SOCIAL ENGINE

Housing Related Support consultation

**Final report
October 2023**

**Warwickshire
County Council**

Contents

About Social Engine

Social Engine was founded in 2015 to support organisations to adopt an evidenced-based and insight-led approach. We work with charities, local authorities, social enterprises and other social purpose organisations to overcome organisational challenges through engagement, research and the application of evidence into practice.

Our work involves applying behavioural insights to support service improvement across a wide range of policy and service areas in order to improve outcomes for individuals and communities.

www.social-engine.co.uk

Executive Summary

Introduction

Warwickshire County Council (WCC) commissioned Social Engine to help support a consultation on the redesign of their Housing Related Support (HRS) services. The HRS services support vulnerable people – including homeless people and those at risk of becoming homeless - to acquire necessary skills for independent living.

Proposed Changes

Discussions with stakeholders resulted in six key proposals which formed the basis of the consultation:

1. Retain both Accommodation-based and Floating Support services for young people and adults by allocating the available budget in the same proportions as currently.
2. Stop commissioning the separate Floating Support service for people with disabilities and meet those needs within redesigned inclusive Floating Support services, one for young people aged 16-25 and one for people aged 25+ years.
3. Adding a flexible range of shorter interventions that respond to individual needs as efficiently as possible and give earlier, focused support for customers who do not need longer-term support.
4. Reduce the maximum duration of services. Floating support for people aged 16-25 be reduced from 24 months to 12 months, for those over 25 the maximum duration will be reduced from 12 months to 9 months and the maximum period for accommodation-based support will be reduced from 24 months to 18 months.
5. A new name for the services. The name of these services is changed from Housing Related Support to Supporting Independence Services.
6. Additional services. Not to include the Street Outreach and 'Navigator' Hubs in the services that providers are asked to deliver. These additional services were not part of the previous specification WCC tendered.

Methodology and responses to the consultation

In collaboration with commissioners and the consultation lead at WCC, a series of engagement activities were designed, to give people the opportunity to share their views on the proposed changes and to contribute ideas and experiences.

*   **Ask Warwickshire** - online consultation hosted on WCC's consultation and engagement hub. 129 responses were received, 9 of these were formal responses received on behalf of organisations.
*   **Email** – people could respond to the consultation via email. 5 responses to the consultation were received by email. Three of these were from individuals with experience of using HRS services, one was a formal response on behalf of Warwickshire District and Borough Heads of Housing and one was an addendum to the response from the Heads of Housing, which was submitted by Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council.
*   **Easy-read survey** – designed and promoted to enable those with access requirements to respond. 25 responses to the easy-read survey were received from individuals with experience of using HRS services.

- **Outreach** – individual interview and small group discussions conducted with previous, current or potential HRS service users at locations across Warwickshire. A total of 311 people participated in the outreach, including 185 individual interviews, 126 people participating in 43 street focus groups and 3 written responses.
- **Consultation Workshop** – held with 30 key stakeholders and partners, including District and Borough Housing, health services, the voluntary sector and current HRS providers.
- **Stakeholder Focus Groups** – held with 22 support workers from the WCC Learning Disability Team and the Physical Disability & Sensory Service Team.
- **Service User Focus Groups** – held with service users from St Basil's, Doorway, the House Project and Warwickshire Vision Support. 19 young people participated in a mix of 3 online and in-person sessions and 44 participants in two in-person focus groups with sight-impaired service users.

The consultation ran from 22nd May to 11th August 2023. A total of 583 contributions to the consultation were received.

Findings
Element 1 - Retain both Accommodation-based and Floating Support services for young people and adults by allocating the available budget in the same proportions as currently.
- **Ask Warwickshire** - 129 responses were received to this question. 54% either agreed (45 people) or strongly agreed (24 people), whilst 24% either disagreed (16 people) or strongly disagreed (14 people).
- **Email responses -** District and Borough Heads of Housing expressed general agreement with element 1 of the proposed changes, however, they were unconvinced of the need to separate floating services for young people and adults.
- **Easy read findings -** No comments were made.
- **Consultation workshop** - Professionals participating in the stakeholder workshop felt both accommodation-based and floating support services were needed for young people and adults. Despite both services being essential, professionals felt it was worth considering allocating a greater proportion of the budget to floating support services and less to accommodation-based services as most people they worked with had housing.
- **Stakeholder focus groups** - Workers felt both accommodation-based and floating support services were needed for young people and adults but considered allocating more budget to floating support services and less to accommodation-based services as they felt there was greater need.
- **Service user focus groups** - Service users felt both accommodation-based and floating support services were needed for young people and adults and appreciated having access to both depending on their needs.
- **Outreach** - 153 people answered a (slightly different) question, asking whether or not they supported the council continuing to provide services to support people who are homeless and need help finding somewhere to live, and services for people that need support to prevent them becoming homeless. 137 of them (90%) strongly agreed, 6 people (4%) agreed and just 3 people (2%) disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Element 2 - Stop commissioning the separate Floating Support service for people with disabilities and meet those needs within redesigned inclusive Floating Support services, one for young people aged 16-25 and one for people aged 25+ years.

- **Ask Warwickshire** - 126 responses were received to this question. 62% either agreed (56 people) or strongly agreed (23 people), whilst 25% either disagreed (10 people) or strongly disagreed (21 people).
- **Email responses** - The three email responses from individuals with experience of using HRS services, all expressed a wish for a separate service for disabled clients to be retained. District and Borough Heads of Housing expressed general agreement with element 2 of the proposed changes, however, they were less convinced of the need to separate floating services for young people and adults.
- **Easy-read responses** - 92% (23 out of 25) of respondents disagreed (28%) or strongly disagreed (64%) with this proposal. Two respondents (8%) neither agreed nor disagreed.
- **Outreach -** 176 people answered this question and 61 people (35%) strongly agreed, whilst 61 people (35%) strongly disagreed.
- **Consultation workshop** - Participants agreed that creating inclusive support services instead of commissioning a separate service for people with disabilities could create more simplicity and streamline processes but stressed that inclusive services would need the resources and knowledge to cater to the needs of disabled service users.
- **Stakeholder focus groups** - Participants agreed that creating inclusive support services instead of commissioning a separate service for disabled people could create more simplicity and streamline processes but stressed that inclusive services would need the resources and knowledge to cater to the needs of disabled service users.
- **Service user focus groups** - While focus group participants mostly agreed that turning separate services into an inclusive service supporting disabled residents could be beneficial, they emphasised the need for specialist training for staff to ensure disabled service users would have a positive experience tailored to their needs.

Element 3 - Adding a flexible range of shorter interventions that respond to individual needs as efficiently as possible and give earlier, focused support for customers who do not need longer-term support.

- **Ask Warwickshire** - 126 responses were received to this question. 72% either agreed (56 people) or strongly agreed (35 people), whilst 18% either disagreed (13 people) or strongly disagreed (10 people).
- **Email responses** - In their collective response to element 3, District and Borough Heads of Housing stressed that services would need to be designed in a way that ensured support would be timely, concentrated and tailored to the individual.
- **Easy-read responses -** There were 21 easy-read responses to this question. 72% of respondents (15 people) either disagreed (29%) or strongly disagreed (43%). One person neither agreed nor disagreed and 5 respondents (24%) agreed.
- **Consultation workshop -** Participants felt that alongside long-term support, shorter interventions may be appropriate for people with clear-cut support needs. They were clear that this ought to be in addition to, rather than a replacement for long-term support.
- **Stakeholder focus groups -** In principle, support workers agreed that adding brief interventions and signposting could be beneficial for those clients whose needs could be met this way. However, they stressed that support would still need to be tailored to individual customers and that particularly vulnerable individuals would require longer term support.

- **Service user focus groups -** Participants felt that while shorter, flexible interventions might suit some, personalised long-term support would generally produce the best outcomes, as it facilitated a trusting relationship with support workers.

Element 4: Reducing the maximum duration of services
- **Ask Warwickshire** - 126 responses were received to this question. 39% either agreed (36 people) or strongly agreed (13 people), whilst 41% either disagreed (30 people) or strongly disagreed (21 people).
- **Email responses -** The Heads of Housing supported element 4, with the proviso that the duration of service would still be determined by individual need and exceptions were allowed to make sure the service was sustainable.
- **Easy-read responses -** There were 21 easy-read responses to this question. 85% of respondents (18 people) either disagreed (33%) or strongly disagreed (52%). One person neither agreed nor disagreed and 2 respondents (10%) agreed.
- **Consultation workshop -** Participants saw significant drawbacks in reducing the maximum duration of services, pointing out the difficulty of delivering a personalised service within a tight deadline. In particular, young people and disabled service users may need support for longer, and shortening support duration might create a "revolving door" instead of empowering service users to be fully independent.
- **Stakeholder focus groups -** Participants saw significant drawbacks in reducing the maximum duration of services, pointing out the difficulty of delivering a personalised service within a tight deadline. It was felt that there was a risk associated with reducing the support available to some clients, who might need longer-term support.
- **Service user focus groups -** Participants highlighted that clients needed sufficient time to build a trusting relationship with their support worker. Young people in the focus groups felt that support with a duration of 2 years minimum would be most useful and appropriate for young people. Most participants had no idea how long their support was due to last.

Element 5: A new name for the services. We are proposing to change the name of these services from 'Housing Related Support Services' to 'Supporting Independence Services' and would like to know if you have any views on this.
- **Ask Warwickshire** - The Ask Warwickshire consultation survey asked for comments on the proposal but no quantitative question was asked. A majority of respondents opposed the name change. Many participants felt the proposed name lacks clarity and specific connection to housing and may risk being confused with other services. Others commented on the potential costs associated with rebranding. Several participants mentioned that the name did not matter as long as the quality of the service was high.
- **Email responses -** In response to element 5, the Heads of Housing felt the word "housing" ought to be included in the name to make it less ambiguous.
- **Easy read findings -** No comments were made.
- **Consultation workshop -** This element was not discussed.
- **Stakeholder focus groups -** Support workers strongly favoured the HRS service retaining its current name, to retain its distinct housing focus.
- **Service user focus groups -** Focus group participants were not asked about their opinions on element 5 of the consultation specifically, and did not make spontaneous remarks that could be linked to these proposals.

Element 6 - additional services removed from future service specification
- **Ask Warwickshire** - 126 responses were received to this question. 29% either agreed (23 people) or strongly agreed (14 people), whilst 41% either disagreed (26 people) or strongly disagreed (25 people).
- **Easy read findings** - No comments were made.
- **Consultation workshop -** This element was not discussed.
- **Stakeholder focus groups -** Participants felt these additional services were valuable and needed but should not be included in the HRS services, as they did not see them as falling within WCC's remit.
- **Service user focus groups -** Focus group participants were not asked about their opinions on element 6 of the consultation specifically, and did not make spontaneous remarks that could be linked to these proposals.

Do you think this Equality Impact Assessment identifies the impacts of these proposals?
- **Ask Warwickshire** - 120 responses were received to this question. 42% (50 responses) said they felt the EIA identified the impacts of the proposal, 28% (34 responses) said it did not. 30% (36 responses) said they were not sure or did not know whether the EIA identified the impacts of these proposals.
- **Easy read findings** - There were 6 responses to the question from easy-read surveys. 1 respondent (17%) felt that the EIA identifies the impacts of the proposals, 2 respondents (33%) did not and 3 repsondents (50%) said they were unsure or did not know.
- **Consultation workshop** - Consideration of the equalities impact of the proposed changes were incorporated into discussion on each individual element at the workshop and the EIA was not discussed in isolation.
- **Stakeholder focus groups** - Focus group participants were not asked about their opinions on element 6 of the consultation specifically, and did not make spontaneous remarks that could be linked to these proposals.
- **Service user focus groups** - Focus group participants were not asked about their opinions on element 6 of the consultation specifically, and did not make spontaneous remarks that could be linked to these proposals.

Conclusions
The consultation findings indicate that people value the HRS and the support it provides, which is regarded as highly personalised, flexible and appropriate for the needs of service users. Whilst there was a general acceptance of the contextual factors which have contributed to a reduction in HRS funding, there was concern over reducing budgets at a time when many people face considerable hardship in the face of the rising cost of living.

Many fear that reductions in funding are likely to cause particular hardship for those with the most challenging and complex needs – whose support needs are likely to take longer and be more resource intensive. There was concern that the proposed changes may make it harder for providers to work with these clients as their needs may not be easily compatible with the redesigned service.

Element 1 - Retain both Accommodation-based and Floating Support services for young people and adults by allocating the available budget in the same proportions as currently.
It is clear that among both professionals, service users and potential service users, retaining these separate services was welcomed. There was a widespread perception that demand for support was already higher than the HRS alone can possibly meet. However, if reductions to the HRS budget need to be made, then the general perception is that doing it this way was both fair and reasonable.

Element 2 - Stop commissioning the separate Floating Support service for people with disabilities and meet those needs within redesigned inclusive Floating Support services, one for young people aged 16-25 and one for people aged 25+ years.
This proposal polarised opinion. Respondents to the Ask Warwickshire survey supported the proposal, almost all of respondents to the easy read survey disagreed with it and among those engaged through the outreach opinion was divided. The primary concern among those who disagreed with the proposal (and indeed among some of those who supported it) was about maintaining and ensuring the quality of the service provided, in particular to disabled people. Whilst many saw simplifying and streamlining services and reducing systemic inefficiency as a positive development, this was very much conditional on being able to ensure that a consistently high-quality service was maintained.

Element 3 - Adding a flexible range of shorter interventions that respond to individual needs as efficiently as possible and give earlier, focused support for customers who do not need longer-term support.
A majority of people expressed support for this proposed change. It was felt to be a positive and empowering development, if it resulted in providing appropriate support quickly and efficiently. However, many people wanted to know more about the detail of how this would work in practice and the practical implications of the proposed change, in particular what such a change might mean for clients with complex and enduring needs.

Element 4: Reducing the maximum duration of services
This proposal was somewhat contentious, with opinion divided among respondents. Whilst some saw the proposal as a positive opportunity to avoid dependency and encourage independence, others expressed concern that clients' needs can't easily be 'fixed' in this way. There was particular concern surrounding the fact that a young person being supported may reach the maximum duration before they are 18 and in a position to take on their own tenancy.

Element 5: A new name for the services.
There was little evidence of disaffection with the current name and the proposal was not strongly supported. Respondents felt that 'supporting independence services' lost the explicit housing focus which HRS services has, and felt that this should be retained.

Element 6 - additional services removed from future service specification
Opinion was fairly divided on the proposal not to include additional services in the revised service specification, although the findings suggest views were not particularly strongly-held. Around one in three respondents either didn't know, or had no clear opinion about this.

Impact on equalities groups

Whilst many respondents believed the EIA accurately reflected the impact of the proposed changes on people with protected characteristics, there were a number of respondents who said they either did not know or felt it did not wholly capture the likely impact.

Recommendations

Whilst we recognise that decisions about the proposed changes and the future of the HRS will rest with the Cabinet, we consider it our responsibility to offer our professional, independent assessment of the evidence in relation to each of the proposed changes and general design features for future HRS service design.

Flexibility - A perceived strengths of HRS is 'flexibility'. The way the HRS is currently configured enables support providers to respond to the individual and their needs and this flexibility is something which is felt to be extremely important to embed in a redesigned service going forward.

Securing simplicity whilst managing complexity - Respondents saw considerable potential in simplifying and streamlining processes. The challenge in redesigning the new service will be in ensuring that people are genuinely able to access support more quickly. Whilst simplicity is desirable, it is equally important to acknowledge that the lives and the support needs of many HRS service users are highly complex, multi-faceted and potentially long-term.

Consistency and quality assurance - We found major discrepancies in the speed of accessing support and of the usefulness of the support received. Whilst this reflects their experience of accessing support more broadly than solely HRS, it does suggest a degree of inconsistency in the experiences of homeless and vulnerably housed people. Understanding and addressing these to ensure a consistently high-quality service would be beneficial.

Clarity of offer and brand positioning - A number of findings point to the importance of a clear HRS offer and brand positioning. It is crucial that homeless and vulnerably housed people understand clearly what HRS offers, how it can support them and that it is a service which is relevant to them and their needs. Indeed, a lack of clarity is likely to create additional administration (as people try to navigate) and it may in turn lead to less good outcomes.

Element 1 - Recommendation – Our assessment of the consultation findings is that there is sufficient support for this proposal for WCC to proceed with this change.

Element 2 - Recommendation – We recommend, on the basis of the consultation findings, that WCC proceed with this proposed change only if guarantees around consistency and service quality can be secured.

Element 3 - Recommendation – We recommend, on the basis of the evidence from the consultation response, to proceed but with clear explanations of how this will be delivered and with clear guidelines to ensure support for clients with complex and enduring needs.

Element 4 - Recommendation – On the basis of the responses to the consultation, we recommend that the new time limits for young people are not taken forward, but that other proposed changes proceed with clear allowance/permission for exceptions where they are necessary to support clients with long-term support needs.

Element 5 - Recommendation – The lack of support for this proposed change and the potential risks of adverse perceptions of doing so, lead us to conclude that WCC should not proceed with the proposed name change.

Element 6 - Recommendation – Our assessment of the consultation findings is that WCC proceed with this proposed change.

The significant reduction in HRS budget is going to be a challenge to continuing to support those in need, particularly at a time when many face increased pressures and hardship. Any changes will need to be made carefully, being sensitive to the risks such changes pose in service design and delivery to mitigate, as far as possible, adverse impacts on the most vulnerable.

Introduction

Warwickshire County Council (WCC) commissioned Social Engine to help support a consultation on the redesign of their Housing Related Support (HRS) services. The HRS services support vulnerable people – including homeless people and those at risk of becoming homeless - to acquire necessary skills for independent living. HRS consists of accommodation-based and floating support services. There are currently separate services for young people and adults and there's also a service specifically for disabled people.

The Housing Related Support contracts were due to end in July 2021 and were originally extended due to the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic. In accordance with best practice commissioners undertook a strategic review of services and identified a number of changes that could be made to the existing model to improve service efficiency for the benefit of WCC customers.

In addition, WCC are now faced with the challenge of reducing the annual Housing Related Support (HRS) budget by £1 million, from the current figure of £3.8 million. WCC believe that simply reducing the budget across all the services is not sufficient and that further efficiencies are achievable through some redesign and restructuring of the way the service is delivered. Through dialogue with key stakeholders, a series of proposed changes were developed that the consultation sought views on. The consultation also sought feedback on the equalities impact assessment and ideas on how the negative impact on particular groups could be mitigated.

There are three main providers who currently deliver the HRS services across Warwickshire: **Together working for Wellbeing (Together); St Basils; and People, Potential, Possibilities (P3)**. The breakdown of services delivered across the county as part of the HRS are set out in Table 1.

