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Our Ref: DK/VB/7803r2
Contact: David Kennedy
E-mail: vbullock@northampton.gov.uk
Date: 28th April 2017

Dear Mr Shah

**Re: Vadims ALEKSEJEVS (deceased)
Letter to prevent future deaths**

Thank you for your letter and report dated 3rd March 2017 concerning Mr Vadims Aleksejevs (deceased). Please find below our response to the 5 matters of concern raised in your report, including details of the action taken to prevent future deaths.

Background

Northampton Borough Council – in its capacity as the local housing authority – is responsible for tackling and preventing homelessness, meeting its statutory obligations (under the homelessness legislation) towards people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, and minimising the number of people sleeping rough in the borough.

Each year, the Council organises two, borough-wide rough sleepers counts (which are informed by local intelligence and carried out in accordance with nationally-determined criteria) between Midnight and 3.00am.

Although the Council employs two full-time Street Outreach Workers to find and help people who are sleeping rough, it can only make a real and lasting difference if it works with a wide range of other organisations to tackle and address the problem.

During the first half of 2016, the Council hosted a series of workshops (attended by thirty services and organisations) and, in July 2016, it published a 3 year strategy: 'TOGETHER we change lives – ending the need for people to sleep rough in Northampton'.

<http://www.northampton.gov.uk/downloads/download/3181/northamptons-multi-agency-rough-sleepers-strategy>

In February 2017, the Council opened an all-year-round Nightshelter in the former British Rail Sports & Social Club in St Andrew's Road, Northampton. With the capacity to accommodate up to 20 homeless men, Northampton's Nightshelter is the first of ten objectives in 'TOGETHER we change lives'.

Continued/...

Matters of concern

I will address each matter of concern in the order in which you have raised it:

(1) There are “lots of people” living on this campsite. At the time of the deceased’s death there were 7 tents containing Latvian, Polish and other nationals.

At the time of the deceased’s death, the Council’s Street Outreach Workers were not aware of the ‘campsite’ on which the deceased had been sleeping.

Although visits were subsequently made to the site by the Outreach Workers and a Park Ranger (following the deceased’s death) in December 2016, it appears that the occupants may have moved away from the site very soon after the deceased’s death.

We are aware of a number of makeshift ‘campsites’ that have sprung up in Northampton and are occupied predominantly by groups of men from Eastern Europe. Although some of these men are working, it is understood that none of them are exercising their treaty rights. This means that they remain in the UK unlawfully.

As soon as the Council’s Street Outreach Workers become aware of a ‘campsite’, they will make contact with the occupants and offer them advice and assistance. Repeated attempts will be made to engage with the occupants with a view to them being offered housing and support or, alternatively, a voluntary reconnection to their country of origin.

Acknowledging the dangers associated with sleeping rough, the Council works closely with the Police and the East of England Immigration Compliance and Enforcement Team and, where the Council’s offers of assistance are repeatedly refused – more often than not due to an unwillingness to pay rent for any housing that is offered – efforts will be made to disrupt the sites through enforcement action, including the administrative removal of individuals from the UK where they are not exercising their treaty rights.

During the past six months, there has been an increase in the number of people sleeping in tents on public and private land outside of Northampton’s town centre. These ‘campsites’ – which include the site occupied by the deceased – are visited regularly by the Street Outreach Workers, the Park Rangers, the Police and the Immigration Service.

Based on current intelligence, we estimate that there are between 15 - 20 people (all of whom are believed to be male and from Eastern Europe) living on 3 sites. These sites are being visited regularly, and rigorous and persistent, multi agency efforts are being made to discourage and prevent people from sleeping rough on these and other sites.

(2) The circumstances of this case may present themselves again over winter.

The winter period poses a very serious risk to the health and wellbeing of people who are sleeping rough. During severe weather, Northampton’s SWEP Project (a partnership between the Council, NAASH and the Hope Centre, based at Oasis House) is activated.

Although there is no strict definition of what counts as ‘severe weather’, the SWEP Project will be activated during any weather (including extreme cold, wind and rain) that might increase the risk of serious harm to people who are sleeping rough. Ordinarily, it will be activated when the temperature is forecast to fall below freezing for 3 consecutive nights.

In January 2016, the SWEP Project provided rough sleepers with emergency shelter, food, advice and support for 7 consecutive nights and, in January 2017, it was operational for the same number of nights. In both years, around two thirds of the people who accessed the Project were EU Nationals from Eastern Europe who said they were sleeping rough but did not appear to be engaging with local services or exercising their treaty rights.

When SWEP is operational, the Council notifies a wide range of services and organisations who are likely to come into contact with rough sleepers, so that they too are able to provide relevant advice and direct them to access the SWEP Project.

We have established that the deceased accessed the SWEP Project in Oasis House in January 2016 for its duration of 7 nights. At the time, he was not exercising his treaty rights and we have found no evidence that he engaged with the help and support that was available to him, at that time, to access housing and support services.

The establishment of Northampton's Nightshelter in February 2017 is already playing an important role in ensuring that, when someone is sleeping rough, or is at risk of sleeping rough, they can immediately be offered a place to stay that is safe, warm and dry while they engage with the services best placed to assess and address their needs.

