

Public questions to the health and wellbeing board – 5 March 2019

The following questions related to agenda item 10, Homeless Link Health Needs Audit. The associated report is available as follows:

<http://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/documents/s50064790/Homeless%20Link%20Health%20Needs%20Audit%20main%20report.pdf>

Question 1

From: Dr Sid Freeman of Hereford

This report recommends that the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWBB) sign up to the St Mungo's 'Charter for Homeless Health' and implement its commitments. In the Council's Homelessness Prevention Strategy (2016-2020, Objective 3 (Action 3), the Council agreed to demonstrate commitment to the health of homeless people by working towards the achievement of this same charter. However, the latest published Action Plan for this Strategy (June 2018) indicates no practical action has been taken to implement the 'Leadership' aspect or the commitment to 'Commissioning for Inclusion'. Nor are there evaluation criteria in the Action Plan to demonstrate effective implementation.

How will the HWBB ensure this recommendation will be implemented coherently across relevant agencies/trusts and that evaluation criteria – including outcomes, impact and improvement – are reported annually, so councillors and the public can judge the effectiveness of the implementation process?

Response

Chairperson of the health and wellbeing board

Thank you for your question. Herefordshire health and wellbeing board will discuss and consider signing up to the St Mungo's Charter and asking partner agencies to report back on the actions they are taking to address the health inequality faced by people who are homeless, in line with the report recommendations.

Herefordshire Council's Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2016-2020 included the commitment to work towards the priorities in the St Mungo's Charter. We would like to clarify that the Action Plan for the Homelessness Prevention Strategy is a working, operational document that is not routinely published. The Homelessness Prevention Strategy review will be undertaken this year, ahead of developing a strategy for beyond 2020. This strategy update will consider any legislative changes, guidance on developing the strategy and the Herefordshire Homeless Link Health Needs Audit and other relevant documents. It will be appropriate to review the action plan structure with the strategy update.

Question 2

From: Christine Pepler, Chair of Herefordshire Homelessness Forum, Church & Society Link Officer for the Diocese of Hereford

One of the aims of the audit (Key considerations point 6) is to "bring statutory and voluntary services together to develop responses to local priorities and address gaps in services", this is also one of the aims and terms of reference for the Herefordshire Homelessness Forum (though we have struggled to find any health representation on the Forum). It takes a lot of support for

somebody who is homeless to access any non-crisis health service, this support often comes from the voluntary/community/faith sector, along with officers from the Homeless Outreach service. How does the Health and Wellbeing Board envisage ensuring that these other sectors are coherently involved and resourced to provide this necessary support?

Response

Chairperson of the health and wellbeing board

Thank you for the question and for raising the valuable role of the voluntary/community/faith sector in supporting people who are homeless. We agree there are considerable challenges faced by someone who is homeless to access services and a broad range of support opportunities is important. This report provides data on the access to services by people who are homeless in Herefordshire. The health and wellbeing board will discuss and consider the recommendations of the report which include seeking assurance from lead organisations on the actions they are taking to reduce this inequality. It is envisaged that these actions will include the partnerships and work being undertaken with the voluntary/community/faith sector.

Supplementary question from Christine Pepler asked at the meeting:

To enhance partnership working and the plans to address inequality of access to health services for the homeless, could consideration be given to consistent representation by health services at the Herefordshire Homelessness Forum?

Summary of the verbal responses provided at the meeting:

The chairperson felt that this was a reasonable request and invited attendees to comment. Stephen Vickers (director for adults and communities, Herefordshire Council) and Jo-anne Alner (managing director, NHS Herefordshire Clinical Commissioning Group) agreed to consider future representation at the forum. Mike Hearne (managing director, Taurus Healthcare) noted that the primary care networks were increasingly become the place where health services and communities worked together collaboratively, and suggested that issues could also be explored at a locality level.

Question 3

From: Elliot Swatridge of Hereford

I entirely welcome this timely audit and its excellent intentions.

However, during volunteering at the Night Shelter, I have seen the true human plight of homelessness, including a very recent fatality, and critically poor health in others. I am thus deeply concerned that, while the commitment to the Charter for Homeless Health is a step forward, that the report's conclusions make no specific, measurable goals, and makes no commitment to financial investment (page 73). The bottom line is that, unless a major overhaul of present services takes place, which realistically includes financial commitment, the next 3 years shall see multiple preventable fatalities in the homeless community. My question is:

when shall specific, measurable targets, with the necessary financial investment to show they are more than empty words, be added to the conclusions of this report?

Response

Chairperson of the health and wellbeing board

Thank you for your question and for highlighting the inequality in health outcomes faced by those who are homeless. The homelessness health audit has provided insight and data on the health and wellbeing of the homeless population in Herefordshire. The reason to bring it to the health and wellbeing board is to enable partner agencies to consider where there are opportunities to improve outcomes rather than to set strategic direction and dictate actions. Measurable targets will not therefore be added to the conclusion of this report but following discussions with partners at the health and wellbeing board, actions that develop can feed into the current work plans. This audit was an action under the Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2016-20 and is part of the work being undertaken by Herefordshire Council and other partners to prevent homelessness and support those who are homeless. The Homelessness Prevention Strategy review will be undertaken this year, ahead of developing a strategy for beyond 2020. This strategy update will consider any legislative changes and guidance on developing the strategy but also take into consideration the findings from the Herefordshire Homeless Link Health Needs Audit and other relevant documents. Finally, the health and wellbeing board will discuss the recommendation that the audit is repeated in the future to determine whether improvements have been achieved.