



The SSP Ethos

We empower vulnerable people to live independently and thrive.

Stepping Stone Projects was originally set up in 1984 in partnership with Rochdale Council to provide accommodation and support for vulnerable people at risk of homelessness in and around the Rochdale area. Since then, Stepping Stone Projects has successfully expanded, and we now offer our services to people across all of the North-West.

The majority of our support services are commissioned and funded by local authorities across the region who regularly assess the quality of our services and ensure that we continue to achieve positive outcomes with our customers.

Our support services are aimed at helping our customers to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence they need to maintain a stable home and a structured lifestyle before assisting them in the process of securing or retaining permanent independent accommodation.

Stepping Stone Projects is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee, governed by a voluntary board of trustees.

We provide a 'stepping stone' on the pathway to independence for people who are not quite ready to live independently without support.

Inside this issue:

SSP Welcomes New CEO	2
SSP vs Covid 19	3
Contract renewal news	4
New business news	5
New partnership news	6
Case studies	7
Useful contacts	8

SSP welcomes new Chief Executive



At the end of 2019, SSP welcomed a new CEO. Dave Smith joined the SSP family in November 2019, from his former position as Customer First Director at First Choice Homes Oldham. Dave has extensive experience the social housing sector, with a career spanning 32 years.

In his first few months, Dave has worked with the Board to draw up a comprehensive 5-year Corporate Strategic Plan, with ambitions to provide quality homes and services to help prevent homelessness and transform lives, empower vulnerable people to live independently and thrive and ultimately to be the best and double in size. Dave's focus has been to retain existing and pursue new contracts, bringing on board several new partnerships and services to date.

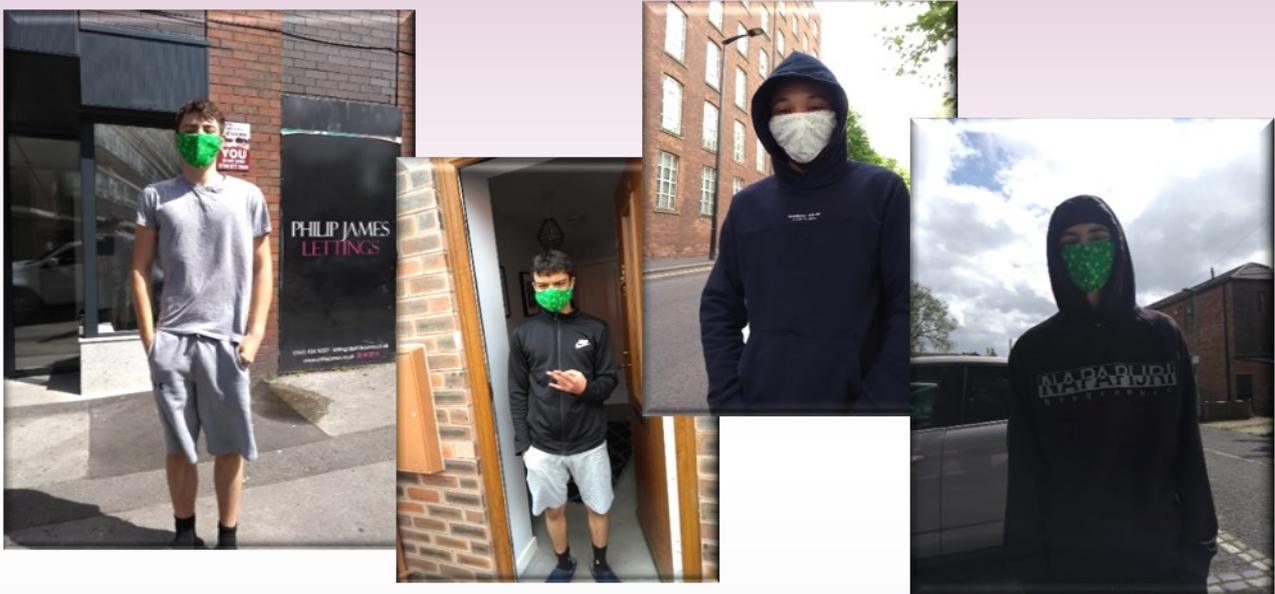
"I am delighted to be working with the Board and colleagues at Stepping Stone Projects to help improve lives for our existing and future potential customers. I look forward to working with other Partners in the coming months to help us achieve this."

Dave Smith, Chief Executive

SSP VS COVID 19

The health and well-being of colleagues and customers has been our absolute priority during the Covid 19 pandemic. Both our colleagues and customers have been provided with essential up to date advice and information throughout the crisis as the Government and local Councils have made daily announcements as the pandemic progressed.

