



Wirral Borough Council

Homeless Supported Housing Commissioning Plan

October 2024

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This draft plan is provisional and potentially subject to amendment to align with any final budget constraints.

BACKGROUND

This Homeless Supported Housing Commissioning Plan seeks to prevent homelessness through the commissioning of a range of services that meet individual needs of people, and which enable long term independence.

The plan sets out the Council's proposed commissioning activity over the next 18 months. This represents a shorter life than most commissioning plans and this is reflective of the need to undertake the five-year review of homelessness within the Borough, as required by the Homelessness Act 2002, in 2024/25

The purpose of a homelessness review is to assess the extent to which the population in the Borough is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless and to identify what is currently being done, and identify what resources are available or may be needed, to prevent and tackle homelessness.

A homelessness review provides the evidence for the Council to develop a homelessness strategy but, critically, provides the basis for future commissioning activity through the identification of unmet need within the borough and the likely future demand for service provision.

As such, rather than a full-scale commissioning plan, this document is intended to act as a 'roadmap' to guide activity over the period of October 2024 to April 2026 until the Homeless Review, and the associated Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy provide the necessary evidence base and priority areas that will form the basis of a longer-term Commissioning Strategy. Nevertheless, the proposed activity described in this plan will still be guided by the following key principles:

- We will continue to commission services that prevent and reduce homelessness and deliver better outcomes and better lives for people using them.
- We will maintain the current diverse range of services but where required, reshape those to meet specific needs identified i.e. new legislation/regulatory changes.
- We will continue to work collaboratively with partners and embed the principles of co-production in commissioning practice.

Previously, long-term commissioning activity has been set out as a component part of the Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy. However, it is recognised that a dedicated local plan is needed to better inform the supported housing market.

HOMELESS ACCOMMODATION SERVICES

Access to a safe, secure and warm home is the most fundamental building block in people living stable, productive and healthy lives. This can be difficult for some of our most vulnerable residents to achieve, and without it can lead people to experience a single or combination of problems including increased isolation, loss of independence, physical and mental health problems, homelessness, substance misuse, domestic abuse and repeat contact with the criminal justice system. These issues affect many people, and therefore the provision of appropriate housing and support is vital to help individuals to achieve and maintain an independent and healthy life, preventing crisis and reduce the use and cost of crisis services. It is also critical that, given the increasing complexity of presenting issues experienced by many homeless people, that these housing and support services are tailored and coordinated to meet the specific and combined needs of individuals.

Although the commissioning and funding of Homeless Accommodation Services is not, itself, a statutory duty, the Council is only able to meet its obligations under Homeless Legislation by virtue of the availability of such services. Not only does investment in these preventative services deliver significant cost benefits to the Council, but also other statutory services such as Social Care, Health and the Criminal Justice System.

Although Homeless Accommodation Services will vary significantly in scale and configuration, and may be provided to different profiles of people under the broader homeless cohort, they typically fall into one of the four service types:

- Direct Access “Hostel”

Direct access hostels are intended to provide easily accessible accommodation that, in theory, can accommodate single homeless people at any time of day or night and, as such, are staffed on a 24-hour basis. They cater for a wide range of support need, from low to high, but have in recent years worked overwhelmingly with those who present with multiple, complex needs such as mental health, substance misuse and offending behaviours.

- Supported Housing (*often referred to as second-stage accommodation*)
This service type provides longer-term accommodation, often for up to two years, to people who usually present with medium to high support needs. The focus of the support provided is to assist someone to become ready to live independently and so, for some, this may involve supporting them around their substance misuse issues or mental health problems.

Specialist services (*i.e. provided to a specific homeless client group*) such as Refuges are often classed as Supported Housing / Second-Stage

Accommodation but, due to access arrangements, could also be considered as direct access provision.

- Semi-Independent Housing

Semi-Independent Housing is medium-term accommodation intended for those people who are almost ready for independence but who would still benefit with some support, which is provided at a lower level than the other service types, before their move to full independence. Semi-Independent accommodation is standard residential housing, with support staff visiting on a weekly / twice-weekly basis.

