

# Winter Shelter Report 2019



# Forward from the chair of the Churches Winter Shelter Management Committee

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The 2019 Shelter took place in a very different context from its predecessors. Through the intervening year Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) had continued to develop their work with those who were homeless or on the edge of homelessness. They had secured significant funding to enable the work to be expanded. This meant that Colebrook Road were able to take a few of our guests from the end of October through to the opening of the shelter.

By the time the Shelter opened TWBC were also part way through developing some 'Housing First' accommodation. This provided a home together with support workers for people who had previously been street homeless or were in imminent danger of being without a roof over their heads.

This had an immediate impact on our numbers which were significantly lower than in previous years. As we appreciated how much volunteers were sacrificing in order to run the Shelter we came to the conclusion that such sacrifice could only be justified if there were at least three guests expected at the shelter. When there were only one or two we arranged to put them up in local bed and breakfast accommodation instead.

TWBC are committed to continuing with their work in this area. Unfortunately this does not mean that there will be no further need for a night shelter! As I write we are wondering what impact cuts in the homeless sector supported by KCC will have. Year-round provision which is dependent on KCC funding will have to review their business plans to see what they can provide in the future. At the moment we rather fear that there will be less provision overall with a consequent increase in street homelessness.

As the 'Housing First' model took off and numbers reduced we found a greater level of challenge among those still needing support. This led to a higher number of people who we could not offer a bed. Three things need to be said about this. First, we do not lightly refuse accommodation to anyone. Using the guidelines from Housing Justice, and taking advice from the local police, we carry out a risk assessment. If as a result someone is thought to constitute too high a risk to other guests, volunteers or the premises we are using, the staff pass the risk assessment to a member of the management committee before refusing a place. This means that there are two stages to be completed before a bed is refused. Secondly, this is only a refusal of a place at the shelter: all other forms of help continue to be available. No-one is ever sent away empty-handed. Thirdly, we are very conscious that this means that there is an ongoing

need for further provision for those who cannot access the shelter. It would be good to see some solutions in this area.

Having said that, this year we have seen a number of our guests enabled to move on to the next stage of help while the Shelter has still been running. This was a real joy and encouragement as work continued. It meant that no-one needed to be turned away on the grounds that the shelter was full.

Once again, the staff, Maureen and Barry Chaseley and Julie Russell, worked diligently with all those who came looking for help. If the Shelter was not the appropriate solution for their situation guests were given things to help them settle elsewhere. At the end of the shelter there were a few people still looking for longer term solutions, but none of them had been left without advice or offers of one sort or another.

The army of volunteers worked willingly at a variety of tasks to make the whole shelter work. The atmosphere each evening was very welcoming and there was much praise for the meals that were on offer.

All of this was the result of working with many partners. The venues, and many of the volunteers, came from the local churches. Funding came from the churches too. All along we were very clear that the real work of the shelter could only be done in partnership. It has been wonderful to work with partners who have been on board since the shelter started and to welcome new partners who joined in for the first time this year.

At the end of the shelter we are very aware of the ongoing challenges of homelessness. Nationally the problem is growing and those who work in the areas of housing and benefits are very apprehensive as we wait for the full roll out of Universal Credit and the potential fall-out from other areas of the political landscape.

Jesus summed up the message of the Old Testament, and offered guidance to his disciples, by talking about loving God and loving our neighbour. The Old Testament also contains demands on the people of God to work for justice, especially social justice. The work is done inspired by Jesus and enabled by the work of his Holy Spirit. We pray for ongoing guidance that we may be faithful in the work God calls us to do.

Jim Stewart  
Vicar of St James, Tunbridge Wells  
Chair of the Management Committee

# The Background to Tunbridge Wells Churches Winter Shelter

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It is encouraging to see the way the people of Tunbridge Wells have shown themselves concerned about the plight of the homeless. Perhaps many find it easy to imagine the situation of homelessness. We would hate to find ourselves without shelter and facing cold and wet nights and days. Knowing how much we depend on hot showers and regular meals we wonder how we might cope if they were lost. We value the way our homes help to shape the settings in which we conduct our relationships with each other and we could not begin to see how this might work without space to call our own.

