

# Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Briefing Paper

## Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel

15 March 2018

### Homelessness

#### **Definitions**

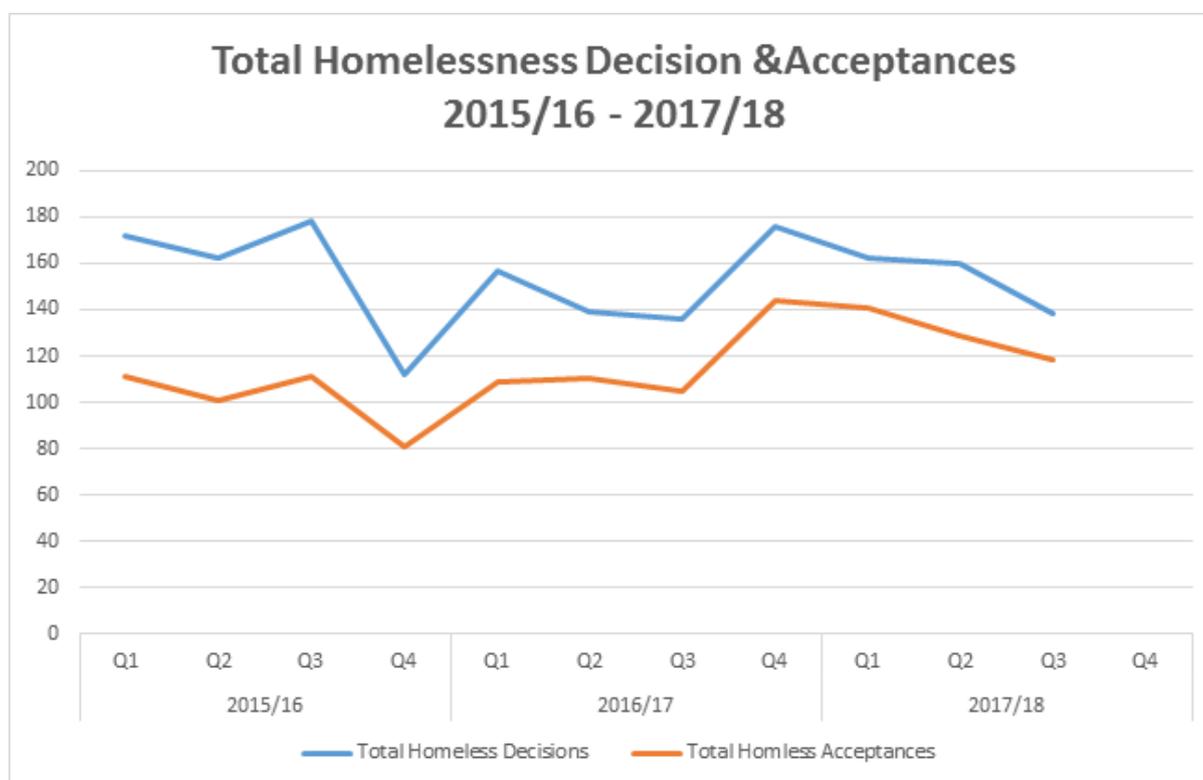
The term homelessness covers a range of circumstances from the extreme of being literally roofless, rough sleeping to those that are in insecure situations. This includes “sofa surfers”; people who have accommodation but are unable to access it for reasons such as domestic violence; those in temporary accommodation, those threatened with homelessness such as those with a legal notice to leave accommodation.

In legal terms we talk about those that are “statutory homeless”, these are households that are owed a full housing duty by the local authority. To be classed as statutory homeless the following tests are applied:

