

# Housing Related Support (HRS)

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| <b>Report number:</b>      | <b>COU/WS/24/011</b>  |              |
| <b>Report to and date:</b> | <b>Council</b>  | 16 July 2024 |
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**Decisions Plan:** This item has been published on the Decisions Plan; however, subject to the decision taken by Cabinet on 9 July 2024, as set out in Report number: [CAB/WS/24/028](#), this item has been referred to Council for decision without debate by Cabinet and, will therefore, not be subject to call-in. No exempt appendices are attached to this report as previously published on the Decisions Plan.

**Wards impacted:** All wards

**Recommendations:** It is recommended that Council:

- 1. Notes the current situation and implications of Suffolk County Council’s decision to decommission the Housing Related Support service.**
- 2. Agrees West Suffolk Council’s position for the future commissioning and delivery of the Housing Pathway and allocate a budget**

**of up to £200,000 per annum funded from the Housing reserve for 2025 to 2027 and include as an indicative cost in the base budget in the longer term as part of the 2025 to 2026 budget setting process.**

- 3. Supports the recommendation set out in paragraph 2.3 to source additional temporary accommodation.**
- 4. Supports the recommendation set out in paragraph 2.4 to undertake a system review of the current Supported Housing Options available to homeless people in West Suffolk.**

## 1. Context to this report

### Background

- 1.1 Suffolk County Council (SCC) has made the decision to substantially reduce Housing Related Support (HRS) services and will only be commissioning services for those to whom it owes a duty to provide support; that is care leavers until the age of 25 and those who have been assessed as having eligible care and support needs by adult services. SCC need to secure a £3 million budget reduction in the financial year 2024-2025, this being split as £1 million in 2024-2025 and the remainder in 2025-2026.
- 1.2 SCC has indicated that it wishes to continue to work in partnership with district and borough councils and providers in Suffolk to find a solution. It was noted in the independent Campbell Tickel report *'Preventing Homelessness in Suffolk: Examples of best practice in homelessness and housing related support'* (October 2023) that there is a perception that joint commissioning or working is not prioritised at a system level, with the majority of current partnerships being locally-based. The localised basis of funding means that available pots of money are not utilised strategically. West Suffolk has continued its dialogue with SCC and been part of the Housing Board discussions on this important topic.
- 1.3 Supported housing provides invaluable housing and support for disabled people, homeless people, people with mental health problems, people who have experienced domestic abuse and many others. Supported housing helps ease the pressure on the NHS and care services and saves the public purse around £940 per resident per year<sup>1</sup>. West Suffolk Council has committed to focussing on the delivery of affordable, available and decent homes as one of its strategic priorities, and this is being developed through the emerging Housing, Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy. The impact of the cessation of the county wide support will be further considered through that.

### The current situation

- 1.4 The current value of SCC's contract in West Suffolk is £963,191 per annum which provides support for **173 bedspaces**.
- 1.5 Services will be affected at the following accommodation settings in West Suffolk:
- Lucy Adams House (formerly Tayfen House), Bury St Edmunds
  - YMCA, Bury St Edmunds

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<sup>1</sup> Source: [National Housing Federation - Supported housing](#)

- Acorn House, Bury St Edmunds
- Coupals Court, Haverhill
- Cangle Junction, Haverhill
- Heazeworth House, Haverhill
- The Limes, Haverhill
- Properties in Springfield Rd and Grove Road, Bury St Edmunds

- 1.6 The above list includes 23 units for young families that are all currently occupied. All the young families currently housed were cases referred by the council's Housing Options Teams and all will be owed a statutory homelessness duty should they lose the accommodation currently in use. **Therefore, should the HRS service end, it is likely all 23 families will need temporary accommodation.** Around 20 percent of these families have children on child protection registers.
- 1.7 Through working with SCC we understand that of the remaining 147 bedspaces only **25** were referred by Suffolk Housing Options Teams during 2023-2024. The remaining 122 beds are occupied by people who have been referred by partner organisations or they are self-referrals and at this stage it is not possible to determine how many the Council may owe a statutory duty to house. There is a risk that, should the service provider decide to exit the market, the Council could face needing to accommodate people currently supported and accommodated through the HRS service and this could result in an increase in rough sleeping.
- 1.8 West Suffolk has a duty to accommodate 16/17-year-olds if they approach the council as homeless. Following the approach, a multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) referral is made to request that a statutory assessment is carried out to determine the young person's needs. This is an agreed protocol across Suffolk.
- 1.9 **The importance of housing related support provision**  
Supported housing currently helps more than half a million people in England to live independently in their communities. It provides a vital service to the people in our society who need the most support, from survivors of domestic abuse to young people leaving care. New research commissioned by the National Housing Federation (NHF) and completed by [Altair Ltd.](#)<sup>2</sup>, shows that the country is not on track to provide a supported home to everyone who needs one by 2040.
- 1.10 The NHF commissioned research to better understand how supported

