

A key risk with this TFG is duplication of the work of the Housing Allocation Scheme TFG. However, the Members of the Homelessness TFG mostly served on the HAS TFG, so will be alive to this risk and aware of work that has been covered before.

14. Proposed Terms of Reference

1. To determine the extent of homelessness in Milton Keynes and whether/to what extent the problem is increasing.
2. To research:
 - (a) the reasons for homelessness; and
 - (b) why some people are not helped.
3. To suggest measures that the Council might put in place to reduce homelessness in Milton Keynes, to contribute to housing policy and the Council theme Living in MK.

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Democratic Services

Overview and Scrutiny

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