



## The Elms

### Continual Improvement Review

### September 2020

This report covers the period from September 2019 - September 2020.

#### 1 Coronavirus Impact and Response:

By mid-March 2020, Coronavirus had begun to impact on the operational service The Elms Working with the Director of Public Health, Hertfordshire County Council, DBC and following government guidance, a COVID plan was quickly put in place, to ensure the Elms could remain open, in a safe and COVID secure manner. This was modified on March 23rd, when 'lock-down' commenced, and then constantly revised in line with changes government guidance.

#### Summary of the Elms COVID Response plan

- 6 Isolation rooms set up for clients, each room has a microwave and kettle.
- All new referrals require to self-isolate in an isolation room for 7 days; any resident reporting or displaying symptoms to self -isolate
- Meals are bought to the room by staff and let outside the room, in line with social distancing
- Mental health and well-being of our clients is a priority, and therefore regular contact maintained with those in isolation through phone and Face-time
- All residents to wash their hand for 20 second before being given access.
- Additional 8 hours cleaning a day.
- As of Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> March, all residents were advised they were to stay within The Elms and can only go out for 30 minutes unless it is for urgent medical appointment or agreed with Management. This was revised with lifting of government restrictions
- The police will be contacted if residents leave for non-essential reasons.
- Residents will be warned if they leave for a period of time for non- essential reasons, and if they continue to do this, they will be evicted. DBC would be notified
- Rota implemented for meals times to ensure social distancing.
- Crash-pad: as of 26<sup>th</sup> March and in accordance with Government guidance, individual could no longer share the crash-pad space; each attendee must have their own room. This reduced capacity to just 3 beds.



- All non-operational staff to work from home, until government guidance changed.
- During this period, DENS worked with DBC to ensure all rough sleepers were found alternative accommodation.

The period from end of March until mid-July, when the majority of the restrictions were lifted, posed very challenging time for both residents and staff. Residents could not access the full range of drug and alcohol and mental health support services as previous. A number of clients went through drug and alcohol withdraw whilst in isolation; with staff doing all they can to support them.

A number of residents made the decision to leave the Elms and stay with family and friends during lock down.

The Elms did remain fully operational during this time. We continue to monitor the COVID situation locally, and have COVID continuity plans in place that will be implemented if forte restrictions are applied locally or nationally.

## 2 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 has two disabled accessed rooms, these rooms have bene used throughout the year by residents with mobility issues.

The fire evacuation procedure to evacuate any resident with mobility or sensory issues was reviewed and revised this year by Black and White Fire Services.

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.

### 3 Performance and Service Provision

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

#### KPI's

	2019	2020
Occupation Rate	99%	99%
Percentage Of Rooms available within 24 hours	100%	100%
Personal contribution arrears	11%	7.7%
Positive Move on rate	58%	48%
Percentage of support plans up to date	100%	100%
Average Stay	113 Days	89 days

#### Move Ons

Where residents move to:

	2019	2020
DENS Move On	25%	31%
Social Housing	38%	31%
Private Rent	3%	2%
Friends/Family	23%	30%
Other	2%	6%

#### Key Points:

- Average Length of stay: this had decreased significantly in 12 months. This is due to several factors;
  - Greater number of Move On clients moving into alternative accommodation, freeing up rooms in these properties

- Significant increase in residents moving in with family and friends. During COVID lock-down, a number of residents moved in with family or friends.
- Decrease in positive move on rate; this is likely to be due to high number of evictions or breach of COVID protocols.

## Evictions

### Reasons for Eviction

	2018/19	2019/20
Drug & Alcohol	29.5%	18%
Personal Contribution Arrears	39.5%	18%
ASB	31%	16%
Prison	Not recorded	6%
Abandonment	Not recorded	13%
Breaches of COVID protocol	NA	29%

- Breaching COVID protocols was the most prevalent reason for evictions. This was, in the main during ‘lock-down’ when residents could only leave the Elms for very short period of time in line with government guidance.
- Failure to pay personal contributions has decrease significantly. Residents on Universal Credit are now reminded to pay their contributions on the day they receive their UC; all residents on benefits also received an increase in their benefit amount and therefore have more income.
- ASB had decreased significantly: due to more robust management of resident’s challenging behaviour; better use of the ‘warnings’ system and residents being more aware of the implications of anti-social behaviour.

## Re-Settlement

For Elms residents moving directly into either council or social housing, DENS Resettlement Team provides up to 12 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.

Whilst face to face to face meetings were put on put on hold during lock-down, support was maintained through telephone calls, FaceTime and WhatsApp. During this 12 month period, 73 clients were supported, and all have maintained their tenancy.