Client group	Service provided	Delivery area	Provider
Disabled adults	Floating support	County-wide	Together
Young people	Floating support	County-wide	St Basils
Young people	Accommodation-based support	Stratford and Warwick District areas	St Basils
Young people	Accommodation-based support	North Warwickshire, Nuneaton & Bedworth & Rugby Borough Council areas	P3
Adults (generic service)	Floating support and accommodation-based support	County-wide	P3

Table 1 - HRS current provision and service providers

The HRS provides a wide range of services which includes (but is not limited to) help for people to:

- Access and maintain a tenancy in secure accommodation;
- Stay safe within the home and local community;
- Manage finances, including budgeting, utilities and benefits;
- Acquire general housekeeping skills;
- Maintain independence and good health and wellbeing;
- Participate in training and/or education; and
- Obtain paid work or volunteering opportunities.

Proposed Changes

Discussions with stakeholders resulted in six key proposals which formed the basis of the consultation:

1. Retain both Accommodation-based and Floating Support services for young people and adults by allocating the available budget in the same proportions as currently.
2. Stop commissioning the separate Floating Support service for people with disabilities and meet those needs within redesigned inclusive Floating Support services, one for young people aged 16-25 and one for people aged 25+ years.
3. Adding a flexible range of shorter interventions that respond to individual needs as efficiently as possible and give earlier, focused support for customers who do not need longer-term support.
4. Reduce the maximum duration of services. Floating support for people aged 16-25 be reduced from 24 months to 12 months, for those over 25 the maximum duration will be reduced from 12 months to 9 months and the maximum period for accommodation-based support will be reduced from 24 months to 18 months.
5. A new name for the services. The name of these services is changed from Housing Related Support to Supporting Independence Services.
6. Additional services. Not to include the Street Outreach and 'Navigator' Hubs in the services that providers are asked to deliver. These additional services were not part of the previous specification WCC tendered.

Equalities

As part of the process leading up to the consultation, WCC conducted an initial Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) and identified that the proposed changes had a potentially adverse effect on people with protected characteristics. A key part of the consultation was therefore to better understand the impact the changes might have, consider how to minimise the negative impact on these groups and ensure equalities considerations were at the forefront of their decision-making in redesigning the new services. WCC therefore sought feedback on the Equality Impact Assessment and thoughts and ideas on how the negative impact on specific groups could be mitigated, both directly and the impact on groups which support people with protected characteristics.

Public consultation

WCC launched a public consultation to seek views from key stakeholders from statutory bodies, public services, voluntary organisations and members of the public on the proposed changes. Additionally, it was essential to ensure that those directly affected, or potentially affected, by the proposed changes were also given an opportunity to respond.

Social Engine, alongside our partners Kaizen, worked with WCC to develop a wide-ranging engagement process that enabled homeless and vulnerably housed people, housing and homelessness professionals and other interested parties to contribute to the consultation.

The consultation ran from 22nd May to 11th August 2023.

A Note on Terminology – The Social Model of Disability

The Social Model of Disability was developed by disabled people and describes people as being disabled by barriers in society, not by impairment or difference. The Social Model states that people have impairments, they do not have disabilities. Accordingly, the term 'people with disabilities' is said to confuse impairment and disability and implies disability is caused by the individual rather than society. [1] We use the term 'disabled people' throughout this report, except when quoting directly.

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[1] https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/social-model-disability-language

Methodology

In thinking about how to meaningfully engage a wide range of stakeholders, we worked collaboratively with WCC commissioners and consultation lead to devise a series of engagement methods to bring the consultation to seldom heard groups and individuals.

This gave people the opportunity to share their views on the proposed changes, to contribute ideas and experiences and to inform the decision-making for the HRS service redesign.

The consultation was promoted in a number of ways, working closely with WCC Communications team to share across press and social media formats, targeting and direct mailing key stakeholders and partner organisations. Direct mail to stakeholders asked people to complete the survey themselves and promote it with their customers and partners. This included the support of EQUIP and Warwickshire CAVA to access and promote to Warwickshire voluntary sector and community groups. Responses to the survey were reviewed throughout the 12-week period with additional targeting of people/groups to extend reach.

The consultation ran from 22nd May to 11th August 2023.

Ask Warwickshire online survey
An online survey was hosted on WCC's consultation and engagement hub, Ask Warwickshire, and was promoted widely to the public, professionals, and those involved in support for homeless and vulnerably housed people.

The survey set out in detail WCC's proposed changes and the rationale behind each change. A wide range of additional information about the HRS and a copy of the EIA could also be accessed through the Ask Warwickshire portal.

The Ask Warwickshire consultation survey can be found in full in Appendix C.

Email responses
People were also able to respond to the consultation via email if they preferred to do this rather than complete the survey on Ask Warwickshire.

Easy-read survey
An easy-read version of the survey was also produced and promoted both through the Ask Warwickshire portal, through the outreach and through partner and stakeholder organisations, to make participating in the consultation as accessible as possible, including with the assistance of a support worker where appropriate.

The Easy-read version of the consultation survey can be found in Appendix D.

Outreach
To ensure the views of those with lived experience (previous or potential users of HRS) were included in the consultation, we worked with our partners Kaizen, to design and deliver a programme of outreach to engage homeless and vulnerably housed people in the community.

A survey was designed specifically for this purpose. In addition to asking about aspects of the proposals, the survey sought to capture broader experience and perceptions of accessing support, their views on what worked well and ways in which the service could be improved.

- Individual interviews
  - In person conversations were held with people in the community, conducted at different times of day and days of the week. Individual interviews, using the outreach survey, typically lasted 15-20 minutes each. Survey responses were recorded on paper forms and then uploaded.
- Small group conversations
  - Where the engagement team encountered small groups of people (typically 2-6), they conducted 'street focus groups' – a form of small group discussion with people who may not generally participate in traditional focus groups or individual surveys. For the Street Focus Groups, a shorter number of open questions were used to facilitate discussion. Responses to the questions were recorded on forms and later uploaded.
- Online survey
  - An online survey, identical to the outreach survey, was promoted by the engagement team to individuals and organisations engaged through the course of the outreach. Service users were able to access and complete the online survey.
- Printed survey
  - Printed copies of the outreach survey were provided to people who preferred to complete the survey in writing.

The outreach surveys used for the individual interviews and the street focus groups can be found in Appendices E and F.

Kaizen's engagement team conducted outreach in areas across Warwickshire, including Leamington, Rugby, Stratford, Nuneaton and Atherstone. They visited services for homeless and vulnerably housed people and services providing support to those in financial hardship, as well as conducting outreach within the wider community, speaking to current, previous and potential users of HRS services. The outreach took place between 12th and 28th June 2023.

Relevant services supporting people likely to be either current, previous or potential HRS service users were identified by WCC Commissioners for the engagement team to visit, including foodbanks, drop-in centres, Hubs and hostels. The engagement team also conducted interviews in the community, engaging people on the street, in parks, outside fast-food restaurants and other locations where people congregated. A list of locations visited by the outreach team is included in Appendix K.

Consultation Workshop
An engagement workshop was held in July with 30 key stakeholders and partners, including District and Borough Housing, health services, the voluntary sector and current HRS providers attending[2]. The majority of participants were from agencies delivering support and services to those with housing related needs who they may refer to HRS services or receive referrals from HRS providers.

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[2] A list of all organisations represented at the workshop is included in Appendix I.

The workshop invited participants to first reflect on what currently works well about HRS services and the barriers to a more efficient and effective service, before moving on to discuss the proposed changes. Participants were asked to consider the proposed changes in terms of the design features or characteristics of a well-designed service, the impact on equalities and how success might be measured.

Discussions were held in small groups, with each group taking notes on their discussion points, with brief feedback shared between groups.

Stakeholder Focus Groups
Two focus groups were held with staff from the Learning Disability Team and the Physical Disability & Sensory Service Team in July and August, gathering insights on the different proposals from 22 support workers.

Feedback was invited from participants on each of the 6 proposed changes and notes of the points raised taken by WCC officers.

Service User Focus Groups
Following the conclusion of the outreach, Social Engine and WCC officers ran five focus groups with HRS customers and customers of other homelessness support services for young people. These provided an opportunity to explore in greater depth their experiences and views on the service and to understand how to best support their needs through the redesign.

Three of the focus groups were carried out with young people aged 16-25 who were receiving support from St Basil's, Doorway and the House Project, to better understand young people's experiences and needs. In total, we heard from 19 young people in a mix of online and in-person sessions of which two were facilitated by WCC staff and one by Social Engine.

Two in-person focus groups were held with sight-impaired service users, made possible by Warwickshire Vision Support, with 44 individuals participating and sharing their views with council staff.

Focus groups run by WCC officers asked participants about each of the proposed changes, as well as exploring what areas of support were important to people.

Those run by Social Engine used an interview guide which explored people's experience of accessing support more widely, in order to understand how services can be designed to effectively meet the needs of service users. The focus group discussion guide used by Social Engine can be found in Appendix G.

Summarised notes of the main points of discussion were taken from all focus groups.

Approach to analysis
The research generated a significant amount of qualitative and quantitative data from across the multiple engagement methods. To guide our approach to analysis and to reduce the risks of cognitive biases and other common errors made when analysing data, we:

- Finalised data sources and the variables within each source;
- Identified covariates to be analysed;

- Devised an approach to explore each data source.

As it was not possible to quantify with any confidence the total number of potential and current HRS service users, or any reliable data on the demographic profile of this population, no attempt has been made to calculate the confidence interval for our sample. We are similarly unable to determine whether the response to the consultation is representative of HRS service users and potential service users.

Quantitative data analysis
For the quantitative data gathered through the outreach interviews, online survey and street focus groups, the headline analysis was supplemented by exploring a range of covariates to identify differences in the perspectives of different groups, in order to ensure the views of particular groups were not overlooked. For the covariate analysis, we investigated whether there are any statistical associations between certain demographic characteristics, such as gender and disability, and dependent variables, such as ease of access to support, waiting time to receive support, perceived usefulness of support and participants' agreement levels to the proposals.

The covariate analysis was performed using the Chi-square test of independence and the significance level was set at 0.05 in order to ensure that any observed statistical association did not occur due to chance.

In the report the quantitative data presented is from the individual interviews and Street Focus Groups conducted as part of the outreach and from the Ask Warwickshire online survey and easy-read survey. The labels on each chart indicate the source of each data visualisation.

Qualitative data – thematic analysis
For the qualitative data in our open survey questions, we used thematic analysis to uncover the attitudes, perceptions and behaviours among participants. Thematic analysis is a theoretically flexible qualitative analytical method which searches for themes or patterns in the data. It is a method suitable for a wide range of research questions but is particularly appropriate for questions around people's experiences, views and perceptions. To identify themes, we used the principles of 'grounded theory'. The phrase 'grounded theory' refers to theory that is developed inductively from a body of data, rather than from the preconceptions of the researchers.

Our approach followed that adopted by Braun and Clarke (2006)[3], following six stages of conducting a thematic analysis:

1. **Familiarisation with the data:** This phase involved reading and re-reading the data, to become immersed and intimately familiar with its content.
2. **Coding:** This phase involved generating succinct labels (codes) that identify important features of the data that might be relevant to answering our research questions. It involved coding the entire dataset, and then collating all the codes and all relevant data extracts, for later stages of analysis.
3. **Searching for themes:** This phase involved examining the codes and collated data to identify significant broader patterns of meaning (potential themes). We then collated data

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[3] Braun & Clarke "Using thematic analysis in psychology" Qualitative Research in Psychology Volume 3, 2006 - Issue 2 https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

relevant to each candidate theme, working with the data to review the viability of each candidate theme.

4. **Reviewing themes:** This phase involved checking the candidate themes against the dataset, to determine whether they tell a convincing story of the data, and one that answers the research question. In this phase, we refined our themes, which sometimes involves them being split, combined, or discarded.
5. **Defining and naming themes:** This phase involves developing a detailed analysis of each theme, working out the scope and focus of each theme, determining the 'story' of each. It also involves deciding on an informative name for each theme.
6. **Writing up:** This final phase involves weaving together the analytic narrative and data extracts, and contextualising the analysis in relation to existing literature.

Although these phases are sequential, and each builds on the previous phase, analysis is typically a recursive process, with movement back and forth between different phases. Consequently, it's not a wholly rigid process, and the analytic process between phases can become blurred.

For group discussions, such as focus groups and small group work at the consultation workshop, a simplified version of the process was adopted. Notes taken from the discussion were reviewed, and key themes summarised for inclusion in the wider analysis and reporting. However, no coding was undertaken since it was not deemed necessary with small amounts of data.

Finally, the analysis from all the strands of the consultation, quantitative and qualitative, were collated and then reviewed by our project team to consider the findings and develop and test our conclusions.

Responses to the consultation

Across the various engagement methods and channels which people were able to use to respond to the consultation, a total of 583 responses were received. Since many people responded anonymously, it is not possible to determine whether some people participated through more than one strand of the engagement. Consequently, the total number of respondents may be slightly lower than the number of responses and contributions received. Where people participated in more than one engagement strand, for example responding to the survey and attending the consultation workshop, the nature of the engagement was different. Whilst the workshop generated qualitative data from group discussion, the Ask Warwickshire survey provided individual responses to quantitative and qualitative questions.

Ask Warwickshire online survey - 129 responses were received to the Ask Warwickshire survey. 9 of these were formal responses received on behalf of organisations (a list of organisational responses can be found in Appendix H).

Email responses - Five responses to the consultation were received by email. Three of these were from individuals with experience of using HRS services, one was a formal response on behalf of Warwickshire District and Borough Heads of Housing and one was an addendum to the response from the Heads of Housing, which was submitted by Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council.

Easy-read survey - 25 responses to the easy-read survey were received from individuals with experience of using HRS services. These responses were all from individual customers of Together, the floating support service for disabled people. Together supported individual customers to engage in the process and submitted the responses on their behalf.

Outreach - A total of 311 people were engaged through the outreach and contributed to the consultation findings, this was made up of:

- 185 individual interviews
- 126 people participating in 43 street focus groups
- 3 written responses, which were added to the individual interviews for analysis
- No responses to the online version of the survey were received

Consultation workshop - 30 key stakeholders and partners, including District and Borough Housing, health services, the voluntary sector and current HRS providers attending[4].

Stakeholder Focus Groups – 22 participants in two focus groups with staff from the Learning Disability Team and the Physical Disability & Sensory Service Team.

Service User Focus Groups - 19 young people in a mix of 3 online and in-person sessions. 44 participants in two in-person focus groups with sight-impaired service users.

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[4] A list of all organisations represented at the workshop is included in Appendix J.

Findings

In this section, we set out our key findings across our various engagement and research channels. We set out the findings from each strand of the consultation in turn.

Ask Warwickshire online survey
Element 1 - Retain both Accommodation-based and Floating Support services for young people and adults by allocating the available budget in the same proportions as currently.
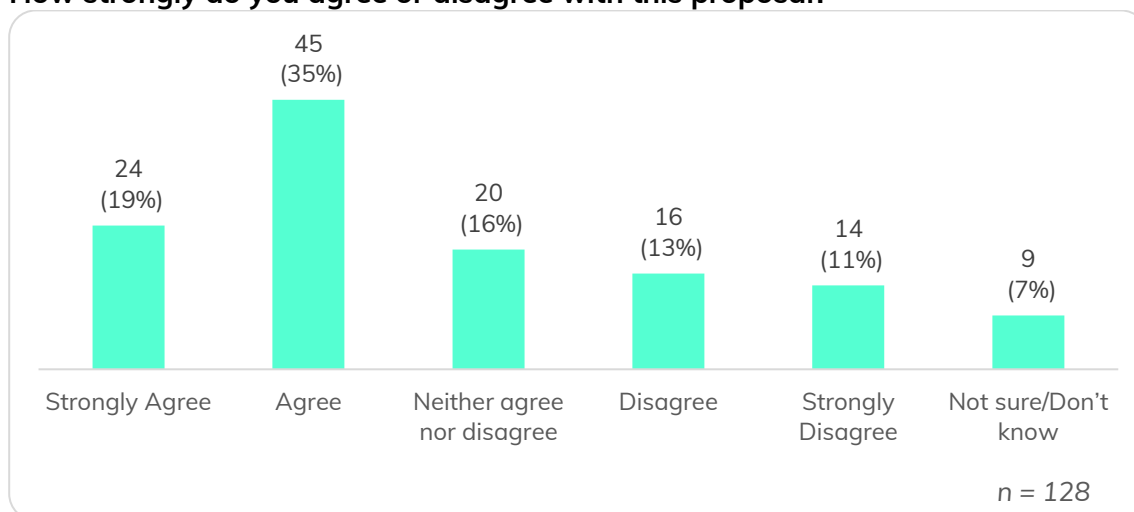**How strongly do you agree or disagree with this proposal?**

Figure 1 – Element 1, Ask Warwickshire consultation responses

Reasons given for people's responses
Agree
Respondents who agreed with the proposal strongly felt that both Accommodation-based and floating HRS services were critical in providing support to vulnerable people. Furthermore, they viewed this proposal as a balanced approach, ensuring that no single service is disproportionately affected. Some participants had personal experiences with the services and wanted to ensure others would be able to receive similar support.

1. Both services are essential
Respondents strongly felt that both Accommodation-based and floating support services were critical to providing support to vulnerable people.

"All the services currently provided are needed by Warwickshire."

"Both types of service, accommodation based and floating support are important for the people receiving support."

"This is an ESSENTIAL service and should always be a priority."

2. Fairness and equity

The proposal was viewed as a balanced approach, ensuring that no single service is disproportionately affected.

"A fair method of keeping all services going."

"I feel this would be a much fairer approach, ensuring services are available for all."

"Means equally divided."

3. Personal impact

Participants shared their personal experiences emphasising the life-changing role of these services.

"I had amazing support from together and want others to also have this."

"I currently use housing support, without I would be street homeless."

"My son and I were homeless he has a disability it needs to be addressed."

Disagree

Respondents who disagreed with the proposal expressed concerns that despite retaining both services, the budget reductions will inevitably lead to a decline in quality, effectiveness and scope of services. At the same time, respondents recognised that demand for services were increasing and the proposed budget cut doesn't align with the present and anticipated needs of society, including the rising cost of living and an aging population. Rather than cutting budgets, respondents argued, there should be a thorough evaluation of the system's inefficiencies and alternative approaches found to funding services.

1. Diminished service quality and reach

Respondents expressed concerns that despite retaining both services, the budget reductions will inevitably lead to a decline in quality and scope of services. Funding is already strained and the proposed reductions would further impact the effectiveness of the services.

"funding is already well below what is needed so a reduction in the budget… would be devastating."

"The money is reducing so although the support services continue to receive the same amount of the budget this is being reduced."

"With such a big cut of money this means that services like what I receive might not exist anymore."

2. Increasing and changing needs

Respondents noted that there are a growing number of vulnerable people in society and that service demand is increasing. The proposed budget cut is out of alignment with the societal pressures, such as cost of living, which are contributing to increased demand.