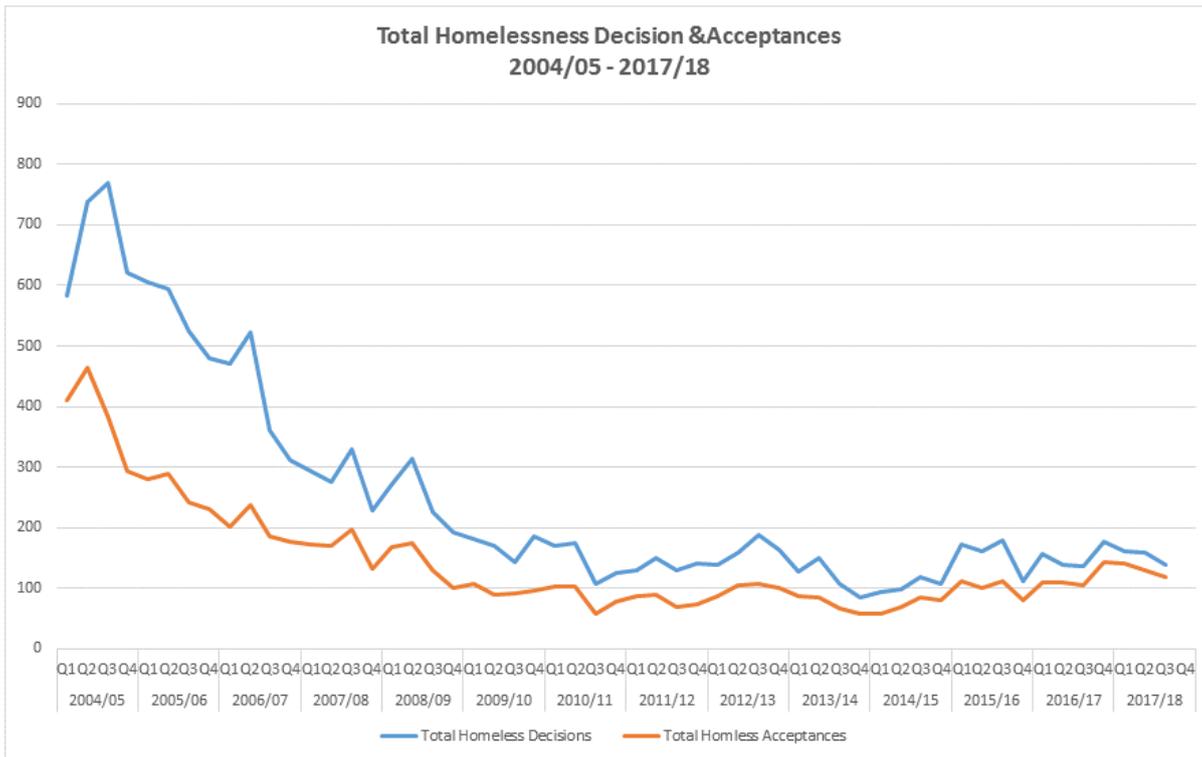
- Eligibility, this is designed to exclude some people by virtue of their immigration status;
- Is the household homeless or are threatened with homelessness within 28 days? (currently)
- Do they belong to a priority need group, ie people with children or singles who are considered vulnerable due to physical or other disabilities
- Are they unintentionally homeless, that is they have not made themselves homeless by their own actions
- Have a local connection to that local authority

