

Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> January, 2016

Dear Jim Crawshaw,

## **ALTERNATIVE PROPOSAL IN NORTHFIELD FOR HOUSING ADVICE SERVICE CONSULTATION**

This letter is a follow-up from the initial correspondence sent on Monday 11<sup>th</sup> January, and follows localised discussions within Northfield in respect of the proposed Housing Advice Service consultation which closes on Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> January.

In my initial letter, I outlined concerns we hold within Northfield for the protection of vulnerable adults through the proposed re-allocation of all Homeless Advice Centres (HACs) to one location, in Newtown. We recognise that BCC's desire is to increase the availability of appointments as well as improving the level of service for those threatened with homelessness. We recognise that the financial backdrop limits options open to Birmingham City Council (BCC). In my letter, I outlined serious reservations about whether individuals in South Birmingham will actually be able to travel to an alien part of Birmingham, such as Newtown, in order to receive advice. These concerns had been raised with me by over twenty organisations represented within Northfield Stakeholders' Group (all of whom support the vulnerable and mentally ill in the Northfield District). I sought to offer important considerations for you to ensure that appropriate, easy-to-access support was available with any changes as well as ensuring that localised communication and support was available all around the city.

This subsequent letter and proposal follows localised discussions within the Northfield District to offer some level of support within South Birmingham to ensure those who may need to cross the city would have some support in South Birmingham. It recognises that training would need to be completed by the appropriate staff and that they would need to work alongside the statutory responsibilities that BCC holds with regards to homelessness. Furthermore, it is consistent with BCC's desire to work alongside local communities which it highlights in its 2016+ budget.

### **Alternative proposal**

In light of the above context and concerns and following consultation with a number of organisations who seek to work alongside homeless, imminently homeless or similarly vulnerable individuals, **we propose a paid worker to support or advise those facing imminent homelessness who would cover South Birmingham and who could be deployed in the vicinity of the existing Northfield HAC.** They would be the local, first port-of-call to anyone in the area who was either immediately or imminently homeless and would help signpost them appropriately. The worker would be able to evaluate the immediate need, identify local provision and offer housing guidance with experienced, local expertise. This could be to any of the local, experienced, support agencies (such as South Birmingham Young Homeless Project or Northfield Community Partnership, who have both expressed keen support of this proposal). Should it be that there was no alternative other than to send them to Newtown, procedures could then be put in place to ensure that this occurred swiftly and safely.

#### **Chair:**

Rev. D. Tubby, Northfield Baptist Church, 789 Bristol Road South, Northfield B31 2NQ

Tel: 0121 4766678

#### **Vice-chair:**

R. Debenham, Northfield Community Partnership, 693 Bristol Road South, Northfield B31 2JT

Tel: 0121 4112157

This adviser would also be able to work alongside other appropriate, existing expert advice in the community where benefits advice, financial planning, housing and work applications, Foodbank support and Local Welfare Provision support already exist. They would bring with them a wealth of local experience and an ability to work alongside the many third sector organisations which provide support and guidance in this area.

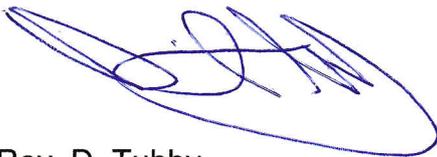
Location-wise, we would anticipate this individual to be based in the community and co-located around South Birmingham in the most appropriate public locations. Over the last week, four potential locations have already been identified with unconfirmed further interest. Should our separate proposal for the Community Asset Transfer of premises in central Northfield also be successful, this location would be perfect for such a service.

We are not clear as to whether BCC funding may be available for such a post. However, regardless of this situation, we would like to meet with you to explore this further and to ensure that some level of service (whether funded by BCC, external opportunities or a combination) can exist and offer the best support to the consultation outcomes.

We believe that this proposal complements the planned centre of excellence in Newtown without compromising the safety of those in South Birmingham who would be unable to make this trip. It would safeguard and protect the most vulnerable in the south of the city and enhance the homelessness service in a cost-effective way.

We await your response and look forward to hearing from you.

With best regards,



Rev. D. Tubby  
Chair, Northfield Stakeholders' Group  
Minister, Northfield Baptist Church

cc: Richard Burden MP  
Cllr. Brett O'Reilly (Northfield Ward)  
Helen Sephton (South Birmingham Young Homeless Project)  
Rebecca Debenham (Northfield Community Partnership)

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Rev. D. Tubby, Northfield Baptist Church, 789 Bristol Road South, Northfield B31 2NQ

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**Vice-chair:**

R. Debenham, Northfield Community Partnership, 693 Bristol Road South, Northfield B31 2JT

Tel: 0121 4112157

## Andrew J Clarke

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**From:** Jim Crawshaw  
**Sent:** 15 February 2016 09:22  
**To:** Simon J Field; Maura Mulligan; Andrew J Clarke  
**Subject:** FW: Consultation on the /future of Homeless Services and Neighbourhood Advice Service

Jim Crawshaw  
Integrated Service Head Homeless & Pre-Tenancy Services  
0121 675 2154  
07887851985

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**From:** Jim Crawshaw  
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 09, 2016 9:00 AM  
**To:** Councillor Lisa Trickett; Councillor John Cotton  
**Subject:** RE: Consultation on the /future of Homeless Services and Neighbourhood Advice Service

Dear Cllr Trickett

Firstly apologies for the delay in responding

Following your e-mail below I have had discussions with Midland Heart regarding any possible buildings they have that would be appropriate for use as a HAC that are more central to the city centre than the Newtown Neighbourhood office. I can advise

- I contacted them initially regarding the Foyer and received the following response from Chris Ellison - *In terms of the Foyer which was also suggested, in consideration we felt it would not be suitable both in terms of the nature of the space required and capacity of the building along with presenting a challenge regarding the nature of the vulnerability of the existing client group and some other client groups in the same space.* As you are aware the statutory service deals with a range of customers from families to single people, some of whom have the most complex issues and therefore it wasn't deemed appropriate to mix these with the current young people in the foyer.
- I visited the Bradford Street office of Midland Heart which I'm sure you are aware is situated very close to the outdoor markets. Unfortunately this office isn't large enough for our requirements. At Newtown we will have a large reception area, 25 -28 front facing desks, 2 private interview rooms predominantly for victims of DV and back office space for up to 12 officers to be located. Bradford Street is not large enough to provide a similar set up. Additionally there would be some building work required and although it has IT access the number of officers we would seek to place there would mean we would have to upgrade this at an additional cost.
- Midland Heart are currently looking at plans for the Bismillah building (which I'm sure you will recall is next to the Snowhill Centre). However this would require significant structural intervention that would be a significant cost as well as the setting up of a new office, IT etc. etc.