"I feel there are more vulnerable people than there were a few years ago and this number is likely to increase with an aging population."

"Homelessness is an increasing concern with benefits not in line with costs of living and local housing allowances falling short of the housing costs for even social rents."

3. Alternative Solutions

Some respondents felt that before implementing budget cuts, there should be a thorough evaluation of the system's inefficiencies. They suggested that there were alternative methods to fund these services. They also noted that more proactive and creative solutions should be sought.

"It needs to be looked at in a new way. The old system isn't working and all referrals seem to be rejected for one reason or another."

"You should fight the government or find other ways to fund. Eg. Tax the developers who are profiting from your house building programmes."

These themes specifically address the reasons why respondents disagreed with the proposed budgetary changes and underscore the potential repercussions and alternative perspectives they bring to the table.

Please tell us how you think this proposal would impact on you:
1. Concern for vulnerable and disadvantaged people

This theme represented participants' worries about the impact of the proposal on the most vulnerable people, emphasising the moral and ethical implications.

"A reduction of any kind will have an impact on those in need and therefore on everyone with compassion within the area."

"Cuts in support services can result in delays for families in crisis which then impacts on other services' time supporting those families."

"Young people should be supported in their own community and not shipped off to an area where they do not know as this increases vulnerability and isolation."

"Less support for young parents and the choices they are able to make which makes it more difficult for me to be able to support them."

2. Personal implications

This theme focused on how the proposal would affect respondents and their family/ environment.

"A lot as I live in accommodation with St Basils."

"As a pensioner with mobility problems this will soon affect me."

"As I am now 70 with no husband or partner, I am very concerned that I may not receive support that I may need after an accident or if my health declines."

"I think it's going to have a significant impact on me and my family."

3. Service continuity and efficiency

Participants emphasised the significance of maintaining existing services and expressed concerns over potential inefficiencies and/ or the lack of improvements.

"Hopefully this proposal would enable support staff to remain in their job roles to continue to help people and make a difference to housing waiting lists."

"I think this would help to keep known services available and ensure people know where to go rather than gearing up to have to go elsewhere."

"The current support services will continue as they are. I work for [Redacted] BC in housing and the floating support and supported accommodation services provided do very little to support us to prevent homelessness."

4. Financial constraints and impact on service reductions

This theme highlighted the concerns about budget cuts leading to reduced support and services.

"Due to the budget cut it is likely to lead to some delays and reduced numbers of people on probation who will receive support."

"We would likely end up with more homeless cases."

"I would be worried if I needed floating support again they couldn't give it to me, if they didn't have as much money they might not be able to support so many people."

"Funding cuts to housing related support services would likely mean that we at the Family Information Service get asked to provide more housing-related support ourselves."

5. Impact on broader community and services

Several respondents emphasised the negative effect the proposal would have on the community and interconnected services.

"I volunteer with a homeless service and Rugby foodbank, where any support is difficult to obtain for those using the services in relation to housing."

"Our services, across the county, are already seeing more and more households threatened with homelessness or actually homeless."

"We are a signposting and referral service primarily. We need good support services to signpost and refer to."

"We would really struggle to move clients on from emergency refuge accommodation to secure housing due to unavailability of affordable housing."

6. Absence of perceived impact

Several participants expressed doubts over whether the proposal would have any tangible or significant impact on their circumstances or on the larger system.

"At the moment, I cannot see that it will impact on me."

"I don't think it will change much; services have always been inconsistent."

"From what I've seen, these proposals seem like more of the same, so I don't anticipate any major shift."

"It's just another proposal. Haven't felt the difference from the previous ones, and I don't expect this one to be any different."

What could we do instead?
Instead of allocating the available reduced budget in the same proportions as currently, participants suggested increased funding for floating support with the expectation that this would constitute a more efficient use of resources. Further measures that were proposed to increase efficiencies were improved resource management, streamlining referrals, focusing on early intervention/prevention and forming more effective partnerships with local voluntary and community sectors. This included innovative community-based solutions, like setting up communal kitchens and supporting families in caring for adult family members. While these measures centred on greater efficiency given decreased funding, other respondents suggested increasing council tax to maintain or increase the resources available for HRS in general.

Funding:
- Allocate more funding to floating support instead of accommodation-based support
- Increase Council Tax to maintain or increase funding

Efficiency and collaboration:
- Streamline referrals with an easy-access form to reduce delays and increase accuracy
- Be more efficient in managing resources
- Improve the way councils interact with voluntary and community sectors
- Engage with agencies to develop partnerships and use volunteer support

Service Redesign:
- Move from accommodation-based support to more floating support tailored to individual needs
- Focus on early intervention, particularly for young people, to reduce long-term costs
- Consider merging disability-specific provision into generic age-group provision

Community involvement:
- Ask local residents to oversee allocation and location of support
- Encourage families to provide housing/care for adult family members with better support packages

Transparency and communication:
- Keep clients informed and consider changing the language from 'customer' to 'client'
- Make sure frontline staff are in place, possibly reducing management

Innovation:
- Look at creating more community-based resources, like communal kitchens
- Team up with care providers for more cohesive and efficient home care

Element 2 - Stop commissioning the separate Floating Support service for people with disabilities and meet those needs within redesigned inclusive Floating Support services, one for young people aged 16-25 and one for people aged 25+ years.
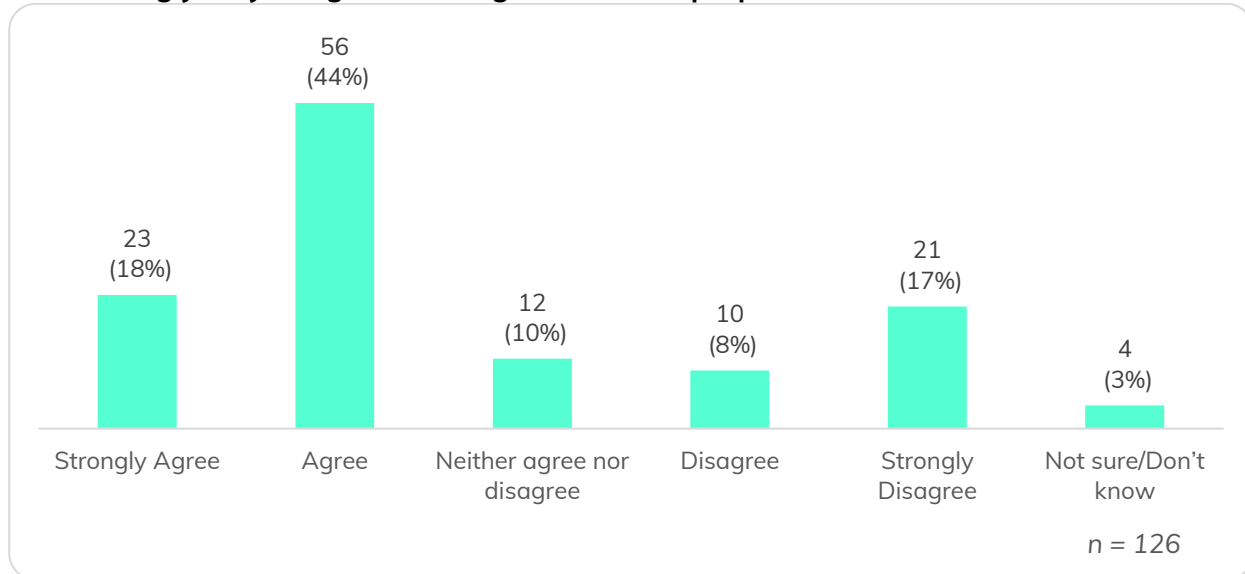
How strongly do you agree or disagree with this proposal?

Figure 2 – Element 2, Ask Warwickshire consultation responses

Reasons given for people's responses

Agree
Respondents reasoned that combining services would make it easier for people to access the right service and reduce confusion. A unified service may further lead to cost savings and more efficient use of funds, and reduce wait times, so those in need could receive help faster. From an inclusivity perspective, participants thought that one service for all could avoid segregation and increase equality – however, respondents caveated that it is essential that quality remains high and specialised support for disabled people is still available.

Simplified Access and streamlining services
Combining services will make it easier for people to access the right service and reduce confusion.

"Access to services need to be straight forward."

"more streamlined service would save money and make it more simple."

"This would offer a more streamlined and less complicated access..."

Efficient resource allocation and budget considerations
A unified service may lead to cost savings and more efficient use of funds.

"In a time of reduced resources, it makes sense to decrease the number of providers..."

"Sounds a sensible use of limited resources."

"This seems the most effective way to maximize the support that the budget can provide."

Focus on inclusivity and equal support
One service for all would promote inclusivity and ensures all residents including disabled people, to get the support needed.

"Avoid segregation and try to drive inclusivity in design from the beginning."

"I agree on the basis of inclusivity and equalities..."

"It is good to integrate services rather than seeing disability as being different."

Service quality and specialist support concerns
While combining services, it is essential that quality remains high and specialised support for disabled people is still available.

"Agree as long as services and quality of service for people with disabilities is not impacted..."

"This sounds like a good idea in principle, as long as staff... had the specialist training and knowledge..."

"those with disabilities do need specialist support, but this should be blended into the service..."

5. Reduced waiting times and delays
One generic service might reduce waiting times and mean that those in need get help more quickly.

"This change will make it easier for people to access the right service... with less delay."

"Would hopefully enable people to access support quicker."

"Referrals will be more streamlined and services will be accessed quicker."

Disagree
Some respondents had considerable concerns regarding the potential loss of specialised support for disabled people. Respondents emphasised that a generalised service may not be able to address the unique needs of disabled people and may fail to provide the tailored support they require. Given the potential vulnerability of disabled people, respondents voiced their worries about increased risks of homelessness and inadequate support.

In addition, respondents doubted that merging services would lead to higher efficiency and effectiveness. They highlighted past positive experiences with specialised support and further argued that delays in the current system were not due to separate services but problems with the referral system.

1. **Specialised vs generalised services**

This theme highlighted concerns regarding the potential loss of specialised support for disabled people. Respondents emphasised that a generalised service may not be able to address the unique needs of disabled people and may fail to provide the tailored support they require.

"I think by not having a separate disability service runs the risk of their vulnerabilities not been seen and not be given the priority that they should receive."

"Specialised services literally saved my life as I had attempted suicide a few days before I first met my support worker."

"To remove a service that delivers directly to people with disabilities in the name of inclusivity fails to acknowledge that we do not live in a world with inclusive social infrastructure."

2. **Concerns about effectiveness and efficiency**

Respondents expressed their concerns about the effectiveness and efficiency of merging specialised services. They highlighted past positive experiences with specialised support and show scepticism about the efficiency of generic services.

"As I mentioned previously, my son has mental health needs and autism. The support he received from the specialist disability service Together UK was excellent."

"Cutting a service doesn't mean efficiency. Already short-staffed need more communication and coordination."

"It seems too generic and less specialist, younger people have different needs to older people and grouping them together would stretch staff and potentially lead to untrained staff dealing with people outside their specialist areas."

3. **Impact on vulnerable people**

This theme highlighted the concerns about the potential negative impacts on vulnerable people, especially disabled people. Respondents voiced their worries about increased risks like homelessness and inadequate support.

"I am really concerned about the impact of these proposals on disabled people."

"People with disabilities are your most vulnerable and most in need. Changes in their provision is to be avoided."

"I think this specific policy will lead to an increase in disabled people facing homelessness in the county, which is shocking."

4. **Structural and referral concerns**

Concerns were raised around the organisational and procedural challenges that might arise from the proposed changes. Respondents mentioned experiences of referral confusion and believed a more efficient referral system could mitigate delays and other issues.

"I don't believe that having the separate service for disabilities is the reason for delays or referrals being referred to the wrong service."

"From experience, there has been confusion among referrers due to services accepting inappropriate referrals. If the referral system was designed to minimise this, then delays would not happen."

Please tell us how you think this proposal would impact on you:
1. Efficiency and simplification
Many respondents commented on the potential efficiency and simplification that could be achieved by merging the services.

"As a referral and signposting service, it would streamline the service."

"Hopefully a more efficient assessment process will enable quicker decisions..."

"It would hopefully streamline to a certain extent."

2. Impact on service providers
A concern regarding the potential restructuring or retendering of services and the impact on the organisations and staff involved was mentioned.

"As an organisation, we are aware that we will have to re-tender for services."

"I think that this would mean our service would be closed or merge with another service..."

"The impact could be job loss as contract could not be delivered."

3. Quality of support for disabled individuals
A major concern was whether the redesigned services can adequately support disabled individuals.

"If people with disabilities struggle to get the extra level of support needed from the new universal services..."

"I have family members and close friends with disabilities and a future without services that acknowledge their disabilities makes me lose faith..."

"If the service was unable to adequately recognise the unique challenges disabilities can create when considering housing..."

4. Individual impact and personal experiences
There were varied reactions to how the change might personally affect individuals, with some sharing their own experiences or those of close relatives.

"I would probably still be in a substandard privately rented room or would have taken my life."

"I think it would mean I would get floating support easier without having to think which service suited me best."

"My husband is registered disabled and should he require support, this proposal would weaken his chances of gaining it."

5. Referral and service accessibility

Respondents expressed the view that the change could have implications for the clarity and ease of referrals, as well as the accessibility of the right services for users.

"Currently we refer to P3 for less complex customers and Together for more complex customers..."

"Should we need to access floating services in the future, it would be easy to identify where we needed to go."

"When I make a referral I don't have to work out which one to refer to."

6. Uncertainty and lack of clarity

Several responses indicated confusion or a lack of certainty about how the proposed changes would impact them or the larger community.

"Not sure."

"Unsure."

"To be honest I am not exactly sure what impact it would have on me personally."

What we could do instead?

Some respondents challenged this proposal directly, suggesting that specialised disabled services should remain, or argued that funding should be increased, for example by redistributing spending from other council areas. To use the available funding more efficiently, respondents suggested implementing preventative services for young people, employing support workers directly rather than via contracts, and partnering with community organisations for more holistic support, including skill-based training programmes. Improved communication between service providers and the community and a streamlined referral process were thought to improve service provision further. Participants also highlighted the special needs of disabled clients and different age groups and suggested employing trained specialist workers. Lastly, respondents emphasised the role of non-profit organisations, suggesting switching to non-profits for service provision and amplifying the voices of smaller organisations in decision-making.

Service structure and design
- Maintain specialised disability services alongside generic
- Implement a 50-50 split between services for adults and young people

Assessment and referral
- Streamline or modify the referral process for better access to appropriate services.

Funding and resource allocation
- Double the existing funding
- Redistribute spending from other less-critical council areas
- Increase allocation of budget to preventive services for young people

Communication and community engagement
- Improve communication between the service providers and the community
- Partner with community organisations for more holistic support

Skills and training
- Invest in skill-based training programs like cooking, budgeting, etc., especially for young people
- Needs for extensive training of service providers for better support

Policy and governance
- Retain or switch to non-profit organisations for service provision
- Make sure smaller organisations' voices are amplified in decision-making

Special needs and requirements
- Ensure services meet the specific needs of different age groups and disabilities
- Employ senior, specialist workers for more challenging cases

Operational efficiency
- Employ directly rather than via agencies or contracts for better long-term benefits

Element 3 - Adding a flexible range of shorter interventions that respond to individual needs as efficiently as possible and give earlier, focused support for customers who do not need longer-term support.

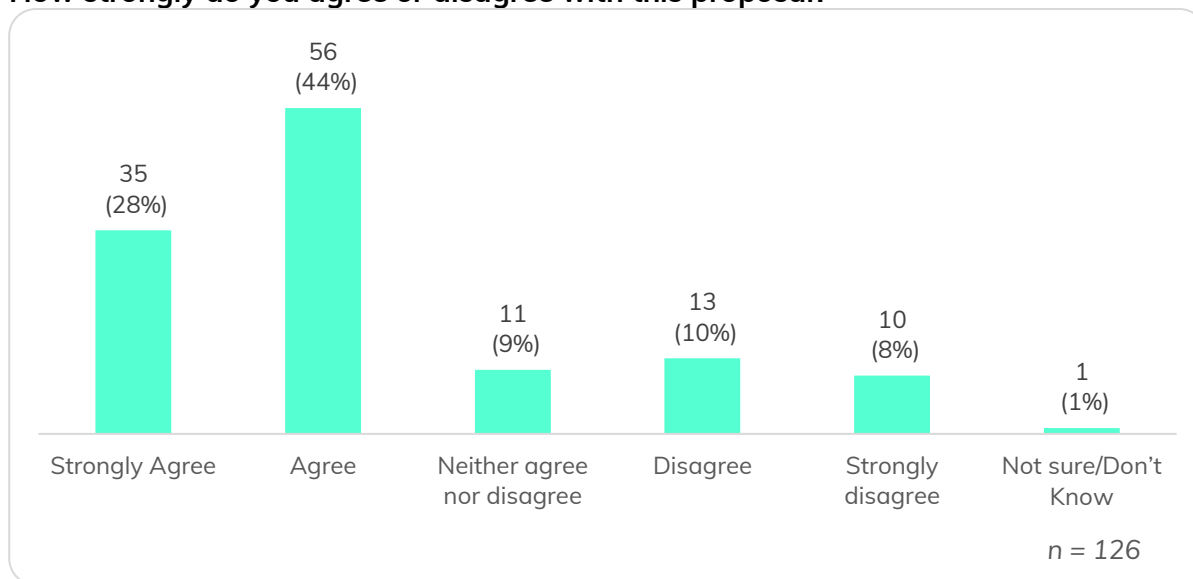**How strongly do you agree or disagree with this proposal?**

Bar chart:
- Strongly Agree: 35 (28%)
- Agree: 56 (44%)
- Neither agree nor disagree: 11 (9%)
- Disagree: 13 (10%)
- Strongly disagree: 10 (8%)
- Not sure/Don't Know: 1 (1%)

n = 126

Figure 3 – Element 3, Ask Warwickshire consultation responses

Reasons given for people's responses
Agree
Respondents in favour of this proposal thought that the proposed system would be more efficient. They appreciated the idea of helping those who need minimal support quickly, thus freeing up

resources for those who require more intensive support. They also appreciated the benefits of early intervention and favoured the flexibility that allows for more personalised service based on individual needs.

While agreeing with the proposal in principle, some respondents expressed concerns about its implementation. They worried about potential negative repercussions if not executed properly and that the system might be misused to save costs, potentially at the expense of those in need of longer-term support.

1. **Greater efficiency**
Participants agreed that the proposed system would be more efficient. They appreciated the idea of helping those who need minimal support quickly, thus freeing up resources for those who require more intensive support.

"A triage system seems an efficient way to identify those most in need..."

"Again this sounds like a sensible approach to streamlining..."

"Faster treatment for individuals."

2. **Early Intervention**
A significant number of respondents appreciated the benefits of early intervention. They felt that preventing issues before they escalate was key.