The Tunbridge Wells Churches Winter Shelter was established in order to offer a first step, at the worst time of year when it is often cold and wet. It came from having listened carefully to many of those on the streets and to enable ongoing listening. It aimed to offer love and compassion, but in a context of growing understanding. From the very start awareness of the complexities drove a commitment to work in partnership with others.

The Churches Winter Shelter aims to pray, listen, and work to bring real solutions. The Shelter is never an end in itself, but always a means to a greater end. It is a starting point for our common, faithful working.

## The Shelter in 2019

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The Shelter opened on 2<sup>nd</sup> January and ran for two months closing on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2019. Each night there were 12 beds available, but, this year, there was never an occasion when all 12 were used. The highest occupancy was 7 and the average was 4. Early in the period, and again at the end, numbers were so low that it was decided to offer guests bed and breakfast accommodation instead of running the shelter.

The occupancy was in sharp contrast to previous years. Given the numbers we were working with it is difficult to draw reliable statistical results, but we were clear that demand was lower because of the good work being done by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Porchlight and other agencies.

Unfortunately it would seem that numbers may increase again next year as there has been a reduction in grants from KCC to agencies working with the homeless.

36 individuals approached the shelter this year. 5 women and 31 men. 7 came from outside the UK and 29 within of whom 24 had a local connection to Tunbridge Wells. Borough Councils can only offer support to people who have a local connection. Having a local connection is a gateway to various forms of help and, while we do whatever we can with all guests, full support is often restricted to those who come from Tunbridge Wells.

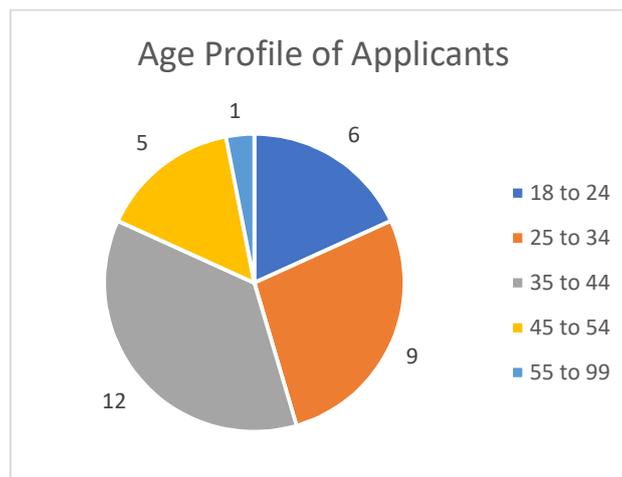
15 guests were street homeless immediately before coming to the shelter. A further 10 had been 'sofa-surfing'. Others were new to homelessness or previously been supported by another agency.

13 referred themselves to the shelter. 10 were referred by Porchlight. The others came from local churches, councils or other homeless agencies.

### The Guests

Most of our guests were in the 35 to 44 age group. While we must always be careful about making statistical judgements from such a small sample, this probably reflects national trends. We should also keep in mind the figures published this year about homeless mortality by the Office for National Statistics. Homelessness has a major impact on life expectancy.

As would be expected the guests needed help with issues other than housing. Homelessness is a complex matter and in turn adds to the complexities. The most frequently mentioned concern was around mental health, followed by issues around alcohol and drugs. Relationship breakdown had also been a significant issue for many.