I hope this reassures you that we have been pro-active in seeking an alternative central location to the Newtown Office, however we have not been successful in finding something large enough to meet our needs that doesn't require significant investment, which in the current climate is highly unlikely.

Happy to discuss this further if you would like to.

Regards

Jim

Jim Crawshaw  
Integrated Service Head Homeless & Pre-Tenancy Services  
0121 675 2154  
07887851985

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**From:** Councillor Lisa Trickett  
**Sent:** Saturday, January 02, 2016 12:41 PM  
**To:** Councillor John Cotton; Jim Crawshaw  
**Subject:** Re: Consultation on the /future of Homeless Services and Neighbourhood Advice Service

Hi John

As discussed previously at pre-Cabinet I fail to see the appropriateness let alone merit of the Newtown location. If we are to have a single hub it should be city centre located for accessibility and combine a wider housing options shop so as to evidence a wider housing offer. This would suggest a shopfront location or as I have previously suggested we could explore with MH the use of the ground floor Foyer?

KR

Lisa

Sent from my iPad

On 4 Dec 2015, at 10:38, Councillor John Cotton <[John.Cotton@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:John.Cotton@birmingham.gov.uk)> wrote:

Dear Colleague

## **CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE OF HOMELESS SERVICES AND NEIGHBOURHOOD ADVICE SERVICE**

We are writing to advise you of consultations which commence today regarding the two services above.

### Homeless Service

The Homeless and Pre Tenancy Service (H&PTS) is currently based in 4 Housing Advice Centres across the city – Erdington, Newtown, Northfield and Sparkbrook as well as at the Youth Hub in Digbeth. The proposed changes to service delivery do not impact on the Youth Hub. As with all services within the Council the H&PTS is continually seeking to improve the service it provides to homeless households in the city. The proposal, for a number of reasons, is to move all the staff into one Housing Advice Service based at Newtown to enable the creation of a centre of excellence for homelessness and housing advice for the city.

### Neighbourhood Advice Service

As you will be aware the Neighbourhood Advice and Information Service (NAIS) has been subject to significant change over a number of years. During 2014/15 municipal year, extensive consultation took place through Executive Members for Local Services on a four-hub future operating model for NAIS, with proposed hubs in Northfield, Newtown, Erdington and Sparkbrook. Following the requirement to secure additional financial savings during 2015/16 the service has developed a proposed new model.

Your comments would be welcomed on these two proposals in order for us to take this into account in the decision making process. Please submit these direct to

[Jim.crawshaw@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:Jim.crawshaw@birmingham.gov.uk) for Homeless Services

[Chris.jordan@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:Chris.jordan@birmingham.gov.uk) for Neighbourhood Advice Service

If you would like to discuss the proposals further please contact either Jim or Chris respectively.

The formal consultation commences today, Friday, 4<sup>th</sup> December and will run for a 7 week period, ending on the 21<sup>st</sup> January 2016.

The consultation questionnaire will be available from Friday and can be accessed via Be Heard on: [www.birminghambeheard.org.uk/people-1/housingadvice](http://www.birminghambeheard.org.uk/people-1/housingadvice) and [www.birminghambeheard.org.uk/people-1/neighbourhoodadvice](http://www.birminghambeheard.org.uk/people-1/neighbourhoodadvice)

Yours sincerely

**Councillor John Cotton**  
**Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Management & Homes**

**Councillor Shafique Shah**  
**Cabinet Member for Inclusion & Community Safety**

# **Proposal to retain Homelessness Advice in Northfield District**

## **Background**

This proposal is written in response to the recent budget cuts announced within the Northfield district. It is written with particular reference to the Homelessness Advice Centre (HAC), Birmingham & Solihull Womens' Aid (BSWAID) & Midland Heart (MH) being relocated to Newtown or an alternative central Birmingham location. I write this on behalf of a number of community groups who have grave concerns about these important services being moved out of an area which desperately needs them. It follows on from a discussion meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> March, 2014 at Allen's Cross Community Centre.

## **Homelessness in Northfield**

We know that homelessness in Birmingham is high in comparison to the rest of the country. The rate of homelessness application acceptances in Birmingham is five times the national average, and four times that of the other core cities.<sup>1</sup> Acceptances within Northfield for the last two years have also been high (361 from 740 applications in 2011/12; 318 from 555 in 2012/13<sup>2</sup>) and initial attendance figures from the HAC in Birmingham indicate this is likely to be consistent from 2013/14.

Most recent figures from the HAC in Northfield show that 1,515 individuals have been seen there between November 2013 and January 2014. Of these, over two-thirds (1,029) either had a Homeless Prevention Interview or presented themselves as homeless on the day.

This is borne out from recent South Birmingham Young Homeless Project last Annual Report<sup>3</sup>, which shows that in 2012/13 they saw 314 adults (primarily under 24), who between them had 181 children (111 under 4). This is in addition to those referred to Youth Hub from the HAC.

These figures alone demonstrate the enormous negative impact that losing the HAC will have on Northfield. Whilst it is sensible to re-direct these individuals to the new central HAC in Birmingham, the reality is that many are unlikely to make this journey because of financial or mental health reasons (both of which are recognised as key priorities within Northfield's most recent District profile). I shall shortly outline a proposal to retain these services in a streamlined, alternative method. However, before doing so, I want to consider the principal reasons within Northfield, too. This will help us analyse what factors need to be considered in any future homelessness support within the area, in order to enable prevention as well as cure.

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<sup>1</sup> Northfield District Profile, Birmingham City Council, 2014, p19

<sup>2</sup> Northfield District Profile, Birmingham City Council, 2014, p19

<sup>3</sup> South Birmingham Young Homeless Project Annual Report, 2012/13

### **Principal reasons for homelessness**

According to the District Profile, the principal reasons for homelessness within Northfield are domestic violence or family breakdown.<sup>4</sup> Clearly, there is a need for advice in both of these areas to remain available for both of these. If any service is to remain in Northfield, these must therefore both be considered. Indeed, losing both MH and BSWAID will certainly also have a detrimental effect on the area, for this reason.

I have already mentioned briefly that poor mental health is a concern within the Northfield District Health Profile. Offering support for both of these must, therefore, remain a significant consideration in any revised service.

Poverty within Northfield remains high, too. Many people are presenting themselves as homeless (or potentially so) because of financial pressures. Increasing sanctions within the Jobcentre has seen a rise in the use of Foodbank referrals in the area.

To my knowledge, there are now at least two Foodbanks serving the Northfield area (Lifeline Foodbank, based at Hollymoor Community Church), Cotteridge Foodbank (Trussell Trust), based at The Cotteridge Churches. A number of locations around Northfield (including Northfield Town Centre Partnership, South Birmingham Young Homeless Project) act as distribution centres or referral units for both of these, and demand is consistently increasing for these, not out of choice but out of necessity.

If any homelessness advice service is to be offered within Northfield, it must also be able to offer advice in these critical areas, too. This will help to tackle many of the root causes of homelessness.