"earlier access to advice and guidance to access various options..."

"early intervention is critical to the long term aftercare..."

"I believe early advice / intervention is an easy win approach..."

While agreeing with the proposal in principle, some respondents expressed concerns about its implementation. They worried about potential negative repercussions if not executed properly.

"As with other elements of these proposals, they make sense as a matter of high-level principle, but what is critical is that they are implemented quickly and well..."

"It is important that those needing immediate responses/support gain timely access..."

3. **Flexibility and personalised service**
Participants favoured the flexibility that allows for more personalised service based on individual needs.

"Flexible support should be provided so people dip in and out of how much support they need."

"Personalising the level of support should enable better use of resources."

"sounds more person-centred & flexible."

4. Worries about potential misuse

Some respondents feared that while the system is good in theory, it might be misused to save costs, potentially at the expense of those in need of longer-term support.

"As long as this is not used as an approach to step back from face to face in person delivery..."

"I do agree with short term interventions provided they are not at the expense of those who need more intensive floating support..."

Disagree

Respondents who were against the proposal were concerned about whether short-term interventions can meet the diverse and complex needs of clients. This was also related to the quality of interactions, including time required to establish trust and rapport and the importance of in-person sessions. Respondents also expressed scepticism that the new proposal would fit with core principles of trauma-informed care and comprehensive support. Apart from these concerns, respondents mentioned issues related to the practical implementation of the new service changes, including staffing and operational challenges, and the need for actionable support rather than mere referral.

1. Adequacy and duration of support

Concerns about whether short-term interventions can meet the diverse and complex needs of clients.

"It is difficult to ascertain how many people will fit into the early intervention/12 week criteria."

"Young people are vulnerable for a reason...these needs don't disappear after one short episode of support."

"We do not need anymore 'signposting' services... So many services are limited to 6 sessions and this isn't sufficient."

2. Quality of relationship and interaction

This theme highlighted the importance of in-person sessions and the time required to establish trust and rapport.

"Everybody is different, not all people are able to seek support they require in the first instance of speaking with organisations."

"Some customers need in person visits to understand their situation and needs."

"For customers with memory issues... the telephone calls are not sufficient."

3. Logistical and operational concerns

Respondents mentioned issues related to the practical implementation of the new service changes, including staffing and operational challenges.

"It's a money-saving exercise with reduces the service capability and people will suffer."

"It depends on how providers would implement this, but there may be difficulties if staff are appointed for different parts of the contract."

"Sounds complicated and service users vulnerable to falling through the net with this approach."

4. Alignment with core principles
Doubts about the new proposal's fit with trauma-informed care and the broader principles of comprehensive support.

"The proposal is reckless."

"The proposals are meant to be based on trauma-informed approaches... These proposals will see an increase in homelessness which is appalling."

"Targeted support that enables independence and self-reliance should always be promoted rather than creating a culture of dependency on services."

5. Current Systems and Practical Support
Participants shared their thoughts on existing services and the need for actionable support rather than mere referral.

"P3 offers a drop-in hub anyway, so that people can get one-off support, without being a floating client."

"We do not need anymore 'signposting' services... Every service signposts but we need services on the ground that actually 'do', not just 'tell'!"

Please tell us how you think this proposal would impact on you:
1. Efficiency and resource allocation
Respondents viewed the proposal as a means of making housing support services more efficient by prioritising resources.

"A triage system seems an efficient way to identify those most in need..."

"...earlier access to advice and guidance to access various options is most commonly all is needed... This would free up resources to provide more intense support to those who really need it."

2. Concerns about implementation
Some participants emphasised the importance of how the proposal is implemented, monitored and refined.

"As with other elements of these proposals, they make sense as a matter of high-level principle, but what is critical is that they are implemented quickly and well..."

"...what is critical is that the assumptions that they are designed on are tested and changed as needed during the initial phase of implementation."

3. Ensuring continuation of long-term support

Several respondents expressed concerns about how this change might impact those who require long-term support.

"Agree as long as those who require long term support can still access it."

"I would be concerned that perhaps companies would potentially choose these methods as opposed to longer term support, as cheaper to deliver."

4. Concerns about delivery method

Some responses showed apprehension about potentially reducing face-to-face interactions.

"As long as this is not used as an approach to step back from face to face in person delivery."

"We are also concerned about any move towards more remote engagements."

5. Support for the approach

Several people expressed clear support for the proposal, viewing it as aligning with existing strategies or as a positive move.

"Warwickshire County Council Public Health support this approach..."

"Brilliant idea."

"Your reasons make sense and focused short-term intervention makes sense if it works."

What we could do instead:

Respondents developed the idea of flexible interventions further. Ideas offered included combining short-term and long-term service options in a personalised support plan with options for pausing support, incorporating user perspectives in service design, focusing on preventative programmes and being outcome and data-driven in monitoring and adapting services. In addition, respondents mentioned the need to streamline paperwork and bureaucratic procedures to increase efficiency, and fostering good communication and collaboration with community organisations, stakeholders and service users.

Personalised flexible support
- Combine personalised support plans, short-term and long-term service options and the possibility to pause services for greater flexibility and customisation to individual needs

Efficient resource utilisation
- Focus on outcome-driven approaches and streamline paperwork and procedures to allocate resources more efficiently.

Enhanced communication and collaboration
- Improve communication between service providers, stakeholders, and service users. Also, foster partnerships with local governments and community organisations for more cohesive support.

Data-driven decision making
- Utilise both qualitative and quantitative data to monitor, assess and adapt services to be more effective.

User-centric and preventative approaches
- Incorporate user perspectives and needs into service design and focus on programmes that tackle the root causes of issues to prevent long-term dependencies on support systems.

Element 4: Reducing the maximum duration of services
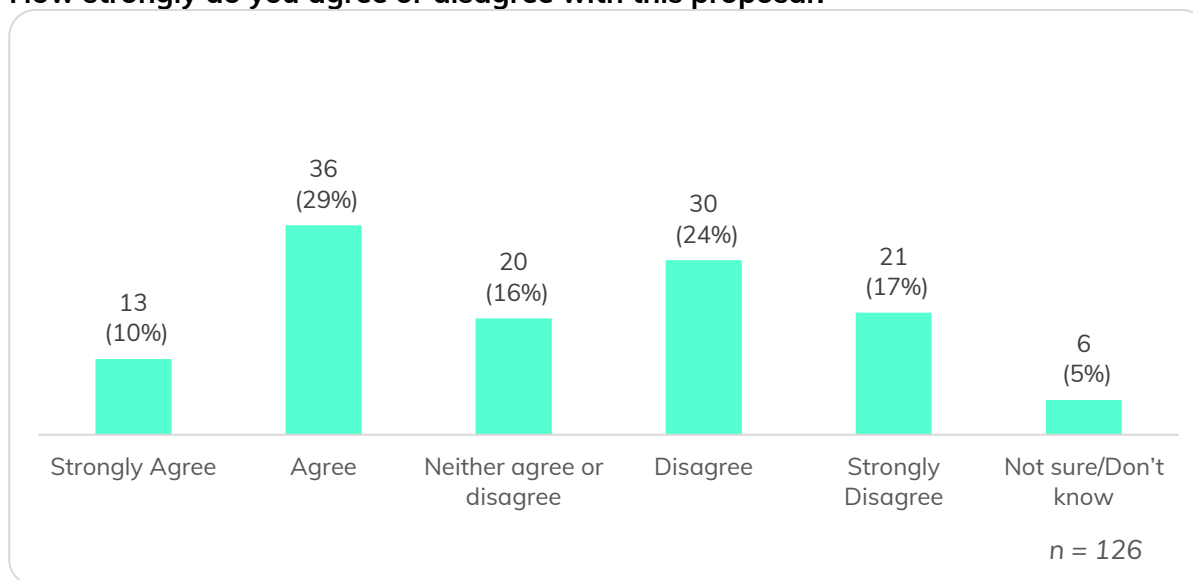
How strongly do you agree or disagree with this proposal?

Figure 4 – Element 4, Ask Warwickshire consultation responses

Reasons given for people's responses

Agree

Many participants argued that a concentrated, results-driven approach can create greater independence in service users, cautioning against prolonged services which may create dependency. A common theme reflected participants' thoughts on the potential for shortened support durations to allow a broader reach of services. While there was acknowledgment of financial constraints, the balance between monetary savings and moral obligations was emphasised. However, respondents stressed that there may be practical challenges faced during the transition from supported to independent living and that the length of support should be different for each person depending on their needs.

1. **Efficiency and independence**

Many participants said that a concentrated, results-driven approach can create greater independence in service users, cautioning against prolonged services which may create dependency.

"a focus on results and independence is good."

"Avoid inadvertently creating a dependency."

"I don't believe this is an issue at present however historically some providers appeared to operate on the principle that "2 years of support" meant that they delivered 2 years of consistent support without moving people towards independence effectively."

"learning how to do things for self is important"

2. Logistical and system concerns

Some concerns were noted regarding the practical challenges faced during the transition from supported to independent living. The need for coordination between councils and agencies to ensure individual needs are understood was felt to be important.

"The accommodation provider must ensure that they have prepared the individual for move on and worked with other services to ensure this is a seamless transition after the period in supported accommodation."

"Floating support seems fair, and I agree. My only concern would be when I lived in accommodation the council take ages to find a suitable property..."

"However, reducing accommodation services to 18 months will only work effectively if we can work closely with local districts and boroughs around move-in options for young people."

"Yes, I agree, but with the proviso that in specific circumstances the duration of services can be extended if there are specific reasons for doing so."

3. Service reach

A common theme reflected participants' thoughts on the potential for shortened support durations to allow a broader reach of services. While there was acknowledgment of financial constraints, the balance between monetary savings and moral obligations was emphasised.

"Service demand is high so this way more people can access the services that are available."

"If this frees up money for housing, rather than support, then I agree."

"Hopefully it would be sufficient support for many people and would allow you to support many more."

4. Specific Needs and tailored support

Respondents said that the length of support should be different for each person depending on their needs. There should be room to make changes if needed.

"Agreed, however would need to a change for 16-year-olds as they would need longer term in accommodation services as cannot move on until 18 years old."

"I have some concerns around people with a learning disability as when at work, I know that transition to a different way of working can take some time."

"This still offers the individual a decent amount of time to get themselves back on their feet and to engage with services."

"This sounds like it could be a good idea and may encourage more efficient support, but I would be a bit concerned that some housing problems are very complex..."

Disagree

Respondents who disagreed stressed a need for individualised and flexible support not limited by set timeframes. Shortening the duration of support might leave certain service users without the necessary assistance they need, potentially worsening their issues. A lot of service users face complex challenges that demand time, patience and consistent support to address effectively. A notable concern was raised about young people, especially between 16-18, who might need extended support due to their age and the unique challenges they face. A situation might arise where a young person was not yet 18 and able to take on a tenancy of their own, before support was removed. Some respondents believed that the proposed changes may be driven by budget constraints rather than by focusing on the true needs of service users.

1. **Individualised and flexible support**

Many respondents believed that support should be tailored to each person's needs and not limited by set timeframes. Instead, it should adapt to changing circumstances and challenges.

"Arbitrary timeframes do not support individualism - why don't you just review at monthly intervals and leave it flexible?"

"It needs to be person led, and allow the organisations to decide on time scales appropriate to that person."

"If this is a holistic, person centred approach then it seems strange to have a one-size-fits all approach."

"support intervention should be on a case by case basis and not one approach fits all."

2. **Concerns over premature termination of support**

Shortening the duration of support might leave certain service users without the necessary assistance they need, potentially worsening their issues.

"If support is withdrawn too soon it may lead to further escalation of problems."

"Discharging people from a service without clear information about ongoing need is not viable."

"Too often people are suddenly cut adrift from support and accessing it again can be exceedingly difficult."

"If the demand is too high then the service isn't working properly or helping people effectively."

3. Complexity and time needed for real progress

A lot of service users face complex challenges that demand time, patience and consistent support to address effectively.

"Customers often have very complex circumstances with a wide range of issues and difficulties."

"Many with housing and other needs that need these services have complex needs and issues that take time, patience and ongoing support to resolve and manage."

"Some vulnerable clients who have had challenging experiences need longer to learn and establish their skills."

"It can take a long time for people to engage and feel comfortable enough with staff to move forward."

4. Special concern for young people

A notable concern was raised about young people, especially between 16-18, who might need extended support due to their age and the unique challenges they face.

"I disagree with reducing the support to one year for people 16 - 18 as one does not achieve adulthood until aged 18."

"To only provide 12 months of support to a 16 year old leaves them without support before they are even legally an adult."

"I think that young people aged 16-24 need a longer period of support than those aged over 24."

"Young people until 18 cannot sign for a tenancy. If accommodated at 16 we cannot move them on until 18."

5. Financial concerns vs quality of support

There was a belief that the proposed changes may be driven by budget constraints rather than by focusing on the true needs of service users.

"It's not sustainable in the long term if the same people have to reapply for continued service."

"You are trying to save money on an essential service whilst continuing to waste money on non-essential services."

"The rationale for making this change does not fully reflect this... something that's being actually being done to cut costs rather than to benefit those in need of these services."

"Sounds like cutting corners and leaving people vulnerable."

What could be done instead

Respondents suggested adopting a more individualised approach to service provision, focusing on clearly defined and flexible support plans co-created with clients. They emphasised the need for a collaborative relationship with local community groups to enhance services. Many highlighted the critical role of efficient case management, including regular reviews to facilitate goal achievement and potentially shortening the service duration but only where it is appropriate to do so.

Element 5: A new name for the services.

We are proposing to change the name of these services from 'Housing Related Support Services' to 'Supporting Independence Services' and would like to know if you have any views on this.

Feedback received

For the Ask Warwickshire consultation survey asked for comments on the proposal but no quantitative question was asked.

Positive

1. Positive perception of 'independence' focus

Some respondents liked the emphasis on independence, as it resonated with the service's aim to make users more autonomous.

"Better. It's help to find your independence, not to stayed supported for ever."

"I feel the new name seems more appropriate to the services on offer with a focus on people having more autonomy."

"We are learning to become independent so this sounds good."

Negative

A majority of respondents were against the name change. Many participants indicated that the proposed name lacks clarity and specificity in relation to the service being about housing and may risk being confused with other services. Another theme that came up was the potential costs associated with rebranding and whether that would detract from the services offered. Several participants mentioned that the name did not matter as long as the quality of the service was high. Respondents also wondered what the intent behind the name change was.

1. Clarity and specificity

Many participants indicated that the proposed name lacks clarity and specificity in relation to the service being about housing.

"Independence" feels like a bigger area rather than housing. Will other areas of independence be included too eg cooking skills?

"Confusing name, the word housing needs to be included."

"'Independence Services' is quite vague and could potentially be confused with adult social care services."

2. Cost and Rebranding Concerns

Another theme that came up was the potential costs associated with rebranding and whether that would detract from the services offered.

"Changing the name is meaningless - the money spent on the re-branding can be better spent on the service itself."

"I like the new name, but not if the cost of rebranding cuts into the budget."

"Just keep it simple. Housing support service so you know it's housing. Not random independence services if you're only dealing with housing needs. What a waste of time that people have been paid to sit and discuss a name change and make a survey about it! Waste of time and councils money and budget yet again! Wasteful rbc."

3. Service quality over naming

A number of respondents felt that what truly matters wasn't the name, but the quality and nature of the service itself.

"Don't screw about with branding if you're making serious service changes. There are more important issues here than what you call it."

"It's not in the name! It's in the deed - name is too wide and confusing- asking for trouble as Need to keep original name as know exactly what the service is for - housing."

"Who cares what it's called as long as it is effective? We don't need to pay people to "re-brand" or "market" new names and all that this entails, eg, updating websites, leaflets, logos, etc - this is a total waste of money."

4. Concerns about confusion with other services

Several responses indicated concerns about the new name being confused with other services or not being distinctly recognisable.

"I believe that the service should remain named as Housing Related Support. SIS sounds too similar to numerous Dom Care and Supported Living Services - it also doesn't explain what it is."

"I think the new name is confusing. There are too many other similar sounding services in Health and Social Care, for people to recognise what this actually is."

"isnt clear what support its offering e.g. housing or send or disabled adults. bit confusing."

5. Scepticism about intent behind name change

A portion of respondents expressed scepticism about the true reasons behind the name change.

"Awful name. Just covers up the cuts. In what way is Independence part of this? It is just telling people to do it themselves."

"Hm....is this an Hegalian act to move any 'housing responsibility' subtly away...eg an image springs to mind of supporting independence on a park bench!"

"Seriously, this question is pathetic. Change the name and all will be alright?? Management gone mad. Best change the leaders and let real people take over."

Element 6 - additional services removed from future service specification
How strongly do you agree or disagree with this proposal?
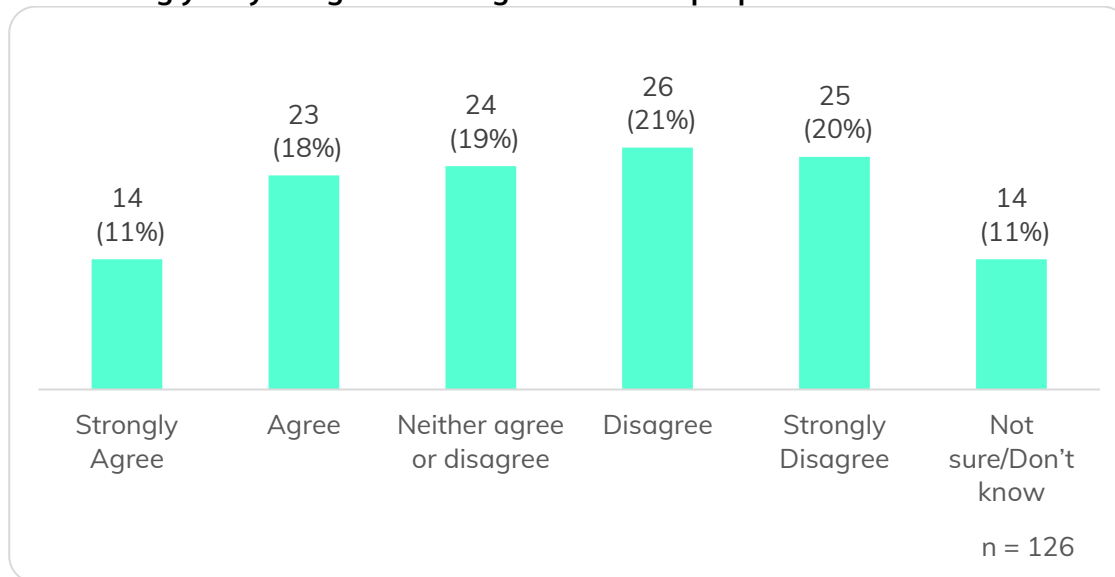
Figure 5 – Element 6, Ask Warwickshire consultation responses

Reasons given for people's responses

Agree

Respondents acknowledged the financial constraints facing WCC, viewing the removal of added value services as a necessary step given the budget restrictions. There was a perspective that if there was no budget for these services, sustaining them may lead to a decline in the quality and effectiveness of the services overall, which might be more harmful in the long run.