It is hardly surprising that most of the guests were supported by benefits (20) or were helped make benefit applications (4) and that only one was working. We do not have complete understanding of the financial situation of all of our guests: some choose not to share the information with us, others are in a

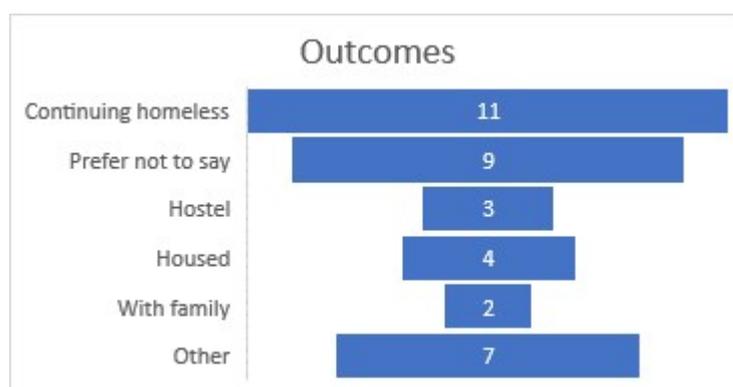
transitional position. We continue to be concerned by the number who are able to make a significant income from begging. We have sometimes found that homeless people would prefer to continue begging in place of coming into the shelter. This happens particularly at weekends and, they tell us, is because there is good money to be made begging on the streets of Tunbridge Wells.

Four guests came to Gateway but then refused a place at the shelter. Three were helped elsewhere. After conducting our risk assessment six guests were not offered a place and a further individual was subsequently banned for unacceptable behaviour in the shelter. We were concerned about patterns of behaviour that were self-defeating: one individual was arrested when trying to book in as a result of behaviour in the Gateway itself.

We were also troubled by the way some of the guests seemed to feel that they were 'entitled' to help. The prize there goes to one gentleman who found himself a very fine place to live and thought that we ought to pay the very significant deposit he needed to secure the property. What is most worrying about this sense of 'entitlement' is the way it gets in the way of their real engagement with addressing their own needs. We will need to attend to this area in the near future.

#### After the shelter

A quarter of our guests were in a better place immediately after the shelter. It is always encouraging to see people move forward and take up housing opportunities, take advantage of a hostel place, or getting effective help from family. The other three-quarters have been offered support of one type or another but the success (or otherwise) cannot be measured in the same way. It is clear that the complexities that have led to homelessness have developed over years and are not easily resolved. We hope and pray that they benefit from the help of the agencies they continue to work with and resolve the issues that lead to their ongoing challenges. Life on the streets is neither good nor safe and we long to see people flourish in new settings with support around them.