#### **Local Picture**

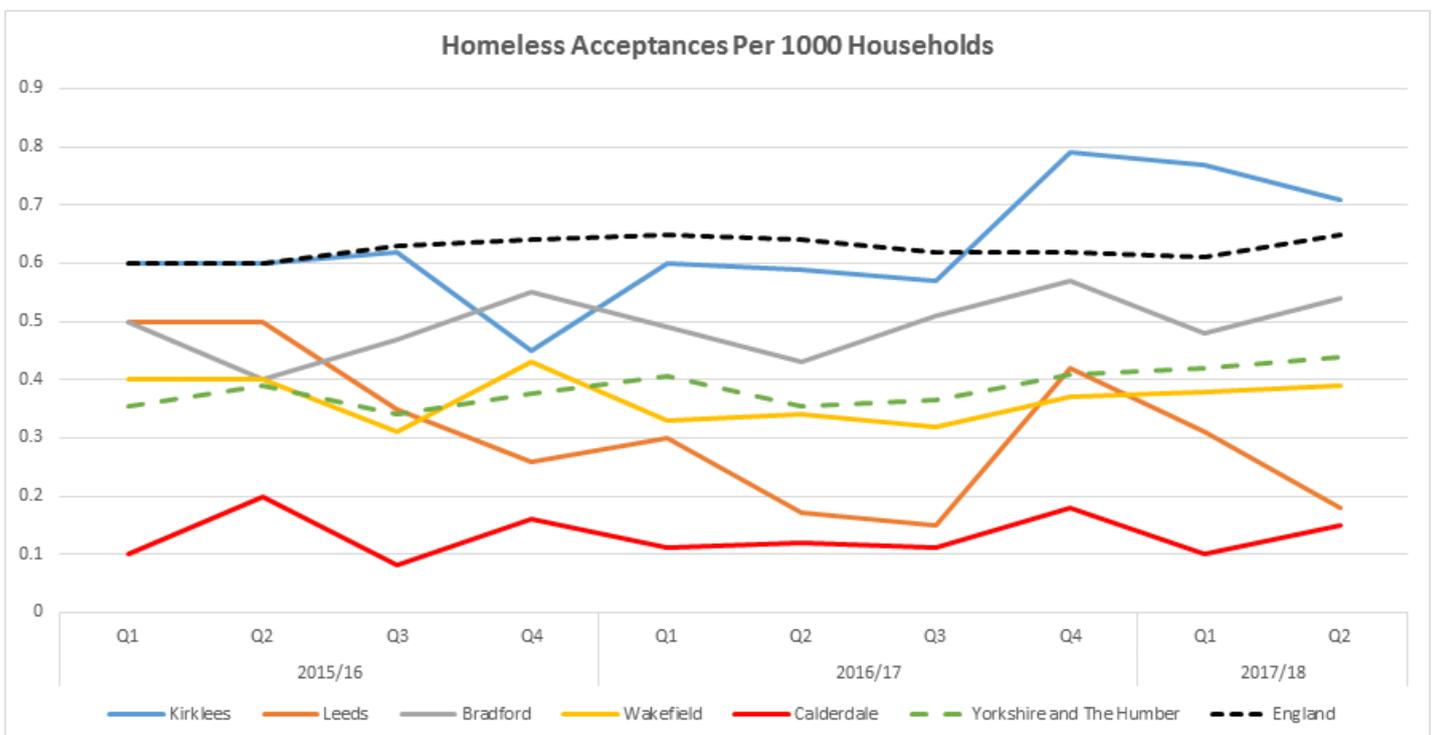
We have seen an upward trend in statutory homelessness acceptances since 2016, with the largest increase in Q4 of 2016/17.



However it is worth seeing the long term trend which has been downwards:



We can see how we compare to the other West Yorkshire local authorities, Yorkshire and Humber and national averages



As can be seen we accept more households per thousand than others in West Yorkshire and the wider region, although we are not far from the national average. In 2015 we took part in peer reviews with Bradford and Leeds, they commented that we appeared to be generous in how we applied the legislation. This is a positive for our customers as it means better outcomes for more households as in Kirklees they can access council tenancies. In comparison to some other local

authorities we assist more singles, other authorities often apply very strict vulnerability tests on single people, in effect acting as gate keepers. Later in this report we will see that we compare favourably on the number of rough sleepers to the rest of the country, one of the reasons is we assist people before ending up literally homeless.

### Accepted homeless household types – Kirklees and England

Accepted Homeless Household Type	Kirklees	England
Couple with Dependent children	17%	22%
Lone Parent – Male	2%	4%
Lone Parent – Female	38%	47%
<b>Total with Children</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>73%</b>
Single Person –Male	28%	13%
Single Person Female	13%	9%
<b>Total without Children</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>22%</b>
Other	2%	5%

### Causes of homelessness

The top three causes of homelessness in Kirklees in the last reporting quarter (September – December 2017) have changed significantly from previous quarters:

1. End of Assured Shorthold Tenancies (AST)
2. Violent breakdown of relationship involving a partner
3. Parents no longer willing to accommodate

This is the first quarter that the end of an AST has been the main cause of homelessness in Kirklees, it has normally been the 4<sup>th</sup> reason. Nationally it has been the main reason for homelessness for some time. In 2017 this accounted for only 9% of homeless acceptances compared to 27% in the rest of England, excluding London. It is too early to say the reason for this change, it could be that full roll out of Universal Credit last year is starting to have an impact. The other significant change we are seeing is the number of people approaching the service experiencing domestic abuse.

The increase has been across all household types, however the rise amongst singles is slightly higher. We believe that one of the main underlying reasons for family breakdowns is the sustained pressure on family finances, leading to violent and non-violent family breakdowns. Continued changes in welfare reforms are impacting on families and their resilience to cope. We are also seeing an increase in the number of people with mental health problems, this is in a period where access to mental health services is limited, although this is hidden because of how and what data is collected for Government returns. The complexity of pressures on the families and individuals approaching the Housing Solutions Service for assistance cannot be explained in one reason for homelessness.

