



## Commissioner calls for improved homeless hostel provisions in Devon and Cornwall



*Commissioner Alison Hernandez with key partners during a visit to Cosgarne Hall, Cornwall*

Police Crime Commissioner Alison Hernandez is calling for a radical rethink of homeless hostel facilities across the region after seeing how a charity in Cornwall is successfully tackling antisocial behaviour (ASB) and drugs, alcohol and mental health issues in the local community.

Harbour Housing, a charity which provides accommodation and support to people who would otherwise face life on the street, recently welcomed a visit from the Commissioner and leaders of Torbay Council to Cosgarne Hall in St Austell which is well known for its successful and spacious accommodation and rehabilitation programme.

The fact-finding expedition has been prompted by a particular need to address crime and ASB in the Castle Circus area of Torquay, which is also where homeless hostel Leonard Stocks is based in Factory Row. It is now under the full ownership of Torbay Council and is often blamed for problems in the town.

Commissioner Hernandez - joined by Devon & Cornwall Police representatives, Torbay council leader Cllr David Thomas and deputy leader Cllr Chris Lewis - were given a tour of Cosgarne Hall's hospital discharge accommodation which is helping to alleviate bed blockages within the NHS.

They were then told how antisocial behaviour in St Austell town centre is being addressed by its outreach team as part of the Harbour Hotspots ASB reduction project which has been funded by Operation Loki, a Devon & Cornwall Police Safer Streets initiative.

Patrols are carried out using its welfare assessment vehicle which carries vital supplies including its surviving winter warm packs, a defibrillator and naloxone – medication that can reverse the effects of an opioid overdose.

Harbour Housing runs several different projects, all with the aim of transforming the lives of at-risk individuals, including the Empowered, Values, Aware (EVA) Project – a specialist service for women escaping domestic abuse or sexual violence.

The charity explained how communities and agencies working together is helping to tackle issues surrounding homeless people with multiple and complex needs. It also told how new rough sleeper accommodation pods in Penzance are being used as part of a return-to-work project for those living in supported accommodation which it is piloting with support from Job Centre Plus.

The ethos of Harbour Housing – which provides supported accommodation for up to 200 residents between Liskeard and Camborne across around 50 different sites, as well as an outreach service to vulnerable individuals in their homes - is centred on rehabilitation.

Among those whose lives have been transformed by the charity is Helen-Marie who has now been clean from drugs for 18 months. Since being housed at Cosgarne Hall, she has completed numerous courses, including in food hygiene and British sign language.

She now helps run a cafe for residents at the shelter which turns food donations into meals.

Helen-Marie said: "Being able to come home to here and have a roof over your head and feel safe where you are living is massive for someone in recovery. I now have routine and access to onsite counselling and well-being services. It has helped me let go of the trauma I have been holding on to for 40 years and focus on my recovery.

"I have also been given help with things like managing a bank account and bills as well as getting to do fun stuff I have never done before like kayaking and surfing.

"I don't take any drugs anymore, not even mental health medication. I feel amazing. I get low days but that's life.

"I get a lot of respect from the residents here because they know I was a drug addict and I'm inspiring them to be clean too."

Commissioner Hernandez now wants to see the same model of care and support replicated in Devon and other areas of Cornwall.

She said: "I was so impressed. It has shown we need an urgent rethink of how homeless hostel provisions are run in Devon. Harbour Housing is a remarkable example of how collaborative working can achieve great success.

“With the best will in the world, homelessness is an issue that is not going away. People are struggling on the streets and they are fighting to get the right support.

“I am often asked why no one is doing something to help them. What Harbour Housing is doing is visibly showing they are trying to help and they are changing lives.

“A multi-agency approach, as adopted by the charity, is needed to keep vulnerable people safe and give them a fresh start in life.

“From a police perspective, we should not be criminalising people who don’t need to be. Instead, we need to be ensuring they are given the help they need and that includes improving drug and alcohol treatment which will help combat homelessness, ASB and crime.

“A radical rethink of homeless hostels is needed, especially in light of the government rightly announcing rough sleeping will be decriminalised next year.”



### *Discussions during the visit to Cosgarne Hall, Cornwall*

Torbay Council took over the running of Leonard Stocks in February 2023 and purchased the building in November 2024. Some of the changes that have been introduced since then include making engagement with the onsite drug and alcohol team a condition of residency; specific times for staying in the hostel and rooms at night; strict rules against anti-social behaviour and loitering, and a reduction in the length of stay.

Councillor Hayley Tranter, Torbay Council’s Cabinet Member for Adult and Community Services, Public Health and Inequalities, said: “We’re working with partners to look at some of the challenges to see how we can create new and innovative initiatives so we can better support individuals in the hostel and surrounding areas with their recovery.

“It’s important to remember that most issues in and around Factory Row are not caused

by residents of Leonard Stocks.”