

PRESS RELEASE

Immediate release

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Gimme shelter

Rough sleepers in Stalybridge now have a roof over their heads thanks to a partnership between our Housing Options staff and Greater Manchester Police.

Seven rough sleepers in the town generated public comment over the last month. The local men have chosen to live and sleep around Stalybridge which is famous for its nightlife. Several have been familiar sights in the town centre for many months, but as the group has grown, so has the problem.

Their presence polarised views in the community. Some found the men's behaviour intimidating and have been reluctant to use nearby shops and services. Others including some local businesses, charity shops and club-goers have offered food and clothing to the men, who have used empty properties awaiting redevelopment as well as shop doorways to sleep in.

Almost all the group have been offered homes in the past but have not been able to hold down a tenancy, despite the efforts of various temporary and 'move-on' accommodation providers.

New Charter's Director of Tenancy Services Tony Powell said: "Our challenge was how we could devise a solution which recognised the differences of view locally about these rough sleepers. There was undoubtedly a desire to see the men moved, but there was both fear and sympathy towards them."

The remedy available to the police centred on the Vagrancy Act 1824, but this was thought unlikely to be effective on its own. Similarly, several of the rough sleepers were well known to staff at Tameside Housing Options Centre based at Old Street in neighbouring Ashton-under-Lyne. So a way forward involved using incentives from Housing Options to place the men in accommodation, with the deterrent from the Police as a backstop.

The men were tracked down by effective outreach work, with Katy Wood from Housing Options and PC Mike Devine from Stalybridge Neighbourhood Policing combining their skills. So far, four of the seven men have been given shelter, one has refused with police action now inevitable, and two others appear to have left the town.



“Not all the rough sleepers are housed yet,” Tony Powell continued. “But we do believe we’ve made a difference to the town and to most of these men. As well as finding them homes, we have also been able to get them registered with doctors and have had excellent help from other agencies such as Jobcentre Plus.”

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. New Charter owns and manages almost 15,000 homes for rent, mainly in Tameside, Greater Manchester. With a turnover of £53million a year and a workforce of 800, New Charter is one of the North West’s largest Registered Social Landlords, and incorporates Aksa Housing Association.
2. New Charter provides homelessness and housing aid services at Tameside Housing Options Centre on behalf of Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council.
3. There has been local coverage of this issue in both news and readers letters sections of the Tameside Reporter and the Tameside Advertiser; and on Tameside Radio 103.6FM.
4. **iN business for neighbourhoods** is a long-term project highlighting housing associations’ performance. As social businesses, housing associations do not make profit. They offer homes for rent and sale at prices local people can afford. Housing associations provide more than homes - they help create places where people want to live. Wherever you see the **iN business for neighbourhoods** sign, something great is happening in the area. Housing Associations who display this logo are committed to their customers, the neighbourhoods they work in and strive for excellence in everything they do.

CONTACT:

David Rigby - New Charter 0161 331 2000

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