As mentioned previously we accept more single people than other local authorities. The main priority need reason for singles is mental health issues followed by physical disability. As a service we do struggle to get help for people with mental health problems. In the past there were link workers employed by mental health services and this worked well, discussions to re-introduce this model stalled whilst mental health services went through a re-organisation. We were successful in a bid to the LGA for consultancy time to research and recommend options for improving access to the private rented sector with a particular focus on single people. We have just received the draft report and we will be progressing work on the options identified.

We use a range of tools to prevent homelessness such as providing specialist debt advice, a Sanctuary Scheme for those experiencing domestic abuse and negotiation with landlords. We use mediation with homeless 16 and 17 year olds and their families and have found it to be an effective tool to prevent homelessness. We have commissioned Yorkshire Mediation to train officers working with older people and families in mediation and negotiation skills.

### **Homelessness Reduction Act 2017**

The Act is due to be implemented from 3 April 2018, this is the biggest change in homeless legislation in forty years. For the first time local authorities will have a duty to help prevent homelessness to all those that are threatened with homelessness, the definition of this has now been extended to within 56 days. In addition where a valid Section 21 notice for possession of a private rented tenancy has been received this should be classed as threatened with homelessness and the local authority should not insist that the landlord takes the case to court. Where homelessness cannot be prevented, there is a new duty to try to relieve homelessness. This is to help secure accommodation that is suitable and the expectation is it will be available for six months.

These new duties are not subject to priority need or intentionality and the Prevention duty does not have a local connection test. They are for anyone who is threatened with homelessness or is homeless. In addition there is a duty to agree a Personal Housing Plan (PHP) which should set out actions to secure and retain suitable accommodation, this places some responsibility on the applicant to cooperate with the plan and carry out any reasonable agreed actions. We see this as a positive change in the relationship between the service and the applicant. It needs to be noted that the full housing duty and the circumstances in which interim temporary accommodation must be provided are unchanged.

A new Duty to Refer has also been introduced for public bodies, including the Jobcentre, NHS, Ministry of Defence, Prisons and Social Services. This requires them to ask anyone they work with who they believe to be homeless or threatened with homelessness whether they want referring to a Local Authority for homelessness assistance. This comes into force in October 2018. A similar Act was introduced in Wales in 2014 and Southwark local authority have been a trailblazer for the Act for 12 months, both have found that preventions have increased, homeless acceptances have reduced, the numbers in temporary accommodation has decreased and customers have felt happier and listened to throughout the process.

We established a Project Board in the summer of 2017 to oversee the implementation of the Act and are confident we are prepared for the implementation in April. Like other Local Authorities we have received New Burdens funding, which we have used to recruit additional staff. We have procured an upgrade to our IT system, which will be in place for the beginning of April. Alongside the Act there are new quite onerous reporting requirements to be submitted to MHCLG quarterly. In Kirklees we started piloting the Act in Dewsbury in October 2017 and since 12 February in Huddersfield. This has been a learning process however the feedback from customers has been positive.

One of the main aims of the Act is to ensure local authorities do more meaningful work with singles. In Kirklees we are starting from a good position because of the assistance we already provide to singles, so we may find some aspects of the Act easier to implement than others.

## **Housing Allocations Policy**

Some changes to the Housing Allocations Policy to assist the service to meet the new duties from the Homelessness Reduction Act has recently been agreed. These will be implemented from 3 April 2018. The changes are

That the following new band awards are created:

- Band B – for the relief of homelessness where the household is eligible for or accommodated in temporary accommodation
- Band C – for the prevention of homelessness
- Band C – for the relief of homelessness where there is not a duty owed to provide temporary accommodation.

That the above bands and the current Band C - Intentionally Homeless are awarded subject to one suitable offer from the housing register.

That the current Band C – Homeless no priority award is deleted – this will be replaced by the new Band C for the relief of homelessness.

Where there is a statutory homeless duty, including prevention and relief duties, officers can place bids on behalf of applicants from the date the band is awarded.

The impact of the changes will be monitored quarterly and if it is not working as envisaged further changes will be considered.

