

TITLE OF REPORT: Homeless Health: Deep Dive into the Health Needs of the Homeless Community within Gateshead

Purpose of the Report

1. To update the Health & Wellbeing Board on progress made to identify the health needs of the homeless community within Gateshead and seek approval for the proposed next steps.

Background

2. The North East Homeless Health Needs Audit 2015 was commissioned by the North East Regional Homeless Group to develop an understanding of the health and wellbeing of individuals who are homeless or utilising homelessness services across the North East.
3. The North East Regional Homeless Group has membership across the 12 North East Local Authorities with each area contributing to the audit which was carried out using Homeless Links' Health Needs Audit Toolkit.
4. Over forty agencies were involved interviewing participants region wide, with the audit being informed by the experiences and lives of some 600 individuals who were interviewed over the course of February 2015.
5. The main report itself provides analysis against the 5 core themes (set out below) identifying how the health issues of those homeless in the North East compare and differ to the national audit Homeless Link carried out themselves in 2014.
 - Access to health services
 - Your physical health
 - Your mental health
 - Drug and alcohol use
 - Vaccinations and screening

A specific local overview report was produced for each local authority.

6. The findings of the report were presented to the Health and Wellbeing board in June 2015 and the HWB agreed that it was an interesting report but asked for more information to be gathered to clarify specific topics in the report. Specifically the board asked for clarification on:
 - what definition of homelessness had been applied
 - whether the age/gender profile of the participants was representative of homelessness in Gateshead.

- some specific aspects raised by the survey question re GP registration and A&E attendance, mental health etc.
- whether significant groups were omitted from the survey due to the methodology e.g. Sex workers, women

Proposal

7. It is proposed that further research be carried out to understand some of the messages in the baseline survey. The work will complement the health needs audit and seek to gather more in depth, qualitative information; it will also inform the Gateshead Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, the HWB and direct the focus of future work.
8. It is hoped that by using peer engagement we will be able to reach some of those not currently engaged with services and who weren't interviewed as part of the health needs audit.

Methodology

9. We propose to explore the findings of the first survey through various targeted strands of work.
10. Staff and volunteers - Prior to starting the engagement we propose to run discussions/small focus groups with the staff/volunteers who conducted the original survey.
11. It is likely that this group will have retained an overview of the issues for those who completed the original surveys and that their anecdotal observations may inform the work.
12. Homeless people – we will seek to carry out engagement work with persons who are not currently engaged with services, to capture information on health needs. This is to test the original data as our initial target group was drawn from those currently accessing housing support services. We have been asked by the Health and Wellbeing Board to verify that the findings have not been skewed by the initial approach used.
13. We recognise the difficulty of identifying and engaging with this group of people but feel that our peer approach could give us a more in depth view by using a qualitative approach. It is likely that only a small number of individuals will engage and participate in an informal 1-1 discussion.
14. The information gathered would be collected by using the original questionnaire as a guide for the conversation but the 'peer interviewer' would ask for and record more detailed information to clarify key points. All information would be anonymous and we would not seek to identify individuals in the final report.
15. Existing service users who have been homeless - We will discuss the survey findings with clients currently in contact with housing services to explore the findings of the report and understand what is behind some of the answers. This will be done by using semi structured interviews led by peer researchers. The questions asked will be informed by discussions with the staff and volunteers who conducted the original survey.

16. It is felt that 1-1 engagement for this work will offer confidentiality to individuals who may be discussing personal medical issues.
17. We recognise that it is unlikely that the same individuals who responded to the original survey will be engaged in the follow up work so the interviews will need to accommodate both those who have and have not already participated.
18. Sex workers - We would like to engage with persons working in the sex industry in the Gateshead area to understand how housing need and homelessness impacts on this group. Anecdotally we understand that persons are engaged in this activity to keep a roof over their heads in some contexts.
19. Work with this group would be facilitated by workers of the Changing Lives GAP (Girls are Proud) project who will help the research team to understand the best way to engage with this group. We understand that the likely engagement will be with a small group of women.
20. This work will inform future more comprehensive work which should also include men and potentially reach across the Newcastle/Gateshead area.

Partners identified

21. A collaborative approach has been adopted including:

- Gateshead Council Housing Services
- Gateshead Public Health Team
- Fulfilling Lives
- Changing Lives
- The GAP project
- Oasis Aquila Housing

Partner support

22. We have identified some in-kind support from partners for this work:

- Fulfilling Lives have committed the use of 2 experienced peer researchers.
- Oasis Aquila Housing have offered the use of their day centre to carry out the research and host a consultation event with service users.
- Oasis Aquila Housing are also prepared to facilitate research with clients who are referred to them.

A working group has been set up and this includes representation from the partner agencies and the first meeting was held on 27/07/15.

Project development and Analytical support

23. Gateshead Public Health team have agreed to support the project design and implementation.

24. A Public Health trainee will offer support between September and December 2015. Jill Harland is a health visitor by background and it is proposed that she work alongside the peer researchers to assist in the collection and collation of the research information and the drafting of the final report.

25. Public Health have also offered support from their researcher in residence.

Recommendations

26. The Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to consider the contents of this report, comment upon proposals and support the project.

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