### **The knock-on effects of losing the HAC services**

Losing the HAC, BSWAID and MH would have an enormous detrimental effect on Northfield. I regularly see people coming in to Northfield Baptist Church seeking support or advice on homelessness. I know that many other community groups in Northfield have the same issues to deal with on a daily basis, too. With such a drastic cut in services, this will only increase, regardless of the effectiveness of signposting to other locations. Every single person I see is vulnerable to some degree, largely because of (though not limited to) finances, poor mental health or confidence. For these reasons, if the alternative option is to get in to Birmingham City Centre, I have serious reservations about how many of them would even attempt this.

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<sup>4</sup> Northfield District Profile, Birmingham City Council, 2014, p19

## **An alternative homelessness advice solution: a community-led proposal**

My understanding is that there is a small sum of money (potentially £30,000) which could be utilised in a flexible way to commission services needed by the District. I understand this spend would be directed by District members.

**Taking into account the concerns I outline above, I would like to propose that a revised homelessness service be retained in Northfield, but which appears in a different form.**

### **Format of revised service**

The service would cover the following areas of support, and would run from a number of locations:-

<b>Support service</b>	<b>Run by</b>	<b>Tackling</b>
<i>Homelessness advice &amp; signposting</i>	Floating HAC adviser	Homelessness
<i>BSWAID</i>	BSWAID	Domestic violence
<i>MH</i>	MH	Homelessness for young people
<i>Budgeting &amp; debt advice</i>	CAP/ alternative provider	Financial budgeting
Signposting to other sources of support	Freephone location (see below)	Lack of awareness of services
Bus pass provision (to get to HAC)	Freephone location	Lack of ability to travel to Central Birmingham HAC
Foodbank referral	Freephone location	Food poverty

This support service would be made up of two strands:-

#### **1. Immediate freephone advice**

The Northfield area would house a number of 'Freephone locations' whereby an individual could present themselves and immediately contact the support service they require (highlighted in italics in the above list). This would be available to anyone who has immediate homeless (or potentially so) concerns, or who has domestic violence issues and would give immediate support without the need to travel in to Birmingham necessarily. The locations would also stock a small supply of bus passes/means to travel which could be distributed at the discretion of the freephone location, and have facilities to signpost individuals to the help they need if it covers other aspects of life. They would also act as referrers to the local foodbanks (this is already in place). The *Visit Northfield* shop, Northfield Baptist Church and Northfield Ecocentre have all expressed interest in offering this, along with various other locations.

## **2. An appointment-based advice session**

Appointments would then be available to be booked, whereby an adviser would be able to see any of the italicised names above. They would be retained at a central location, with the additional benefit of being contactable on the phone outside of appointments.

### **Costs for revised service**

Initial costs would include installation and use of freephones for connecting to the HAC, and advertising the service. Ongoing costs would include the HAC adviser salary, any costs associated with BSWAID and MH contracts, and bus passes/Foodbank referrals as required.

### **Funding required for revised service**

This would require some level of funding from the District (I understand some money is potentially available which is allocated to homelessness services in Northfield). This funding would be combined with funding sourced from alternative locations (grant or lottery funding, for example).

### **Summary**

I recognise that the issues are far broader than this document does justice. However, this document intends to offer an alternative solution retaining significant services within Northfield to help tackle issues of homelessness, domestic violence and poverty, all of which are recognised as significant within the area. I would value an opportunity to discuss this proposal further with you.

Rev. Dave Tubby

Northfield Baptist Church

On behalf of the Northfield Community Stakeholders group

24<sup>th</sup> March, 2014

4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR, RUSKIN CHAMBERS, 191 CORPORATION STREET, BIRMINGHAM, B4 6RP | DX 23525 Birmingham 3  
T: 0121 685 8595 | F: 0121 236 5121 | Email: office@communitylawpartnership.co.uk  
Visit our Website: www.communitylawpartnership.co.uk

## Homeless & Pre-Tenancy Services

23/12/2015

Dear Sirs,

We are currently engaged in judicial review proceedings against Birmingham City Council in respect of what we assert is unlawful homeless gatekeeping and systematic failures in homeless procedures. The title of the case is *The Queen on the application of (1) Rachel Edwards, (2) Vernica Cole, (3) Yasmin Saeed, (4) Marian Noworol* – Claim Numbers CO/1518/2015, CO/1520/2015, CO/2045/2015 & CO/2177/2015 respectively.

The matter was heard in the High Court, Birmingham, over 5 days from 7 – 11 December 2015. A final day is scheduled for hearing on 26 January 2016.

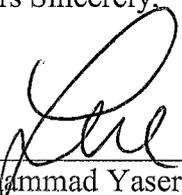
Further details can be obtained from the Integrated Service Head of the Homeless & Pre Tenancy Services Team being your Mr Jim Crawshaw.

In these circumstances, we would suggest that you delay in submitting any consultation report to the Cabinet for a final decision on the matter until the above proceedings have concluded. Clearly, the outcome of the case could have a significant impact upon your proposals. We propose that a further period of 7 weeks after 26<sup>th</sup> January 2016 is provided in order for us to consider our position and to consider further matters in relation to the new 'one location' system.

Please find attached a completed consultation form in which we have detailed our views.

We hope to hear from you soon.

Yours Sincerely,

  
Mohammad Yaser

## **Birmingham Housing Advice Service consultation**

### **Overview**

The City Council is continuing to strive to improve its services for homeless households in Birmingham.

Housing Advice Centres are presently co-located in four Customer Service Centres and we are therefore consulting on changes to this service. The service provided by the Youth Hub (provision for single young people aged 16-25 is not affected by this proposal.)

The Housing Advice Service provides assistance with joining the Council Housing list, discussing housing options, seeking temporary accommodation and assistance with Homelessness or Homelessness Prevention.

### **Why We Are Consulting**

In the current climate the Council is reviewing all services to ensure they best meet the needs of the citizens of Birmingham. Historically, Housing Advice and Homelessness has been delivered alongside the Council's Neighbourhood Advice Service. We recognise that the current approach has not always led to a consistent service for customers and a small number have experienced delays and frustrations with the service they receive.

In seeking to develop an improved service, consideration has also been given to the significant savings required within the Neighbourhood Advice Service for 2015-16.

We are confident that the proposed changes to the service will bring about improvements such as allowing the service to increase the availability of appointments as well as improving the level of service for Households threatened with homelessness.

However, we also acknowledge that such changes can bring with them concerns from citizens and we may not have identified all of the potential impacts upon our customers. We also recognise that customers are well placed to suggest other improvements that we may not have thought of.

Therefore we are undertaking public consultation to get as much feedback on our proposals as we can to inform our decision making as we move forward.

