



Ipswich Locality Homelessness Partnership (ILHP) Briefing Paper: An introduction to homelessness and how to help people who are homeless, or at risk of this, in Ipswich.

Background and introduction: Since 2011, the Ipswich Locality Homelessness Partnership (ILHP) - often referred to as the “Locality” - has been bringing together partners with an interest in homelessness from across the statutory and voluntary sectors.

The ILHP is made up of over 40 organisations, all of which will cut across homelessness in some way but not all of which have homelessness as their sole focus, working together to provide

“a strategic, co-ordinated and effective approach to all aspects of homelessness, its causes and effects, in the Locality of Ipswich. To do nothing separately that we could do better together”.

For the purposes of the ILHP, and as per its Terms of Reference, “. . . the “Locality” of Ipswich refers to any services supporting marginalised adults, who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, in the Ipswich area”. Hence much of the work of this ILHP is to respond to people for whom there is no statutory duty, such as single people who are homeless and do not meet the criteria for the local housing authority to provide accommodation for example.

One of the shared aims of the ILHP is to help people off the streets, rather than support them to stay on the streets. This is in line with the principles of the Government’s No Second Night Out (NSNO) initiative, which is about no-one new to rough sleeping spending a second night out on the streets.

As organisations with an interest in homelessness, we are often asked to explain more about homelessness. So, we have produced this paper as a way of explaining what we understand about homelessness, and also to share information about what is available in Ipswich to help people who are homeless, or at risk of this, locally.

Before reading this, it might be interesting to ask yourself “What I do think of when I hear the word “homeless?”, and then see if this is the same when you have read this briefing paper.

1. What is homelessness?

- Firstly, homelessness is something which can happen to anyone.
- At the ILHP, we tend to talk about “homelessness” as a consequence, as opposed to a condition or client group. In the same way, we tend to talk about people who are homeless, rather than “homeless people”.

Generally in life we don’t talk about “people who pay rent or a mortgage” and so, in the same way, we tend not to talk about “homeless people” but rather about people who are homeless. This is because being homeless is a circumstance or situation, rather than a category. The circumstances and situation of everyone who is homeless, or at risk of this, is as different as every individual (homeless or otherwise).



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- Homelessness can happen for a single reason, such as either loss of employment or a family breakdown or because of issues relating to addiction, mental health or learning difficulties for example, or as a consequence of a combination of these factors. Similarly, homelessness can be a one-off or very temporary experience or a circumstance that can be moved in and out of in either the short, medium or longer term.

So, because homelessness can be a consequence of a number of different issues, finding accommodation is not always the only solution if we are looking to help prevent people from being homeless, or at risk of this, in the long term. More often than not, finding accommodation is only the starting – and not the end - point for people who may have a number of issues with which they would like help, such as alcohol or drugs for example. Supporting people to deal with the range of issues which might have resulted in them becoming homeless is essential to preventing homelessness, both in the short and longer term.

In many ways, we could be setting people up to fail if all we were to do was to find them somewhere to sleep but were not supporting them to deal with any other issues with which they might want help and which, if not addressed, could lead to them becoming homeless again at some point in the future.

It is also worth remembering that for people who have been rough sleeping, especially for a long time, going into a room or a flat in a house could arguably be just as scary (and lonely) an experience as spending a first night out on the streets would be for anyone who has never slept rough before.

It can be quite a change to go from sleeping out to being in an enclosed space, and also a bed if you've been used to sleeping at ground level. So, much of the work of support agencies working with people who are homeless continues after people have gone into accommodation. Hence, accommodation is sometimes only the starting point, rather than the end point, for moving from the streets to independent living.

- “Homelessness” is a broad term, and is often broken down into sub categories such as “roofless”, “rough sleeping” or “sofa surfing” for further clarification.

Although rough sleeping is generally the most visible form of homelessness, it is arguably only the “tip of the iceberg”. To give some context to the figures in Ipswich, in 2012 there were just over 1,000 individuals applying to hostels for the 330+ single person hostel bed spaces in Ipswich. This is about 40 times the amount of people estimated to be regularly rough sleeping over the longer term in the same year in Ipswich.

