

Some Notes from a Meeting Stephen Williams: 25 Apr 09

Background

Graham Donald, the chair of the board of Crisis Centre Ministries, wrote to Stephen Williams on 25 March 2009 about some of the problems people with addiction problems in Bristol have in accessing treatment.

A meeting was arranged for 25 April 2009. Present were Stephen Williams, MP, Graham Donald (CCM Chair), Paul Hazelden (CCM General Manager) and Alan Goddard (CCM Drop-in Centre Manager).

Some basic observations and questions

There is a serious lack of funding of residential treatment for alcoholics from Bristol. There is no funding for a wet house in Bristol. Yet we fund the police to deal with the problems caused by the people who continue to drink, and who drink in the street because there is nowhere else for them to go.

There is a serious problem with Bristol's policy of sending local people in addiction only to local residential treatment. It doesn't work because once the treatment finishes, the addict is back in contact with the family, friends and associates who were involved in developing or sustaining the addiction. It is almost impossible to stay clean if the people you associate with are using, and even more difficult if (as is often the case) they are encouraging you to use.

This raises the obvious question: why does Bristol have this policy? It must contravene the best practice guidelines. We suspect the reason may be about directing money to local businesses.

Another consequence of this policy is that local authorities outside Bristol often send their addicts to treatment centres in the Bristol area. Some of these people relapse and become local addicts. Bristol does not send addicts elsewhere. So as well as reducing the chances of a successful outcome, Bristol's policy also has the effect of increasing the concentration of addicts in Bristol in comparison to the rest of the country. We wonder if any study has been undertaken of the associated costs of this inevitable consequence of this aspect of the policy.

The policy of not paying Housing Benefit directly to landlords results in many people getting into arrears with their rent, and frequently the end result is that they lose the accommodation and become homeless again.

Alcohol addiction and street drinking cost Bristol a significant amount of money, in many different ways: policing the street drinking ban is just one of them. If alcoholics could have direct access to rehabs in Bristol, this would get more people off the streets, and reduce the number of people causing a nuisance and needing medical attention. Can we quantify the cost of limited access to treatment for

alcoholics?

‘Pathways’ – the new centralised system for accessing Supporting People accommodation – is much slower than the previous system, so people are not helped as quickly, they may develop worse problems, they continue in this period to access other sources of help which the taxpayer is often paying for, and the houses have more empty places. It does not benefit anyone.

Facts and Figures

It would be helpful to know some basic facts and figures. The table below identifies a useful starting point for talking about comparative costs.

| | Alcohol Addiction | Drug Addiction |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| How many people in Bristol are addicted? | | |
| What is their cost to the taxpayer? | | |
| How many people were helped in the past year? | | |
| How much do we spend on treatment for them? | | |
| How much do we spend on residential treatment? | | |

It would also be helpful to know what Safer Bristol does, how it reaches decisions about the various aspects of its work, what the structures are, and who works for it. Who is responsible for what areas and which decisions?

In passing... we understand that Safer Bristol was responsible for getting 152 people treated last year, and we have managed to get around 300 people off the streets in the past two years.

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