



The Elms
Continual Improvement Review
September 2019

1 Annual Equality Impact Assessment

DENS is committed to promoting equality and diversity within its services. The Council and DENS continue to work closely together to ensure that the service provided is joined up and clients are provided with appropriate advice and assessment to secure accommodation.

Where DENS is not able to provide a service which may be due to the immigration status of the client or health or safety restrictions, which can relate to previous offending behaviour of the client, DENS works closely with the Council to ensure the client receives appropriate advice and intervention to prevent street homelessness.

DENS will make adjustments to service provision and provide specialist individual support to uphold diversity and equality principles. The Elms have two accessible bedrooms, which have been used through the previous 12 months for residents with mobility issues or other specialist requirements. Specialist furniture had been provided by DBC for 2 clients who, due to weight issues could not safely use a standard bed or chair.

It is mandatory for all DENS staff to complete Disability Awareness Training within one year of commencing employment and to attend as refresher course every 3 years.

2 Performance and Service Provision

DENS strives to constantly improve the service we provide for all our service users.

KPI's

Occupation Rate	99%
Percentage Of Rooms available within 24 hours	100%
Personal contribution arrears	11%
Positive Move on rate	58%
Percentage of support plans up to date	100%
Average Stay	113 Days

Move Ons

Where residents move to:

DENS Move On	25%
Social Housing	38%
Private Rent	3%
Other	2%
Friends/Family	23%

Move On: DENS Move On Service supports clients for up to 18 months in DENS managed HMO's. Each resident has a key worker who will support them to maintain their tenancy, live more independently and take the next positive step in their lives. This may include support with budgeting, finding employment and accessing health and well-being services. Clients will initially meet with their key worker once a week, as less support is required this will reduce.

Evictions

Reasons for Eviction

Drug & Alcohol	29%
Personal Contribution Arrears	39%
ASB	31%
Other	1%



Failure to pay personal contributions is now the most prevalent reason for eviction; this has increased by 18% since the previous year. We believe the introduction of Universal Credit has impacted on this.

Drug and alcohol (this would be having drug paraphernalia, drugs or alcohol either on their person or in their room) has increased by 12%. This may be due to more robust searching, including using a hand held metal detector when undertaking body searches, resulting in an increase in 'crack' pipes being found.

Clients with Additional Support Needs

With the increase in clients who have more complex and higher support needs at the Elms, it was clear that a more specialised and intense support programme was needed to support these clients to be able to access Move On services.

For the past year a number of these clients, who previously would not have been suitable or able to manage in Move On due to their support needs, have been provided with intense support programme in the Move On service.

Initially this involves daily visits from their key worker, as well as phone contact; along with help with shopping, cooking and basic household tasks. The key worker will also make contact with other community support programmes, such as Meals on Wheels. The support from the key worker will slowly reduce in line with the needs of the client, but can be reverted back to intense support if needed.

Not only does this support clients to take the next step in their lives and prepare them for when they move into social or council housing, it also frees up much needed temporary accommodation beds at the Elms.

Resettlement Work

For Elms residents moving directly into either council or social housing, DENS Resettlement Team provides up to 6 months support to manage the transition from hostel living into more independent accommodation.

This service is fundamental to reducing the 'revolving door' syndrome that happen to so many clients who leave a hostel and move into social or council



housing with limited support. This will often result in person not being able to cope, losing their tenancy and ending up either back in the hostel or homeless.

DENS have just received notification that we have been awarded a 3 year grant from the Henry Smith Trust for additional staff hours and can now commit to providing an enhanced Resettlement Service, meaning we can support clients for up to 12 months.

In the previous year, the Resettlement Team has supported 47 clients who have moved into council or social housing. Of the 47, all have maintained their tenancy agreement.

Crash-pad

The crash-pad at the Elms had previously only been available to those with a local connection for one night, whilst are waiting and/or sourcing alternative accommodation. With the increase in demand for all forms of temporary accommodation, this was reviewed and those with a local connection can now access the crash-pad until either a room at the Elms is available or an alternative form of accommodation has been identified.

The crash-pad is also available to rough sleepers and those without permanent accommodation who either by choice or due to eviction are not able/willing to access the Elms. Allowing this cohort to access the crash-pad not only means in the short term we are ensuring individuals are off the street, safe and fed; but they are engaging with DENS even in a limited way, and we can support them to access other services, in particular health services.

SWEP

Year on year, there is an increase in the number of people accessing SWEP (Severe Weather Emergency Protocol). During the winter of 2018/19 SWEP averaged 7 people a night, with though on some occasions 13 people used the facility. People do not need a local connection or recourse to public funds to access SWEP, and we have had people from neighbouring Hertfordshire boroughs, as well as Luton and Essex access the service; as well as individuals with no recourse to public funds.



This put additional pressure on our resources, with extra staff and security being required to work so we can meet the needs of the cohort in a safe environment.

The cohort who access SWEP are often rough sleepers, who have complex issues and can display quite challenging behaviour.