### Crash-pad

Demand for the crash-pad remained busy. During this period, 57 individuals have accessed the crash-pad.

As stated previously prior to COVID, we could accommodate up to 12 people each night in the crash-pad; however this had now reduced to 3. This had led to referrals being turned away almost every night, and a decrease in the annual number of those accessing the crash-pad.

### Cold Weather Provision

With funding from DBC, from the 24<sup>th</sup> November 2019 until the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 (when lock down came in), we were able to extend the Cold Weather Provision, which included;

- Day centre open 5 nights a week and Saturday during the day, for any person who had no accommodation. They could use all the Day Centre facilities (shower, laundry, access to clothes etc.), and on week nights, transport was provided to the Elms.
- Elms - crash-pad - available to anyone who otherwise would have nowhere else stay. Anyone accessing the crash-pad would meet either with a DENS Key-worker or DBC Housing officer the following morning to work with them to find more appropriate accommodation
- During this period a total of 55 individual accessed the crash-pad

### 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.



In June 2020 DENS Board agreed to use un-restricted income to fund the post of ETE (Education, Training and Employment) Co-ordinator. The post holder will work across DENS services to support clients to develop and access pathways to education, training and employment. The ETE Co-ordinator will work closely with key-workers and the DENS Social Enterprise Team.

The recruitment of the post has been delayed due to COVID, however we expect the post-holder to be in place by the December 2020.

#### **4 Social Enterprise**

The overall aims of the social enterprise programme are 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.

Three programmes were initially piloted to ascertain which would be the most feasible long term based on participation and engagement rates; potential for clients to develop employability skills and medium term income potential. During this year, it was agreed to focus on the Bike project, and the Catering project.

Bike project: The bike project has really developed this year. Participants can attend 3 days a week and learn a range of skills including bike repair and maintenance, customer service, as well as team work, communication skills and acceptable behaviour in the work-place.

14 current or previous residents have participated in the project. All participants involved in repairing bikes, get to keep a bike for personal use. Bikes have also been provided for several residents of the Elms to use to get to work.

Catering project: The Catering project was just starting to pick up bookings when COVID hit; resulting in bookings being cancelled and events postponed. The project has catered for 4 small events, with ex-residents from the Elms (who are now in Move On), participating in all.

The team does have a number of bookings scheduled from spring 2021 onwards, COVID dependent.



## **5 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
- 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.

Prior to COVID restrictions, Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Marijuana and Cocaine Anonymous all hold weekly meetings at the Elms.

## **6 Customer Feedback and Quality Assurance**

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.

In September 2020 DENS was awarded the nationally recognised Trusted Charity Mark (formerly the PQASSO Quality Mark). The Trusted Charity Mark is externally verified and addresses all the essential areas necessary for the effective management and governance of a charity.

## **7 Challenges**

**COVID:** Like all, we do not know what is likely to happen with the pandemic. We have a robust COVID contingency plan in place that can be implemented immediately if there is a significant increase in cases in the Dacorum area, and/or more stringent restrictions are implemented.

**Increase in Demand:** Year on year, there has been an increase in demand for the Elms. As the full financial impact of COVID takes its toll on the community, we do expect to see an increase in demand for all DENS services,



including The Elms. We are currently working with DBC Housing Team in regard to the development of alternative temporary housing options.

Recruitment of Key-workers: We have found it difficult to recruit to experienced and committed individuals to this post. This is due to a combination of factors including currently fairly low unemployment rates in the area, close proximity to London and therefore competing with roles offering inner London weighting and the post involving shift work. We have reviewed our recruitment process, as well as the remuneration packages and are confident this will make a difference

## **8 Planned Improvements for the Next Year**

Additional Stage 2 Accommodation. DENS had identified alternative accommodation for those residents who are ready to move on from The Elms, but still require more support that is provided within our Re-settlement and Move on Services. We are currently in discussion with DBC Housing Team in regard to this.

We are also aiming to purchase our first property for Move On service; at present DENS Move On properties are all leased from either the Council or private landlords. Owning our own properties will give us far more flexibility in terms of the service we can offer. We will be investigating the feasibility of providing long term supported accommodation for those who require far greater support in the community.

Social Enterprise: We have recently been awarded a grant for Homeless link to invest in the development of the Social Enterprise programme. The funding will be utilised to develop more formalised training pathways for participants of the programme and the development of the catering arm.

ETE co-ordinator: The ETE will be recruited by December 2020, and will work across the served to support DENS clients into education, training and employment.

Wendy Lewington  
Chief Executive

Sean Fitzgerald  
Head of Accommodation Services

9<sup>th</sup> October 2020