Some respondents who agreed with the proposal argued that the existing services such as the Hubs and outreach were inefficient. They suggested that some services such as the navigator hubs and street outreach could be removed as long as clear signposting was available, indicating a belief that more streamlined services could potentially be more effective. A point expressed was the overlapping services provided by different outreach teams. In a similar vein, participants highlighted that there were other community resources and centres that are already providing services similar to those offered through navigator hubs that may potentially fill the gap created by removing the added value services.

1. **Inefficient current services**

Some respondents found the existing services like P3 and outreach unsuccessful. They noted the inefficiency in the current system and believed that some services such as the navigator hubs and street outreach could be removed as long as clear signposting was available, indicating a belief that more streamlined services could potentially be more effective.

"As far as my experience goes, P3 and outreach has not been much of a success."

"In my experience, the hub would not offer accessible support for my son. He would not feel able to attend."

2. **Financial pragmatism**

Respondents acknowledged the financial constraints facing WCC, viewing the removal of added value services as a necessary step given the budget restrictions. There was a perspective that if there was no budget for these services, sustaining them may lead to a decline in the quality and effectiveness of the services, which might be more harmful in the long run.

"If there is no budget there is nothing we can do. Money does not grow from trees."

"if there is no budget then the council have already considered and dismissed it"

"With no money the provision would be scrappy and unregulated."

3. **Alternative resources**

Some participants highlighted that there were other community resources and centres that were already providing services similar to those offered through navigator hubs. They noted the existence of alternative community resources that could potentially fill the gap created by removing the added value services.

"There are community centres in Rugby--such as the Benn Partnership Centre who already provide signposting services across a range of services--I am a trustee there and we deal with housing support enquiries daily by signposting--others could do the same."

"We have provided a drop-in service for young people for more than 10 years and hubs can be a good resource but we use alternative funding for this."

4. **Overlap and redundancy**

A point expressed was the overlapping services provided by different outreach teams, indicating a redundancy in the current setup. Respondents saw potential in removing some services as it could eliminate the duplication of efforts and foster more streamlined assistance.

"Street Outreach by P3 overlaps with our own Outreach Team and is not needed in Rugby although I can't comment on other areas in Warwickshire."

"Providers already provide drop in sessions and services, so hubs are probably not really needed."

Disagree

Respondents who disagreed with the proposal saw it as contrary to a moral obligation to help vulnerable people and feared that removing the services would increase homelessness. In their view, the current services were essential and effective, helping many people in their communities and ensuring accessibility for all. There was a concern that removing these services would increase the burden on other community and voluntary organisations and it was felt that the proposal did not provide clear alternatives to the existing services. Some respondents argued that cutting the budget would not necessarily save money in the long run and could ultimately cost more.

1. **Moral obligation to help the vulnerable**

Individuals believed that there was a moral obligation to help the most vulnerable in society.

"Disagree because doesn't seem good to not help and support some of the most vulnerable in society because of money."

"Leaving people outside help and hope"

"Morally obnoxious"

2. **Fears of increased homelessness and suffering**

Respondents feared that removing these services would increase homelessness.

"Homelessness is a big issue and local authority should offer some support"

3. **False economy**

Some respondents argued that cutting the budget would not necessarily save money in the long run and could indeed cost more.

"We are here to heal young people of their traumas, build up their life skills and help them to rebuild their lives. Every penny spent here has the potential to save the NHS, social services, police etc a lot of money in the future."

"More cost for little or no benefit"

4. **Lack of clear alternatives**

Participants felt that the proposal did not provide clear alternatives to the existing services.

"It is unclear in the proposal whether homeless individuals/rough sleepers will continue to receive support."

"Who will be providing this service? It sounds like the plan is that we will just stop this?"

5. **Value and effectiveness of existing services**

Respondents noted that the current services were essential and effective, helping many people in their communities.

"P3's Navigator Hubs do exactly what WCC is proposing in their previous element to provide signposting, short-term support and advice."

"The outreach and navigation hubs are vital services."

6. Potential increased pressure on other services

There was a concern that removing these services would put extra burden on other community and voluntary organisations.

"Removing these services would put an excessive burden on community and voluntary organisations to provide these services."

7. Accessibility issues

Respondents pointed out that many service users do not have phones or transportation, making the outreach and navigator hubs crucial for them.

"Lots of service users do not have telephones or a means of transport. Lack of outreach and navigation hubs makes it harder for those in need to get help they may require."

"This is often the only way that some clients can access support, especially those that are street homeless."

Please tell us how you think this proposal would impact on you/ other people?

1. Negative impacts on homeless people

Many respondents expected a directly negative impact on homeless individuals, fearing that the loss of these services will leave them with decreased support.

Impact on support access:

Services may be less targeted and fewer people might be reached:

"It may mean that providers can see fewer people, deliver less targeted support."

A lack of specialised outreach services for disabled individuals:

"It would be nice if there were specialist outreach services for people with disabilities…"

2. Increased burden on alternative support systems

Respondents were concerned that discontinuing the services would place a greater burden on other agencies, charities and community groups to provide support, which may already be stretched thin.

"Cost charities more."

"I am not sure how these non-profit organisations would continue to offer their services without any funding…"

3. Potentially positive outcomes

A subset of responses acknowledged potential positive impacts, suggesting that the proposal might foster more efficient services and encourage self-sufficiency amongst those using the services.

"It would impact on those Clients who currently use the hubs. However, it could be a good turning point…"

"speed things up,"

"People will be approaching the correct service i.e., the council for housing advice…"

What could we do instead?

Respondents who disagreed with this proposal stressed the importance of continuing existing programs that cater to the needs of homeless individuals and rough sleepers. Participants further pushed for community participation and inter-agency collaboration to strengthen the effectiveness of service provision, emphasising the necessity to involve a broad range of stakeholders, including local agencies and non-profit organisations, in designing and implementing services. At the same time, respondents underlined the need to advocate for policy changes at the government level, including lobbying for increased funding and promoting investments in social housing by the central government.

1. Maintain or enhance current services

Respondents stressed the importance of continuing existing programs that cater to the needs of homeless individuals and rough sleepers.

"Continue to have an outreach service that can support rough sleepers to access services."

"Keep the services as they are, look at other ways of saving the money."

"Ensure that the service continues."

2. Collaborative and community-engaged approach

Community participation and inter-agency collaboration was seen as a means to strengthen the effectiveness of service provision, emphasising the need to involve a broad range of stakeholders, including local agencies and non-profit organisations, in designing and implementing services.

"Co-design services with other areas, e.g. health."

"Encourage joint responsibility among other agencies."

"Ask local support for the local initiatives."

3. Innovative solutions and preventative strategies

Some responses encouraged creativity in designing new solutions, focusing on early intervention and preventive work to avoid crisis points.

"Something to provide a full experience of housing support. There are services available but only for those who have reach crisis point."

"Engage with more realistic and holistic organisations and look at what is working already."

4. Government engagement and policy advocacy
Respondents underlined the need to advocate for policy changes at the government level, including lobbying for increased funding and promoting investments in social housing by the central government.

"Convince central government to invest in council (not private "social" housing)."

"Campaign central government for more public fund allocations."

"Propose to move budget form say road building or park maintenance."

Do you think this Equality Impact Assessment identifies the impacts of these proposals?

Whilst 42% of respondents felt the published EIA accurately detailed the impact of the proposed changes on marginalised and vulnerable groups, 30% felt unsure about this and almost the same percentage (28%) felt it did not do so.
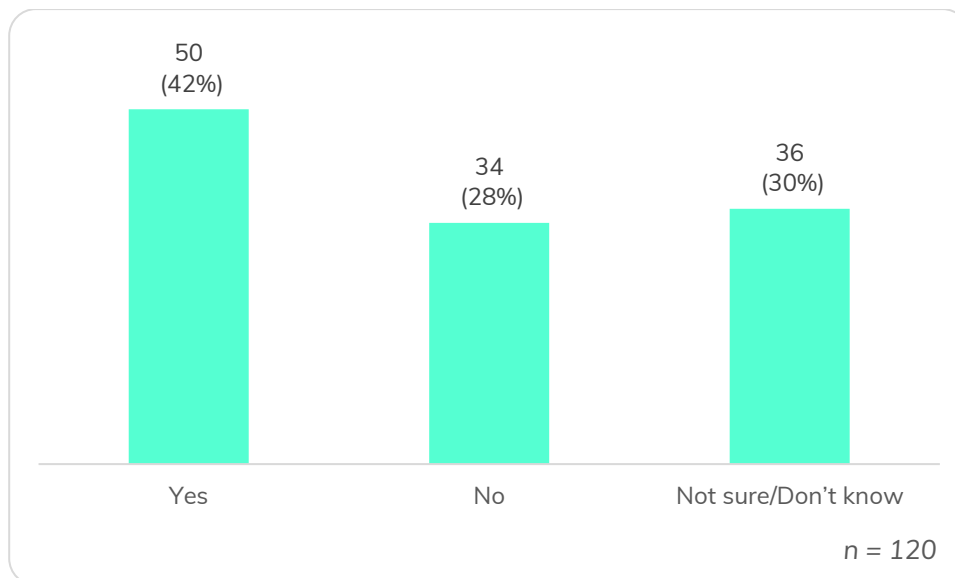
Figure 6 – Equality Impact Assessmenrt, Ask Warwickshire consultation responses

When we examined responses to this question by who responses came from ('reason for responding') we observed differences in perceptions across different groups. Whilst WCC officers and voluntary sector organisations were highly likely to say they felt the EIA did identify the impacts of the proposals; HRS providers were considerably less likely to share this perspective. Only 15% of responses from HRS providers agreed, whilst 62% did not agree – twice the proportion of all other groups. Those who use HRS services were most likely to say they did not know whether the EIA identified the impact of these proposals.

We performed a series of Chi-square tests to explore whether responses from specific groups of respondents, including WCC employees, current HRS providers, interested citizens and customers of HRS services, showed any statistical associations with their answers to whether they believe the EIA accurately reflected the impact of the proposals.
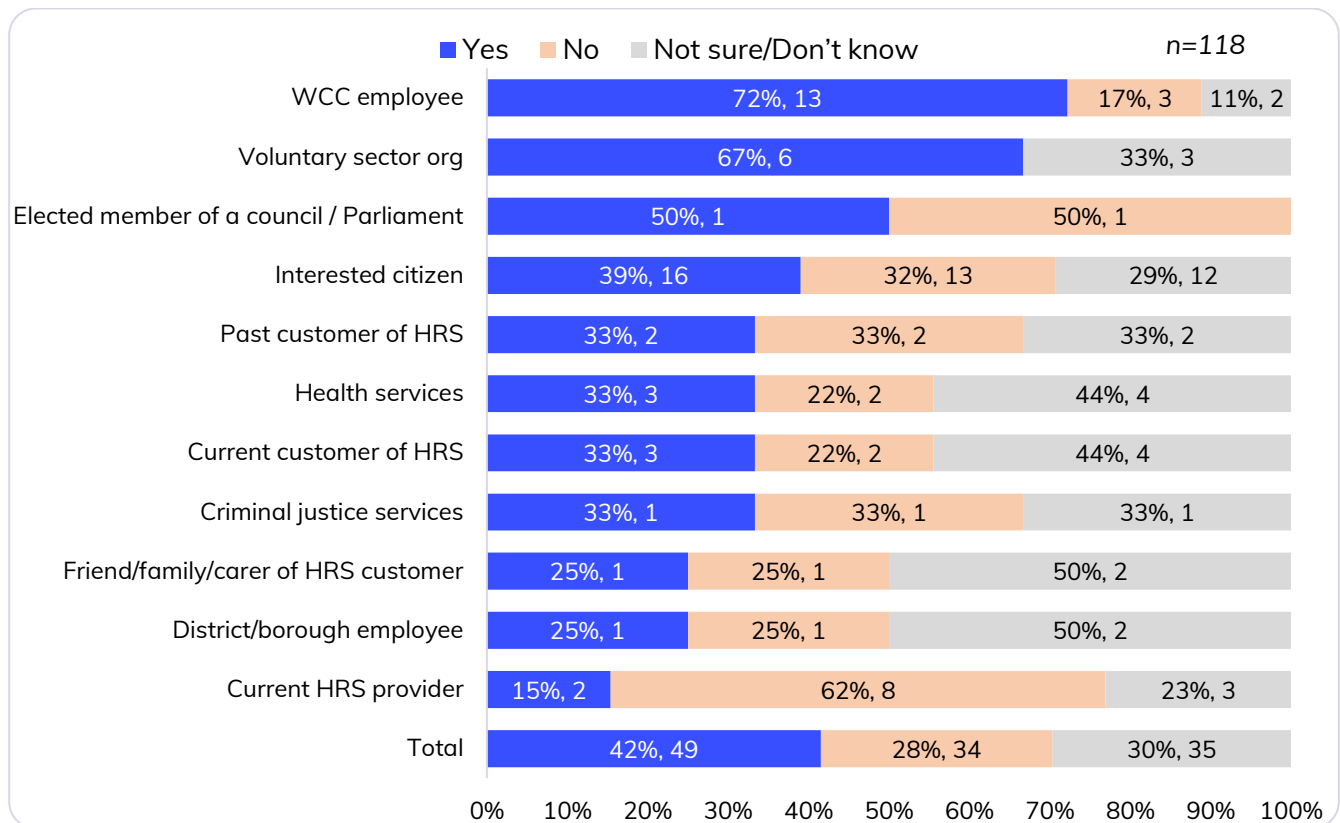

Figure 7 – respondent type by EIA response, Ask Warwickshire consultation responses

WCC Employees
According to the Chi-square test, the responses of WCC employees on the EIA question differed significantly (p = 0.016, chi-square statistic = 0.89) from those of other groups combined.

Current Housing Related Support Service Providers
The responses of current Housing Related Support Service providers on the EIA question also differed significantly (p = 0.01, chi-square statistic = 0.83) from those of other groups combined.

Interested Citizens
Analysis of the responses of interested citizens on the EIA question did not differ significantly (p > 0.05) from those of other groups combined.

Customers of Housing Related Support Services
Similarly, the responses of customers of Housing Related Support Service on the EIA question did not differ significantly (p > 0.05) from those of other groups combined.

Do you think there is anything missing from the Equality Impact Assessment?
1. Concern for specific vulnerable groups
   - Refugees, asylum seekers and those from countries at war
   - Those with disabilities, including mental health and autism

- Male offenders
- Illiterate individuals
- Young parents and their babies
- Gypsy, Roma, Travellers
- Young people
- Ex-prisoners

2. Clarity and specificity
   - Vague mitigation strategies like 'signposting'
   - Need for clearer information about who/what organisations are signposted
   - Need for detailed numerical breakdowns in the EIA
   - The proposal's impact on homelessness
   - The lack of specific data about certain areas like the south of Stratford on Avon

3. Service delivery and effectiveness
   - The potential impact of de-commissioning specialist services, especially for those with disabilities
   - Training and expertise requirements for effective support
   - Pressure on already strained services like housing, mental health, etc
   - Cost implications of changes
4. Lack of involvement and representation
   - Concerns about not involving certain stakeholders or experts
   - Need for a wider understanding of service users
   - Lack of consultation with or consideration of the thoughts of those directly impacted by the services

Do you have any ideas about how we can reduce the impact on people with protected characteristics that use the current Housing Related Support services or might use services in the future?
Staff training
   - Respondents were concerned about the attitude of certain staff, finding them to be rude and not informative.
   - They recommended better training for staff to understand specific needs of various groups, including individuals with disabilities

Service availability and accessibility
   - The availability of staff to speak to is a recurring concern
   - Services need to be easily accessible through multiple means, including face-to-face and paper format
   - Some respondents emphasised the importance of having specialised services, especially for groups like young parents and individuals with disabilities

Inclusion and equality
   - Several responses criticised the current system for prioritising certain groups over others (like ex-forces over refugees)
   - Concerns were also raised about understanding and respecting the language, culture and dietary needs of different groups

Monitoring and accountability
- More robust forms of monitoring and data collection to understand the impact on various people
- Suggestions included close monitoring of statistics, steering groups and the use of Health Equity Assessment Tools

Communication and information
- Respondents felt that better signposting to services and improved communication channels were crucial
- There was a recommendation for professionals to be properly informed so they can adequately refer and signpost those in need

Efficiency
- Suggestions were made to have fewer points of contact to increase efficiency
- Some respondents also advocated for a more specific and specialised service rather than a "one-size-fits-all" approach

Policy and governance
- Respondents were sceptical about decisions affecting the services, including budget cuts

Specialised support
- Retaining specialised support services, especially for individuals with disabilities
- A specialised team member to oversee cases involving those with learning disabilities

Open feedback channels
- The need for open forums, regular consultations and user committees is highlighted, indicating a desire for ongoing dialogue between service providers and users

Email responses

Five email responses were received to the consultation. Three of these were from individuals with experience of using HRS services, one was a collective response from the District and Borough Heads of Housing and the final one was from the Head of Housing of Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council as an addendum to the collective submission.

The three individuals were clients receiving support from "Together". In their responses, they all expressed a wish for services to remain as they are and retaining a separate service for disabled clients. Respondents valued the support they had received and worried that the quality of support would suffer and disabled people would have a harder time receiving the support they needed from a generic service.

The Warwickshire Heads of Housing expressed general agreement with elements 1 and 2 of the proposal, However, they doubted the need to separate floating services for young people and adults. They further stressed that specialist support would need to be made available where necessary to ensure good customer service and that efforts should be made to retain accommodation assets. In response to element 3, the group stressed that services would need to be designed in a way that ensured support would be timely, concentrated and tailored to the individual. Respondents supported element 4 under the condition that the duration of service

would still be determined by individual need and exceptions were allowed to make sure the service was sustainable. Lastly, regarding element 5, respondents felt the word "housing" would need to be included in the name to make it less ambiguous.

Easy-read survey

25 responses to the easy-read survey were received from individuals with experience of using HRS services.

These responses were all from individual customers of Together, the floating support service for disabled people. Together supported individual customers to engage in the process and submitted the responses on their behalf. These responses focused on service design elements (proposals 2,3 and 4) and commenting on the equality impact assessment, but did not make any comment on proposals 1,5,6.

Element 2 - Stop commissioning the separate Floating Support service for people with disabilities and meet those needs within redesigned inclusive Floating Support services, one for young people aged 16-25 and one for people aged 25+ years.
25 people responded to this question and 92% of them (23 people) either disagreed or strongly disagreed. No one agreed with the proposal.