So, not everyone who is homeless is rough sleeping, people could be staying with family or friends for example (sometimes described as “sofa surfing”) or could be in emergency/temporary accommodation but still be homeless, technically speaking.

- You might hear people talk about “Statutory” and “Non statutory” homelessness. Put simply, this is about whether or not – following a process of assessment, which takes into account a number of factors about who is homeless, how and why - there is a duty for a statutory organisation to help someone who is homeless. Anyone who is homeless



can contact their local housing authority for advice in the first instance.

2. What services are available to help people who are homeless in Ipswich?

There is a wide range of services available for people who are homeless, or at risk of this, in Ipswich, including:

- **Accommodation services** such as, for example: supported accommodation, often referred to as “hostels”, providing emergency, temporary and short term accommodation for adults and younger people, along with advice and support; Ipswich Borough Council also funds emergency beds all year round, and arranges for additional emergency beds to be available in Severe Weather; during the Winter, the Ipswich Winter Night Shelter also offers a number of beds, as well as a meal and hospitality.
- **Advice services** such as, for example: direct access housing advice, via Customer Services and Housing Options at Ipswich Borough Council, and the IHAG Chapman Centre for example; a wide range of other services, such as Housing and Recovery services, also offer housing advice and support as part of what they provide.
- **Outreach services** such as, for example: the ILHP Assertive Street Outreach service, which works specifically with people who are rough sleeping; other Outreach services also work with people who are out on the streets, like the Anglia Care Trust (ACT) Alcohol Recovery Officers, Outreach workers from the Health Outreach Project and Turning Point Outreach workers for example.
- **Food and Welfare** such as, for example: hot food provided every evening by the Ipswich Soup Kitchen, often supported by other services such as the Health Outreach Project and The Samaritans; hot food is available on a Monday to Friday at the IHAG Chapman Centre, along with access to computers, post collection, showers and a telephone etc. Other partner organisations can also provide food and basic welfare support as required.

These are just some of the direct access/front line services for people, many of which are available out of hours.

In addition to these, there are lots of other services provided by a wide range of agencies which can help people who are homeless, or at risk of this, with access to advice (including Money Advice), food, healthcare and welfare assistance. Many of these services can be accessed directly and/or or by referral from partner agencies.

So, there is a wide range of organisations offering different types of advice and assistance in Ipswich who may be working with people who are homeless, or at risk of this. Therefore, there are multiple possible routes in to advice and support around homelessness particularly. For adults who are single and homeless, then the most likely routes in for advice and support will be via Ipswich Borough Council Customer Services or the IHAG Chapman Centre for

advice in the first instance, who can sign-post people on to the most appropriate or specialist agencies from there.

ILHP partners are working together to ensure that, wherever possible, people who are homeless and rough sleeping (so out on the streets) receive a co-ordinated offer, effectively a “single message”, from all partners. This is to avoid the potential for mixed messages which, understandably, can confuse people about what they need to do.

Advice and support agencies will offer what they can and, ultimately, it is up to the individual whether or not to act on any advice and/or accept what is offered. This might help to explain why it can sometimes take time to support people off the streets. Understandably, if someone is seen rough sleeping regularly then it could look like no-one is helping. However, given the wide range of advice and support services in Ipswich (including an outreach service specifically for people who are rough sleeping), it is unlikely that someone known to be rough sleeping in Ipswich would not have the offer of advice and support of some sort.

3. How can you help?

- You can **take action** if you are concerned about someone sleeping rough, get in touch so we can connect them to local services. Call 0300 500 0914 or visit www.StreetLink.org.uk.

People of any age, gender or background can become homeless and many people don't know where to turn if they find themselves sleeping rough. By getting in touch you can connect rough sleepers to the local services available to them.

- If you would like to help then local charities would love to hear from you. **Most local charities welcome donations**, in many forms.

The ILHP has a list of a number of local organisations with an interest in homelessness and what donations/items they take. So, if you would like to find out more about **where to take your donations for charities involved in homelessness in Ipswich** then please contact the Locality.

