

Dover Winter Night Shelter



Project Report 2023/2024



Operation of the Night Shelter

Co-ordinating team

There was a mixed team involved in the operation of the Night Shelter as follows:

- Rob – House Manager (DOC)
- Kirsty – Tenancy Support (Porchlight)
- Noel – Project Lead (DOC)

Dates

This year's Night Shelter operated from the 1st December 2023 to the 29th February 2024.

Venue



The Night Shelter operated again from Suffolk House, 302 London Road. This building was formerly used as a bail hostel and then left empty for 4 years until we entered into a lease for this building in October 2022. This gives the Night Shelter a permanent base for the next few years. Nine bedrooms (one double occupancy), four kitchens, four bathrooms and a dining/lounge area were available over the four upper floors in this building. Access was also available to a patio area and garden at the rear of the property. It provided a warm and pleasant environment for all guests.



Volunteers

There were good volunteering opportunities, where teams were able to cook at the venue, serve and share a meal with guests. As in previous years, the Night Shelter initiative was led and supported by Christians and Churches. Whilst we are keen to maintain these good relationships and involvement into the future, it does not prevent those from other faiths or without a faith volunteering and being part of this initiative. We were blessed to have the following co-ordinating meals and teams for us:

Evening	Meal Co-ordinator	Representing
Sunday	Richard Moore	St Georges, Deal
Monday	Peter Wallace	One Church
Tuesday	Elizabeth Beck	The Beacon Church
Wednesday	Chaim Kurtz	Beechgrove, Nonington
Thursday	Claudine Nutley	St Paul's Catholic Church
Friday	Rob and Pauline	DOC and Suffolk House
Saturday	Anne Gavin	St Martins Church

Food

Volunteers providing the evening meal had the option to cook, to warm food through or serve straight from insulated delivery containers at the venue. It is a little frustrating that the smallest kitchen is on the ground floor and next to the dining area, but whichever option our meal providers chose, the food was always good and welcomed by the guests.

Food waste, which was a minor irritation last year, proved to be less of an issue this year with little or no food binned or wasted.

Breakfasts were again provided at the Sunrise Cafe 6 days a week and food left at Suffolk House for Sunday morning breakfast as there was access to well equipped kitchens on each floor.

Referrals and Guests

Referrals for potential guests came through Dover Outreach Centre (Drop In), Dover District Council, Porchlight, Serveco, Probation and other agencies.

This year the following referrals were received/undertaken:

- Twenty five completed/received
- Twenty three were offered a place in the Night Shelter and stayed one or more nights
- Two on the waiting list were temporarily accommodated elsewhere
- One female guest
- Six of the guests were foreign nationals

All guests enjoyed the security of having their own room/space and not having to leave at a specific time. Room inspections were undertaken every Wednesday afternoon to check that our guests were looking after themselves and their rooms. Very few issues that needed addressing were ever discovered at these times.

Behaviour

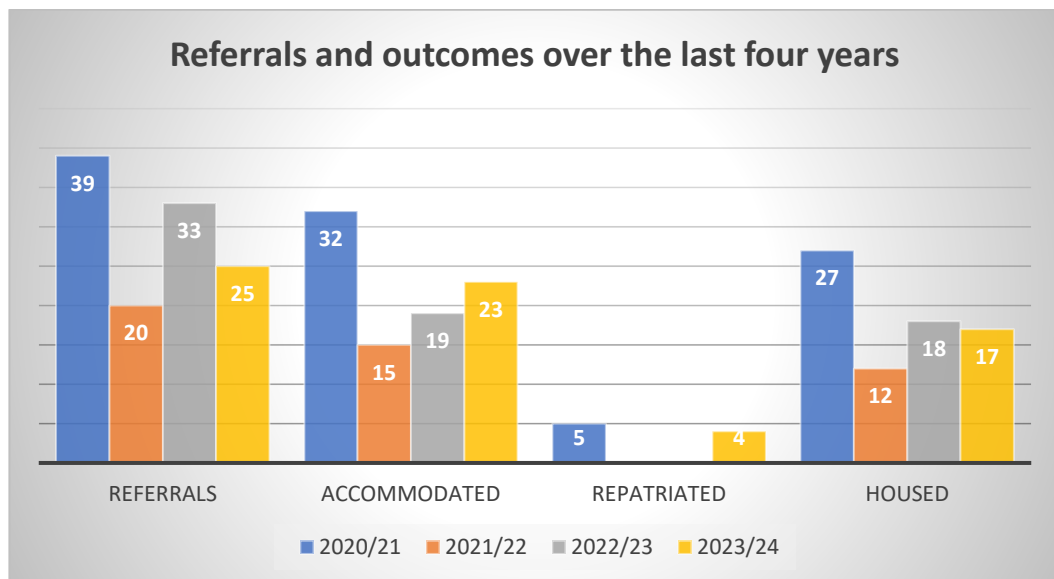
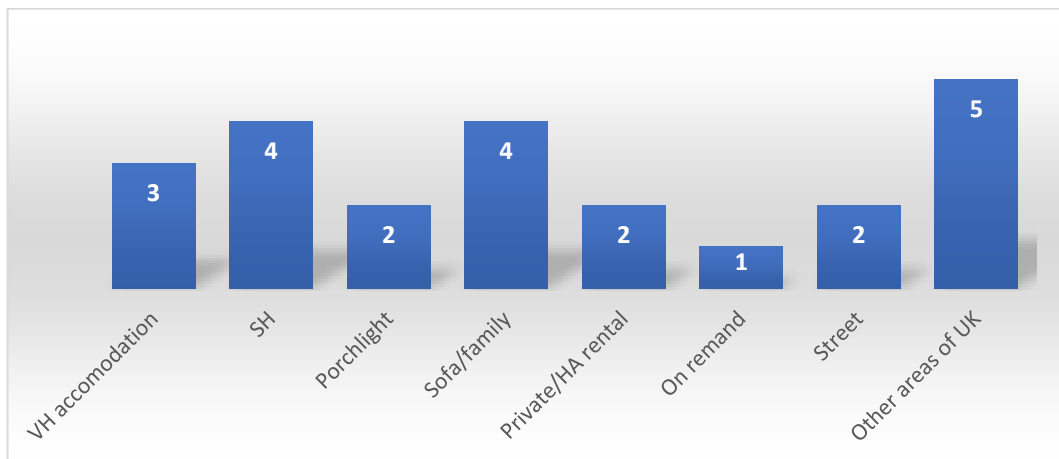
All guests accepted and signed a Guest Agreement which gave details of the venue and the conditions of entry and rules around conduct, drug and alcohol use. We operated a “three strikes and out” policy unless incidents were of a very serious nature.

