



**HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:**  
**13 SEPTEMBER 2023**

**REVIEW OF HOMELESS SUPPORT SERVICE**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

**Purpose of report**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek views of the Committee around the proposed homeless support offer as part of the consultation.

**Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

2. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2023/24 – 2026/27 (agreed by the Council on 22 February 2023) includes a target of saving £300,000 by 1 April 2024 through a review of homeless support services.
3. The proposal is aligned with the Public Health Strategy "Delivering good health and prevention services 2022-2027", the Leicestershire Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2032 "Staying Healthy, Safe and Well", and the County Council's Strategic Plan 2022-26, in particular the outcome of 'Keeping people safe and well: ensuring that people are safe and protected from harm, live in a healthy environment and have the opportunities and support they need to live active, independent and fulfilling lives'.
4. The draft revised model for the delivery of homeless support was considered by Cabinet and it was agreed to commence consultation on 23 June 2023.

**Background**

5. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 amended the Housing Act 1996 to place duties on housing authorities to prevent homelessness and to provide homelessness services to all those affected.
6. Locally, these responsibilities sit with district councils as the Housing Authority. Funding through the Homelessness Prevention Grant has been provided by The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to support district councils to deliver against these responsibilities.
7. It is not a statutory duty for the County Council to provide specific services for individuals who are homeless, and the council is not a recipient of grant funding that is focused on preventing or relieving homelessness.

8. The County Council has a statutory duty to take appropriate steps to improve the health of people living in Leicestershire, including the provision of health improvement information and advice and support services aimed at preventing illness.
9. People experiencing homelessness have far worse health and social care outcomes than the general population. The average age of death for the homeless population is around 30 years lower than for the general population.<sup>i</sup> People experiencing or at risk of homelessness are therefore one of several populations of concern for the County Council in terms of their health and wellbeing.
10. The County Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2023/24 – 2026/27 includes a target of saving £300,000 by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 through a review of homeless support services.
11. The Council currently commissions on a discretionary basis a homeless support service which aims to improve the health of this population by providing support to adults who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. This is provided for the Council by Falcon Support Services (Falcon) and Nottingham Community Housing Association (NCHA). The contract value is £300,000 per annum and ends on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024.
12. The support commissioned from Falcon and NCHA is aimed at adults who are homeless or at of risk becoming so. The key elements of provision include:
  - a. A referral hub – to process and assess all referrals received to determine the most appropriate course of action.
  - b. In-reach support – provided within hostel accommodation across Leicestershire.
  - c. Outreach support – provides services such as telephone support, group work, benefits advice surgeries, signposting, and one-to-one support.

The service aims to improve the health and wellbeing of those that are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This is achieved by supporting access to health and wellbeing services and by building the resilience of this cohort by supporting independent living and broader welfare rights and tenancy advice. It should be noted that the funding does not pay for the running of homeless hostel buildings. The funding is for the support provision outlined below.

13. Public Health assessed the associated challenges identified around the current provision which were analysed and summarised in the table below:

<b>Provision</b>	<b>Description of provision</b>	<b>Challenges</b>
<b>Referral hub</b>	Service users and professionals refer into the service via telephone or email.	The service holds a waiting list leading to delays in service users accessing support.
	An assessment is carried out and the service user is assigned a case worker.	There is an eligibility criterion; only those that have a non-priority need can access the in-reach hostel based support

<b>Hostel based (in-reach) support</b>	Support provided within hostel accommodation across Leicestershire.	<p>Limited to 30 service users at any one time.</p> <p>Support offer is concentrated within the Falcon Centre in Loughborough.</p> <p>Support offer is concentrated towards non-priority need individuals.</p> <p>Service is underutilised due to slow move-on of service users into alternative accommodation.</p>
<b>Outreach support</b>	Case worker works with a service user on a short-term basis on any areas where they require support.	<p>Predominantly focused on signposting and providing information and advice.</p> <p>Specific support on areas such as substance misuse is not provided.</p>

## Proposals

14. The proposal is for the County Council to cease funding a dedicated homeless support service, and instead to provide support via the Council's existing public health services **where eligibility is wider**.
15. This will be achieved **primarily** through the universal offer of First Contact Plus and the Local Area Coordination service **as opposed to a bespoke offer specifically for individuals who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless**. First Contact Plus helps adults in Leicestershire to access information, advice, help and support on a range of services. Referrals to First Contact Plus are made via an online form. For those individuals who may have difficulties in self-referring via an online platform, a referral can be made on their behalf by a professional or friend/family member/carer. Local Area Coordinators work with individuals who may be vulnerable or at risk of crisis by building a supportive community around them thereby reducing social isolation.
16. The principles of the future approach centre around the following:
- a. Coverage across the whole of Leicestershire.
  - b. Eligibility that includes any individual who is currently homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, irrespective of whether they fall under the priority need group or not.
  - c. Access to support via a central point of access.
  - d. Support that is tailored to the needs of each individual with no defined timescales for the support offer.
  - e. Greater focus on improving the health and wellbeing of individuals.
17. This model will include using First Contact Plus as the referral hub into services which include the following:

- Department for Work and Pensions for support to access the right benefits.
- Citizens Advice for debt management support.
- Community Recovery Team and Local Area Coordination Team for one-to-one support.
- Warm Homes Service for support on housing issues such as damp, mould, draught proofing, and signposting to funding for energy efficiency measures.
- Health and wellbeing services such as smoking cessation, drug and /or alcohol misuse, healthy weight, physical activity, and sexual health services.
- Mental wellbeing services such as Vita Minds (a talking therapies service for low level mental health support).
- Services provided by the Council's Adults and Communities Department, including community support workers and social care.
- Adult Learning and Multiply for support on accessing learning and educational courses, including support on budgeting. Multiply is a programme aimed at helping adults to improve their numeracy skills.

