



ECONOMY, REGENERATION & HOUSING COMMITTEE

14th October 2024

REPORT TITLE:	COMMISSIONING PLAN FOR HOMELESS ACCOMMODATION/SUPPORT SERVICES
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION AND PLACE

REPORT SUMMARY

The Commissioning Plan for Homeless accommodation/support services 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 aim is to improve outcomes for some of the borough's most vulnerable residents and will proactively respond to how inequalities impact people's lives, and commission services to reduce the inequalities gap. Our approach to commissioning will be outcome focused and evidence-based, underpinned by a strong commitment to partnership and collaborative working.

The proposals set out in the Commissioning plan are intended to cover period August 2024 to January 2026 and are intended to enable essential homeless services to continue to be delivered, whilst the five-year statutory review of homelessness within the borough is undertaken, the findings of which will inform future commissioning activity in the longer term.

The proposals within the Commissioning Plan also include specific procurement exercises which are outlined within the Annex to the plan and authority is sought to proceed with these.

The provision of good quality, cost-effective homeless accommodation/support services directly contributes to the 'Safe and Vibrant Communities' theme and the associated aim of reducing homelessness and rough sleeping, but also contributes to the aims of the 'Active & Healthy Lives' theme by assisting in the reduction of health inequalities and the improvement of mental wellbeing.

This is a key decision.

RECOMMENDATION

The Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee is recommended to approve:

1. The Commissioning Plan for Homeless accommodation/support services as set out in Appendix 1 to this report; and
2. That the Director of Regeneration and Place be authorised to proceed with procurement exercises in relation to the service types currently carried out by Service Providers B, C, D, E, F, G, H and I as set out in Annex B to the Commissioning Plan for Homeless accommodation/support services.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 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.
- 1.2 The plan sets out the 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, and is likely to span across 2024 and 2025.
- 1.3 The purpose of a homelessness review is to formally 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 what resources are available or may be needed, to prevent and tackle homelessness.
- 1.4 A homelessness review provides the evidence for the Council to develop its statutory required homelessness strategy but, critically, provides the basis for future commissioning activity through the identification of unmet need within the borough, the likely future demand for service provision and whether reconfiguration of existing provision may be required to meet any emerging needs of the local homeless population.
- 1.5 The most recent Homelessness Review was undertaken by Arc4 Consultants in 2019 with the findings providing the foundation for the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025. This Strategy identified the following key themes, all of which are underpinned by a series of actions.
 1. Providing a joined-up approach to early intervention and homeless prevention.
 2. Ensuring that housing-related support services meet the diverse and complex needs of customers.
 3. Preventing and ending rough sleeping.
 4. Ensuring the adequate supply of temporary accommodation.
 5. Improving access to, and developing more, settled accommodation solutions.
- 1.6 Historically the priorities for commissioning have been included in the Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy. However, corporately, it has now been recognised that a dedicated interim commissioning plan for this area of work will better inform and stimulate the supported housing market and enable the procurement of essential services, until the end of the current strategy.
- 1.7 The proposed commissioning plan is therefore intended to act as a 'roadmap' to guide the activity over the next 18 months until the Homeless Review, and the associated Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy have been concluded, and the necessary

evidence base and priority areas that will form the basis of a longer-term Commissioning Strategy have been identified and considered by Members. The proposed activity described in the plan will be guided by the key principles that the Council will:

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

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 One option is to re-procure existing provision for longer contract terms than that proposed within the interim commissioning plan period i.e. for 5+ years. This has been discounted due to the desire to align longer-term commissioning with the evidence from the Homeless Review. It is intended that the longer-term commissioning plan which will be presented to members based on the findings of the review, will consider this option further.
- 2.2 Another option is to no longer commission some, or all, of the services described in this report and associated plan. This option was discounted as these services are critical in supporting the response to homelessness within the borough and, without them, the Council would be unable to meet its legal obligations to suitably house those with vulnerabilities, as required under homeless legislation.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Homeless supported housing is any housing scheme where housing and support are provided as an integrated package. Some schemes provide short-term accommodation that provide stable accommodation to people who may otherwise have no recourse but to sleep rough and will focus on the assessment of needs of those who may have spent many years experiencing cyclical homelessness. Others are medium-term, defined as anything up to 2 years, designed to help people develop the emotional and practical skills needed to move into more mainstream housing. This can include support with health needs, including mental health, drug and alcohol use, managing benefits and debt, developing daily living skills, and accessing education, training and employment. Within the borough, there are 495 bedspaces of supported housing which are fully occupied at any one time.
- 3.2 People accepted into supported accommodation are either homeless, inappropriately housed, or at risk of becoming homeless and many present with multiple, complex needs around poor mental health, substance misuse, or a lack of independent living

skills. These housing services therefore support other agencies and departments within the Council to meet both corporate priorities (as set out in the “Working Together” Corporate Plan) and statutory obligations, as well as supporting individuals to sustain and achieve more permanent accommodation in the long term.