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<sup>2</sup> [National Housing Federation - How much supported housing will we need by 2040?](#)

housing specifically impacts homelessness, health and wellbeing<sup>3</sup>. They wanted to further understand the challenges that it faces and the ways in which it supports and interacts with the NHS, social care, the justice system and other public services. Amongst others, it made the following conclusions:

- Good quality supported housing has a significant positive impact on its residents' health, wellbeing and sense of social connection.
- Supported housing plays a critical role in reducing homelessness and relieving pressures on the social care, health, criminal justice and housing sectors - ultimately lessening demands on the public purse.
- Short-term and transitional supported housing is playing a key role in reducing and/or preventing higher-risk forms of homelessness, such as rough sleeping.
- Supported housing residents have complex needs: 9 out of 10 have at least one health condition or disability (including substance misuse, mental ill-health, learning disability/autistic spectrum disorder and physical conditions), and half of them are experiencing more than one of these conditions.

## 2. Proposals within this report

2.1 The figures at 1.4 to 1.7 indicate that West Suffolk does have some requirements for accommodation with support. With current providers considering withdrawing from the market there is an opportunity to work with them to provide the services we need for the future. We also need to consider that accommodation for 16/17-year-olds is required to be Ofsted registered (currently only two providers offer this service).

### 2.2 **Recommendation:**

#### **Provision for those with medium and high support needs.**

Allow the Council to explore in more detail with providers the additional capacity needed to enable the team to commission services in West Suffolk to cater for those with medium and high support needs. The team would need to talk to the market and understand their positions in respect of whether they will continue to be working in West Suffolk or planning to sell properties they currently own. The service provider could look to claim housing benefit to cover its housing management costs and there would be a need for contract management resource. By increasing the budget envelope to a maximum of £200,000 per annum the Council could take the time needed to develop a more nuanced and local response that meets local demand and supports need and will be informed by the emerging Housing Strategy.

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<sup>3</sup> [imogen-blood-research-into-the-supported-housing-sectors-impact-on-homelessness-prevention-health-and-wellbeing.pdf](#)

We make no proposals around the commissioning of any young parents supported bedspaces. Should a family require support this can be delivered within their own homes by Suffolk County Council's Early Help service or social care professionals.

The £200,000 per annum cost will be funded from Housing Options reserve for the first two years to March 2027 and then included as an indicative pressure in the base budget in the longer term as part of the 2025 to 2026 budget setting process. Demand and performance will be reviewed quarterly with a formal review in September 2026 to inform budget and resource planning for future years.

- 2.3 There are two further actions recommended which do not have an ongoing resource commitment. To retain the much-needed social housing in the area, we should work with providers to explore the opportunity to have rights to use on additional temporary accommodation, ideally with staff onsite 24/7. The full costs of these units can be covered through Housing Benefit. By having a site with staff available 24/7 we could consider taking higher risk applicants in emergency situations, which would meet a need we currently have. We would also no longer need to have staff on call out of hours and would therefore save the cost of on call payments. This would be for around 15 bedspaces. Providers have not yet advised what their plans are however given that all in West Suffolk are larger providers we hope to see some stock converted to general needs accommodation. We have already spoken with existing HRS providers working in West Suffolk and indicated our desire to work with them to on both actions.
- 2.4 This approach should be supported by a system review of the current Supported Housing Options available to homeless people in West Suffolk. This includes those in Rough Sleeping and Next Steps accommodation provisions. Current annual funding of Rough Sleeping Initiative (£336,852) and Next Steps Accommodation Provision Funding (£131,220) are both currently funded until 31 March 2025.
- 2.5 Commissioning services directly will create the opportunity to shape those services for the benefit of need in West Suffolk and to control nomination rights to ensure that the best use is made of the accommodation. The Campbell Tickell report (undertaken before the decision was made to decommission the Housing Related Support (HRS) contract) recommended a higher level of support provision than that provided by the existing HRS contract. Working independently will provide West Suffolk Council with an opportunity to deliver support at a medium and high level.

