

Hampshire County Council Future Services Consultation

Proposal relating to Homelessness Support Services (also known as Social Inclusion Services)

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What is the current situation?

Hampshire is served by two tiers^[1] of local government:

- local district, borough and city councils
- Hampshire County Council

Each of these have different legal responsibilities, which include:

- **Local district, borough and city councils:** Responsible^[2] for providing advice and help to people who are homeless or at risk of becoming so, and for providing housing for people who are homeless who have priority needs^[3]. They receive funding from central Government to undertake this work.
- **County Council:** Responsible for ensuring that people who may be in need of care and support are offered a Care Act needs assessment^[4]. The County Council is also responsible for ensuring eligible needs^[5] are met (whether someone is homeless or not).

The County Council currently contributes funding to Homelessness Support Services (also known as Social Inclusion Services) for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. These services help people over the age of 18 to address the issues that may have contributed to their current homelessness or may be putting them at risk of homelessness. This includes support to:

- find and keep accommodation
- understand the rights and responsibilities of their tenancy agreement
- apply for welfare benefits
- manage debt and budget effectively
- gain access to support to manage substance misuse
- improve physical and mental health and wellbeing

[1] hants.gov.uk/aboutthecouncil/governmentinhampshire

[2] Under the Homelessness Act 2002: legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/7/contents, the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017: legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/13/contents/enacted and Housing Act 1996 section 193: legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/52/section/193

[3] gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities/chapter-8-priority-need

[4] Under the Care Act 2014: legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/23/contents/enacted

[5] legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/23/section/13/enacted

The services funded by our contribution are delivered in three types of settings:

Stage One supported accommodation (homeless hostels):

Stage One supported accommodation provides crisis accommodation services in five hostels across the county for individuals who are homeless. These are: Basingstoke (May Place), Fareham (Gosport Road), Andover (Dene Court), Aldershot (Grosvenor Road) and Winchester (Westview House).

There are currently an estimated 110 people using Homelessness Support Services in Stage One accommodation. Staff are on site 24 hours a day, most of whom are support staff funded by us.

We also contribute funding to the Winchester Beacon which provides crisis accommodation with support for 10 people.

Our funding does not cover the cost of the accommodation itself or housing management services. This is usually paid for by Housing Benefit (claimed through district, borough and city councils by those service users who are eligible for it).

Stage Two supported accommodation:

Stage Two supported accommodation is for individuals who are homeless but have lower support needs or are ready to move on from Stage One accommodation.

We only fund Homelessness Support Services in Stage Two accommodation where there is no Stage One accommodation in the area. Currently services are provided in Eastleigh, Petersfield and Havant.

In some of these, staff are on site throughout the day, while in others support is provided by visiting staff. Support staff are funded by the County Council, while any housing management staff are funded via Housing Benefit (as above, claimed through district, borough and city councils).

Our funding does not cover the cost of the accommodation itself or housing management services. This is usually paid for by Housing Benefit (claimed through district, borough and city councils by those service users who are eligible for it).

There are currently an estimated 17 people using Homelessness Support Services funded by us in Stage Two supported accommodation.

Community support:

In the district and borough council areas of Fareham, Gosport, Havant, East Hampshire and the New Forest, we also fund Homelessness Support Services for people living in the community. This is for those who are at risk of homelessness and have additional needs that make it harder for them to manage their housing situation without support. People using this service may be living in their own homes, or in temporary accommodation.

The support overall is jointly funded by the County Council, and district and borough councils. The County Council pays for an estimated three full time staff who support up to 60 people at any one time.

In addition to the services funded by us, other Homelessness Support Services are available across the county. These are funded by the district, borough and city councils from funding received from central Government for this purpose.

Current investment

In total, we provide around £2 million of support each year for Homelessness Support Services. Of this, around £1.7 million pays for support in Stage One accommodation and around £300,000 pays for support in Stage Two accommodation and in the community.

The funding and support we pay for across Hampshire is shown below:

	Our annual contribution	Stage One support	Stage Two support	Community support
Basingstoke and Deane	£376,000	Yes		
Eastleigh	£36,000		Yes	
Fareham and Gosport	£370,620	Yes		Yes
Hart and Rushmoor	£334,620	Yes		
Havant and East Hants	£202,984		Yes	Yes
New Forest	£36,000			Yes
Test Valley	£334,620	Yes		
Winchester	£337,211	Yes		

What is being proposed?

We are proposing to withdraw all County Council funding for Homelessness Support Services (around £2 million) on 31 March 2025.

Unless alternative funding can be found, this would mean the withdrawal of those services funded by us in homelessness settings and in the community.

Housing management services in Stage One and Stage Two accommodation that are paid for by rents and service charges are not within scope of this proposal.

Why is this being proposed?