- 3.3 Through a contractual framework, the Housing team commissions a variety of supported housing services intended for homeless client groups. These services are delivered by charitable and voluntary organisations, as well as Registered Providers. There are, currently, 13 separate contracts across 8 organisations that deliver the previously mentioned 495 bedspaces. Outcomes and performance are monitored as part of the homelessness “Mainstay” system, (a sub-regional bespoke IT System for the management of referrals into homeless supported housing) and all contracts are required to comply with a quality framework that sets out the standards expected in service delivery.
- 3.4 The Homeless Act 2002 sets out the legal requirement for Councils to conduct a homeless review and publish a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy every 5 years. Locally, the last review was undertaken in 2019 with the associated strategy running from 2020 to 2025 and, as such, is due to conclude next year. A new homeless review is therefore required to be undertaken across 2024/25 to inform the development of Wirral’s new strategy for 2025- 2030. As in-line with the previous homelessness review, an independent consultant is being commissioned to undertake the review and work on a proposed draft strategy for February 2025.
- 3.5 Since the last review was undertaken, the homeless landscape, locally and nationally, has shifted significantly because of various global influences but, most particularly, following the pandemic. The review will therefore ensure the availability of up-to-date, reliable information and data which is central to informing commissioning activity. It will also ensure that the Council has a good understanding of the local housing market, the current and future demand for homeless services and needs of its customers, to deliver effective services that meet their needs. This will provide the basis for the development of a five-year Commissioning Plan.
- 3.6 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. This long-term commissioning plan will link to the priorities set out in the council’s Housing Strategy and the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy 2025-2030 and will set out how the Council will meet the needs of those vulnerable adults with multiple and complex needs.
- 3.7 As described above, the commissioned homeless accommodation services mentioned in this report strive to reduce health inequalities amongst some of our most vulnerable residents. However, it is recognised that there are a growing number of homeless people with substantial care and/or health needs that cannot,

currently, be completely met by these services and, consequently, the long-term commissioning plan will set out how these services are currently strategically aligned with the commissioning priorities of Health and Social Care, and will also set out where further alignment and investment may be required, to ensure the holistic needs of all homeless people can be met.

- 3.8 The Commissioning Plan sets out commissioning intentions over the next 18 months. Activity, which is set out in more detail in the accompanying plan, includes:

Commencement of 6 tender exercises including:

- Teenage Parent Service.
- Supported accommodation for 18–25-year-olds.
- Supported Lodgings for 16–21-year-olds.
- Semi-Independent Supported Housing for 18+.
- Refuge; and
- Floating Support Service

With a total estimated cumulative value (based on 2-year contract term with 2 x 12-month options to extend) of £5.7m assuming that both extension options are taken.

Options to extend 5 contracts, as set out within their current contract award:

- Supported Housing for 16- & 17-year-olds.
- Adult Direct Access Hostels
- Direct Access Hostel for Young People (18-25)

- 3.9 The tender award process for the procurement exercises in relation to the service types currently carried out by Service Providers B, C, D, E, F, G, H and I as set out in Annex B to the Commissioning Plan for Homeless accommodation/support services will be awarded by the Director of Regeneration and Place by way of Officer Decision Note given that none of these exceeds the upper threshold for officer decision making of £1.5m.
- 3.10 An Officer Decision Notice will be similarly appropriate for decision making in respect of whether to extend the contract for Service Provider J as referred to in Annex 1 of the Commissioning Plan.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Assuming, for the services to be tendered on an initial term of 2 years, that both 12-month extension option clauses are activated, then the cumulative estimated value of these contracts over the 4-year period is £5.7m. This will be met from the Supported Housing Programme budget.
- 4.2 For those existing contracts where it is proposed to activate an extension clause, financial approval has already been given as part of the original procurement activity.