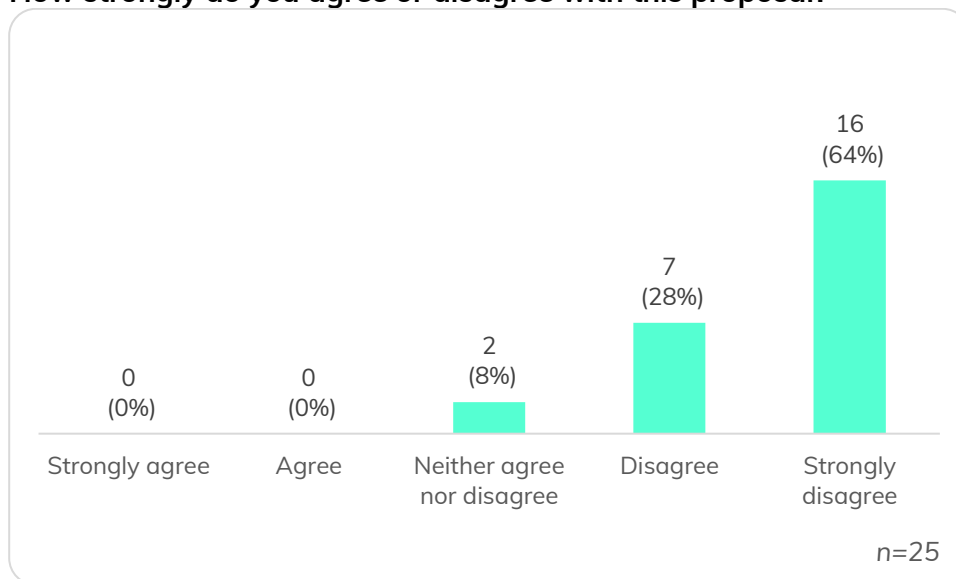**How strongly do you agree or disagree with this proposal?**

Figure 8 – Element2, Easy Read survey responses

Element 3 - Adding a flexible range of shorter interventions that respond to individual needs as efficiently as possible and give earlier, focused support for customers who do not need longer-term support.

21 people responded to this question and 72% of them (15 people) either disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 5 people (24%) agreed.

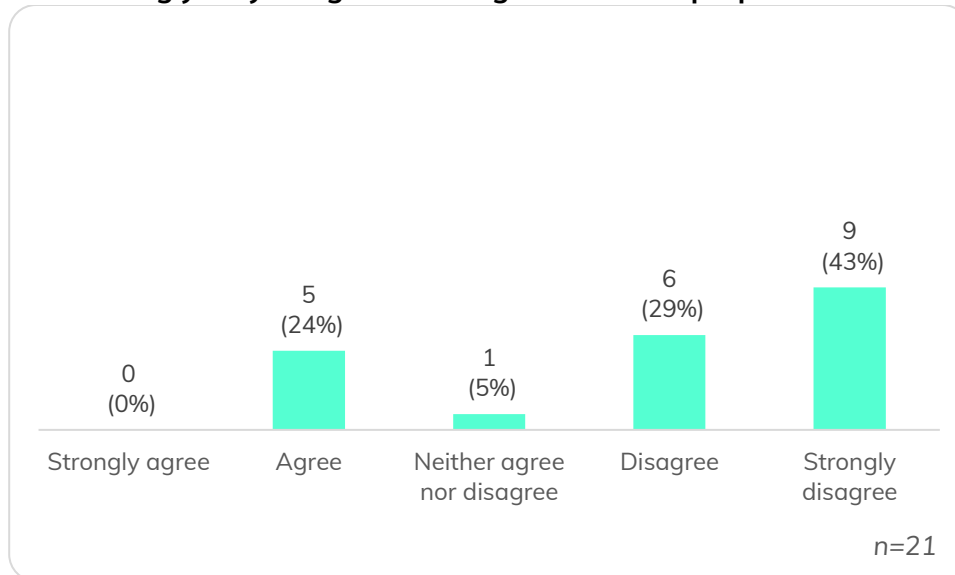**How strongly do you agree or disagree with this proposal?**

Figure 9 – Element 3, Easy Easy read survey responses

Element 4: Reducing the maximum duration of services

Of the 21 easy-read responses received, 18 (88%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposal, with just 2 people (10%) agreeing with it.

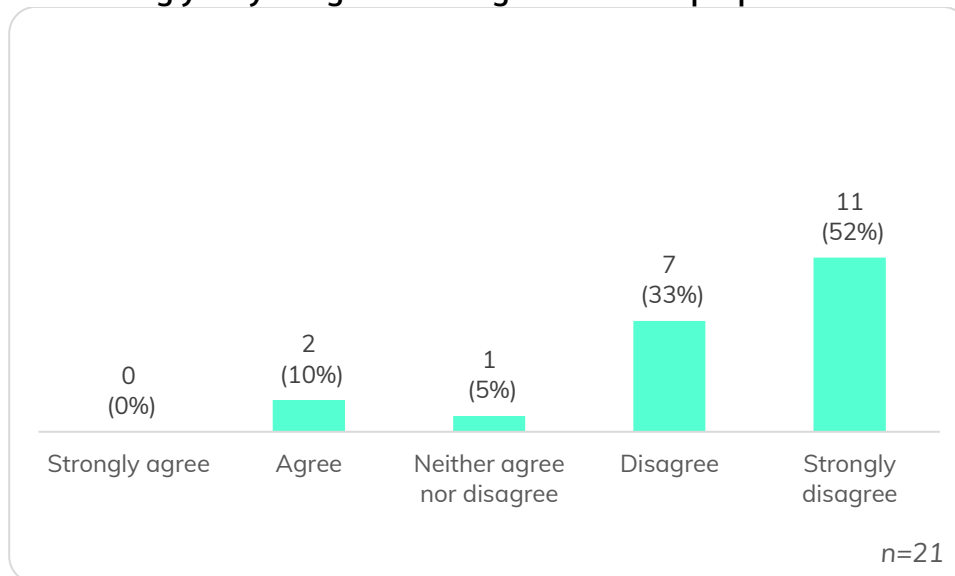**How strongly do you agree or disagree with this proposal?**

Figure 10 – Element 4, Easy read survey responses

Do you think this Equality Impact Assessment identifies the impacts of these proposals?

Only 6 people responded to this question. Three of those said they were unsure or did not know, 1 said they felt the EIA identified the impacts of the proposals and 2 said they did not.
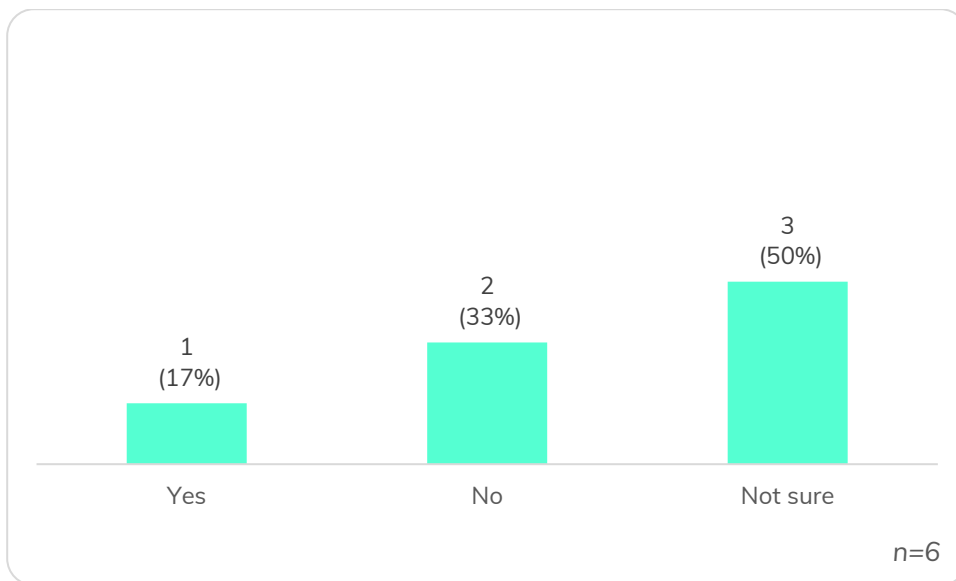
Figure 11 – Equality Impact Assessment, Easy read survey responses

Findings from the Outreach

During the outreach, we heard from homeless and vulnerably housed individuals about their experience of accessing support.

It is important to note that this related to their experience of accessing support with housing that people received in general and did not specifically or exclusively relate to Housing-Related Support services commissioned by Warwickshire County Council.

The small group discussion held in Street Focus Groups used a different, discussion guide to the structured individual interviews. The findings below indicate whether responses refer to individual interviews or Street Focus Groups.

Quantitative Analysis

The Council are thinking about making some changes to services. Please tell us to what extent you agree or disagree with these proposals:
To keep providing services to support people who are homeless and need help finding somewhere to live, and services for people that need support to prevent them becoming homeless.

153 individuals answered this question in interviews and a further 123 did so within Street Focus Groups. Almost all of them (95% in Street Focus Groups and 90% in individual interviews) strongly agreed.
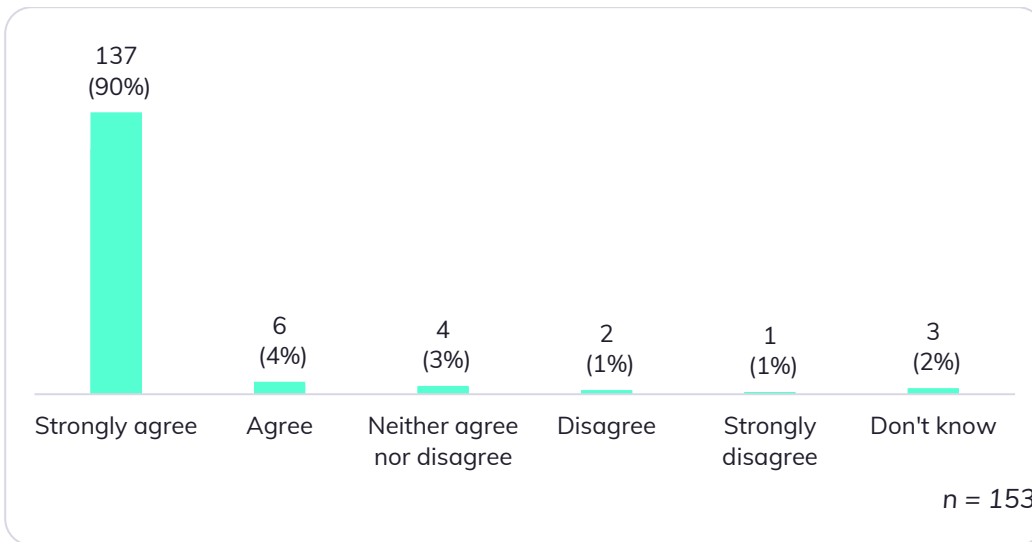
137
(90%)

6
(4%)

4
(3%)

2
(1%)

1
(1%)

3
(2%)

| Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree | Don't know |

n = 153

Figure 12 - Outreach survey (individual interviews)

117
(95%)

5
(4%)

1
(1%)

0
(0%)

0
(0%)

0
(0%)

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Don't know |

n=123
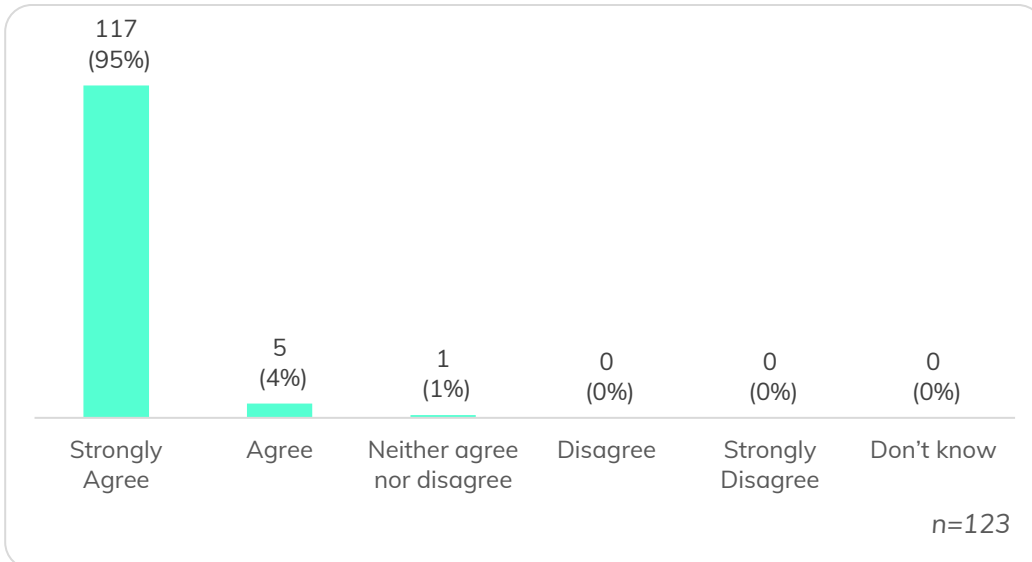
Figure 13 - Outreach survey (street focus groups)

To have a single inclusive service for disabled people and those without disabilities, rather than separate services.

The survey results show a polarised response to the Council's proposal of implementing a single inclusive service for disabled and non-disabled individuals, rather than having separate services.

A substantial 35% of respondents 'strongly agree' with this proposal and 10% 'agree', totalling 45% in favour of the change.

However, an equal proportion of respondents (35%) 'strongly disagree' with the proposal, highlighting significant opposition. Along with the 7% who 'disagree', the total against the proposal is 42%.

A small segment of respondents (6%) reported that they 'neither agree nor disagree', indicating a neutral stance. 7% of respondents expressed 'Don't know' suggesting uncertainty or lack of information to form a concrete opinion.
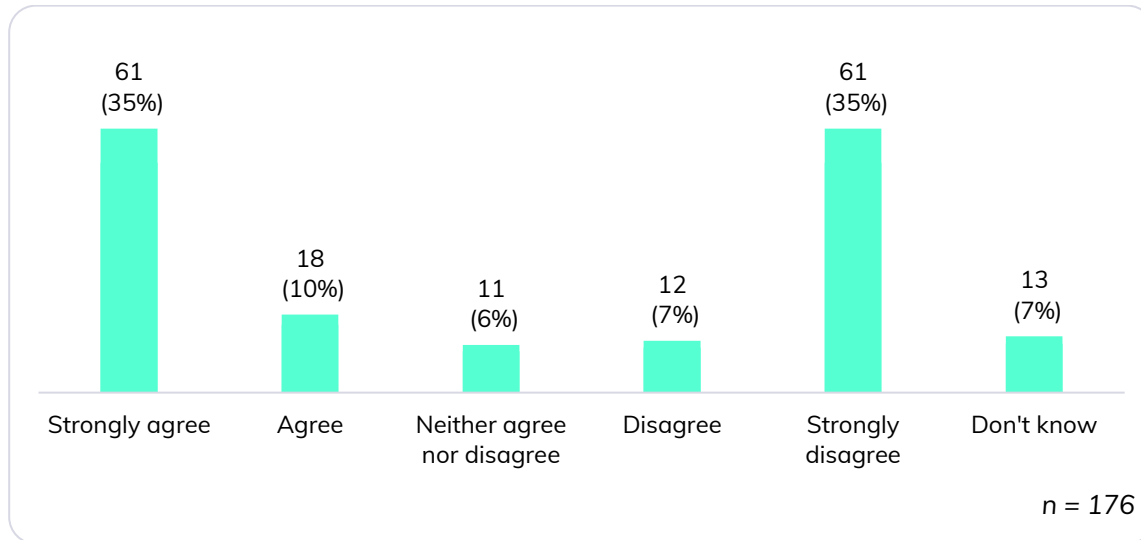

Figure 14 - Outreach survey (individual interviews only)

Responses from the Street Focus Groups were similar, with 45% (54 people) strongly agreeing and 30% (36 people) strongly disagreeing.
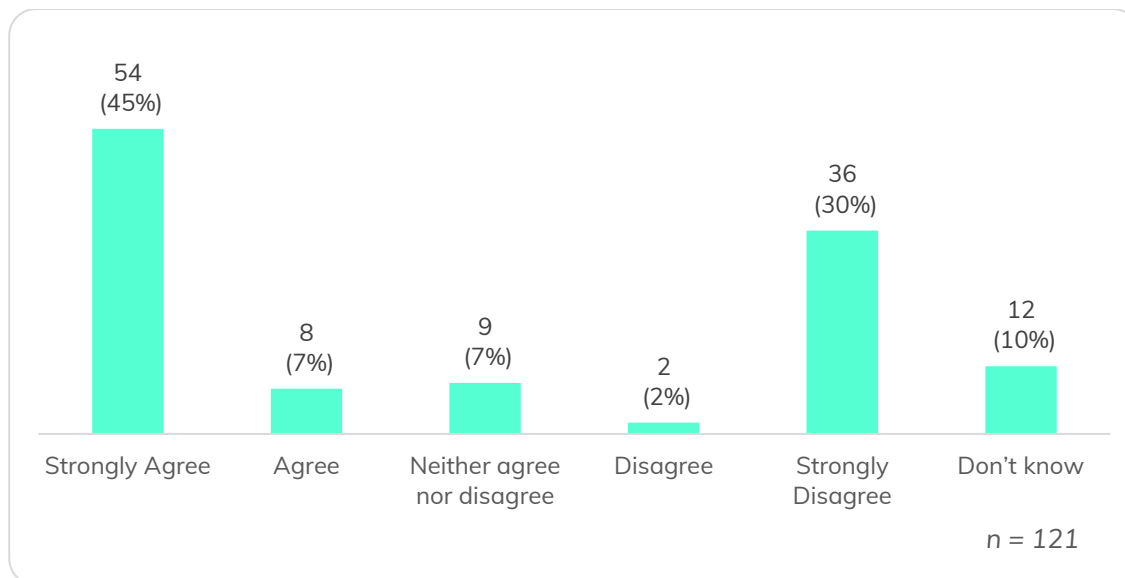

Figure 15 - Outreach survey (street focus groups)

People's experience of accessing support with their housing

The outreach asked people a number of questions about their experience of accessing support with their housing. This was not confined to their experience of HRS services, but encouraged them to draw on their wider experience. The intention in adopting this approach, was to understand the broader context of providing support to those in housing need and to learn from

their experience, both positive and negative, about accessing support. The findings below all relate to this wider experience, rather than specifically relating to their experience of HRS services.

Have you ever been worried that you might have significant difficulty in paying your rent or having a place to live, whether due to debts, money problems, loss of income, health problems, being harassed, addiction, abusive relationships etc?

20% of respondents (36 people) said they were currently experiencing concerns about their housing due to factors such as debts or health issues. An additional 48% (88 people) said that they had experienced these worries in the past.