- Floating Support

‘Floating support’ Services are visiting support services provided to people living in their own homes to help them remain living independently.

Frequently, floating support is provided to people who are experiencing difficulties in their accommodation that may, potentially, lead to homelessness. However, it can also be for people who have previously been homeless and living in supported housing, and who will be moving in to their own flat or house within the community.

The table below shows the numbers of bedspaces (units) currently commissioned under each service type:

Service Type	Number of units commissioned
Direct Access	130
Supported Housing	151
Semi-Independent	64
Floating Support	150
TOTAL	495

As described earlier, homeless accommodation services can be provided to a range of different homeless client profiles, the following table sets these profiles out accompanied by the numbers of units commissioned for each (*excluding Floating Support*):

Client Profile	Number of units commissioned
Young homeless people aged 16 & 17	48
Homeless people aged 18 - 24	95
Homeless Teenage Parents	22

Homeless Adults 25+	168
Women fleeing Domestic Abuse	12

FINANCIAL & BUDGETARY INFORMATION

Funding for Homeless Accommodation Services was previously ring-fenced through the “Supporting People” programme, and criteria for its use was clearly set out by (the then) Department for Communities and Local Government, as was the structure for Commissioning and contracting arrangements. Although the ring fence is no longer in place, the Council has continued to ensure that vulnerable homeless people with housing support needs are able to access appropriate support services and accommodation.

The overall budget for the Supported Housing Programme is £2.8m and split across the following Service types:

Service Type	Proportion of budget spend
Direct Access	37%
Supported Housing	43%
Semi-Independent	11%
Floating Support	9%

The table below shows the Programme budget split across services provided to young homeless (16-24), and adult homeless (25+):

	Proportion of Budget Spend
Services for Homeless People under the age of 25	44%
Services for Homeless People over the age of 25	50%
Floating Support Services (18+)	6%

CURRENT CONTRACTUAL ARRANGEMENTS

All homeless accommodation services are commissioned through a contractual framework that vary in their length of term from service to service. There are currently 13 live contracts for homeless accommodation services, and, at the time of drafting, these are split between either:

- Those that have been the subject of a formal tendering process and still within their original term (including any extension periods); or

- Those that were previously tendered for, but which are no longer within their original term and have been the subject of direct award(s) since the expiration of the original contract.

There are currently 5 contracts that are still within their original term (See Annex A), and 8 contracts that have been directly awarded (See Annex B)

The rationale for directly awarding contracts will, again, vary from service to service but, as an example, in relation to supported housing for homeless 16- & 17-year-olds, the Government announced its intention to implement a new regulatory framework regarding the delivery of these services in 2022. Given the potential impact of these new regulations on how these services were to be commissioned, the decision was made to defer procuring on a long-term basis until the new framework was published and understood. There was, however, a significant delay by OFSTED in publishing, meaning that it was necessary to continue deferring, and directly awarding contracts for these services, until such time as details were released.

In the case of directly awarded contracts, the Division uses a robust process to satisfy itself that contracted services are provided on a cost-effective basis that represents effective VfM, whilst allowing the Service Provider the level of funding required to implement the service to the required quality standards and deliver on the agreed strategic outcomes and performance standards.

All contracts have been let in accordance with the relevant legislation governing public procurement and are classed as falling under the 'light-touch' regime meaning that they are subject to more flexible procurement rules. It should, however., be noted that Procurement law only allows for direct awards to the cumulative value of (currently) £663,000 and , therefore, to be legally compliant it is necessary to tender any service that reaches this threshold.

ANNEX A

The following table represents the contracts already approved and within their original term and which have extension clauses that may be activated depending on the outcome of the Homeless Review.