### **The proposals on which we are seeking your views:**

#### The Housing Advice Service

The Housing Advice service is presently based in 4 Customer Service Centres at Sparkbrook, Newtown, and Erdington & Northfield. It is proposed to reorganise the service to be delivered, from a single location at Newtown Customer Service Centre, Birmingham. This new single Housing Advice Centre will have more advisors on duty and additional available interviews. There is no planned reduction in accessibility to specialist Housing & Homelessness advisors via the telephone and long term we anticipate improved access to housing advice available via phone and web.

This proposal is not based on the Homeless and Pre-Tenancy Service saving money and we are not looking to reduce resources available to the service at this present moment. We believe that one centre will be able to deliver a more consistent service through centralising

our staff and expertise. This will take place alongside improvements to our phone service and further enhancement of online services. This approach is inline with that being taken by other similar authorities.

The Newtown location is proposed for its central location and because it sits in an area of the highest demand for Housing Advice Services. It is the most evenly accessible of the four present locations for people across the city to get to and meets the space requirements to accommodate the service. This proposal follows exploration of alternate options; these have been considered however none have been found to be viable. Alternate options which we considered included:

1. *Do nothing and stay as we are:*

After consideration, it was concluded that if the Neighbourhood Advice staff are to be reduced, it would be necessary to balance this with an enhanced ability on the part of the Housing Advice Service to offer more appointments, ensure that the most consistent service is available and secure the high quality decisions which are needed, particularly in the area of homelessness, all of which objectives are in any event desirable in their own right. This option was therefore not found to be viable.

2. *Move Housing Advice Delivery to a two centre model:*

Upon further exploration it was concluded that this option would still require more Neighbourhood Advice Service staff in support than those actually available or would require additional resources for the Homeless and Pre-Tenancy service. It wouldn't create sufficient increased capacity and would not fully resolve issues around consistency or flexibility of staff cover. This option was not considered viable in view of this.

3. *Relocate the Housing Advice Service to a single site in Birmingham City Centre:*

This was explored however the Council has no suitable building currently available to use and an evaluation of renting a private building recognised that we would incur significant yearly costs as well as one off set up costs which are unlikely to be sustainable and thus this option was not considered viable.

As part of these proposals we are consulting with and seeking the views of citizens of Birmingham and users of our services along with professionals delivering advice in these areas of work.

# Birmingham Housing Advice - Future proposals consultation



The Council are currently consulting on the Housing Advice service delivered from Customer Service Centres. This questionnaire will enable us to better understand the views of those using the centres. If you have any questions regarding this consultation please email [AdviceServiceConsultation@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:AdviceServiceConsultation@birmingham.gov.uk)

## 1. Which centre have you visited today?

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Erdington Customer Service Centre | <input type="checkbox"/> Northfield Customer Service Centre            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newtown Customer Service Centre   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sparkbrook Customer Service Centre |

## 2. What service did you come in for today?

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Join Housing Register | <input type="checkbox"/> Bring in paperwork             | <input type="checkbox"/> Housing Advice |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Use phone or Computer | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Present as Homeless | <input type="checkbox"/> Other          |

## 3. How did you get here today?

- |                                  |  |                                       |                                  |
|----------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> On foot | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> By Car | <input type="checkbox"/> By Bus/Train | <input type="checkbox"/> By bike |
|----------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|

## 4. How long was your journey?

- |  |   |                                    |                                      |
|--|---|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> less than 15 mins | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 15-30mins | <input type="checkbox"/> 30-45mins | <input type="checkbox"/> over 45mins |
|--|---|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|

## 5. Before you came here today did you try to find information...

- By calling our customer service line ( 0121 303 7410)
- By looking at our Birmingham City Council or Birmingham Housing Options website ([www.birminghamhousingoptions.org.uk](http://www.birminghamhousingoptions.org.uk))

## 6. Thinking about what you came in for today could we have dealt with this in any other way listed below?

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> By an improved website with clearer on line help and advice | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> By allowing documents to be emailed in to us |
| <input type="checkbox"/> By an arranged call back or interview by phone                         | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> By allowing documents to be posted in to us  |

## 7. Including today how many times have you been into the centre in the past year?

- |                            |                            |                            |                            |                            |                               |   |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> 6-10 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 10+ |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|---|

## 8. To help us understand the areas using our service please can we have the post code of your current/most recent address (Optional)

B4 6RP

## Proposed changes to the service

It is being proposed that Housing and Homelessness Advice moves to being delivered from a single location at Newtown Customer Service Centre, Birmingham with more advisors on duty and additional available interviews. There would also be improved advice available via phone and web.

### 9. If we went to a single Housing Advice Centre what if any concerns would you have about this?

### 10. Please tell us how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about how you might access housing and homelessness advice in the future?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not sure/Not Applicable	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I would still be able to get to the centre in Newtown	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would use the web or phone to get the service I need instead.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would be able to get help from another advice service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a support worker or other professional who could help me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would need additional support to enable me to get to Newtown	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### 11. How do you think we could make it easier for you to get the housing and homelessness support you might need? Any other comments on our proposals?

### 12. The characteristics below are protected. This means that there is protection for people who identify with them against discrimination based on that characteristic. Please tick appropriate boxes (if any apply) which you believe might impact upon your ability to travel to Newtown?

- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Your age                | <input type="checkbox"/> Your disability     | <input type="checkbox"/> Your race                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Your marital status     | <input type="checkbox"/> If you are pregnant | <input type="checkbox"/> Your Sexual Orientation   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Your religion or belief | <input type="checkbox"/> Your gender         | <input type="checkbox"/> None of these apply to me |

## Data Protection & Privacy

Birmingham City Council has a privacy statement. We will process any personal data given in relation to this consultation for the purposes of:

- Evaluating the answers to the survey
- Reviewing responses to the proposals contained within

In addition, we will hold and process your personal data in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and our full privacy notice which is available from [www.birmingham.gov.uk/privacy](http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/privacy)

This survey is anonymous and does not ask for your name, full address or any contact details. Your postcode (and contact details in the case of professionals delivering advice) is the only personal data requested throughout the completion of this survey (although the provision of this is not compulsory).

This data is requested only to analyse geographical spread of our customer base and respondents (and for any identified follow up work for professionals delivering advice).

Responses to these questions will not be included in public feedback on this consultation.

However, as part of other public consultation and the feedback we provide on this matter, responses you provide to other questions may be made public. Therefore please take care not to enter any personal details, information or opinions that you are not happy to be made available in the public domain. We would ask that you take particular care when entering free text in your responses as, depending on the complexity and number of respondents, we are unlikely to be able to remove any personal data contained in these responses, prior to providing public feedback.

If you have any questions, please contact the nominated email address contained within the Be Heard consultation page at [www.birminghambeheard.org.uk/people-1/housingadvice-service](http://www.birminghambeheard.org.uk/people-1/housingadvice-service)

## Response type

### \*1. Are you responding as:

- A user of Housing Advice Centres within the last 12 months?
- An organisation or professional delivering advice?
- A Birmingham resident but non-user of these services?