Despite the national shortages that were experienced early on, thanks to



the efforts of SSP colleagues, we have been able to supply PPE to be used by both colleagues and customers for any home visits, thanks in part to donations from local sewing groups and Centrepont.

Immediately that the Government announced their plans for lockdown, our IT Manager made sure that all our staff had the appropriate technological equipment to be able to work from home. The only colleagues who continued operating from SSP premises were those providing essential and emergency 24-hour security, health and safety and support services, where they were able to work safely alone in an office. We quickly put in place a process of daily welfare checks on all our customers (via a daily telephone call or the internet) to ensure that everyone was safe, well and coping with their enforced confinement. All customers were advised of these working arrangements and given the latest advice on the coronavirus, how to minimise risks and what to do if they suspect they have the virus. They have also been provided with a list of emergency numbers and contacts in the event of illness or an emergency.

Some of our teams came up with innovative ways to keep their customers entertained and occupied – Our Burnley Young Persons Accommodation team made up well-being packs including word searches, crosswords, mindful colouring sheets, quizzes, face masks, hot chocolate sachets and some donations of toiletries, books, colouring pens/pencils etc.



Another of our Supported Housing Workers on the Care Leavers Team held video chats with her young customers who gave her make up tutorials and cooking lessons.

Helping More People in Need During the Crisis

Despite the many obvious practical problems we have experienced during such a difficult time, SSP has been able to respond very positively to the urgent and dire need to provide additional self-contained homes and support for rough sleepers, the homeless, hospital and care discharges and new emerging needs, such as increased domestic violence.

During the crisis so far, SSP has provided over 80 new homes for homeless people, many in boroughs we have not worked in at any scale before. We have doubled our A Bed Every Night (ABEN) provision in Rochdale, started new ABEN services in Burnley and Hyndburn, provided new temporary accommodation and support services in Oldham and Bury, provided new self-contained homes for those homeless people with low level mental health issues and support needs in Rochdale and expanded the number of homes we provide for care leavers and through our Lancashire dispersed housing and complex needs services. Much of this accommodation has been secured with the support of our housing association partners such as Rochdale Boroughwide Housing, MossCare St Vincent's, Onward Homes, Calico and Your Housing.

We are also still investigating and are in advanced negotiations to provide more homes and support in Bury, Rochdale, Burnley, Hyndburn, Tameside and Rossendale.

Planning and Preparing to do More

As we emerge from lockdown it is likely the environment within which we operate will be very different as things start to return to something more like normal. There are currently still over 400 people being accommodated in hotels which, once the hotels re-open, will need accommodating, largely at the same time. There is also going to be a lot of pent up demand for accommodation and support from those that are experiencing suppressed family breakdown and domestic violence, those that have sofa surfed during the crisis and from people being evicted once evictions are allowed again. At the same time, the continued uncertainty, deep recession, increased unemployment and reduced incomes will lead to a collapse in house sales and rented accommodation becoming available as people sit tight or are no longer able to afford housing.

We are already working with a wide range of Councils and a number of housing associations in considering how we can help provide more medium and long-term homes and support solutions for homeless people and rough sleepers as part of the Government's new £265m "Next Steps Accommodation Programme".

Quite simply, this gives SSP and other such homeless organisations, many opportunities for us to help us deliver on our purpose, mission and vision to prevent homelessness, support independent living, transform lives and to double in size, even quicker than we anticipated. However, to do this we need to work in close partnership with our key partners and stakeholders, including Councils, commissioners, housing associations and private landlords, referral and other support agencies etc. Our new Business Development and Partnership Strategies, developed during the crisis, will enable us to better deliver on these opportunities to help more people, prevent homelessness and support customers to achieve independent living.

Our plans to prepare for this are already underway, identifying possible future partners, models of working and financing properties and schemes to provide this much needed accommodation and support, as we come out the other side of this pandemic.

We are determined SSP will take advantage of these new opportunities and to be at the forefront of finding new solutions to help us realise our purpose of preventing homelessness for the most vulnerable.

New Ways of Working and Delivering Our Services

During the crisis we have also learned a lot about how we can continue to deliver essential SSP support services in more mobile and virtual ways of working, utilising digital means. Our new ICT Strategy uses this learning to ensure we continue to invest in and improve our ICT capabilities, systems and support services over the next 2 years and beyond.

CONTRACT RENEWAL NEWS

Existing Contract Extensions

The following existing contracts have been extended until at least 31 March 2021: -

Complex Needs Service

Consisting of 16 self-contained, fully furnished flats at Redfearn House in Rochdale, the Complex Needs service offers supported accommodation for single people with high-level support needs, aged 18 and over, who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The service also provides a further 15 self-contained fully furnished semi-independent move on accommodation units with support.