Service Provider	Service Type	Current Contract Term	Approximate Annual Contract Value	Proposed Action
Service Provider A	Supported Housing for 16/17-year-olds	July 2024 – June 2025	£424,610	This service is within its originally tendered contract term until June 2025. The contract provides for 2 x 12-month extension options running from July 2025 to June 2026, and July 2026 to June 2027. The outcome of the Homeless Review will determine whether these options are taken up. APPROVAL ALREADY GIVEN.
Service Provider J	Direct Access	February 2024 – March 2025	£148, 868	Service is within extension term of original contract until March 2025. One extension option remains for period March 2025 to February 2026. The outcome of the Homeless Review will determine whether this option is taken.
Service Provider K	Direct Access	May 2024 – April 2025	£210,000	Service is within extension term of original contract until April 2025. One extension option remains for period May 2025 to April 2026. The outcome of the Homeless Review will determine whether this option is taken. APPROVAL ALREADY GIVEN
Service Provider L	Direct Access	May 2024 – April 2025	£267, 586	Service is within extension term of original contract until April 2025. One extension option remains for period May 2025 to April 2026. The outcome of the Homeless Review will determine whether this option is taken. APPROVAL ALREADY GIVEN
Service Provider M	Direct Access	May 2024 – April 2025	£466, 427	Service is within extension term of original contract until April 2025. One extension option remains for period May 2025 to April 2026. The outcome of the Homeless Review will determine whether this option is taken. APPROVAL ALREADY GIVEN

ANNEX B

The following list of directly awarded contracts represent those that will be the subject of a procurement exercise during the life of the Commissioning Plan.

Service Provider	Service Type	Current Contract Term	Approximate Annual Contract Value	Proposed Action
Service Provider B	Supported Housing for teenage parents	July 2024 – June 2025	£162, 789	This service is within its directly awarded contract period until June 2025. It is proposed to commence a tender exercise in January 2025, concluding in February 2025, with an Officer's Decision notice published in March 2025 with new contract award in July 2025. The proposed contract term will be for 2 years, with 2 x 12 month options to extend.
Service Provider C	Supported Housing for 18-25 year olds	July 2024 – June 2025	£106, 591	This service is within its directly awarded contract period until June 2025. It is proposed to commence a tender exercise in January 2025, concluding in February 2025, with an Officer's Decision notice published in March 2025 with new contract award in July 2025. The proposed contract term will be for 2 years, with 2 x 12 month options to extend
Service Provider D	Supported Housing for 16-21 year olds	July 2024 – June 2025	£188, 336	This service is within its directly awarded contract period until June 2025. It is proposed to commence a tender exercise in January 2025, concluding in February 2025, with an Officer's Decision notice published in March 2025 with new contract award in July 2025. The proposed contract term will be for 2 years, with 2 x 12 month options to extend
Service Provider E	Floating Support	September 2024 – May 2025	£268, 654	Service is within directly awarded contract period until May 2025. It is proposed to commence a tender exercise in November 2024, concluding in December 2024, with an Officer's Decision notice published in January 2025 with new contract award in May 2025. The proposed contract term will be for 2 years, with 2 x 12 month options to extend.
Service Provider F	Semi-independent for 18+	February 2024 – January 2025	£275, 120	Service is within directly awarded contract period until January 2025. It is proposed to commence a tender exercise in September 2024, concluding in October 2024, with an Officer's Decision notice published in November 2024 with new contract award in January 2025. The proposed contract term will be for 2 years, with 2 x 12 month options to extend
Service Provider G	Semi-independent for 18+	February 2024 – January 2025	£51, 690	Service is within directly awarded contract period until January 2025. It is proposed to commence a tender exercise in September 2024, concluding in October 2024, with an Officer's Decision notice published in November 2024 with new contract award in January 2025. The proposed contract term will be for 2 years, with 2 x 12 month options to extend
Service Provider H	Supported Housing - Refuge	February 2023 – January 2025	£206, 520	Service is within directly awarded contract period until January 2025. It is proposed to commence a tender exercise in September 2024, concluding in October 2024, with an Officer's Decision notice published in November 2024 with new contract award in February 2025. The proposed contract term will be for 2 years, with 2 x 12 month options to extend
Service Provider I	Supported Housing for 18+	April 2024 – March 2025	£178, 284	Service is within directly awarded contract period until March 2025. It is proposed to commence a tender exercise in October 2024, concluding in November 2024, with an Officer's Decision notice published in December 2024 with new contract award in April 2025. The proposed contract term will be for 2 years, with 2 x 12 month options to extend