## Users of Housing Advice Services (Within the last 12 months)

**2. What services have you visited our Housing Advice Centres for in the last 12 months (please select all that apply)?**

- Use phone or Computer       Join the Housing Register       Present as Homeless  
 Bring in paperwork       Housing Advice       Other

**3. How did you normally get there?**

- On foot       By bike  
 By Car/Motorcycle       Other  
 By Bus/Train

**4. On your last visit to a Housing Advice Centre, how long was your journey?**

- less than 15 mins       31-45mins  
 15-30mins       Over 45 Mins

**5. Before you visited in person, did you try to find information by any of the following means...(please select all that apply)**

- By calling the Birmingham City Council or Housing contact centre?  
 By looking at the Birmingham City Council or Birmingham Housing Options website?  
 By contacting another agency first i.e. advice agency or charity

**6. Thinking about the last time you visited our service, could we have dealt with this in any other way listed below? (please select all that apply)**

- By an improved website with clearer on line help and advice  
 By an arranged call back or interview by phone  
 By allowing documents to be emailed in to us  
 By allowing documents to be posted in to us

**7. Approximately how many times have you been into a Housing Advice Centre in the past year?**

- 1       5  
 2       6-10  
 3       10+  
 4

**8. What is your postcode so we can learn how far you travelled (Optional):**

B4 6RP

## Housing Advice Service - Feedback

It is being proposed that Housing and Homelessness Advice moves to being delivered from a single location at Newtown Customer Service Centre, Birmingham with more advisors on duty and additional available interviews. There would also be improved advice available via phone and web.

This proposal follows exploration of alternate options; these have been considered however none have been found to be viable. Alternate options which we considered included:

**1. Do nothing and stay as we are:**

After consideration, it was concluded that if the Neighbourhood Advice staff are to be reduced, it would be necessary to balance this with an enhanced ability on the part of the Housing Advice Service to offer more appointments, ensure that the most consistent service is available and secure the high quality decisions which are needed, particularly in the area of homelessness, all of which objectives are in any event desirable in their own right. This option was therefore not found to be viable.

**2. Move Housing Advice Delivery to a two centre model:**

Upon further exploration it was concluded that this option would still require more Neighbourhood Advice Service staff in support than those actually available or would require additional resources for the Homeless and Pre-Tenancy service. It wouldn't create sufficient increased capacity and would not fully resolve issues around consistency or flexibility of staff cover. This option was not considered viable in view of this.

**3. Relocate the Housing Advice Service to a single site in Birmingham City Centre:**

This was explored however the Council has no suitable building currently available to use and an evaluation of renting a private building recognised that we would incur significant yearly costs as well as one off set up costs which are unlikely to be sustainable and thus this option was not considered viable.

**9. Do you have any comments or feedback regarding the alternate proposals that were considered?**

In relation to alternate approach number 1, this is the best approach to take as the situation currently stands, even 4 access points are still not proving to be enough for people to access, therefore causing access problems. People are demanding more access points as opposed to less, or as being proposed, just one central access point. Travel can be quite expensive and some individuals would prefer to be at walking distance from their closest neighbourhood office.

**10. Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the proposal to centralise Homelessness Advice at one central location at Newtown Customer Service Centre**

Agree

Not sure

No opinion

Disagree

**11. If we went to a single Housing Advice Centre what if any concerns would you have about this?**

See Question 20

**12. Please tell us how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about how you might access housing and homelessness advice in the future, in light of the proposals?**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable
I would still be able to get to the centre in Newtown	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would use the web or phone to get the service I need instead.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would be able to get help from another advice service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a support worker or other professional who could help me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**13. How do you think we could make it easier for you to get the housing and homelessness support you might need?**

Please see attached 'Question 13'

**14. Do you have any other comments on our proposals or benefits you see from them?**

CSA's and Homeless officer's should carry out home visits in certain situation, or where individuals are vulnerable, such as where a property is deemed unfit to occupy or where an individual is unable to visit the local HAC or neighbourhood office because of an illness or vulnerability. This would provide the CSA/Homeless officer with a better view on how the individuals case should be assessed, as they would be viewing the physical state of the property themselves and can discuss any issues which may need addressing.

### **Question 13**

The introduction of more HAC's, so individuals can gain easier access to help and support. There needs to be more CSA's trained so the system can move faster. Provide a better and more user friendly online and telephone service, as the current service is not very helpful nor does it provide individuals who need help with any proper help, advice or support. As well as online services, communication should be made better, for example, when individuals visit a HAC, rather than the individual having to make numerous calls and visits after an initial visit, or waiting for a letter in the post, CSA's or Homeless Officer's should endeavour to call the individual back and update them on the progress of their claim or query. E-mail is widely used today and in this day and age it is the most commonly used form of instant communication. It would be very beneficial to individuals to receive e-mail updates as to the progress of their claims or applications, and a responding to e-mail service would also be beneficial.

## Organisations and Professionals delivering advice

The Housing Advice service is proposing that Housing and Homelessness Advice moves from the four present sites (Sparkbrook, Northfield, Newtown and Erdington) to being delivered from a single location at Newtown Customer Service Centre, Birmingham with more advisors on duty and additional available interviews. There would also be improved advice available via phone and web.

### 15. Are you responding on behalf of an organisation or are these your individual views

I am responding on behalf of my organisation

These are my individual views

### 16. Please provide some details about your organisation including the type of service it provides?

The Community Law Partnership  
Law Firm - Providing Legal Housing Advice

### 17. If you are happy for us to contact you regarding any feedback you wish to provide, please provide a means of contact (telephone or email with a contact name) below:

The Community Law Partnership  
4th Floor  
Ruskin Chambers  
191 Corporation Street

It is being proposed that Housing and Homelessness Advice moves from its four present centres (Newtown, Sparkbrook, Erdington & Northfield) to being delivered from a single location at Newtown Customer Service Centre, Birmingham with more advisors and available interviews. There would also be improved advice available via phone and web.

The proposal in relation to Homelessness & Housing Advice follows exploration of alternate options, these have been considered however none have been found to be viable. Alternate options which we considered included:

1. Do nothing and stay as we are:

After consideration, it was concluded that if the Neighbourhood Advice staff are to be reduced, it would be necessary to balance this with an enhanced ability on the part of the Housing Advice Service to offer more appointments, ensure that the most consistent service is available and secure the high quality decisions which are needed, particularly in the area of homelessness, all of which objectives are in any event desirable in their own right. This option was therefore not found to be viable.

2. Move Housing Advice Delivery to a two centre model:

Upon further exploration it was concluded that this option would still require more Neighbourhood Advice Service staff in support than those actually available or would require additional resources for the Homeless and Pre-Tenancy service. It wouldn't create sufficient increased capacity and would not fully resolve issues around consistency or flexibility of staff cover. This option was not considered viable in view of this.

