**Winter night shelter receives quality mark for excellent practice**

Basildon Emergency Night Shelter (BENS) has received national recognition for its excellent practice in supporting rough sleepers.

The shelter, which last winter opened for five nights each week in churches across the borough, has achieved the Housing Justice Quality Mark (HJQM) for Church and Community Night Shelters for Excellent Practice.

The accreditation scheme assesses volunteer training, health and safety, referrals and links with other homelessness agencies, and data collection and sharing.

Cllr Don Morris, Chairman of Basildon Council’s Housing Committee, said: “We are committed to tackling homelessness and will continue to do everything in our power to support selfless volunteers who are able to provide frontline help.

“The cold winter months can be a dangerous time of year for people living on the streets, and the Basildon Emergency Night Shelter provides an invaluable service. I am delighted that the hard work and dedication of the Basildon Homelessness Working Group has been recognised with this well-deserved quality mark.”

Phyl McLaren, Chair of the Basildon Homelessness Working Group, added: “We are naturally delighted to receive this recognition. I would like to thank our Co-ordinator and all the volunteers as this award is a testimony for all their hard work. It reflects our commitment to provide the best possible and safest experience for guests and volunteers. It can also provide confidence to our funders and partners.”

BENS guests are provided with a hot drink and evening snack, somewhere to sleep, and breakfast before they leave in the morning.

Basildon Council also works with St Mungo’s to provide an outreach service to people sleeping rough in the local community. Outreach workers go out and contact people on the streets, talk to them about their situation, their health and other issues, and help them to move off the streets for good.

Housing Justice Chief Executive, Kathy Mohan, said: “We are delighted to welcome BENS to the network of Housing Justice Quality Mark accredited Night Shelters.

“Church and Community Night Shelters are proving an effective response to homelessness across the country, providing shelter to people who might otherwise be forced to sleep on the street or sofa surf with friends or family.

“Many shelters are seeing the value of signing up to Housing Justice Quality Mark accreditation. More than 20 Church and Community Night Shelters have been through the rigorous assessment process across the country”

If you are concerned about someone sleeping rough and want to connect them to local services, visit the national referral service at [www.streetlink.org.uk](http://www.streetlink.org.uk/)

**ENDS**