

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12 November 2024

### \*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

#### SUPPORTED HOUSING SCHEME FOR WOMEN

REPORT OF: Service Director of Housing and Environmental Health

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Cllr Dave Winstanley, Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health

COUNCIL PRIORITY: ACCESSIBLE SERVICES

#### 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Council no longer owns any affordable housing, and it works closely with registered providers and partners to meet the housing needs of its residents.
- 1.2 Demand for homeless individuals in North Herts remains high following the increase in numbers following the pandemic, including a significant number of women.
- 1.3 Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) have commissioned Druglink, a substance misuse charity based in Hertfordshire, to run a two-year pilot of small service for single homeless women that will be based in North Herts.
- 1.4 The Cabinet previously agreed match funding of Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) ring fenced Homeless Prevention Grant (HPG) to support a similar scheme, and this report seeks approval of a revised proposal.

#### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. That the Cabinet supports the allocation of £73k of ring fenced MHCLG Homelessness Prevention Grant to HCC to match fund the two-year pilot of Druglink's Supported Housing Scheme for Women.

#### 3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1. This proposal has been made in order to enable the two-year pilot to go ahead.

#### 4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1. None.

#### 5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1. Cllr Dave Winstanley, Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health has been consulted and is supportive of this proposal.

## 6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2024.

## 7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 Demand for homelessness assistance from the Council remains high following the pandemic, driven to a large degree by increased approaches from single homeless people including some with multiple support needs. The following table outlines the Council's legal duties to homeless households over recent years (the **bold figures** represent the number of single people – and some couples, without children – who approached the Council because they were homeless):

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Households owed a prevention duty	275	229	194	175	207
Households owed a relief duty	219	385	281	241	269
<b>of which, single households</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>322</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>178</b>
Households owed a main housing duty	65	90	128	123	131
<b>of which, single households</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>43</b>

- 7.2 Single women make up a significant proportion of homelessness demand in the district. Just under one-third of single homeless people to whom the Council owed a relief duty in 2023/24 were women, whilst a similar proportion of single people entering temporary accommodation (TA) in that year were women. The vast majority of women (in common with the TA cohort as a whole) have a support need, with 59% of single women having two or more support needs. The most common support needs were poor mental health (47% of women) and poor physical health (35%). Half (51%) of single women in TA had however experienced or had been at risk of abuse, mostly domestic abuse but also sexual or other forms of abuse. This is almost double the proportion of the TA cohort as a whole who had experienced abuse.
- 7.3 Whilst a number of single homeless accommodation schemes have recently been developed in the district, there are currently no female only schemes. At its meeting on 13 December 2022, Cabinet approved the allocation of £73k of Homelessness Prevention Grant funding to Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing (MTVH) for a scheme in Letchworth for single homeless women with complex needs in conjunction with HCC. However, HCC subsequently decided against appointing MTVH for the scheme, and it did not progress.
- 7.4 The proposed pilot is designed to help women with a variety of support needs. This is likely to include women who are survivors of domestic abuse. In September 2024, Hertfordshire (led by HCC) took part the Women's Rough Sleeping census for the first time; this is designed to collect information about women who experience homelessness,

such as rough sleeping. This includes women who might not always be sleeping out on the street and acknowledges that women's rough sleeping can be hidden, transparent and intermittent. Partners identified 107 women known to services who had slept rough in the last three months; with the 107, 60 women completed the recent Hertfordshire survey, and seven women indicated they had slept rough within North Herts at some point over the last three months.

- 7.5 The Council has recently achieved White Ribbon Accreditation, and this service contributes to its commitment to provide support and housing services for women fleeing domestic abuse.

## **8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS**

- 8.1 Whilst the Council no longer owns any housing stock, as the local housing authority, NHC retains legal housing responsibilities including accommodation duties towards homeless households. The Council is reliant on registered providers (formerly known as housing associations), and in some cases the private rented sector, to help us meet local housing need. The provision of single homeless accommodation has therefore been a long-term strategic challenge for the Council in light of continuing high demands for homelessness assistance, particularly from vulnerable single homeless people.

- 8.2 Around one-third of single homeless people approaching the Council for assistance are women and about half of these women have experienced, or been at risk of, some form of abuse. Trauma and abuse from partners in particular mean that female only spaces are essential for women who may not feel safe in mixed environments and who, in the absence of such spaces, may fail to engage with support. There are currently no female only supported housing schemes in the district for homeless women.

- 8.3 HCC have recently commissioned Druglink to run the proposed two-year pilot. This will be located in the District although the exact address of the scheme has to remain confidential due to the fact that some residents will include women who are survivors of domestic abuse. The property is owned by HCC and they have confirmed there are no planning implications and/or requirements. The service will offer six rooms and Druglink will provide daily support for all residents. All referrals into the scheme will come from the Council and we will also provide support with move on options for residents when they are ready for more independent settings.

- 8.4 The Council, Druglink and HCC will monitor the progress of the pilot throughout the two-year period; if successful, funding options for its continuation will be considered at the appropriate time.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 The Cabinet's Terms of Reference provides at paragraph 5.7.15; "To oversee the provision of all the Council's services other than those functions reserved to the Council".

- 9.2 The Housing Act 1985 Section 1 (1) confirms that the District Council is the Local Housing Authority (LHA).

- 9.3 LHAs' homelessness duties are contained within the Housing Act 1996 Part VII, as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which placed significant new duties on English local housing authorities.

9.4 LHAs have a legal duty to provide interim (also known as emergency) accommodation to homeless applicants, if, at any point during their enquiries, there is a reason to believe that an applicant may be:

- homeless
- eligible for assistance, and
- in priority need

If an LHA fails to provide interim accommodation, or if the accommodation provided is unsuitable for the applicant, this can be challenged by way of judicial review.

9.5 The LHA also holds the 'Relief Duty' which applies when a council is satisfied that an applicant is homeless and eligible for assistance; it requires the Council to take reasonable steps to help the applicant secure that suitable accommodation becomes available for the applicant's occupation for at least six months. This therefore requires the Council to work with the applicant to help them find and retain accommodation to meet this legal duty.

9.6 Should Cabinet agree this proposal, the Council will enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with HCC for the two-year pilot.

## **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 At its meeting in December 2022, the Cabinet earmarked a contribution of £73k for a Supported Housing Scheme for Women. This was funded by ring-fenced Homelessness Prevention Grant provided by MHCLG. This amount match funds a similar contribution from HCC that is required to make the scheme financially viable and is currently held in reserve.

## **11. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

11.1. Good risk management supports and enhances the decision-making process, increasing the likelihood of the Council meeting its objectives and enabling it to respond quickly and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.

11.2. The provision of supported accommodation for single homeless people has been a long-term challenge for the Council and this specialist supported housing scheme for women provides some mitigation to the risk of long-term hotel use for some clients.

## **12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

12.2. The provision of this specialist accommodation scheme will meet evidenced need for female only accommodation for women with complex support needs who have fled trauma and abuse from partners.

### **13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS**

- 13.1. Social Value will be realised by the employment opportunities offered by the new housing scheme and by the service itself and its fundamental aim to support local homeless women on their journey to independence.

### **14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to the proposal in this report.

### **15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 15.1 None

### **16. APPENDICES**

- 16.1 Appendix 1 – Draft Equality Analysis – Supported Housing Scheme for Women

### **17. CONTACT OFFICERS**

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### **18. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 18.1 Cabinet minutes 13 December 2022: ([Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 13th December, 2022, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council](#) (item 144))
- 18.2 Druglink's website: [Druglink](#)