

**NATIONAL POVERTY AND HOMELESSNESS  
ACTION WEEK 26 JANUARY- 3 FEBRUARY 2008**



**“ A STRONG CLEAR VOICE” - MPS, CHARITIES CHURCHES AND CITIZENS COME TOGETHER  
TO COMBAT HOMELESS AND POVERTY AT “OPENING DOORS OPENING HEARTS” 1 FEB 08**

Homelessness and Poverty need urgent action. This was the clear message from 110 Portsmouth residents at the very successful Opening Doors, Opening Hearts Event at the Discovery Centre St Johns RC Cathedral, Portsmouth on Friday 1 Feb. Sixth form students from Oaklands Catholic School in Waterlooville, with their new Head Teacher Matthew Quinn, joined members of churches across the City, charity workers and other Portsmouth citizens from a wide range of ages, cultures and social backgrounds. The group was joined by representatives of leading Portsmouth third sector Groups: the Foyer, the Roberts Centre, Central Point, Portsmouth Savers Credit Union, Portsmouth Housing Association and Haslar Visitors Group in a packed programme. In a keynote address Havant MP David Willetts highlighted the critical impact of insufficient affordable housing for young families as part of strengthening the family, preventing social breakdown and ensuring that the pathway for those young people who do not enter higher education, currently both confused and complex, becomes as clear as that route for those who do enter it.

Seven discussion groups worked with charities using case studies to highlight the problems faced by their clients. A lively Question Time followed with David Willetts MP, Mike Hancock CBE MP, Councillor Hugh Mason (PCC executive Member for Housing) and representatives from the Roberts Centre, the Portsmouth Savers Credit Union and the Wessex Housing Group. Deftly chaired by Drayton resident Captain Paul Quinn OBE, group members challenged decision makers on need for new strategies including the clear need for more affordable housing for young families, extra accommodation for homelessness people, to consider allowing asylum seekers to work while they await a decision on their residency and the challenge for universities to provide jobs for students (as happens in the USA). The Hearing adopted the three Charter Challenges – to work together in partnership with the charities to raise awareness of poverty and homelessness, to listen to each other and those who feel isolated, and to provide a strong clear voice to those in Portsmouth with the power and influence to deliver change reminding them of the ethical issues. Event Chairman Bruce Finch (38) from Farlington said “this was a very successful way of highlighting the complex issues we all face. We will be working together to deliver our Charter challenges with the charities and decision makers to make Portsmouth a better place for everyone”.

**ENDS**

**Further information can be obtained from “Opening Doors Opening Hearts” Chairman Bruce Finch on 07751351903 or bfinch@cafod.org.uk, the Reverend Bob White at St Mary’s Vicarage (02392 822687),**