Over the course of the Night Shelter five guests were asked to leave permanently, with anti-social behaviour being the cause in all cases. We were fortunate to find three of them alternative temporary accommodation and two returned to sofa surfing out of area.

One other guest was questioned by the Police and then proceeded to assault one of the officers, so has since been remanded in custody awaiting trial.

Outcomes

Following support provided through the Night Shelter, the Outreach Centre, Dover District Council, Porchlight, and Serveco the following outcomes have been achieved:



Finance

This year the costs of the Night Shelter were partially funded by grants from the Department for Levelling Up and Dover District Council. The remaining funding was from private donations to Dover Outreach Centre.

Feedback from Guests

As part of a desire to reflect and improve for future initiatives we asked our guests the following questions to which they gave a score of 1 to 10. The average scores are shown in red.

How satisfied were you with the sleeping arrangements and food? **9.7**

How satisfied were you with the welcome provided? **9.6**

How safe did you feel at the Shelter? **9.7**

They also gave the following feedback.

Rob and Pauline were so nice, a warm, friendly and helpful couple.

Good people, good food, nice warm rooms.

A place to keep out of the cold and feel safe.

I enjoyed the interactions and the social activities.

I have felt very happy here.

Feedback from volunteers

Feedback was generally positive, a few of the comments below.

Never regretted making the effort to come out. Any trepidation or nerves generally replaced with positive feeling at the end of the evening.

It was plenty of help on hand when I arrived with the food and I really enjoyed the whole evening and the interaction with the guests. It was like a very pleasurable invitation to dinner by friends.

Another year that I have really enjoyed, was hoping it would have been extended another month.

A lovely friendly atmosphere among space volunteers and the residents. It was a great fulfilling experience.

It's enjoyable having some conversations with residents. There have been interesting stories told, and laughter, and a nice atmosphere in the house.

Very rewarding, good to see the guests engage, and look well after the night shelter has finished.

Feedback from staff

Rob and Pauline

We think on the whole it was very successful compared to last year as there were less police presence and the guests once settled overall were well behaved.

The use of our WhatsApp group seemed to work as there was no overlapping of meals being repeated and the food was generally well received. The main issue we found was the random number of guests coming down to eat, sometimes there would be 8 or 9 guests and other times there would be 3 or 4. There was no real pattern to the number of guests eating dinner.

We feel that they felt comfortable and safe being at Suffolk house and appreciated the time we both spent talking to them and helping them out with various questions such as what would be happening after the winter shelter ends. There were quite a few that didn't want to leave at the end but felt comfortable once they knew where they were going to.

Noel

To change things around in these reports I have decided to give my feedback and comment last. There is a risk that familiarity breeds contempt in all areas which does include the operation of winter night shelters and this is something that we all need to guard against.

Without sounding too conceited, I believe that all involved now run the winter night shelter very well each year. It is made so much easier in having a great venue at Suffolk House. The success as shown by the outcomes achieved again this year do not happen by chance but by the hard work, effort and commitment of the staff and volunteers that are involved.

We are blessed to have Rob, who has lived experience and his partner Pauline living on site and they have in many ways been something of parents too many of our guests this year. Our volunteers have many years of experience both with this model and the previous ones that we have used to operate night shelters and they bring so much to the atmosphere in the shelter.

Local Authority, charities, organisations, and agency coordination in the Dover District is excellent and this has also played a part in the success of this initiative again.

All that remains for me to say is a massive thank you to you all, whatever part you have played this year. May God bless you.