

Equality Impact Assessment

Proposed changes to Homelessness Support Services

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Description of current service

Homelessness Support Services are services for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Service users include rough sleepers, people with mental health support needs, substance misuse issues and those with a history of offending.

Hampshire County Council currently funds support services for up to 264 single homeless people living in accommodation based (supported housing) schemes.

The Council also funds community support for individuals or families requiring help to access or maintain accommodation. Specialist community support services for rough sleepers are also funded in some areas. Approximately 1000 people use community support services at any one time.

Description of proposed change

The County Council is consulting on proposed changes to Homelessness Support Services.

We are proposing to fund support services in supported housing schemes that meet the needs of the most vulnerable people who are sleeping rough or most at risk of sleeping rough and withdraw funding 'attached' to lower level and 'move on' supported housing.

We are also proposing to reduce community support services and only fund a targeted service for people moving on from supported housing, those living in lower level or 'move on' supported housing and single homeless people with complex needs who are unable to access other sources of support.

The proposed changes overall would deliver £1.8m of savings.

Engagement and consultation

Since September 2017, the Council has engaged with: District and Borough Councils, Probation, Community Rehabilitation Company, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, Clinical Commissioning Groups (mental health), HASC members and current service providers. Internal discussions have been held with Public Health and Children's Services.

A public consultation on the proposed changes to services will run from 11 June – 6 August 2018. This consultation will seek the views of service users and other interested stakeholders on the proposed changes to services. Alongside a questionnaire, drop in events will be facilitated for service users and other homeless people across the County.

Statutory Considerations

Age:

Impact: Medium

Services support people aged between 18 and 64, and above where this is the most appropriate service to meet their needs. Whilst supported housing services are only available to single homeless people, community support is available to individuals and families. Available data shows that a significant majority of service users (97%) are aged between 18 and 60. Whilst there are variations around the county, the data shows a fairly even spread within the 18 and 60 age bracket. The available data does not show a marked variation in age between the users of the different types of Homelessness Support services.

The proposal to target resources to meet the needs of the most vulnerable people who are sleeping rough or most at risk of sleeping rough would mean that families would no longer be able to receive support from this type of service. This may increase the risk of family breakdown and impact on children if families have to move due to becoming homeless. The reduction in housing related support for families may also result in increased demand for statutory Children's Services. Data available shows that approximately 350 families receive support from community support at any one time.

Mitigation: From April 2018, under the commencement of the *Homelessness Reduction Act*, people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness within the next 56 days can receive support to relieve and prevent homelessness from the District and Borough Councils. The County Council would engage with all organisations currently referring into Homelessness Support services to support awareness of this referral pathway.

Families identified as requiring support additional to their housing needs, could be referred to, or refer themselves to, the Hampshire Family Support Service. This service includes intensive family support for families whose lives may be being affected by multiple difficulties including issues such as health problems, children with poor school attendance and long term unemployment. Following assessment, a family may be offered specialist family support or signposted to other community services including those provided by health professionals.

Gender:

Impact: Medium

All Homelessness Support services in this cluster are mixed gender. However available data shows a variation in use of the different types of service. The majority of people using accommodation based services are male whilst the majority of people using community support are female.

Whilst the changes being proposed for lower level and 'move on' supported accommodation would affect more men than woman, the changes being proposed for community support would affect more women than men.

Mitigation: The proposed changes for single homeless people would result in a service offer for the most vulnerable homeless people sleeping rough or most at risk of sleeping rough. Proposed services would be available to both men and women.

From April 2018, under the commencement of the *Homelessness Reduction Act*, people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness within the next 56 days can receive support to relieve and prevent homelessness from the District and Borough Councils. Following initial contact and where appropriate, people would be signposted to other community services for additional support, including organisations offering debt and money management advice. Where additional support needs are identified, the District and Borough Councils can refer people to other County Council funded support services, including drug and alcohol services, the Mental Health Housing and Support pathway, Wellbeing Centres, and for assessment under the *Care Act 2014*.

Any adult affected by these proposals that may have eligible care and support needs would be able to have their needs assessed by the County Council and helped to access support to meet any identified eligible needs. The County Council has a duty under the *Care Act 2014* to ensure that people's eligible care and support needs are met and would work with current service providers to ensure that clear processes are in place to support access to assessments for anyone affected by the proposed changes to services.

Disability:

Impact: High

Data available shows that over 50% of service users experience mental health problems. Furthermore, approximately 80% of users of accommodation based services and 50% of users of community support receive Employment Support Allowance (ESA) because of illness or disability.

Service providers have supplied evidence that they are working with more people with complex needs. People with complex needs have a combination of mental health and drug and alcohol problems and possibly additional issues such as a learning or physical disability and offending behaviour.

The proposed changes to services may mean that this group find it more challenging to access and maintain accommodation. This may result in an increase in homelessness and street homelessness, and associated health problems such as substance misuse and mental health issues. This could in turn result in an increase in A&E and hospital admissions and demand for adult social care services.

Mitigation: Proposed changes to services would focus on meeting the needs of the most vulnerable clients who are rough sleeping or most at risk of rough sleeping.

The County Council would ensure that anybody affected by the proposals that may have eligible care and support needs as defined by the *Care Act 2014* can have their needs assessed by the County Council. Following assessment they would be offered services to meet eligible needs or signposted to other community services.

People with mental health support needs are also able to access accommodation and support through the Mental Health Housing and Support pathway. Additionally and where appropriate, individuals experiencing mental ill health can access support through the Wellbeing Centres that are also commissioned by the County Council.