3. Relocate the Housing Advice Service to a single site in Birmingham City Centre:

This was explored however the Council has no suitable building currently available to use and an evaluation of renting a private building recognised that we would incur significant yearly costs as well as one off set up costs which are unlikely to be sustainable and thus this option was not considered viable.

**18. Do you have any comments or feedback regarding the alternate proposals that were considered?**

In relation to alternate approach number 1, this is the best approach to take, because as the situation currently stands, even 4 access points are still not proving to be enough for people to access and fully utilise the Homelessness Service, therefore causing access problems. People are demanding more access points as opposed to less, or as being proposed, just one central access point. Travel can be quite expensive and some individuals would prefer to be at walking distance from their closest neighbourhood office.

**19. Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the proposal to centralise Homelessness Advice at one central location at Newtown Customer Service Centre**

Agree

Not sure

No opinion

Disagree

**20. If we went to a single Housing Advice Centre what if any concerns would you have about this?**

Please see attached 'Question 20'

**21. Please provide any comments on how these changes could impact upon the clients you work with?**

Please see attached 'Question 21'

**22. What benefits can you see from the model?**

None

**23. Given the current resource restrictions, do you have any further comments which could improve the service?**

Please see attached 'Recommendations for Improvement to Homeless Service'

## **Question 20**

When our practice was first set-up in Birmingham, homeless applications were accepted at any of the council's numerous "neighbourhood offices" based throughout the city and in most if not all areas. There were approximately 30 offices. Decisions on homeless applications were made within individual offices. There followed a period when the power to decide homeless applications was removed from local offices and placed in the hands of officers based centrally within a "homeless service". Applications were completed at local offices but then channelled to a central team for a decision to be made. This structure was then dismantled and replaced with the current structure which I will now describe.

No longer are applications taken at local offices. The Council will now only agree to investigate an application if it is made to one of four 'customer service centres' one of which does not accept 'on the day' applications and all of which operate appointment systems.

There has therefore been a narrowing of the opportunity for a person to seek assistance (the number of offices has fallen from approximately 30 to 4 already). A person who might at one time be able to walk to the end of their road to make an application may now have to travel many miles across the city.

Corresponding with this narrowing opportunity is the fact that there is less access to obtaining assistance at the customer service centres.

## **Question 21**

From the personal experiences of our law firm, and in dealing with homeless clients, it can be said that on the previous occasion when neighbourhood offices were reduced from 30 to 4, it caused a considerable amount of disruption for clients and became a difficult process for clients in terms of access. Some clients live too far from even one of the 4 current HAC's, and travelling to these takes a considerable amount of time, and can be quite costly to some individuals who are not financially capable of making the journey to the HAC.

Reducing the current 4 HAC's to 1 Central HAC would mean that clients or individuals would then need to travel to Newtown. It is stated in your consultation document that Newtown is an office which is central and the travel distance would remain the same from a number of neighbourhoods. However, if an individual is living in Acocks Green and wishes to make a homeless application, this would mean having to catch two or three buses to the destination, or paying around £20 for a taxi, and in some cases, clients would need to take their children and family with them as they are homeless on the day, which would mean more expenditure.

Furthermore, clients and individuals would prefer to be able to access a HAC which is close enough for them to make a short journey to, and as the situation currently stands, even having 4 HAC's is proving to be a struggle and strain for our clients, therefore it would not make the matter any better or easier for our clients if access points were limited from 4 to 1. It would be the suggestion from our organisation and from clients have already dealt with, that more HAC's are introduced as well as an improved system for contact via telephone and online services. More help and support should be offered by CSA's and information should be readily available and easily accessible, as our experiences till date have proved that the system to obtain information is not easily accessible nor is it readily available.

## **Recommendations for Improvement to Homeless Service**

The following are suggested steps for improving Birmingham City Council's Homeless Service having regard to failings in the four areas identified by the Local Government Ombudsman in its report: *Homelessness: How Councils can ensure Justice for Homeless People – Focus Report: Learning the Lessons from Complaints*.

### **1. Homeless Prevention (Where no concurrent action taken under Part 7)**

1.1 Take homeless prevention measures in conjunction with and not instead of the steps required to be taken under Part 7 Housing Act 1996.

1.2. Make organisational changes/system changes to enable this to happen.

1.3. Provide improved training.

### **2. Failure to Enquire**

2.1. Make organisational/system changes to enable officers to identify actual or potential homelessness when new applicants join the housing register.

2.2 Register all applications at point of first contact.

2.3. Put in place a system for registering all applications for assistance (registration not simply to run from the date an application form is completed/date of an appointment).

2.4. To ensure that timescales for notification of decisions run from date of first registration and to ensure that such timescales are in line with the guidance provided to Local Authorities in the Homelessness Code of Guidance.

2.5. To provide training in relation to the homeless duties and the low threshold for

investigating homelessness and providing accommodation.

### **3. Difficulty in Making Homeless Applications**

3.1. Overcome difficulties by making organisational/system changes as necessary.

3.2. Provide a single coherent leaflet explaining the rights of homeless applicants and explaining clearly how an individual can engage with those rights providing relevant contact and access details.

3.3 To produce a dedicated website page dealing with rights and duties under Housing Act 1996.

3.4. To provide direct telephone access to applicants/their advisers to register a homeless application.

3.5. Otherwise to effectively publicise homeless services in the city.

3.6. Provide better access for making homeless applications. An applicant should be able to register an application for homeless assistance at any of the Council's numerous housing offices instead of at any four service centres – make structural changes as necessary.

### **4. Non Provision of Interim Accommodation**

4.1. In all cases to consider interim accommodation provision on the same day as initial application.

4.2. Not to confine the provision of interim accommodation to 'roofless' cases only. Make system/structural changes as necessary.

4.3. System for monitoring the need to provide interim accommodation throughout the decision making process.

## **Training/Homeless Procedures Manual**

Individual Housing Officers would be assisted if there was a comprehensive homeless procedures manual or similar document. The Council has never had a procedures manual (or at least has never disclosed one). The manual could include key information about rights and duties and about the systems and procedures in place to ensure that rights are upheld and duties are lawfully discharged. On a practical level the manual could include details of relevant homeless officers, contact and access details etc. This would lead to greater conformity in decision making and improved transparency.

## Equalities Data

Birmingham City Council has responsibilities under the Equalities Act (2010) to work to prevent against people based on protected characteristics. To assist in this we like to gather data regarding the demographics of people providing us with feedback and responding to consultations.

This information is not mandatory and if you do not wish to provide such information a 'Prefer not to say' option is available on each question.