The cumulative total of these extension options is £1.51m and, again, will be met from the Supported Housing Programme budget.

- 4.3 The availability of the services described in this report enables the Council to discharge its statutory obligations under homeless legislation for some individuals who meet priority need thresholds. If these services were not available, the Council's usage of costlier Temporary Accommodation (such as hotels and B&B's) would increase.
- 4.4 The provision of Homeless accommodation/support services achieves multiple, and significant cost benefits for other council budgets. The preventative nature of the support provided in these services reduces the numbers of people reaching thresholds for statutory social care services.
- 4.5 Delivery of these services also relieves the pressure on other statutory agencies budgets such as the Police through crime reduction associated with reducing levels of homelessness, and Health Services linked to the better management of health, amongst Rough Sleepers in particular.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Section 1(4) of the Homelessness Act 2002 requires Councils to publish a new homelessness strategy, based on the results of a further homelessness review, within the period of 5 years beginning with the day on which their last homelessness strategy was published.
- 5.2 Under section 2(1) of the 2002 Act, a homelessness review means a review by the Council of the extent to which the population in the borough is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, assess the likely extent in the future, identify what is currently being done and by whom, and identify what resources are available, to prevent and tackle homelessness.
- 5.3 Services that will be procured competitively during the period of review will be done so in accordance with the Public Contract Regulations 2015 and the new procurement regime that is expected to come into force with effect from 28 October 2024 under the Procurement Act 2023..Where such services are defined under the Council's Contract Standing Orders (CSO) as 'High Value' the requirements of the CSO will be complied with by carrying out a two-stage tender process involving the shortlisting of suppliers following receipt of selection questionnaires and a competitive tendering process.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 There are no staffing implications for the Council arising out of the recommendations set out in this report.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 Risks associated with the procuring of services will be mitigated by undertaking all procurement processes in accordance with the 2015 Procurement Regulations and the Council's own procurement rules. Colleagues from the Finance Department will advise and assist officers regarding the conduct of the procurement process, and liaison with colleagues from Legal Services will take place regarding the resulting contractual arrangements.

- 7.5 Once contracts have been awarded, risks will be identified and managed by Homeless Commissioning Officers through ongoing performance monitoring.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 The Services described within this report are commissioned based on, and are intended to respond to, findings gathered from a range of sources including the recommendations set out within the current Homeless Review and Strategy; quantitative data regarding the utilisation of homeless supported housing services; Service User feedback; and national and regional best practice.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision, or activity.

- 9.2 The provision of homeless accommodation services seeks to address homelessness and rough sleeping for those who are vulnerable and subject to social exclusion and equalities issues.

- 9.3 The Equalities Impact Assessment undertaken for the current Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, and which is directly applicable to the commissioning plan that is the subject of this report, can be found at the following link: [EIA Wirral Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025.pdf](#)

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 During their original procurement, services were evaluated on any additional social value delivered, which includes potential impact of the contract on Wirral's climate and environment. Social value will continue to be monitored as part of routine contract and performance management arrangements.

10.2 The content and/or recommendations contained within this report are expected to have no significant impact on emissions of greenhouse gases.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Commissioned services will work closely with a socially isolated and stigmatised cohort of people within the borough, often in regular contact with criminal justice services, who experience elevated levels of repeat homelessness, unemployment and have poorer health outcomes than the general population. The social benefits for the individual are in relation to improved health as an engagement with appropriate treatment services and a cessation in rough sleeping. In the medium to long term, the service user would have developed the skills necessary to manage their support needs, manage a tenancy with minimal support and in some cases begin to engage in education, training, and employment through volunteering or paid work. The impact on the community includes a potential reduction in offending and increased community safety.

11.2 The organisations that provide homeless accommodation services are principally made up of third sector agencies i.e. charities and voluntary & community organisations, and local Registered Providers. These services employ local people, some of whom will have had lived experience of homelessness.

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APPENDICES

Homeless Supported Housing Commissioning Plan

BACKGROUND PAPERS

‘Wirral Homeless Review 2019’

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/sites/default/files/all/Housing/information%20and%20advice/Wirral%20Homelessness%20Review%20Final%2019-12-19.pdf>

‘Wirral Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025’

<https://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/documents/s50065564/Enc.%201%20for%20Homelessnes%20and%20Rough%20Sleeping%20Strategy%202020-2025.pdf>

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Cabinet – ‘Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025’	24th March 2020