The contract to provide these services for Rochdale Council has been extended to 31 March 2021.

Male Only Service

Consisting of 13 self-contained flats, at Ashburn House in Rochdale, the Male Only service offers supported accommodation for single men, aged 18 and over, who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. In addition to the Ashburn House accommodation, we also offer another 15 independent properties dispersed within the community.

The contract to provide these services to Rochdale Council has been extended to 31 March 2021.

Generic Floating Support and Safer Communities Services

Also in Rochdale, our Generic Floating Support service supports over households and people aged 18 and over to obtain accommodation, manage their own tenancies and develop the skills necessary to achieve independence.

We also provide accommodation and support services to a further 10 ex-prisoners

who are at high risk of re-offending through our Safer Communities project.

The contract to provide these services to Rochdale Council has been extended to 31 March 2021.

Lancashire Young Persons Dispersed Housing and Burnley Accommodation Services

Our Young Persons Dispersed Housing and Burnley Accommodation services provides fully furnished, dispersed housing accommodation and support for young people between the ages of 16 and 25, who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, in Burnley, Pendle, Hyndburn, Ribble Valley and Rossendale.

The contracts to provide these services for Burnley and Lancashire Councils have been extended to 30 September 2021.

Other Contract News

In May 2020 we were successful in our bid to join the North West Support and Independent Living Services (SaILS) framework contract, allowing us to continue to provide our North West Care Leavers accommodation and support service. We scored 94 out of 100 in the overall assessment, with the quality of accommodation and support offer scoring 74 out of 80 and the social value element scoring a perfect 20 out of 20.

This new contract runs until April 2030 and has already resulted in SSP increasing our provision by over 20% in the first 3 months of operation .

NEW BUSINESS NEWS

Rochdale A Bed Every Night Services

Before lockdown, SSP has operated a pilot ABEN service in Rochdale that unusually provided rough sleepers with their own self contained full furnished homes with wrap around support, until more permanent accommodation could be found. During lockdown we doubled this provision from 7 to 14 units of accommodation. The model and service has been commended and replicated by GM Mayor Andy Burnham.

Rochdale Council has now extended this provision until June 2021.

Burnley Homeless Accommodation & Support

Burnley Council has just agreed a new contract for SSP to provide a further 10 self-contained supported homes in the borough, to be used by rough sleepers and homeless people, similar to the A Bed Every Night services provided in Rochdale and Greater Manchester. This service commenced in August as many homeless people have to leave the temporary accommodation they were provided under the "Everyone In" programme during the Covid-19 lockdown period.

Discussions have already commenced about extending this to 15 units during the winter period.

Hyndburn Homeless Accommodation & Support

Similarly, Hyndburn Council has contracted with SSP to provide a further 5 self-contained homes, with support, for similarly affected homeless people and rough sleepers leaving "Everyone In" accommodation.

Oldham Homeless Temporary Accommodation

During lockdown, Oldham required additional temporary accommodation for homeless people and rough sleepers. SSP were able to respond and provided 6 new self-contained and fully furnished supported homes in a very short space of time.

Bury Homeless Temporary Accommodation

SSP responded to similar problems in Bury and provided 10 new self-contained fully furnished units for homeless people and rough sleepers in Bury.

NEW PARTNERSHIP NEWS

Rochdale Boroughwide Housing

SSP is being repeatedly approached to provide more accommodation and support to homeless and vulnerable people. Most of the intended customers are a long way from the labour market and dependent on housing benefit. A major barrier to SSP being able to meet these needs, through using privately rented homes, has been housing benefit regulations, meaning that only 60% of these costs are recoverable by the council. However, if the council utilise housing association homes they can recover 100% of these costs.

As the demand for housing association homes has increased, it has become harder to access a ready supply of such homes.

SSP has therefore agreed a partnership with Rochdale Boroughwide Housing for them to provide quality homes and housing management services for use as homeless and supported housing either directly or through entering into private rented sector leases and then sub-letting these to SSP. This will assist RBH to help meet the homeless and housing needs, not just in Rochdale but across the North-West, at a time of great demand and needs, at no cost and risk to them and minimal cost to the Council. The reason RBH are keen to do this is because homeless and supported housing needs in Rochdale, Greater Manchester and the North-West are growing fast and further increases are forecast.

MossCare St Vincents

SSP has entered into partnership arrangements with MossCare St Vincents to provide 7 self-contained supported homes for those with low level mental health issues in Littleborough.

We recently extended this partnership to provide a further 4 homes for those with no recourse to public funds in Heywood. This has been commissioned and supported by Rochdale Council.

Acquiring and renovating homes with Cornerstone Place (CSP)

The SSP Board approved, in principle, an outline business case for SSP to pursue a "Shared Upsides" lease arrangement model with CSP to acquire and renovate a 12 bed property in Tameside for use as supported accommodation for homeless people.