**24. Which age group applies to you?**

**\*25. What is your sex?**

## Equalities Data

26. As a woman, are you pregnant, on maternity leave or returning from maternity leave?

\*27. Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last for 12 months or more?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

## Equalities Data

**28. If yes, do any of these conditions or illnesses affect you in any of the following areas? (More than one answer is acceptable)**

- 1. Vision (e.g. blindness or partial sight)
- 2. Hearing (e.g. deafness or partial hearing)
- 3. Mobility (e.g. walking short distances or climbing stairs)
- 4. Dexterity (e.g. lifting and carrying and carrying objects, using a keyboard)
- 5. Learning or understanding or concentrating
- 6. Memory
- 7. Mental Health
- 8. Stamina or breathing or fatigue
- 9. Socially or behaviourally (e.g. associated with autism, attention deficit disorder or Asperger's syndrome)
- 10. Prefer not to say

Other (please specify)

**29. Ethnicity: What is your ethnic group?**

**30. Sexual Orientation: What is your sexual orientation?**

Heterosexual

**31. Religion What is your religion or belief?**

Muslim - Islam

**32. What is your marital or same sex civil partnership status?**

Single

**33. Do you have caring responsibilities?**

Yes

## Finish

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your responses will be reviewed and considered as we develop our proposals and make decisions as to what will happen next.

**From:** Councillor Brett O'Reilly  
**Sent:** Friday, December 04, 2015 11:36 PM  
**To:** Councillor John Cotton; Jim Crawshaw; Chris Jordan; [richard.burden.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:richard.burden.mp@parliament.uk);  
[burdenr@parliament.uk](mailto:burdenr@parliament.uk)  
**Subject:** RE: Consultation on the /future of Homeless Services and Neighbourhood Advice Service

Hi John / All,

Thank you for the email.

Whilst I appreciate entirely the current financial situation, I would be deeply concerned at the prospect of the homeless service being relocated to one centre. A centre of excellence is all well and good, but I struggle to imagine how difficult it would be for me to get to Newtown, particularly if I had no funds or transport.

Newtown, for many in the far reaches of Birmingham, might as well be in another region for the access that citizens trying to use the service will have. This is not just from a Northfield perspective, but from many other wards, I suspect including Shard End.

I recall raising similar concerns at EMLS when I was at the helm for Northfield, and I would like to think that the concerns that I raised then were duly considered.

It would seem to make sense to me to have staff working at the four main hubs that will be in operation anyway, even if this means working peripatetically moving forward.

I have copied in Richard Burden MP as I think it likely that he will wish to contribute.

I can see the logic in four main hubs for NAIS and I know that much work has gone into this. I would urge reconsideration on the Homeless service, as I believe that with an equally innovative solution, we can maintain a diminished, yet comprehensive homelessness offer.

Kind Regards

Brett

Councillor Brett O'Reilly

Labour Councillor for Northfield

0121 303 2039

Tweet: [@bret4northfield](https://twitter.com/bret4northfield)

Facebook: [Bret4northfield](https://www.facebook.com/Bret4northfield)

The Council House  
Victoria Square  
B1 1BB

From: Councillor Josh Jones  
Sent: Friday, December 04, 2015 11:32 AM  
To: Jim Crawshaw; Chris Jordan  
Subject: Homelessness and NAIS consultation

Hi Both,

As I said at exec members last week, it is extremely unfortunate that we are where we are, but I think that what you have put together is the best use of the available resources that we have.

I would prefer it if we had more staff, offices and more points of access to the homelessness service, but I think having specific hubs with the homelessness team centralised in one building is the best bet with the lack of staff we have.

Kind Regards

Josh

Sent from my iPad

**From:** David Hughes

**Sent:** Friday, December 04, 2015 3:36 PM

**To:** Jim Crawshaw

**Cc:** Chris Jordan; Doreen Brown; Lynda Lea; Gillian Mcpherson; Hamood Saleh; Kathryn Rider ([Kathryn.Rider@birminghamunison.co.uk](mailto:Kathryn.Rider@birminghamunison.co.uk)); Lisa Taylor; Mohammed Zubair; Taheir Mahmood

**Subject:** Housing Advice Consultation

I have for the first time seen the consultation Questionnaire and accompany Information sheet. There is no question on the Questionnaire about whether the public would prefer to keep the existing 4 site model or move to 3, 2 or 1 so in that sense it is loaded to produce the response required.

The accompanying information is much worse because it makes assertions that are unfounded and even untrue, to support moving to one office in Newtown. For this reason I think I would urge UNISON members not to issue the information sheet in its current format.

I am very disappointed that these documents have been finalised without any trade union involvement, regards David Hughes UNISON

Monday 11<sup>th</sup> January, 2016

Dear Jim Crawshaw,

**RE: PROPOSED CHANGES TO BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL HOUSING ADVICE SERVICE**

I'm writing to you in response to the consultation you are undertaking regarding Birmingham City Council (BCC)'s Housing Advice Service. I'm writing to share concerns from the Stakeholders' Group and to help you as you consider the most effective and sensible long-term solution to this important service.

We understand the sense that it makes to streamline a service which needs to remain consistent, effective, legally compliant and serve all of Birmingham. We understand, too, that this is against a backdrop of unprecedented financial pressure for all of BCC. Taking all this into consideration, I wish to share three points which I hope you will find helpful and constructive.

**1. The most vulnerable need to be protected as the priority**

This is perhaps our greatest concern and has been raised by every single service provider and supporter across Northfield that has been in touch with us. When someone presents themselves as homeless, this is for a whole variety of reasons. However, for a significant proportion that we come into contact with, the mental health of the individual is poor. To expect an individual in such a vulnerable situation to travel to an unknown location the other side of the city is very unlikely to result in them doing so successfully. Logistically, they may be offered a free bus-pass but that is not the hurdle that prevents them making the journey; it is their poor mental health.

Whatever the service looks like, it is essential that the most vulnerable are protected and are able to receive the appropriate support and advice as soon as is practically possible with as little disruption as is possible. Clearly, homeless applications will need to be processed in person, so there appears to be little way to avoid that physical journey. However, local community can play its part in sign-posting, advising, supporting and guiding to ensure the vulnerable individual is helped quickly.

**2. Access to the service is essential**

In order to make this revised service effective, the critical aspect is that it must be readily accessible for everyone.

Reducing the number of HACs from four to one will increase the pressure and reliance on access to services through other means. Your website will need to be able to effectively and quickly direct people to the appropriate support. The reliance on telephone support will increase substantially, too. This will require a strong, experienced team to be available and for phones to also be readily available. Northfield's HAC already has an in-demand set of freephone telephones for advice. If the number of Neighbourhood Offices is also due to decrease (which the separate consultation is proposing), then the demand for advice on the telephone (regardless of the topic) is only going to increase.