For many people, the Nightshelter will provide them with an invaluable 'stop gap' that meets their immediate needs when they have become homeless at short notice and while they are helped to make their own housing arrangements. For others, it will provide somewhere safe to stay while they await a move into Oasis House or one of Northampton's other supported housing schemes.

Alternative arrangements have been put in place to accommodate any women sleeping rough, and these arrangements are funded by the Council.

Although the circumstances of this case may present themselves again in future winters, the Council has clear procedures in place to help those who want to access housing and support, and to help everyone during periods of severe weather.

For those who want to leave the streets and access housing and support, there are clear pathways to help achieve this quickly and effectively. Even those who are unable or unwilling to access the Nightshelter are able to work with the Street Outreach Workers to come off the streets by accessing housing and support through Northampton's Multi Agency Assessment Panel. The Assessment Panel is attended by a wide range of housing and support providers, and members of the Panel work together to agree housing and support plans for each individual presented to the Panel by the Street Outreach Workers.

(3) It is not known if adult social care or addiction services provide any form of outreach service to the homeless.

Northamptonshire County Council's Adult Social Care team commissions outreach services for homeless people by two drug and alcohol advice and support services: Bridge and S2S.

The outreach services provided by Bridge and S2S work closely and flexibly with the Council's two Street Outreach Workers to meet the individual needs of homeless people. They have played a key role in the development and implementation of Northampton's multi agency rough sleepers strategy, 'TOGETHER we change lives'.

The Council's Street Outreach Workers carry out at least 2 outreach sessions each week, commencing early in the morning at 5.30am and late at night at 10.30pm. They respond to all reports and alerts of suspected rough sleeping sites, including tents, 'campsites' and people seen bedded down. Reports and alerts are received from a variety of sources including a range of services and organisations, members of the public, and Streetlink.

(4) It is not known if the campsite houses other vulnerable individuals, such as children or the elderly.

Based on the intelligence we have gathered, we are satisfied that that there are no women or children – and no men who are elderly or disabled – living on the 'campsites'.

It is known, however, that the 'campsites' do contain some people who have severe addictions – including people who have a severe alcohol dependency – and are refusing help and support. Their vulnerability is compounded by the fact that, when all efforts to engage them are exhausted, they will not necessarily be subjected to administrative removal from the UK. This is not in this Council's control.

(5) It is unclear if there are other housing options available or indeed if there is any statutory duty to house vulnerable individuals living in such campsites.

The Council does not have a statutory duty to house everyone who is homeless.

The Council will only provide emergency accommodation, or settled accommodation, to some homeless people. This is set out in the homelessness legislation: Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and Localism Act 2011).

The Council will only provide someone with emergency accommodation – except at the Nightshelter – if it has reason to believe that they are homeless, they are eligible for assistance and they are (or may be) in priority need. Although some priority need groups are automatic, most single people under pensionable age will only be deemed to be in priority need if they are vulnerable for a reason or a variety of reasons. The term 'vulnerable' should be taken to mean 'vulnerable' under the terms of the statute.

The Street Outreach Workers provide crisis support and advice to those they find sleeping rough who are new to the streets, and are able to help them to access housing and support quickly and effectively, preventing any further deterioration whilst on the streets.

They also offer a Housing Advice Drop-In at Oasis House, Monday to Friday from 9.00am until 1.00pm, and this complements the opening hours of the Hope Centre (a day centre for vulnerable people, including homeless people and rough sleepers) which is also based at Oasis House. The Hope Centre encourages homeless people to work with the Street Outreach Workers and access the Housing Advice Drop-In and Nightshelter.

For those more entrenched rough sleepers, and those who are refusing to come off the streets – due to a reluctance, perhaps, to pay rent/service charges and/or address addictions – the regular outreach sessions provide the opportunity for repeat and persistent conversations. This approach has led to some behaviour change amongst entrenched rough sleepers, and the team will continue to try new approaches until the same behaviour change is achieved with others who are still refusing to leave the streets.

For those who are homeless and sleeping rough – and where they are willing to engage with the advice and help that is available – there are clear pathways to access housing (including the Nightshelter, Oasis House and other housing schemes) and support.

For those who are sleeping rough and are either refusing to co-operate with the help and advice that is available or are resistant to everyone's efforts to persuade them to come off the streets, there are also clear pathways as to how this will be tackled.

For those entrenched rough sleepers who tend to gravitate to the town centre area of Northampton, the most common reason cited for refusing to leave the streets is a reluctance to address alcohol and drug addictions. They are aware, however, that services and organisations will work proactively with them to help them address their addictions, change their behaviours, improve their life chances and achieve their aspirations.

In order to keep people safe and bring about behaviour change, the Council and its partners are doing everything they can to deliver a clear and consistent message about how dangerous it is to sleep rough and to take robust, decisive and effective action.

Although I trust that this letter has addressed the matters of concern that you have raised in your report, please do let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Yours sincerely



David Kennedy
Chief Executive