CSP is a social enterprise set up to help fund and deliver more supported accommodation in the charitable sector to combat homelessness. CSP and their Shared Upsides model of funding has been endorsed by GMCA, who set up a workshop for housing associations and charities to find out more in February 2020.

The model is primarily aimed at providing move on accommodation for homeless and vulnerable people which is particularly hard for councils and charities to access and fund, which means expensive temporary accommodation then becomes full and blocked which in turn means more and more is needed.

The model is relatively simple. CSP and the charity form a jointly owned special purchase vehicle (SPV) to purchase and renovate properties to the charities specification ready for letting. The SPV enters into a 15-year lease agreement with the charity to utilise the property for their purposes at an agreed annual rental charge, as we would with a private landlord or housing association but on a longer-term lease.

SSP CASE STUDY

Stepping Stone Projects working in Partnership with Rochdale Borough-wide Housing, MossCare St Vincents, Sanctuary Trust and Regenda

A great example of how effective partnership working can be ...

Customer X, known here as Jimmy, had a childhood of abuse and neglect, with family histories and allegations of sexual exploitation and regular spells in care homes and foster care. Jimmy had recognised Special Educational Needs owing to behavioural and social adjustments impeding his learning.

Jimmy's mother was regularly in a care home herself during his childhood, his father had support needs as a former SSP customer himself and was a convicted sex offender and paedophile.

In adolescence, Jimmy was diagnosed with both Asperger's Syndrome and schizophrenia. He was often sexually inappropriate and impulsive and also a known user of illegal drugs (cocaine and cannabis) but it is not believed Class A drugs.

Jimmy had a history of failed involvement with many support services, including CAHMS, Princes Trust and Rochdale Positive Steps. As a young man, Jimmy became homeless in 2017 and was briefly accommodated in Rochdale Council's homeless persons' facility. However, his violent and aggressive behaviour towards fellow residents and staff meant he was quickly evicted.

He was then provided with emergency accommodation by the Sanctuary Trust at their Nightstop in Rochdale. He was

offered his own home by Rochdale Boroughwide Housing (RBH) but his support worker believed that he required more support before he was ready to sustain his own tenancy and so referred him to Stepping Stone Projects (SSP).

As RBH had made an offer of a home to Jimmy, he was initially considered for SSP Floating Support to be provided to him at his new home. However, the SSP assessment of his support needs identified that his needs were too high for this and so he was placed into an RBH Trainer Flat with more intensive support provided through the SSP Male Only Support Service. Unfortunately managing his tenancy and the level of support provided, proved too much for Jimmy and he relinquished his tenancy, as he could not manage.

He was therefore accommodated instead into SSP's 24/7 Residential Male Only Accommodation at Ashburn House. This is a 15 unit grouped housing scheme that utilises an RBH owned, self-contained block of flats, that was renovated and is managed by Regenda, for use by SSP, for men who need highly intensive support services.

Relatively early into this tenancy, familiar problems of non-engagement with support, non-payment of rent and bills and poor cleanliness of his property re-emerged. He would go missing to Blackpool for periods at a time. He received an Exclusion Order from Rochdale Town Centre and its retailers because of his repeated shop lifting. His inappropriate sharing of details of his own background and his father's offences, led to him being assaulted by a group of young men.

Despite SSP's best efforts, it seemed Jimmy was in a spiral of slow but continual decline. Therefore, we decided to transfer him to our Complex Needs Service, residential project at Redfearn House, as even more support was needed, including with daily living tasks. Redfearn House is a 16-person 24/7 intensive residential support home, which is owned and managed by MossCare St Vincents, from which SSP provide accommodation and support for people with a history of substance abuse, domestic and sexual abuse and mental health issues. Working with Rochdale Council's Adult Social Care Team, additional care services were brought in to help Jimmy and slowly but surely, he began to turn his life around and improve.

After a long and difficult journey, in which SSP, with help of all the key partners identified above, have persevered to support him, SSP were able to recommend Jimmy for permanent move-on accommodation into his own tenancy. RBH awarded Jimmy top priority for rehousing, despite his previous poor tenancy history, because of his vulnerability and the support he was getting. Jimmy was supported to finally move into his own RBH flat in 2019.

He continues to receive SSP floating support services, along with support of RBH and Rochdale Council Adult Social Care Services, but he now has a fully furnished home which he is successfully maintaining, along with his independence.

“This is just one of many similar stories of customers who just need a little support and encouragement to turn their lives around. Helping people like Jimmy is at the heart of SSP's mission and values and can only be successfully achieved through partnership working.”

Dave Smith, CEO, SSP

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