- Most **local charities rely on volunteers**, so if you are able to give your time then they would be keen to hear from you.

To find out more about donating to or volunteering with local homelessness charities, you can contact the Locality via email (Locality@ilhp.org.uk) or by telephone (01473 639 040).

4. What about giving food, or money, to people who are out on the streets?



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We know that **most people want to help** when they see someone who they think looks like they might need help out on the streets of Ipswich. As a wide range of partner agencies working with people who are out on the streets, we are thankful that people want to help.

People sometimes tell us that they find it hard to know what to do for the best when asked for money by someone who is out on the streets. So, we understand the need to respect the rights of individuals to make their own choices but also know from our experience of this type of work that there are **dangers and risks associated with being out on the streets**, such as those associated with alcohol, drugs and exploitation or vulnerability. This means that there could be potential longer term consequences of any short term acts of kindness, especially when you cannot be sure where any money you give will be going.

Giving money directly to people on the streets means you cannot be sure where this money will go, or of the consequences of how it could be used. However, giving money to agencies who work with people who are out on the streets will ensure that it is spent on supporting people off the streets.

People are sometimes surprised to hear that being out on the streets does not necessarily mean being without access to benefits and/or money. Besides, the **hostel accommodation for people who are homeless in Ipswich does not require payment in advance.**

Presently, there are over 300 single person hostel bed spaces in Ipswich, these are mostly accessed through a waiting list but there are a number of direct access “emergency” beds.

Anyone living in Ipswich who is homeless, or at risk of homelessness, can call Ipswich Borough Council for Housing Advice. As explained in section 2, there is also a **wide range of advice and support services in Ipswich**, including Outreach services and teams, provided by both the statutory and voluntary sectors, to help people to find accommodation and to offer support as appropriate, for example helping to access drug and alcohol treatment and mental health programmes where needed.

Some of these support services and teams operate out-of-hours, and all are working together **to help support people to get off the streets** in the short and longer term.

In fact, one of the ways for outreach services to make an initial connection with people on the streets is to offer free food and/or hot drinks as part of encouraging people to come in and work with local advice and support services.

Hot food is available in Ipswich for people who are homeless, and there is also a Soup Kitchen available every day of the week. So, there is a **wide range of local organisations in Ipswich offering food and refreshments**, and doing so as part of a planned approach to engaging with people to support them off the streets.

In the end, it comes down to personal choice whether or not to give food or hot drinks to someone who is out on the streets, just as it is personal choice for people out on the streets as to whether or not to accept what is offered. All we are asking is that we all think about what we do in response to people who are out on the streets and take the action that is most likely to help people off the streets.



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This is why we would encourage people to help those who are out on the streets **to connect to local services for support and welfare** (for example, by contacting **StreetLink** to report rough sleeping) wherever possible, rather than by taking actions which could be helping people to stay out on the streets.

If you particularly want to give money to local homelessness charities, instead of giving money directly to people who are out on the streets, then many take donations. You can either donate directly to any of the local charities of your choice or to a single Ipswich Locality Homelessness Fund. Any donations to this fund will be used locally, as agreed through the Ipswich Locality Homelessness Partnership. Search for the Ipswich Locality Homelessness Fund at BT MyDonate: www.btplc.com/mydonate.

5. Have we helped you to know more about homelessness and what is available to help people who are homeless, or at risk of this, in Ipswich?

In the introduction, we asked what you think of when you think about homelessness. Having read this, we hope that this helped your understanding of homelessness (or at least given some explanation as to why it can be about more than simply where people are sleeping), and also helped to explain some of the services available to help people who are homeless, or at risk of this, in Ipswich.

If you would like to find out more about homelessness generally then more information is available from national organisations such as, for example, Crisis, Shelter and StreetLink.

Thank you for taking the time to read this, which we hope has been helpful, and also for your interest in homelessness.

We are always interested in hearing what we could do differently. So, if you have any comments, or more questions, then please get in touch.

You can contact the ILHP by email (Locality@ilhp.org.uk) or by telephone (01473 639 040).