Until a sustainable long-term national funding solution can be found to address the intense financial pressures facing not only the County Council, but also wider local government, we have no choice but to consider changing or reducing services in some areas and propose options for savings.

The withdrawal of Homelessness Support Services would contribute towards addressing the County Council's overall anticipated £132 million budget deficit from April 2025.

We are not required by law to provide advice or help to people who are homeless, or to prevent or relieve homelessness in Hampshire, and we do not receive funding from central Government to do so. This duty sits with district, borough, and city councils^[6].

How would the proposal be implemented?

If approved, spend on Homelessness Support Services by the County Council would be withdrawn on 31 March 2025 in all areas of Hampshire.

We would work with partners up to and after 31 March 2025 to:

- support them with the application process for funding should opportunities for central Government grant funding arise
- consider how access to any alternative support services could be made easier for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness

We would also continue to ensure that people who may be in need of care and support are offered a needs assessment and that their eligible needs are met.

[6] Under the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

What are the potential impacts?

There are currently an estimated 127 people using Homelessness Support Services in Stage One and Stage Two accommodation funded by the County Council, and at any one time an estimated further 60 people receiving this support in the community. As the support these people receive is short-term, we anticipate that existing users would have transitioned to other services by the time any proposed changes were introduced and so would not be impacted.

Therefore, these changes would be more likely to impact people who would need these support services in the future, and the staff currently delivering these services.

The following specific potential impacts have been identified:

- **Potential increase in homelessness levels, and consequent increase in demand for homelessness accommodation** as people may find it harder to apply for accommodation or remain in their current housing without support. We would:
 - work with partners to support prevention of homelessness through early identification of risk and to raise awareness of the importance of timely referrals to the district, borough and city councils for homelessness prevention support^[7]
 - continue supporting the prevention of homelessness via public health initiatives (including substance misuse services and wellbeing services) to encourage people to take appropriate steps to address factors putting them at risk
 - continue promoting our online tool ‘Connect To Support Hampshire’^[8] to signpost people to early support that may help them with issues that could affect their housing situation (for example, advice on housing issues and money matters from local Citizens Advice services)

- **Risk of closure of some of the short term homelessness accommodation where we currently fund Homelessness Support Services, due to withdrawal of support staff.** Although the accommodation side of these services (including housing management services) is not directly affected, the withdrawal of support staff funded by the County Council could reduce overall staffing levels. Should closures be necessary, this could affect:
 - support staff currently employed
 - people who are homeless in the area
 - other providers of accommodation for homeless people across the county (including district, borough and city councils) who could see greater demand for their advice, support and accommodation services

[7] Under the Duty to Refer:

[gov.uk/government/publications/homelessness-duty-to-refer/a-guide-to-the-duty-to-refer](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/homelessness-duty-to-refer/a-guide-to-the-duty-to-refer)

[8] connecttosupporthampshire.org.uk

We would explore all options with partners during the consultation period that may support accommodation-based schemes to remain open.

- **There may be disproportionate impact for groups of vulnerable people** (e.g. victims of domestic abuse, people with learning difficulties, people whose lives are affected by physical disability, mental health or substance misuse challenges, and those who live in poverty). We would:
 - draw on other sources of central Government funding such as money allocated for support within safe accommodation settings for victims/survivors of domestic abuse^[9]
 - listen to the views of organisations in the voluntary sector and the NHS to ensure that their preventative and therapy services for people with mental health problems are accessible to people currently using Homelessness Support Services
 - continue to work with the providers of our substance misuse support services to ensure that people needing such services know how to access them
 - continue to develop ‘Connect to Support Hampshire’ to help individuals and organisations find support which could help with their needs, or prevent their needs becoming worse
- **Less timely identification of eligibility for social care for some homeless people** and consequently less opportunity for preventative support. We would work with district, borough and city councils to make sure that all organisations in contact with homeless people are aware of how to make a referral to the County Council for a needs assessment.
- **Increased demand for other services.** If no alternative funding is identified, this proposal may increase demand for other services across the health, Adult Social Care, criminal justice (police force) and housing system. We would work collaboratively with all partners concerned to understand and minimise these risks.

[9] Under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021: legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/contents/enacted

What alternatives have been considered?

There are other approaches that we could take that are not proposed at this time. In developing this proposal, we have also considered the following:

Maintain the current level of spend and service: This option is not being proposed because of the scale of the budget pressures faced by the County Council, and the legal requirement to operate within budget. If we maintained our current levels of spending, this would put additional pressure on other statutory^[10] or critical services to deliver increased savings. This may impact levels of service in these areas and our ability to operate within our budget.

Make a partial reduction to services: We are not required by law to provide homelessness support services. Maintaining even partial support would increase strain on the County Council's budgets, including those for services we legally have to provide.

[10] Services we are legally required to provide.