People with substance misuse issues would be able to access support through the specialist substance misuse services commissioned by the County Council. In addition to support for substance misuse, these services also help people with other issues such as problems with welfare benefits and engagement with health services. New contracts for these services start in July 2018 and services will be required to work closer with District and Borough Councils and a range of other organisations to support homeless people to access specialist substance misuse services.

The County Council will further consider the needs of people with complex needs through operational mechanisms, within any future review of Mental Health Housing and Support services and within the wider strategic plans for people with Mental Health support needs.

From April 2018, under the commencement of the *Homelessness Reduction Act*, people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness within the next 56 days can receive support to relieve and prevent homelessness from the District and Borough

Councils. Following initial contact and where appropriate, people would be signposted to other community services for additional support, including organisations offering debt and money management advice. Where additional support needs are identified, the District and Borough Councils can refer people to other County Council funded support services, including drug and alcohol services, the Mental Health Housing and Support pathway, Wellbeing Centres, and for assessment under the *Care Act 2014*.

Poverty:

Impact: High

Available data shows that the majority of people using Homelessness Support services are in receipt of welfare benefits.

Homelessness Support services help people to access their full entitlement of benefits, attend appointments for benefit assessments and resolve issues with benefit claims. Service providers have reported an increase in the number of people requiring this type of support following the roll out of welfare reforms. Services also help people budget on a low income, access debt advice and prioritise rent payments. Support to access training courses, voluntary work, education and employment is available and pre-employment activities are provided to support vulnerable people who are not yet ready to engage with more mainstream employment support.

The proposed changes would result in a reduction in services available and may result in more people not accessing welfare benefits and less vulnerable people entering employment. Subsequently, more people may become homeless as a result of non payment of rent.

Mitigation: People who need support to claim benefits and resolve issues with existing claims would need to get this help either directly from Job Centre Plus or from other organisations offering this type of assistance.

Other organisations that offer support with benefit claims, debt and money management include the district and borough councils as part of homelessness advice. There are also a range of voluntary sector organisations that can offer support including: Citizens Advice, Money Advice Service, Income Max, Step Change, Pay Plan and Christians against Poverty.

People living in accommodation owned by district and borough councils or larger registered social landlords can access in house services for support with benefit issues.

General support to find employment is available through Job Centre Plus and specialist employment support programmes are available for people in receipt of disability benefits.

Support and information is also available through the Hampshire Local Welfare Assistance Information and Advice line. This is a Freephone number where people facing financial hardship can find out more about the options available.

Rurality

Impact: Low

The reduction in community support may mean that people living in more rural areas could find it harder to access the support they need. Accommodation based services are in urban areas and people who currently receive a visiting community support service may need to travel to get support from other services.

Mitigation: Single homeless people moving on from accommodation based services would receive short term support to help them maintain housing regardless of the location of the accommodation they move on to.

As part of the programme to prevent and/or reduce demand for formal adult care services, the County Council is currently working with voluntary and community groups in rural areas to understand the assets within rural communities. This programme will consider the needs of people who currently use community support services.

Sexual Orientation, Race, Religion or Belief, Gender Reassignment, Pregnancy and Maternity, Marriage and Civil Partnership

Impact: Neutral

Additional information

The proposed changes to Homelessness Support services would mean that some people with lower support needs and others with more complex needs who are currently using lower level supported housing or community support would need to access alternative services. People who may be affected include single homeless people, people with mental health support needs, people who misuse substances, people with a history of offending and other people, including families, who use the preventative side of the services to maintain accommodation.

The County Council would work with the district and borough councils and current service providers to plan the transition to any new arrangements and ensure that people who may be affected by any changes are provided with clear information regarding alternative support services and how to get help to prevent homelessness in the future.

Whilst other sources of support are available, the vulnerability of some of the people who use services may mean that they do not seek or access the help they need to prevent homelessness. This could result in an increase in homelessness and street

homelessness, and an increase in the number of people who subsequently require services from the District and Borough Councils.

As part of the review process the County Council is looking at a range of actions that may mitigate any potential impact from these proposals. These include:

- Strengthening referral pathways into other County Council services, including the services provided for people with substance misuse and mental health support needs.
- Engagement with all agencies who we anticipate may see an increase in demand for their services.
- Working closely with the District and Borough Councils to ensure that services dovetail with the statutory services provided by these councils to prevent homelessness.
- Active participation in local partnership approaches to tackling homelessness led by district councils to support the best use of County Council, District and Voluntary Sector resources.
- Continuing to work with all partners to explore how we can collectively meet the varying needs of individuals and families earlier and before they may need more intensive services.
- Where District and Borough Councils or other statutory partners wish to collaborate more closely and invest in housing related support services, the County Council would provide commissioning and procurement resources to buy jointly funded services. This could reduce the cost of administration, achieve economies of scale and support the delivery of joined up services for vulnerable people who currently receive support from multiple agencies.
- Continued engagement with other organisations supporting vulnerable people who refer into Homelessness Support services to ensure that all potential impacts are identified and considered. An analysis of the numbers involved from service data has already been shared with key partners, including district and borough councils, probation and Clinical Commissioning Groups (Mental Health commissioners), to support understanding of any potential increase in the need for other services and allow preparation for this.

This Equality Impact Assessment will be updated using feedback from the public consultation that is open for 8 weeks from 11 June – 6 August 2018. The final assessment will be included in the Decision Report for the Executive Member on 5 December 2018, when a decision regarding proposed changes to Homelessness Support services will be made.