Whilst 32% of respondents (58 people) said they have never faced such issues, we found that even among this group, their answers to subsequent questions suggested some degree of vulnerability. Despite feeling less concerned about their financial situation, they reported experience of indicators of vulnerability in their housing, health or financial situations.
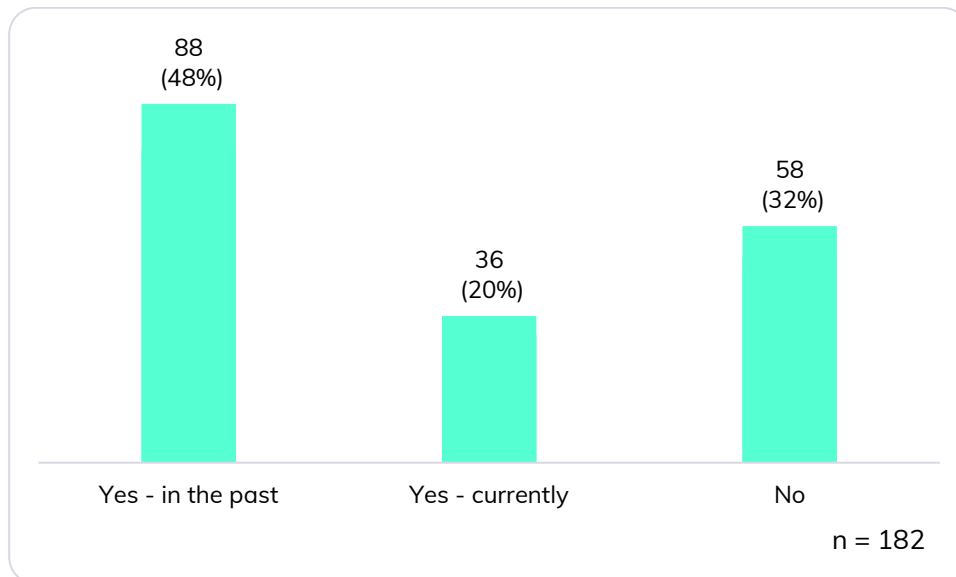

Figure 16 - Outreach survey (individual interviews)

Responses from the Street Focus Groups were somewhat different, however a similar proportion - 35% (44 people) – said they had never faced such issues. However, 36% (45 people) said they were currently experiencing such issues and 29% (37 people) said they had done so in the past.
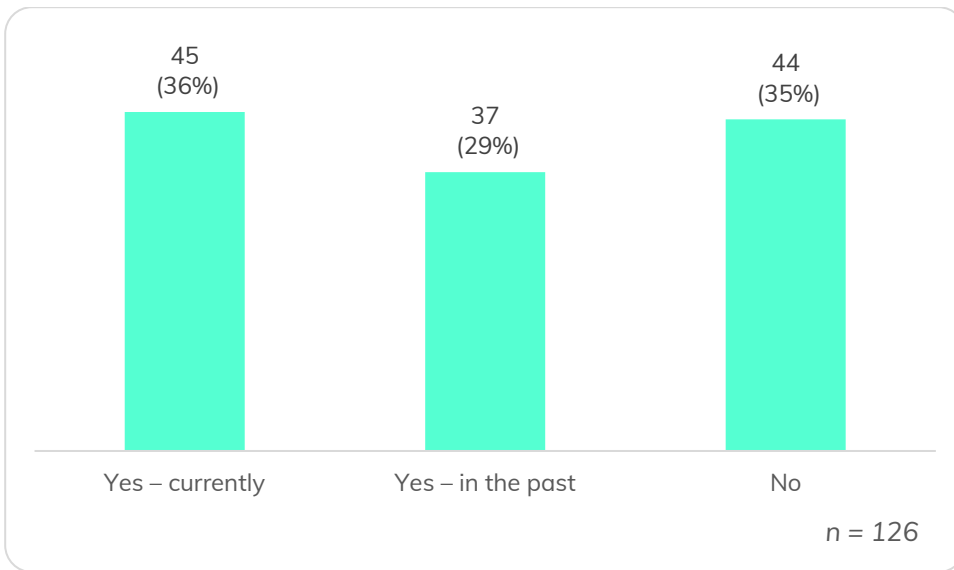
Figure 17 - Outreach survey (street focus groups)

Have you ever tried to access or ever received help or support around your housing (including help to find somewhere to live, keep you in your current home or move to a more suitable place)?

73% of respondents said they had either tried to access or have received support concerning their housing situation, which includes aid in finding a new place to live, staying in their current home, or moving to a more suitable location. On the other hand, 26% of respondents have not accessed or received such assistance.
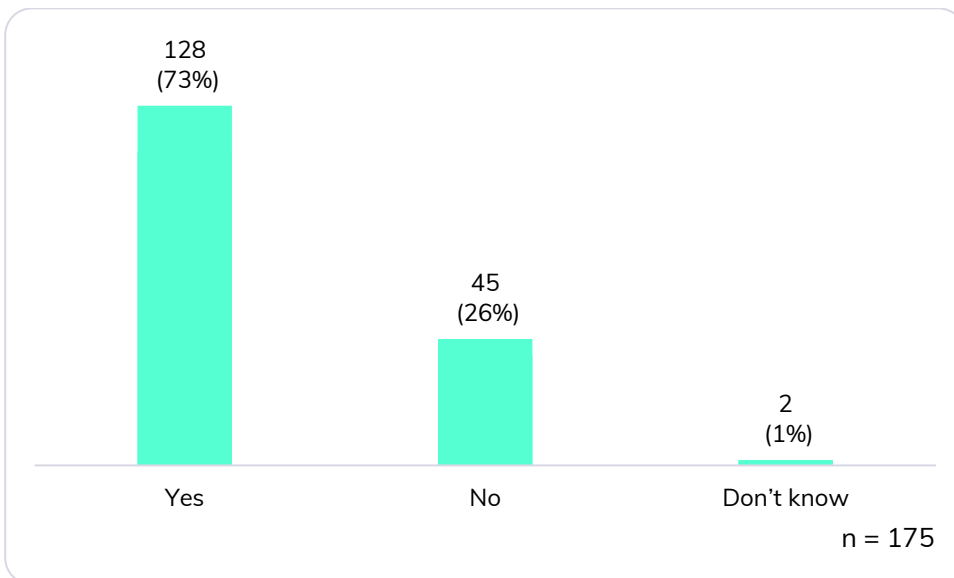

Figure 18 - Outreach survey (individual interviews)

Responses from the Street Focus Groups were fairly similar – though the proportion of those saying yes was slightly lower, with 61% (76 people) saying yes and 36% (45 people) saying no.
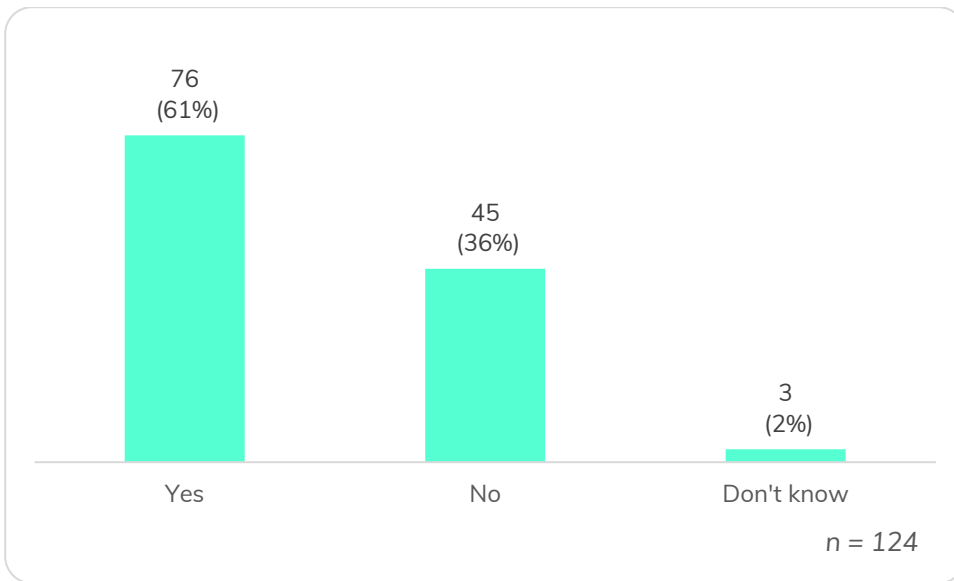
Figure 19 - Outreach survey (street focus groups)

Did you have help finding somewhere to live (Accommodation- based support) and/or support where you already lived (Floating Support)?

Of the 127 respondents who had tried to access housing support, around two-thirds (63%) confirmed that they received either accommodation-based support (help finding a new place to live) or floating support (assistance where they already live). However, 37% reported not having accessed such housing support.
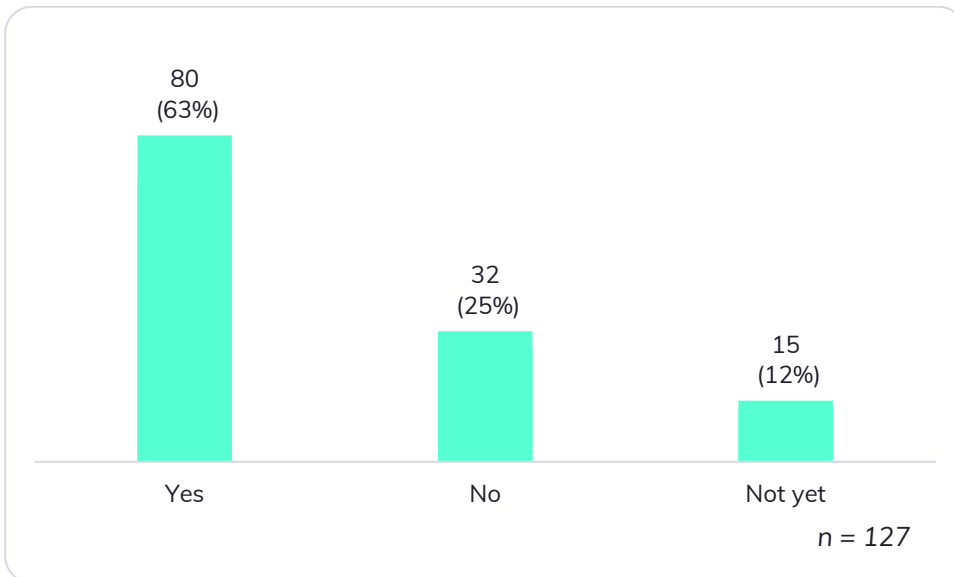
Figure 20 - Outreach survey (individual interviews)

How easy did you find it to access the support you wanted?

The results revealed diverse experiences of respondents in accessing the housing support they needed – including, but not limited to HRS services. A combined total of 28% of respondents (37 people) reported a positive experience (either 'very easy' or 'easy'), whilst20% (27 people) reported a neutral experience, describing the process as 'neither hard nor easy'. However, over half of the

respondents encountered difficulties in getting support they required in relation to their housing. Specifically, 22% (29 people) found accessing the support 'hard', while 30% (39 people) described the process as 'very hard'. This suggests that over half of the respondents encountered difficulties in getting the housing support they sought.
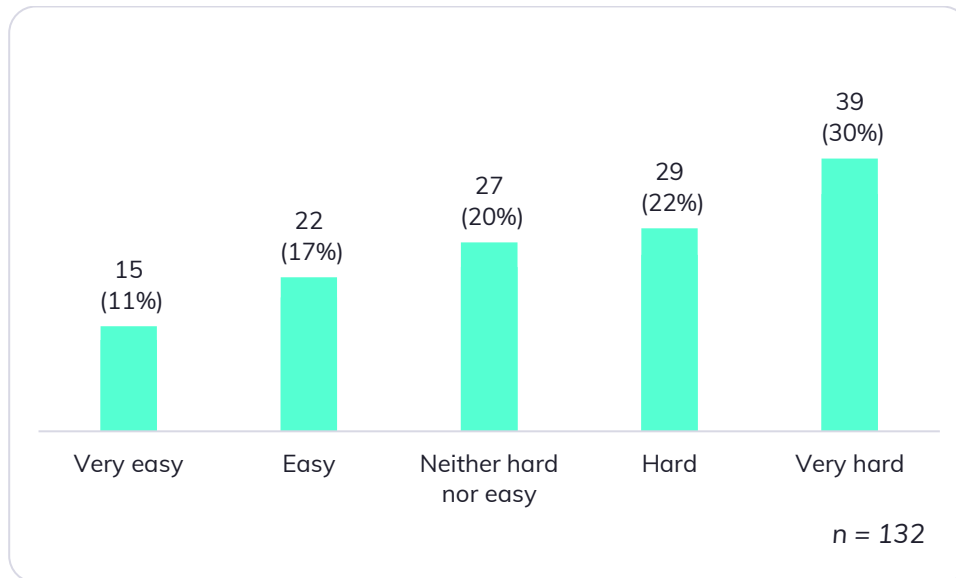
Figure 21 – Outreach survey (individual interviews)

How long did it take for you to get the support you wanted?

The survey results show varying timeframes experienced by people in receiving housing support.

Around a third (46 respondents) never received the support they wanted. 19% of respondents (26 people) waited more than 6 months. A smaller proportion (7%, 10 people) received support within a 3-6 month period and 11% (15 people) received help within 1-3 months. The quickest support was experienced by 9% of respondents (12 people) who received support in less than a month and around 1 in 5 (25 people) who received support within a week or even immediately.

Figure 22 – Outreach survey (individual interviews

How useful was the support you received?

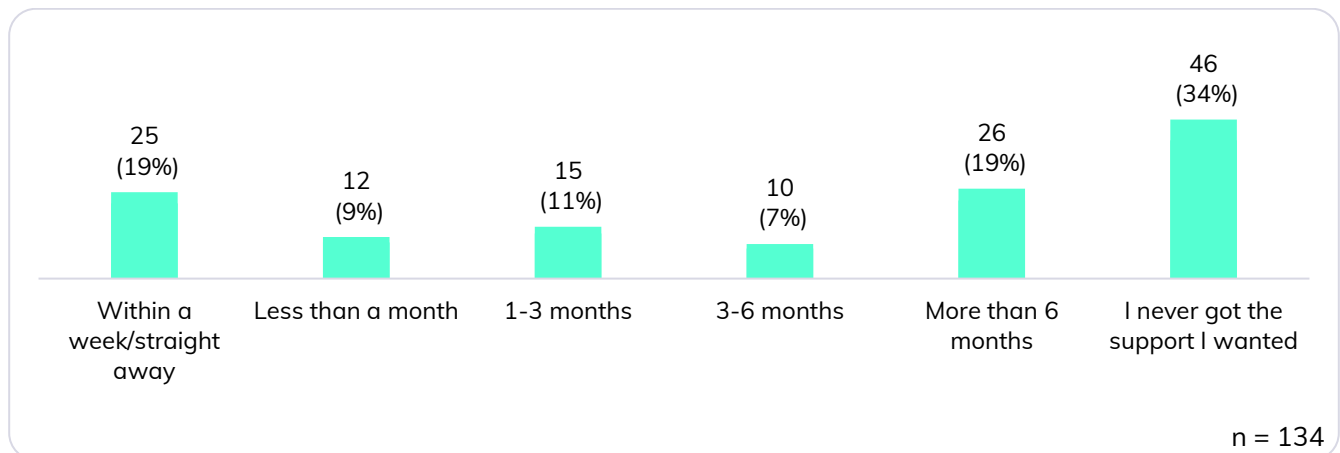More than half of the respondents viewed the support positively, with 37% finding the support 'very helpful' and an additional 18% 'helpful'. However, a considerable number of respondents experienced less satisfaction with the support received. Specifically, 13% found it 'unhelpful', and 15% 'not at all helpful'.
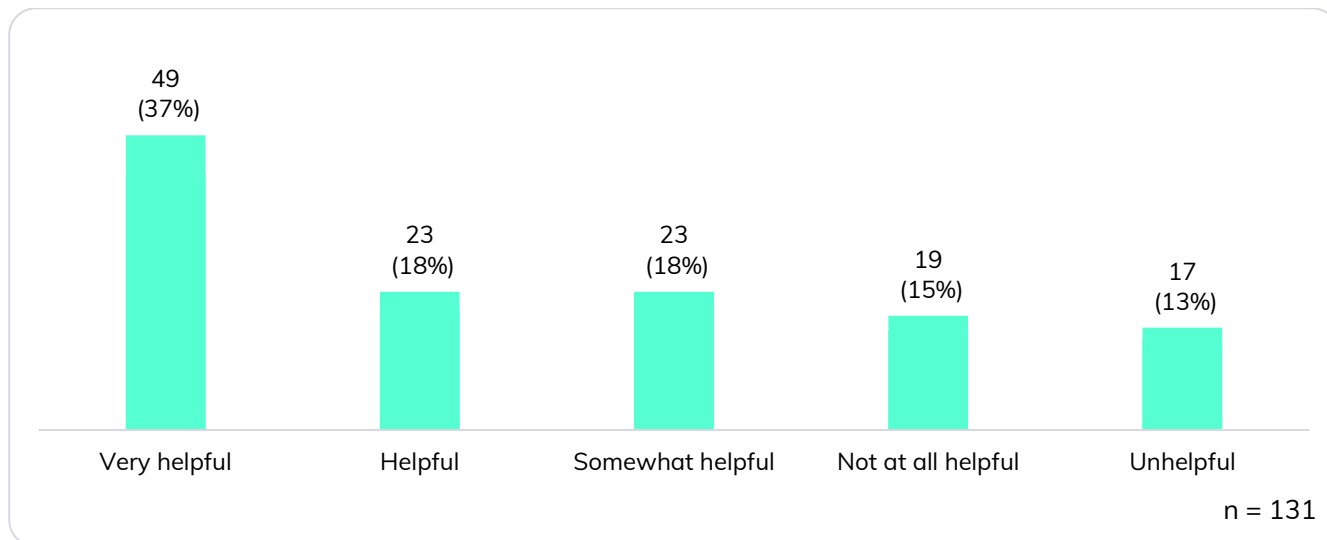

Very helpful	Helpful	Somewhat helpful	Not at all helpful	Unhelpful
49 (37%)	23 (18%)	23 (18%)	19 (15%)	17 (13%)

n = 131

Figure 23 – Outreach survey (individual interviews)

Understanding the experience of people with protected characteristics (covariate analysis)

We carried out covariate analysis of outreach responses to explore differences between the experiences and views of respondents belonging to different demographic groups.

We considered the following key variables:

- **Ease of access to support:** This categorical variable represented participants' ratings of how easy or hard it was for them to access their desired support. We collapsed the categories into 'Easy' and 'Hard' for simplification.
- **Time to receive support:** The time it took for participants to receive the support they desired. We categorised this variable into 'Prompt' (Less than a month, Within a week/straight away), 'Moderate' (More than 6 months, 3-6 months), and 'No Support' (I never got the support I wanted) for analysis.
- **Usefulness of support:** This categorical variable reflected participants' assessments of how helpful the support they received was. We collapsed the categories into 'Helpful' and 'Unhelpful.'
- **Agreement levels to proposals:** We examined this variable to understand participants' levels of agreement with the proposals.
- **Gender:** A binary categorical variable describing the gender of the participants.
- **Disability:** A binary categorical variable indicating whether participants reported having a disability.
- **Age:** A categorical variable representing the age of respondents.