### 3. **Alternative options that have been considered**

- 3.1 As a result of SCC's decision there will be an impact on West Suffolk Council (WSC) in some way. If we do not respond proactively to the decision, and let the services close, it is likely providers will withdraw their provision as it will be unfunded. This would likely have a significant impact on the Council's housing register and homelessness services as well as people's lives and wellbeing, as those currently accommodated and supported through the HRS service would approach the Council for accommodation.

We have explored the option of procuring a fixed number of bedspaces that offer up to five hours of support per week, in line with the SCC current contract. On current hourly rates estimated service cost would be £115,245 per annum. The provider would claim housing benefits to cover its housing management costs. In addition, there would be a cost of contract managing this service; this could be a part time post at circa. £30,000 per annum. Total cost would therefore be approx. **£145,000 per annum** (SCC current budget £963,191 which is the current value and allowing for 8 percent annual inflation increase).

- 3.2 As an additional alternative, consideration was given to entering into an arrangement with SCC to co-commission services. This would mean that we decide how much budget we would set aside for the purpose of providing support with the considerations above and, SCC could novate, or replace with a new contract, and amend existing contracts with providers. This is likely to be on a reduced number of support hours and/or bed spaces. The risk with this approach is that we are not in control of the services we are commissioning for our population and could be later impacted by further changes that SCC may make.
- 3.3 Meet the service gap resulting from the SCC budget reduction in its entirety. That would cost WSC in excess of £900,000 and is difficult to justify on the basis of the available data.

### 4. **Consultation and engagement undertaken**

- 4.1 Local providers have been met with individually. All have indicated a willingness to work with West Suffolk. They have expressed concern about the approach taken by SCC.
- 4.2 Staff have met with SCC and been part of workshops to consider what a combined service may look like.

- 4.3 Liaison with other district and borough councils in Suffolk has been undertaken at the Suffolk Housing Board.

## **5. Risks associated with the proposals**

- 5.1 Providers do not want to continue to provide the service or work with West Suffolk Council resulting in an inability to meet the local demand (likelihood low following engagement).
- 5.2 Providers continue the service with other local authorities that can offer more competitive rates resulting in an inability to meet the local demand (mitigation: working with other Local Authorities to understand likely rates).
- 5.3 Costs or demand increase putting additional pressure on Council budget. This will be monitored through the in-year and annual budget monitoring processes.
- 5.4 The use of the Housing reserve for the first two years will put pressure on the availability of that reserve to fund the service should the specific grant received from central government be removed without sufficient notice. This will need to be closely monitored as future local government funding announcements are made.

## **6. Implications arising from the proposals**

- 6.1 Financial – As set out in the main body of the report.
- 6.2 Legal compliance: West Suffolk Council has no legal duty to provide support.
- 6.3 Personal data processing – not applicable
- 6.4 Equalities – We will complete an Equality Impact Assessment as part of the new service project.
- 6.5 Crime and disorder – no plans to change location of provision so potentially no change to levels of associated anti-social behaviour
- 6.6 Safeguarding – existing protections would be in place through existing providers.
- 6.7 Environment or sustainability – not applicable
- 6.8 HR or staffing – new Contracts Manager employed by West Suffolk Council that has been budgeted for. There are no other staffing implications.
- 6.9 Changes to existing policies – we will need to develop an allocations scheme but are looking to utilise the existing Home-Link system for this purpose – subject to further discussion.
- 6.10 External organisations (such as businesses, community groups) – Multiple affected organisations whether we work with SCC or alone.



These include services currently able to refer into services, for example, probation and prisons.

## **7. Appendices referenced in this report**

7.1 None

## **8. Background documents associated with this report**

8.1 None