

Manchester Homelessness Partnership

Suggested language guideline

Introduction

The language we use to refer to people can have a positive or negative impact on the way that people feel. To form this guideline, we have had open discussions about labelling and around the terminology which is used in relation to homelessness. Currently, [2018] there are certain terms that some people are uncomfortable with, and other terms that people feel more comfortable with.

An involvement from everyone is needed to make sure that organisations across Greater Manchester promote the use of positive and respectful language when referring to the people they work with. We also advocate for plain and jargon-free language when describing homelessness services.

This document is not intended to be a set of rules but is a way for us all to think about the language that we use and how it might affect people.

Guidance:

Please avoid these terms:

- Beggars
- Drug addicts
- Alcoholics/drinkers
- Rough sleepers
- Lived-experience
- Squatters
- Clients or service-users
- The homeless

Instead please consider using these terms, (*key word = 'people'*):

- People who are begging
- People with substance misuse issues/problems
- People with health issues/problems
- People who are sleeping rough / people who are street homeless
- People with a personal insight into homelessness
- People who are squatting
- People who working with a service(s) [name of person and name of service if known]
- People who are or who have been homeless

At external meetings (including MHP meetings)

People should be referred to by their name and, if applicable, their position. If people are volunteering their time, experience and skills, this should be acknowledged. People do not want to be referred to or introduced as someone with 'lived-experience'. People who are working or volunteering would prefer to be introduced by their job title or role - without an additional label.

Some people are happy to talk about their experiences which relate to homelessness, but this is a personal choice. If you are at a meeting with someone you don't already know, it could help to ask them beforehand how they would like to be introduced and what they would and wouldn't feel comfortable in discussing.

The content of any meeting needs to be easy to understand - please avoid using jargon, acronyms, or complex language.

The terminology of blame

People are often referred to as "not engaging" with services when it is actually the services responsibility to be responsive and accessible. Saying that people "aren't engaging" is placing the blame onto the individual, rather than recognising limitations in the service.

Imagery

As well as language, the representation of 'homelessness' in imagery is also important. We would ask for any pictures or photography to be less intrusive and less stereotypical. We would also encourage the use of images which more accurately depicts the whole picture of homelessness and includes more positivity where appropriate (e.g. not black and white photos of people who are rough sleeping and who appear in distress).

An extra consideration is also needed with photographs when the subject could be easily identified - has their full permission been given and what implications could the use of their photo have both now and in the future.

Thank you

It is hoped that the guidelines in this document, or something similar, will be taken forward by the Manchester Homelessness Partnership, the Greater Manchester Homeless Action Network, The Mayor's Office, and any relevant organisation working with the homelessness sector.

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