## **Rough Sleeping**

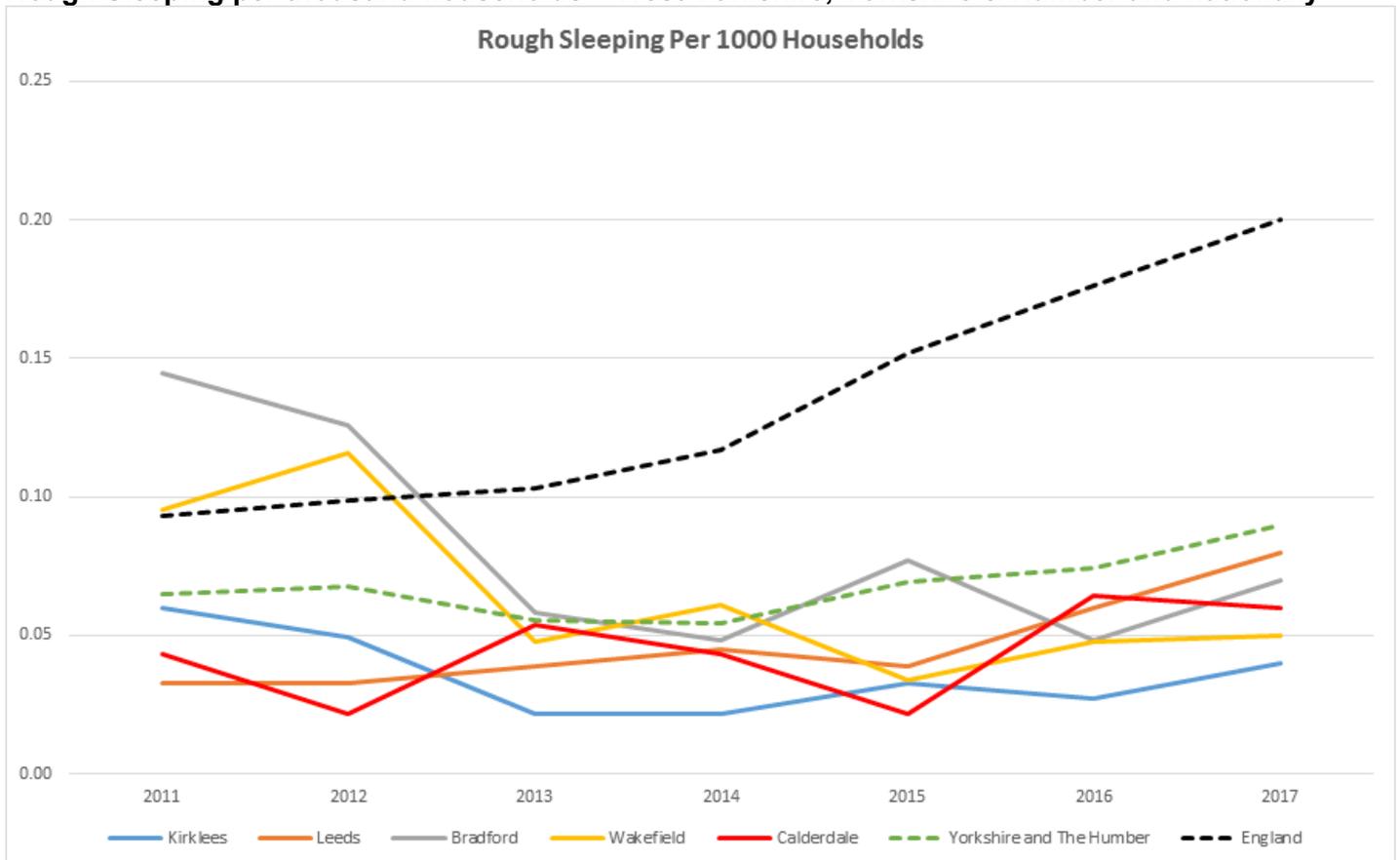
### **National Rough Sleeping Statistics**

- Each year, local authorities within England are required to submit a single night snapshot of rough sleeping using street counts and intelligence driven estimates.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Rough Sleepers</b>
2010	5
2011	11
2012	9
2013	4
2014	4
2015	6
2016	5
2017	8

- Within Kirklees, the annual submission for 2017 is 8. This is a 60% increase on the 5 submitted in 2016 and the highest number since 2012, we can compare this to others:
- The graph below illustrates that, in comparison to other local authorities, Kirklees is performing favourably with regard to rough sleeper volumes. This reflects the proactive work we do with single people is preventing rough sleeping for the vast majority of this significant group facing homelessness.