Cold Weather Provision

From January 2019-April 2019, DENS piloted the additional cold weather provision project. The project was funded by DBC and included:

- Extended Day Centre provision. The Day Centre opened three evenings a week, providing shelter, hot refreshments, warm clothes and advice. A taxi service was provided from the Day Centre to the Elms so attendees could access SWEP.
- Provision of clothes, sleeping bags and toiletries for those who did not want to access SWEP.
- Out-reach undertaken throughout the borough by Elms and Day Centre staff.
- Over a 3 month period 19 individuals used the service with 12 of these accessing SWEP.

Training and Development for clients

All residents have a support plan that they develop and review with their key worker. The support plan includes training and development. Where possible Elms key workers will link residents into locally based training and support providers, such as Southill Centre.

Work Experience

Residents are now being supported to access volunteer opportunities in DENS services, particularly the Foodbank.

DENS is working in partnership with Oakmann Inns, who manage the Red Lion Restaurant and Bar in Water End. Elms residents who are interested in pursuing a career in hospitality have been offered two weeks work experience at the Red Lion. As a result of this, two residents have been offered full-time employment at the Red Lion.



Social Enterprise

Over the past year, DENS have established 3 social enterprise programmes;

- Bike up-cycling project - repairing and selling second hand bikes
- Coffee cart - a mobile coffee cart, providing barrista style coffee made and served by our clients.
- House maintenance - providing basic house and garden maintenance; initially for DENS properties and moving forward to the community.

The overall aim of the social enterprise programme is short term to provide DENS clients as well as vulnerable adults in the community with a supportive environment to develop pre-employability and work skills; medium term to provide an additional income source for DENS, that can be used to further develop our social enterprise and training programme.

Whilst all three are still in their infancy, so far 28 service users have participated in the programme and the positive impact is already apparent.

As one client stated:

'Helping to set up and maintain the coffee cart has helped me to keep busy and stay sober. They help me, and I help them.'

3 Partnership Working

Partnership working is key to the success of DENS, not only at The Elms, but organisationally. This includes working in partnership with DBC, as well as other statutory and third sector organisations.

- DENS are active members of the Homelessness Forum and DENS CEO is the vice-chair
- DENS CEO chairs the Homelessness Mental Health Working Group, a sub-group of the Homelessness Forum
- A Senior Manager from DENS also attends JAG, and the PCC Rehabilitation of Offenders sub-group and Early Intervention sub-group.
- ELMs Manager is a member of HART

The Elms work closely with a number of third sector and public sector organisations, including Drug-link, Southill Centre, HYH, CGL, and Hightown Housing.



Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Marijuana and Cocaine Anonymous all hold weekly meetings at the Elms.

4 Customer Feedback

Residents meetings are held monthly and the times of these are advertised widely within the Elms. There is also a suggestion box at the Elms. Quarterly feedback surveys are undertaken.

Most recent feedback included:

- *Key workers are worth their weight in gold and should be up there with doctors."*
- *DENS makes you feel a sense of relief, and worthy."*
- *"The Elms has been a Godsend to me. It's given me back my independence. My keyworker has taken away the stress of filling out forms."*

5 Challenges

Universal Credit

For a number of the clients who access the Elms, budgeting and prioritising can be very challenging particularly for this with substance and/or alcohol misuse issues. Delays with Universal Credit payments and monthly rather than weekly or fortnightly payments results in clients being able to access large amounts of cash in one hit. The temptation can then be to spend it all quickly rather than make their personal contribution payment to the Elms. We have had a number of situations, when on receipt of a large back dated payment or their monthly payments clients have abandoned their accommodation, rather than make a payment to the Elms. This had led to an increase in evictions for personal contribution arrears.

Elms staff are working closely with the Job Centre and DWP to support clients in this situation. As well as supporting clients to access budgeting training support with Christians Against Poverty and supporting clients to stick to agreed payment plans.

Mental Health Support



The availability of mental health provision to meet the needs of people with complex issues, including dual diagnosis (mental a health and drug/alcohol misuse); has been an on-going issue. Wendy Lewington CEO of DENS chairs the Homelessness and Mental Health Working Group, which brings together key stakeholders to develop solutions to resolve this issue.

Increase Demand

The demand for accommodation at The Elms is increasing. As previously stated, the crash-pad is being to accommodate people whilst they are waiting for a room to become available.

6 Planned Improvements for Year 5

Additional Stage 2 Accommodation. DENS is currently identifying other forms of accommodation that could be used to support individuals ready to move from the Elms but still need additional support; including use of alternative forms of accommodation on the Elms site. This would provide clients with a greater level of independence, whilst still being able to access more intense support. A proposal will be presented to the Elms core meeting in October.

Further Development of the Social Enterprise Programme

We know that providing clients with structured activities in the day that not only help them develop work skills, but increase self-confidence and life skills, is key to reducing homelessness long term. DENS is committed to further development of the social Enterprise Programmes and we are currently in discussions with several funders to provide additional resources to extend this programme.

Extension of the Resettlement Service

With the grant from Henry Smith Trust for 3 years, we can now extend the support being provided by the Resettlement Team. With more council and social housing being built in Dacorum, we believe the need for this service will increase and is fundamental to ensure that those moving on from The Elms can maintain a long term tenancy and be an active member of their community.



Wendy Lewington
CEO DENS

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ELMS and Move On Manager