18. Where one-to-one support is required, the Local Area Coordination service is well established within communities and so can meet this need through their links with community groups, drop-in sessions and through the direct provision of one-to-one support. Other services commissioned by Public Health such as the substance misuse treatment service and the sexual health service already provide outreach services on a one-to-one basis.

19. A key strength of this approach is that links can be made to a broader range of health and wellbeing services therefore providing a more holistic support offer for individuals. In addition, this approach enables better links into existing public health services and wider onward referrals including to the district housing authorities.

### **Consultation**

20. Consultation was approved by Cabinet on 23 June 2023. The consultation launched on 28 June 2023 and ran for 10 weeks (closed on 3 September 2023) to seek feedback on the proposed model.

21. The consultation was aimed at the general public, users of the service, service providers, and a range of additional stakeholders including NHS service providers, district councils, voluntary sector providers, and Leicestershire Police. The survey was accessible online on the County Council's website and available as a hard copy on request. An easy read version of the supporting information was also available online.

22. The views of professional and partner stakeholders, as well as current and previous service users and support workers, was captured through:

- a. Discussions at face to face and online information sessions to talk through the proposal and provide information on how individuals could have their say. A total of 5 sessions were held during the consultation period. At the face to face sessions, paper copies of the consultation information were made available to attendees. The information packs included: questionnaire with free post return, supporting information, easy read version of supporting information, and a set Frequently Asked Questions.
- b. Responses to the questionnaire (paper copy and online copy).

c. Receipt of letters from service users.

23. At the time of writing this report, 234 responses to the questionnaire had been received. The majority of responses were received from service users (23%) and employees of homeless support services (24%).

24. Responses to the consultation are yet to be fully analysed. Current feedback indicates: 16% strongly agree or tend to agree with the proposal and 73% strongly disagree or tend to disagree (the remaining 11% neither agree nor disagree). The key points are as follows:-

- a. concerns over changes to support (loss of 1-2-1 support, loss of 24/7 support, loss of support for those with complex needs, loss of targeted support)
- b. concerns over risk of closure of supported accommodation
- c. concerns on the capacity and ability of the proposed provision to deal with the demand
- d. concerns over lack of coordinated approach across organisations
- e. recognition of the need to focus more effort on preventing homelessness
- f. recognition of the need to provide wider access to support (wider geographical coverage, wider range of support that goes beyond housing)
- g. recognition of the benefit of having a simplified single point of contact and avoiding potential duplication of service provision

25. The outcomes of the consultation will be reported back to the Health and Overview Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 1 November 2023 and will inform the final proposal put forward to the Cabinet on 24 November 2023.

### **Resource Implications**

26. The proposed model has a target of achieving £300,000 per annum which would contribute to the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) savings.

27. The Director of Corporate Resources and the Director of Law and Governance have been consulted on the content of this report.

### **Timetable for Decisions**

28. The outcomes of the consultation will be reported back to the Health and Overview Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 1 November 2023.

29. A summary of the consultation findings and a final proposal will be presented to Cabinet on 24 November 2023. If the Cabinet agree to proceed with implementation of the model this would commence - with a new offer from 1 April 2024.

### **Conclusions**

30. The Contract for local authority commissioned homeless support service is due to end on 31 March 2024.

31. Following a review, a proposed model for homeless support has been developed and went out for public consultation.
32. The purpose of this report is to seek the views of the Committee on the proposed model as part of the consultation.

### **Background papers**

33. Report to the Cabinet - Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023/24 - 2026/27 - 22 February 2023  
<https://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MId=6913>
34. Report to the Cabinet – Review of homeless support services - 23 June 2023  
<https://politics.leics.gov.uk/documents/s177126/2023.06.23%20Cabinet%20Report%20Homelessness%20Consultation.pdf>

### **Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure**

35. None

### **Equality Implications**

36. Under the Equality Act 2010 the County Council is required to have due regards to the need to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
  - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share protected characteristics and those who do not; and
  - Foster good relations between people who share protected characteristics and those who do not.

Homelessness or being at risk of homelessness is not a protected characteristic but there will be people within the cohort who do have a protected characteristic. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed on the proposal currently being consulted on and the impact of a change in service model will be informed by the outcomes of consultation. Initial findings are that the proposal will have a wider reach (wider geographical coverage, and wider eligibility that goes beyond non-priority need individuals) and be able to offer broader support that goes beyond housing need. The post-consultation EIA will be presented to the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in November so that it may be taken into account as part of the decision making on this issue in due course.

### **Human Rights Implications**

37. There are no human rights implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

### **Health Implications**

38. It is intended that the proposed model will enable individuals to access a broader range of health and wellbeing services therefore providing a more holistic support offer for individuals.

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<sup>i</sup> NICE guidance, Integrated health and social care guidance for people experiencing homelessness.  
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