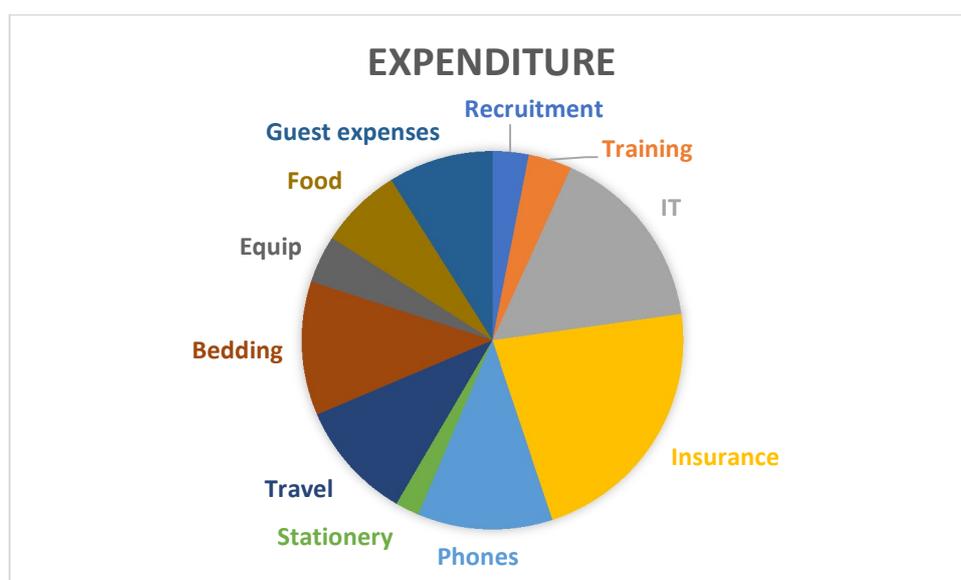


## Finance

We were very grateful for the donations received. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council were key partners throughout the shelter and contributed funding and a desk at Tunbridge Wells Gateway. Many churches and a few local businesses also contributed generously. There were a number of individual donations which were also gratefully received. We were not able to take up all the offers of food from local businesses! It was good to come across their generosity and their concern to use their resources well.

Salaries were obviously the most significant area of expenditure. During the actual running of the shelter a further £4,000 was spent and the pie chart illustrates the key areas. These costs fluctuate from year to year depending on the wear and tear of different items and the actual demand.

We had three staff (2fte) and 185 volunteers this year. The volunteers covered nearly 800 shifts between them, working a total of 3,366 hours. If these hours had been paid at the current real living wage (currently £9ph) it would have cost some £30,000 more to run the shelter.



The Tunbridge Wells Churches Winter Shelter is part of Churches for Tunbridge Wells (CfTW). CfTW is a registered charity (1150026) and the full accounts can be accessed on the Charity Commission web-site.

## Operations

Each year there has been an enormous task involved in organising the rota. Different systems have been tried each year. Last year we introduced '**When I Work**'. Susan Schibli worked with the developers to customise this for our purposes and to get it up and running for everyone involved in the shelter.

Having had experience of the system last year the operation was much simpler this year: some data can be carried over from one year to the next meaning far less needs to be input during December, and it should be possible to launch the rota much earlier.

**Training** continued to be expected of all new volunteers. This served two functions. First of all it enabled the trainers to go through the basic systems that are in place and give everyone a chance to ask questions if they were uncertain about the procedures. Secondly, and just as importantly, it enabled the shelter to work towards a consistency of ethos across all the venues and through all the volunteers. The shelter is possible through a number of churches working together: it can only flourish when the guests find the same ethos to be apparent at each venue and among all the volunteers. This year the management committee, especially Vanessa Nicholls, took a larger part in delivering the training.

**Chaplaincy** We were very pleased that the Revd Miriam Barker (licensed by the Bishop of Rochester as a community chaplain for West Kent) was happy to continue with the management committee and to lead this work. Miriam's specially recruited small group of chaplains worked with her in providing input each night of the shelter. They were available to guests and volunteers as required. Those who did speak with them were grateful for their help.



## Looking forward

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Last year we reported that during the year significant progress had been made in establishing a new, year-round, resource centre. It was given the provisional name of Mosaic. The name was chosen to reflect the way different agencies would come together to provide services. We had hoped that it would open in 2018 once Planning consent had been granted and refurbishment work had been completed. Unfortunately this proved not to be possible but we do hope to see significant development this year.

The plan is that Mosaic will provide a permanent home for the Soup Bowl which has been moving around local churches for a number of years. Other

help would be available for Soup Bowl guests, Winter Shelter guests and others. This could include help addressing addictive behaviours, counselling or basic training. Facilities could be included to help with job applications or to search out housing opportunities. We continue to work with other partners to look for the detail of future provision.

We believe that this is a positive way forward. Amongst other things it would offer an opportunity for generous residents of Tunbridge Wells to channel their giving in ways which contribute properly to the well-being of those in need in our town.

The Management Committee is appointed by the Trustees of Churches for Tunbridge Wells (CfTW). CfTW is very grateful to all those who serve in this way.

The members of the Management Committee in 2017-18 were: Canon Jim Stewart (Chair), Revd Cliff Allen, Revd Miriam Barker, Mr Michael Bourne, Mr Joe Kennedy, Mrs Vanessa Nicholls, Mr Peter Querstret, Miss Susan Schibli and Captain Graeme Smith.