



The response of Camden Homelessness Forum membership and steering group to the cutting of the Forum's funding

Camden Homelessness Forum (CHF) is concerned with the decision by Camden Council to reduce funding to CHF by 90%. This means that beyond March 2011 there will be no longer a CHF or services provided via this medium.

Although funding has been reduced over the last year, moving the post from full-time to part-time (3.5 days a week) the Forum maintained and delivered the following activities:

- Forum meetings
- Information dissemination and briefings
- Workshops
- Outreach to research into staff training needs and service user involvement mapping.
- Project work (service user involvement training).

In addition to the above activities the work also includes being a focal contact for the statutory, voluntary and community sector which has enabled consultation, responses to request for information from members, collating of information and sign posting.

CHF members state that the Forum provides an important facility for discussing changes in homelessness policy and practices within the Borough and that this work is of direct importance to the homeless clients.

CHF has been invaluable in providing a supportive network to providers of services to the homeless. It is a platform which has enabled networking, sharing concerns, and raising and highlighting of issues. It also provides support, information, training opportunities and is a conduit for communication between policy makers, service providers and those whose day to day lives are affected by homelessness.

CHF is particularly important for small organisations with limited resources and in giving voice to service users.

Indeed as of this point, the issue of how Camden Council hopes to engage the independent voice of the homelessness sector within its policy and strategy decisions remains unaddressed.

The decision to further reduce funding to CHF is all the more extraordinary in the current economic climate. It seems likely that cuts to benefits, increased unemployment and rising living costs, will result in many more people facing the prospect of losing their homes. It is akin to removing life floats knowing that there are non swimmers who have fallen into the sea! Given that there has been a mainstreaming – fragmenting – of housing-related support services to

three different parts of the Council, it seems the wrong time to be taking support away from CHF – as homelessness levels begin to rise again.

CHF is all the more needed now, when so many people will be struggling in very hard times, when their support services are also facing cuts and when they are in need of the help, advice and support the forum provides.

The advisory group of Camden Homelessness Forum would like it to be stressed that they intend to do all they can to continue the work of the forum in some form, thus the forum urges Camden council to reconsider the decision to cut the funding to the forum as it may prove very much more expensive, in the long term, to remove this very valuable resource than to maintain it. Indeed Camden Homelessness Forum has within the year, enabled the council and other statutory bodies meet key targets around public health, joint strategic needs assessment and has participated in various wider consultations and responses to mention a few.