**Chair:**

Rev. D. Tubby, Northfield Baptist Church, 789 Bristol Road South, Northfield B31 2NQ

Tel: 0121 4766678

**Vice-chair:**

R. Debenham, Northfield Community Partnership, 693 Bristol Road South, Northfield B31 2JT

Tel: 0121 4112157

We would also encourage you to increase the number of telephone points in the Neighbourhood Offices around the city, and also consider placing additional telephone points in third-sector organisations (such as churches or community buildings) around the city, too. Whilst it could be problematic inputting a phone-line, logistically it will relieve a lot of pressure on existing BCC staff and enable residents to access services from a much broader range of locations. I could give you at least six locations in Northfield which would take one such phone if you would find that helpful.

It is also imperative that such a telephone advice service is free-phone. The one consistent problem for those facing homelessness is a lack of funds. To offer this readily-available service on a free basis will ensure that this advice is accessible to all and not just those who could afford the initial call.

### **3. It is essential to partner with existing, experienced local organisations**

In the Northfield district there is a breadth of experience and expertise around homelessness. Organisations such as South Birmingham Young Homeless Project already work closely with statutory services around Birmingham and in order to continue protecting the most vulnerable this needs to continue.

We can help sign-post or act as a support post and we would value a dialogue with you in this regard. Clearly, this would need to be tailored to the Northfield district, but I would urge you to actively seek out organisations across the city (particularly those close to existing Homeless Advice Centres (HACs)) where you could use this expertise to support any transition you are seeking to make. In order for any proposed changes to the homelessness service to be implemented effectively, it is imperative to actively engage with these organisations. This will help your immediate costs and will also greatly improve the sharing of experience and expertise across Birmingham.

In March 2014, we submitted a proposal to BCC to help it reconsider how it used the third-sector in its offering of advice and support towards homelessness. I include it alongside this letter because, whilst some of the circumstances have changed, our proposal seems to still be consistent with ways that BCC is seeking to engage with local stakeholders. Perhaps it can be of use now.

Finally, let me reiterate how grateful I am to you for your offer to meet with relevant third-sector organisations to discuss the practical implications of any such transition and see how we can work with you in that regard. I will seek availability from relevant, interested parties and come back to you separately with potential dates.

In the meantime, please be assured of our support and desire to work with you to help ensure this vital service remains effective for the city of Birmingham.

With best regards,



Rev. D. Tubby  
Chair, Northfield Stakeholders' Group  
Minister, Northfield Baptist Church

cc: Richard Burden MP  
Helen Sephton (South Birmingham Young Homeless Project)

**Chair:**

Rev. D. Tubby, Northfield Baptist Church, 789 Bristol Road South, Northfield B31 2NQ

Tel: 0121 4766678

**Vice-chair:**

R. Debenham, Northfield Community Partnership, 693 Bristol Road South, Northfield B31 2JT

Tel: 0121 4112157

Jim Crawshaw  
Integrated Service Head Homeless & Pre-Tenancy Services  
Birmingham City Council  
Sent via Email

11 January 2016

Dear Mr Crawshaw

**Re: Birmingham Housing Advice Service consultation**

I am writing in response to the above consultation and specifically the proposals to relocate four customer service centres to one hub in Newtown, Birmingham.

Having looked at the proposals I have a number of concerns about the proposed housing advice changes. I'm very concerned about the proposals to deliver housing and pre-tenancy advice from one location which would effectively see the existing customer service centres in Sparkbrook, Newtown, Erdington and Northfield relocated to Newtown. Many of my constituents who need to access advice regarding how to get on the council housing list, housing options and temporary accommodation are vulnerable and I believe that by moving the services to one location, the Council will effectively be discriminating against those who don't live in Newtown.

As you will be aware, my constituency is located in South Birmingham and in order for my constituents travel to Newtown they would need to get two or three buses. Many of the people who need to access housing advice are often those most in need i.e. disabled people, domestic violence victims (who are often limited to which areas they can go to in the city), single parents with children, young people and homeless people. By relocating local customer service centres to Newtown, many of my constituents will find it very difficult to access the services they need as Newtown is not in close proximity and many are likely to struggle to afford transport to Newtown from South Birmingham. I believe that the current proposals discriminate against people in my constituency and favours those who live in the inner city such as Nechells, Aston, Handsworth and Perry Barr.

I note in the consultation document that there is no planned reductions to specialist housing and homelessness advisors via the telephone and there are plans to increase the number of advisors in the proposed Newtown centre. I can't see how there won't be a cut to resources and in particular, staff if you intend to move them all to one premises. I also note that a relocation to a single site in Birmingham City Centre was considered but no such building could be identified and the Council cannot afford to rent a building privately. I do not see how the housing advice service will be improved under the current proposals and I believe that if implemented, many of the most vulnerable in my constituency and across the city would struggle to access the service, both for financial and proximity reasons.

I would appreciate it if you could take the serious and practical concerns I have raised into consideration and provide an update on the outcome of the consultation once complete.

If you require any further information please contact my office on 0121 443 3911.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve M'Leese". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large 'S' and 'M'.

Labour MP for Birmingham Selly Oak

On 8 Dec 2015, at 11:59, BURDEN, Richard <[BURDENR@parliament.uk](mailto:BURDENR@parliament.uk)> wrote:

Dear John,

I think Brett has raised valid concerns here.

As well as echoing those, you will remember that this reorganisation was a key example of the kind of thing that then Northfield Stakeholders Group raised when you came to Northfield a while ago. Basically, if these initiatives are treated by the City Council as essentially internal reorganisations of its own departments, they cannot meet the challenges ahead, particularly in the current financial environment. How the City Council configures its own contribution to community advice services (on homelessness and more generally) should be related to what other partners are operating - or could operate- in different areas, to differing kinds of need and community resilience in different parts of the city, and to what local resources are available, including how capital assets such as office and other venues can be used and shared most effectively.

As far as I know, I have not had your e-mail directly and I have only seen it because Brett has copied his reply to me. Therefore, I do not know if there was any enclosure attached to what you sent out to Councillors. I may, therefore, be missing something. If that is not the case, however, on the basis of what was in the main body of your e-mail, I can't see grounds for optimism that the kinds of things we discussed when you visited Northfield being reflected in the way this reorganisation is proceeding. Developing local partnerships that work has to be about more than treating other stakeholders as consultees to an internal City Council reorganisation.

Sorry to be blunt about this but I hope you will see what I am getting at.

Best wishes,

Richard

**Richard Burden MP**

Birmingham Northfield

House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

t: 020 7219 2318 (Commons) / 0121 459 7804 (Constituency)

e: [richard.burden.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:richard.burden.mp@parliament.uk)

w: [www.richardburden.com](http://www.richardburden.com) | [www.FB.com/richardburden4northfield](https://www.FB.com/richardburden4northfield)

<image002.png> **Follow me on Twitter - [www.twitter.com/RichardBurdenMP](https://www.twitter.com/RichardBurdenMP)**

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