



# Co-operative Councils

## Innovation Network

### SAFEGUARDING

### Stevenage Borough Council

## No More Service - breaking barriers, especially through Lockdown

As the efforts of public sector workers during the Covid-19 pandemic are recognised by Government, senior leaders and the general public, it is vitally important to acknowledge not only the outcomes and the good news stories, but also the nature of the work that it takes to produce them – work that doesn't always lend itself easily to public discussion – let alone celebration – but that is the everyday reality for many staff on the frontline.

This is very much the domain in which Stevenage's 'No More Service' operates. Set up in 2012 with a £2k grant to engage street drinkers, and additional funding from partners allowed a full-time worker to be employed with a holistic approach to help clients reduce alcohol consumption. Further contributions funded a drugs worker, and in 2016, with roles now generic, 'offending' was added to the client profile. 2019 research into the links between 'complex needs', addiction and offending led to a further expansion of the service's remit.

When decisions had to be made about which services could continue in the face of the pandemic, Members, senior managers, and staff themselves were adamant that the 'No More Service' was one that had to be maintained. In the first two weeks alone, demand increased by 157% and 48 rough sleepers were helped into accommodation, whilst contact with 12 high-risk offenders changed from quarterly reviews to several contacts per week.

It is a simple job to tell heartwarming stories of outcomes achieved. Albie's\* disability and mental health crises isolated him long before lockdown and when his escape into books was cut off by closure of the library delivery service, No More stepped in to provide a new supply. Peter\*, released from prison to a home that had been broken into, was provided with food parcels and second-hand furniture to help him adjust to both life outside prison and inside due to physical distancing rules. Lucy's\* heightened anxiety made accessing support through a mental health telephone triage service a real struggle but was reassured by a familiar voice at the No More Service and assisted to get the help she needed.

All three took the time to thank the service for their support (see below), but behind each of these outcomes and the many others that the No More Service has been involved with, lies a

complex web of activity to manage the risks and crises involved in enabling people like Albie, Peter and Lucy to live in their community and in some cases, to prevent the community being a victim of their recidivism. The everyday reality of the work can involve: talking to clients on the verge of attempting suicide whilst sourcing and persuading them to take an offer of help; managing sex offenders, arranging regular catch ups and supporting them to reduce their risk of reoffending; and challenging current approaches or perceptions of offending, addiction and homelessness which end up with clients not getting the kind of help that is right for them but being offered the kind of help existing services offer.

It was Winston Churchill, whilst working to form the United Nations after WWII, who famously said, “Never let a good crisis go to waste”. Now, as then, this was no flippant remark in the face of the tragic numbers of casualties around the world, but a pragmatic understanding that the situation both required and opened up the potential for changing the paradigm. For No More this means grasping the opportunity presented to engage the rough sleepers, accommodated temporarily in hotels, to break the habits of many years attachment to a life on the streets and to find innovative ways to support those involved in the cycle of offending and addiction.

Homeless people being accommodated, people with addictions socially distancing and sex offenders locked down does not reduce the need for continual crisis intervention. It only changes how it can be delivered, with pathways to support from other agencies and the service they provide changing. This is something, though, that district and borough councils have had to adjust to over the last ten years or so, as social care and health services have relied more and more on thresholds and signposting to ration services in the face of austerity measures. Districts and boroughs at the centre of communities and with open front doors have found themselves, often along with the local police, having to be increasingly innovative to meet the scale of demand that has nowhere else to go. In response to the changes brought by Covid-19, the team, as they have always done, used the conversations they were having to ‘know more’ about who they were helping and how to adapt to these unprecedented circumstances. Key lessons learned early on were:

- People needed help to adapt the coping skills they had developed to manage their addiction and mental health
- High-risk offenders, already with restrictions placed on them, would be further isolated
- For some, the situation simulated the prison environment, with the potential to trigger individuals and bring about related behaviour
- Other support services were being reduced, leading to clients losing their existing contact and feelings of support
- Those who had been rough sleeping for a prolonged period of time had to adapt to the rules and regulations of the accommodation they had been provided with
- Some clients’ behaviour was anti-social, partly due to the fact that they and their neighbours were in their home for extended time, meaning conflict resolution was needed
- Harm reduction messages were needed for clients adapting methods of substance use.

In response, the team has been ever resourceful, adaptable and innovative, with examples including:

- Securing a grant from the local Community Trust, within two working days, to buy phones and credit for clients without them. This enabled contact with support workers and others, including emergency services and the mental health helpline
- Teaming up with Housing Options to offer every rough sleeper an allocated No More Support Worker, both during their stay in the hotel and after they leave
- Continuing to support clients evicted from the hotel. The team recognises the underlying issues that have led to their situation and how they continue to impact on behaviour. The No More Service maintains consistency in offering help
- With reduced access to other services, No More has continued to have an office presence for emergencies and for people with nowhere else to turn.

As with everything at Stevenage Borough Council, the response was guided by Co-operative Principles. The No More Service was prioritised and has been determined and successful, even in the face of a situation that no one in local government has faced before, because these principles have not been abandoned or compromised. Rather than focus on thresholds, the service has listened and responded to demand, seeing clients as citizens of the borough in need to support. Of the principles adopted by the borough, of greatest importance at this time have been that the council will:

- Exhibit a clear knowledge of the specific needs of the community
- Provide services that are personalised, and community based
- Embed an open, creative and reflective culture
- Be a fair council that treats people equally and with respect.

But the principles are just words until they are enacted by people, such as those in the No More Service, who have shown extraordinary levels of dedication, passion, empathy energy and sheer humanity. For Sandra, who has had daily contact to help her cope with her mental health, neighbour disputes and social isolation, the No More Service has been an essential lifeline. In Sandra's words:

**"People are clapping for the NHS again tonight...I'm going to clap for you and all the support you give me"**

### **Feedback received from clients**

**"I appreciate my book delivery. It made my day!! I have already started one of them"**

\*Albie - housebound due to disability and experience a mental health crisis. Usually spends days reading, relying on the library delivery service which has been closed.

**"I appreciate the daily calls as I have had no credit to call people"** \*John - recently moved away from the town centre which has brought a change to routine and ability to socialise.

**"I am extremely grateful for the food parcels and furniture I had delivered for me. It made my experience of coming out of prison easier"** \*Peter - recently released from prison to a property that had been broken into.

**“I am so glad we could do the weekly drug test via video link, as it helps prove to Social Services that I am no longer taking drugs”. \*Louise**

**“Thanks for everything and sorting out food bank, appreciate it a lot. THANK YOU AGAIN”**

\*David – Has been in lockdown due to his health and struggled to get food

**“I really do appreciate the help you have given me and all the support and time you’ve put in” \*Lucy – Is experiencing a mental health crisis, struggling with a changing her routine and to engaging with mental health referral services as it requires a triage over the phone.**

\*All names have been changed

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