## Rough Sleeping per thousand households – West Yorkshire, Yorkshire & Humber and nationally



- Housing Solutions Service and Homelessness Forum partners have comprehensive intelligence and are aware of most of the people who are visibly living on the streets. In addition to providing the official annual figure, partners are now meeting quarterly to share information about individuals at risk, those actually sleeping rough and those taking up subsequent accommodation and support.
- Excellent partnership working and intelligence sharing among Housing Solutions, Huddersfield Mission, Neighbourhood Police, Clare House Hostel, Fusion Housing, Choices Home Care and West Yorkshire – Finding Independence (WY-FI)
- A common view of street homelessness is that it is a problem of accommodation. Health problems including substance abuse and complex factors are often the precipitant of homelessness or barriers to prevent people from acquiring and/or sustaining appropriate accommodation. Such issues can lead to social isolation, a reluctance to engage, inability to sustain a tenancy and difficulty managing household budgets. To illustrate this, of the 8 individuals verified as actually sleeping out for this year's snapshot, 3 already had accommodation provided.
- The main reasons for the increase in rough sleepers include:-
  - Impact of Welfare Reforms
  - Reduction in funding or raising threshold of support services (ie Mental Health)
  - Shortage of appropriate accommodation

### Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)

- During very cold weather, Government guidance suggests when temperatures are forecast to be zero or below for three consecutive nights, the Council will trigger the 'Severe Weather Emergency Protocol' (SWEP) whereby the process to access an emergency bed for the night is made easier (without the need for a comprehensive homelessness assessment).

- This provides an opportunity for Housing Solutions to further establish rapport and endeavour to facilitate appropriate support. It also provides some respite for those individuals not usually engaging with services. Kirklees Council adopt more flexibility when triggering SWEP. Other weather conditions are considered rather than just very low temperatures.

### **Rough Sleeper Outreach Initiative**

- There are several community, faith and volunteer groups who provide help and assistance to people living out on the streets. Assistance includes providing social interaction, hot drinks, snacks, blankets, sleeping bags, food parcels and pet food. This gathers greater momentum during adverse weather. Due to the relatively low numbers of people on the streets within Kirklees, donated gifts can create logistical issues around storage and distribution. A lack of co-ordination among the different groups can lead to duplication, inefficiency and minimises the benefits to this vulnerable group.
- To improve the effectiveness of the various groups, it is intended for a sub-group of the local Homelessness Forum to be created as a networking opportunity for the various groups to share information, working practices and feed into the Forum.
- In preparation, a working group of partners has developed some guidance for outreach workers which includes health & safety considerations and 'best practices'. The group is being facilitated by Homeless Link, a national organisation whose expertise is tackling and preventing rough sleeping and single homelessness. The initial workshop for a wide variety of outreach groups is scheduled for March 2018.
- Outreach groups invited include:-
 

Fusion Housing	Clare House	WY-FI	Huddersfield Mission
Welcome Centre	One Big Family	Jubilee Centre	Bradford Nightstop
Huddersfield Change Project		Dewsbury Baptist Church	
Kirkheaton Church			

### **Communications**

- If anyone is concerned, at any time, about someone sleeping rough, they can send an alert through a website or app via [www.streetlink.org.uk](http://www.streetlink.org.uk)
- The details provided through Streetlink alerts the Council's Housing Solutions Service and their outreach partner to help them find the individual, check what help the person needs and connect them to the appropriate support if required.
- Council media team are producing positive communications and media releases around homelessness and rough sleeping. Currently working with Clare House around real life case studies.
- Further advice for members of the public on 'How to change a life' was published in Kirklees Together <https://kirkleestogether.co.uk/2017/03/26/help-change-a-life/>
- This advice includes how to alert the professions, supporting a local charity and giving small things such as a hot drink or even kind words and a smile.
- Huddersfield Mission is an example where a voucher can be bought to give to a homeless person so they can buy food/drink and take advantage of the support on offer.