

## **Appendix 2 - Press release June 2020**

### **Life changing support for rough sleepers in Portsmouth**

Over a hundred of Portsmouth's rough sleepers have been housed in hotels across the city for the past two months to give them self-contained accommodation during the coronavirus outbreak.

It is part of an unprecedented emergency operation to get all rough sleepers off the streets, to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

James\* is just one of the people being housed in a hotel after a breakdown in his relationship and losing his job.

"I was staying in lodgings when this all kicked off and the man I was staying with was older and had underlying health conditions so I had to move on. I spoke to the council and they said they'd help me to find somewhere to stay and put me up in the Ibis hotel. I was there for a few nights and kept myself to myself but there were never any problems for me.

"They looked after me well and the support staff couldn't do enough. They even helped me to carry all of my bags and help me move in! I've moved on now and I'm in a private rental and I'm going back to work a week on Monday."

Cllr Darren Sanders, Cabinet Member for Housing said: "I've been really pleased to hear all of the good stories about the positive impact this is having on people's lives. There are people using the hotels that haven't been accommodated or slept in a bed for years.

"Our teams are working together to ensure that those using the hotel are getting the best support they can. This is being supported by our Community Wardens who are providing additional outreach support to rough sleepers, the youth service, library services, catering staff from the Civic Office's staff café and The Hub, as well as support from HIVE Portsmouth."

The providers of the homeless service, The Society of St James and Two Saints are continuing to work with the council to ensure everyone can access support in a safe environment.

Lucy\*, Senior Support Worker within homeless services said: "During the first few days in March managing social distancing at the homeless day service and night shelters was really difficult. I felt awful that people were only able to come into the day service for half an hour at a time.

"You could tell those using the service were concerned about coronavirus and this grew day by day. I was so happy when I was able to tell people that they would be moved to a hotel and I could tell how excited they were. When I visited the hotel the next day it was so quiet because they hadn't been in a real bed for such a long time!

"I love that we have all of the services under one roof, all the support staff are here, mental health nurses, wellbeing services - there is so much support for people. We have two bedrooms for one to one sessions and even a donation room.

"The local community have really pulled together. We have charity shops donating clothes, local supermarkets donating food packages and we even received Easter eggs for the guests, staff and volunteers!

## Supporting rough sleepers and the hidden homeless: options for the way forward

"I'm proud to be part of this. Everyone is working together to make the most of a strange situation."

As well as support from homeless services, there are also volunteers delivering food to the residents of the hotel.

Helen has been volunteering at the hotel through HIVE Portsmouth since March and has been delivering food for residents at the hotel 3 times a day, 6 days a week. Ex-teacher Helen has been furloughed and wanted to help out.

"I've found it really rewarding, they are interesting people and in the main really friendly. I even recognise some of them from my local area. I'm amazed at how beautifully kept many of the rooms are, they keep their belongings beautifully, better than your average student halls I should think.

"They are stuck in one room, they might go out for fresh air, bit of a smoke but otherwise there is nowhere for them to go. They are stuck in a small room. I have a small house and garden and a family back home, I would not change places...the residents are incredibly cheery in the circumstances".