Statistical test - Chi-Square Analysis
To explore potential associations and differences, we employed the Chi-square test of independence. The Chi-square test is a non-parametric statistical test suitable for examining the relationships between categorical variables.

Results
Among the demographic variables analysed, only gender demonstrated a statistically significant association. In particular, a higher proportion of women (45%, n=29) reported finding it easy to access their desired support compared to men (20%, n = 8). Conversely, a higher proportion of men (80%, n=32), compared to women (55%, n=35) found it hard to access their desired support.

This result is statistically significant, as evidenced by a p-value of 0.016 obtained from the Chi-Square Test of Independence, yielding a Chi2 statistic of 5.82 and 1 degree of freedom.

Whilst the following differences were observed, they did not all pass standard tests for statistical significance. Whilst this does not mean they are not reliable findings; it does mean that they may be the result of chance and as such should be interpreted with a degree of caution.

Gender
- More women (45%) reported finding it 'easy' or 'very easy' to access support compared to men (20%)
- Women (32%) accessed the support they needed more quickly than men (22%)
- More men (60%) found the support they received to be helpful, compared to women (51%)

Disability
- Disabled respondents were twice as likely as non-disabled respondents to have encountered housing-related difficulties.
- A greater proportion of disabled respondents (88%) attempted to access housing support than non-disabled people
- Disabled respondents (36%) found it significantly easier to access the required support compared to non-disabled respondents (24%)

Age
- Younger people (18-24) were less likely than average to have sought out support.
- People aged 25-39 were less likely than average to have accessed accommodation-based or floating support.
- It was more difficult for people within the 25-39 age bracket to access their desired support.
- Notably, young people (18-24) were quicker at accessing support.

Qualitative analysis
The survey included five open-ended questions. We used thematic analysis to map the topics and issues respondents brought up most frequently for each question.

As previously indicated, these questions reflect people's experience of accessing support related to their housing. Whilst this includes HRS services, it also includes their experience of accessing support more generally, from Districts and Boroughs, voluntary and community organisations and wider public services.

Can you tell me about your experience of getting support/trying to get support?

1. Complicated and bureaucratic process

Respondents emphasised that their experience of getting support had involved complex bureaucratic processes that made it more complicated for them to access the help they needed.

"Constant phone calls, pillar to post until finding the right dept, with the right criteria. A bit long winded..."

"Loads of form filling! & evaluations oh and a bit of running around but all okay experience"

2. Long waiting times

Participants were at times frustrated with what they perceived to be long waiting times until they received the appropriate support, particularly when waiting for housing provision[5].

"Very difficult to be honest I had to sofa surf for 9 months before I was housed, very thankful for friends."

3. Negative emotions

Individuals shared that their experience of housing related support led to negative emotions, such as anger and frustration, as they did not feel understood.

"Sometimes it's as though you're not being heard. I can get quite angry I know it doesn't help overall, but what can I do. So frustrating."

4. Mixed experiences with staff

People reported mixed experiences with support staff, with some expressing high satisfaction while others complained about impoliteness.

"Housing officer and staff are very rude, they are better"

'I have a very good key worker. All the staff are very nice but there's not much to do here (Fred Winter).'

What worked well in your experience of getting support?

1. Effective communication and empathy from support staff

Participants valued staff's ability to empathise with clients' experiences and the effort they put into helping them with their situation.

"I found the person at the other end of the phone, very helpful/empathic. That was refreshing."

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[5] District and Borough Councils, rather than WCC provision.

"Council lady really supportive knew I was going through a hard time & did lots for me."

2. Speed and efficiency of support

Some respondents were very satisfied with how quickly they received the support they needed.

"Very helpful & quick & within 8 months was offered a place. In Coventry I was on the list for years."

"P3 very helpful, they made phone calls on my behalf (P3) obv I've no fixed abode."

3. Support through housing and accommodation

Respondents also stressed that support was effective as it helped them to get accommodation, leading to their desired outcome.

"Well, I got rehoused (bottom floor flat for accessibility) That worked well."

"The fact I got a home!"

''Have experienced many situations, some good, some horrendous, so I'll just concentrate on the ones that worked well. I'm not homeless'

What things, if any, got in the way of you getting the support you needed?

1. Bureaucracy and administrative difficulties:

Many people mentioned that administrative difficulties and bureaucratic rules made it difficult for them to access the required support and get through the assessment.

"Diagnosing my brothers PTSD. Social services, Drs notes, service records, plus hospital reports. You wouldn't believe how hard it is to get assessed."

"Takes forever It took so much time and effort, had to keep chasing, it's exhausting."

*"No help assessment showed I earned too much money to warrant the support I needed, £2 over is a bit much init!" For **** sake."*

"Sometimes the protocol/bureaucracy got in the way, also depended on who you got on the other end of the phone."

2. Communication issues:

Participants reported that they faced various communication difficulties, including inconsistency, long response times and access-related issues linked to disability and access to digital technologies.

"The Council not providing better face to face support for deaf people. I can't ring a number they gave me I can't hear."

"Terrible communication from Council."

"When you email them it's like throwing a message in a bottle into the sea. You never know when or if you'll get a reply."

"I don't even own a computer and they're sending me emails. How's that supposed to work."

3. Lack of suitable / affordable housing

Respondents stressed that the housing that is available in the area was in many cases not suitable to their needs and/or budget.

"There are no homes suitable for my disability in the area. The lack of accessibility options feels like a personal slight."

"The few properties that are affordable are in terrible condition. It feels like we're being punished for being poor."

"Every time we save enough for a deposit, the rents go up. It's like trying to hit a moving target."

''Even though I work full-time, I'm still considered low-income. The affordable housing options are just not affordable for me."

"Council offered me one inappropriate house situation and that was it, never heard from them again. Offered a shared house - unsafe for me as I had to kick out ppl from shelter I was working at."

4. Inadequate or inappropriate support

A number of respondents explained that although they received support, the support available was not appropriate to their needs and personal circumstances, making it less useful for them.

"Staff is not trained, they are incompetent, they have no experience. Worst management I have dealt in my entire life"

"Housing Officer at Council assigned for me, bad with contact. I have to go everyday to hear anything"

"They assigned me a support worker who had no knowledge of my condition. How was that supposed to help me?"

"The help they offered was not practical. I needed immediate assistance, but all they gave me was a long-term plan."

"I was put into a support programme that didn't cater to my needs. It was as if they just wanted to get rid of me."

"The support I received didn't take into account my personal circumstances. It was a one-size-fits-all approach."

5. Lack of awareness or knowledge

Some participants raised the point that lack of awareness of the support that was available kept them from accessing support.

"Knowing who to contact about accommodation & support."

"For me it was if I didn't know about this place I'd of been in a pickle. Lack of knowledge."

"Better awareness of support, struggled in private rental for ages."

6. Personal factors / circumstances (eg mental health & addiction)
A few respondents mentioned that particular personal factors, including health issues, made it difficult for them to get the support they needed.

"My addictions. I'd say these got in the way of me accessing conventional services''

"My mental health, it wasn't that good before I came to be homeless. Being homeless just made it worse!"

What would have made the service or support better for you?

1. Improved/ better communication
Many respondents indicated that there was a lack of clear, prompt, and effective communication from the support services and better communication would have improved their experience.

"Better response times."

"For them to actually answer the phone, we get ignored, no follow up."

*"Better communication. We had fire marshals with no * We'd have to leave. Why not move families out gradually? I was suddenly in temporary accommodation on Xmas Eve - it was awful, no gas, freezing."*

"Reaching Council staff easier. Shorter response times. The attention, feels rude."

2. Better support and understanding of individual circumstances:
Participants mentioned a need for more empathy, personalisation and understanding of their specific circumstances.

"Just to have someone listen. Honestly."

"Manners, sympathy, empathy are free (Council staff)."

"If people treated us with more respect."

3. Improved housing and accommodation services
People emphasised the importance of appropriate housing, quicker repair services, regular maintenance and support for specific housing situations.

"Well if I could have a ground floor flat this would have made a huge difference."

"The maintenance side could be better."

"Getting helped by Council with Council home. Council should calculate your earnings after tax & NI."

"Council need to go round & check properties more often. Council help people that sit around, don't help people that want to help themselves."

4. Fairness and equitability

This theme involved concerns about the council's decision-making process and questioned whether it treated all residents fairly. This included questions around how income is calculated for eligibility, the prioritisation of local residents for housing as well as perceptions that the council is more likely to help those who don't work compared to those who do[6].

"Council must raise earning threshold or consider individual circumstances. Help working people, we need help."

"Council help people that sit around, don't help people that want to help themselves,

"I've worked & contributed locally all my life but now I need help Council won't help - their reason is I'm over earnings threshold, 3 kids, single, can't afford private."

"Think Council should give housing to local people not people from other Countries, locals need priority. Can't afford private rental in Atherstone."

5. Individual circumstances and specific needs

Respondents expressed the desire for individual circumstances to be taken into account more, such as the need for ground-floor flats due to health issues or individual earnings after tax[6]. Also mentioned were more specific and specialised support like therapy, addiction support, mental health care, translation services and the need for staff with more experience.

''I need a ground floor flat because of my health condition. It's not a luxury; it's a necessity.''

''The council should consider individual circumstances, not just income thresholds. My kids are struggling despite being just over the earnings limit.''

''I need help with form-filling for benefits. It's a complex process, and mistakes can be costly.''

6. Clearer/ more transparent information and familiarity with the system

There was a perceived need for the services to be more straightforward, with a clearer system in place for accessing support.

"Clearer timeline: A-B, how to do access the right department."

"More clarity of what emergency services are available."

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[6] These comments appear to relate to District and Borough housing allocation policies, though no further clarification was sought on the point at the time of conducting the interviews.

"Being savvy, once you are aware of how the system works you/one gets resentful, because you want to fast track and cut through the red tape."

7. Better mental health support

Respondents expressed a need for improved mental health services and understanding from service providers**.**

"Better access to service records. Army PTSD, i.e. mental health and stigma."

"As I've said my mental health took a battering needed therapy NHS not up to it - I had to go private."

"I wish I'd known more about mental health at the time."

"Quicker mental health support or income opportunities while experiencing poor mental health."

Is there any kind of support or help would be of use to you right now?

1. Housing needs and concerns

Many respondents expressed the need for affordable and appropriate housing, whether it was a ground-floor flat, a bungalow, or a council property. They were also concerned about the lack of support for local residents. Some were unhappy with the current housing situation, mentioning arrears, repairs and the need for more council houses.

"Yes, a ground floor flat. Katie is my carer & a wet room. But a ground floor flat is a must."

"Council needs to build more houses, and not just flats. Families need space too."

"The state of my flat is terrible. I've requested repairs multiple times, but nothing's been done."

2. Support for specific circumstances and individual needs

Several respondents mentioned needing support that related to their personal circumstances, such as support for disabilities (physical, deaf, mental health etc), support for working people who are just over the earnings threshold and for pregnant women who are homeless.

"Suddenly gone blind. Need help from council to stay living in Evesham."

"Yes, I'm pregnant 6 month/24 weeks and I'm sleeping rough."

"Help working people like me (earning just over Council threshold) to get Council property. Have kids & struggling to pay private rental."

3. Financial support and advice

Some participants expressed a need for financial advice, budgeting support and help with the cost-of-living crisis. They also suggested changes to how income is calculated for council support eligibility recommending that it should be based on earnings after tax and National Insurance.

"Budgeting support, money management."

"Council should consider your earnings after tax & N.I. not before in terms of earnings threshold."

"More help with cost of living crisis."

"It's just too hard to make ends meet. We need financial help and advice on budgeting our income."

"I've been living paycheck to paycheck for years now. I don't know how to save or invest, and I need guidance."

4. Assistance with forms and benefits

Some suggested that better support for form filling, benefits, and complaints about the police would be beneficial.

"Help with form filling for benefits."

"Form filling for benefits. People for responding to call outs quicker."

"Signposting to complaints about police."

5. Job support and life skills

Several respondents mentioned the need for job support and life skills education, especially for young people. They expressed the need for advice on savings, investments and bill management.

"Help finding job (harder than it used to be)."

"Not much info as YP in how to get mortgage or rent when you get older. Life skills around money for YP - saving, investment, money, bills, etc."

6. Medical and care needs

 Some individuals referred to specific medical and care needs, such as better medical support after a stroke, physical support for knee problems and help for people with ongoing health conditions.

"Better medical support (I had a stroke) for ongoing health conditions."

"Just physical support for my knees."

7. Community infrastructure and amenities

There were a few comments highlighting a desire for better community infrastructure, such as improved footpaths, more public toilets and more benches. Some also expressed their concerns regarding the environmental impact of new developments and the loss of green spaces.

"Better footpaths. Disabilities. More public Toilets."

"Few more benches. Should be more support for working people."

"Get rid of HS2 It's a blight. Greenery is gone. Train Council staff well, Training in disabilities."

8. Substance abuse and mental health support
A few participants indicated a need for support with substance abuse and mental health issues. One person mentioned needing a distraction to help with alcoholism, while another requested support with anxiety.

"A distraction to help with alcoholism. An allotment or something similar."

''Psychotherapy because I suffer from anxiety due to a back injury since 1979."

Consultation workshop
We invited professionals working in housing support to share their views on service provision and 30 key stakeholders and partners attended, including District and Borough Housing, health services, the voluntary sector and current HRS providers attending. A full list of participating organisations can be found in Appendix J.

The workshop invited participants to reflect on what currently works well about the HRS and barriers to a more efficient and effective service. Participants were asked to consider the proposed changes in terms of the design features or characteristics of a well-designed service, the impact on equalities and how success might be measured.

The main themes and points of discussion to emerge from the workshop are summarised below.

What Works Well
- Online availability of information makes accessing information easy.
- Strong knowledge of clients helps in tailoring support.
- Diverse range of services, although it can be overwhelming.
- Effective professional relationships and collaboration between teams.
- Acknowledgement that different approaches work for different individuals.
- Willingness to engage and support people with complex needs.
- Positive impact of partnership working involving various agencies.

What Gets in the Way
- Insufficient resources and funding; more resources are needed.
- Waiting lists for services.
- Confusion regarding service roles and boundaries.
- Local connection and priority needs can be unclear.
- Challenges related to the two-tier service model.
- Lack of support for individuals with personality disorders.
- Individuals with neurodivergence   falling through gaps.

Element 1 - Retain both Accommodation-based and Floating Support services for young people and adults by allocating the available budget in the same proportions as currently.
Professionals participating in the stakeholder workshop felt both accommodation-based and floating support services were needed for young people and adults. Despite both services being

essential, professionals felt it was worth considering allocating a greater proportion of the budget to floating support services and less to accommodation-based services as most people they worked with had housing.

For this element, design features, impact on equalities and measures for success were not discussed in detail.

Element 2 - Stop commissioning the separate Floating Support service for people with disabilities and meet those needs within redesigned inclusive Floating Support services, one for young people aged 16-25 and one for people aged 25+ years.

Similarly, participants at the stakeholder workshop agreed that creating inclusive support services instead of commissioning a separate service for people with disabilities could create more simplicity and streamline processes but stressed that inclusive services would need the resources and knowledge to cater to the needs of disabled service users. Their thoughts on necessary design features, impact on equalities and evaluation are set out below.

Design features, factors & characteristics

The discussion focused on the need to balance training for all staff with specialised expertise, employing robust risk assessments to ensure comprehensive support, building strong relationships through the involvement of a steering group of professionals who understand disability, and finding ways to integrate support from social services. It was emphasised that the service should find a way to merge inclusivity with the necessity for specialised knowledge and resources.

Impact on equalities

Concerns were raised about the potential exclusion of certain individuals and the potential impact on waiting lists for services. The transition to an inclusive model needs to ensure that accessibility remains a priority and that the changes do not inadvertently disadvantage any particular group.

Measuring success

The success of the proposal would be measured by tracking the number of people who access the newly inclusive services, assessing any changes in demand compared to previous periods, conducting surveys to gather feedback from service users, and consistently reviewing the outcomes and progress achieved by the service.

Element 3 - Adding a flexible range of shorter interventions that respond to individual needs as efficiently as possible and give earlier, focused support for customers who do not need longer-term support.

Professionals found that in addition to long-term offers, shorter interventions may be appropriate for people with clear-cut support needs but would not be able to replace long-term support. As detailed below, interventions tailored to clients' needs, no matter the length, were seen as paramount.

Design features, factors & characteristics

Discussions centred on the importance of offering flexible and personalised support interventions. It was stressed that even in shorter interventions, there should be mechanisms for ongoing

support, ideally with the same support worker to establish trust and maintain continuity. The focus was on designing interventions that are tailored to the individual's needs and preferences.

Impact on equalities
Concerns were raised about the possibility of certain individuals "falling through the net" due to the shorter duration of support. It was recognised that some complex cases might require more extensive assistance and that the structure should be adaptable to accommodate diverse needs.

Measuring success
To gauge the effectiveness of shorter interventions, the group discussed the implementation of long-term impact surveys that would be conducted around six months after individuals move on from the support. This would allow for an evaluation of sustained positive outcomes beyond the immediate intervention period.

Element 4: Reducing the maximum duration of services
Participants in the stakeholder workshop saw significant drawbacks in reducing the maximum duration of services, pointing out the difficulty of delivering a personalised service within a tight deadline. In particular, young people and disabled service users may need support for longer, and shortening support duration might create a "revolving door" instead of empowering service users to be fully independent.

Design features, factors & characteristics
The conversation revolved around the idea of reducing the maximum duration of services. The group emphasised that such a reduction could potentially reduce dependency on services while acknowledging the challenge that numerous and varied issues cannot always be resolved within predefined timeframes. To make this work, there was consensus that service quality should be elevated through comprehensive staff training, easy access to ongoing support, and regular feedback mechanisms from service users.

Impact on equalities
It was recognised that a reduction in service duration might have a negative impact on certain individuals with specific needs, such as those with multiple complex needs or caring responsibilities. The proposal would need to carefully consider these factors.

Measuring success
The group outlined key metrics for measuring success, including the number of individuals who successfully complete designated support programs, the extent of service user satisfaction, and evaluating whether the quality of the initial triage process affects the overall success of interventions.

Element 6 - additional services removed from future service specification
As detailed below, professionals discussed the inclusion of additional services in the context of existing alternatives

Design features, factors & characteristics
There was deliberation on the potential impact of reallocating resources to these services and the importance of leveraging partnerships, outreach efforts, and community engagement to maximise benefits.

Impact on equalities

Participants voiced concerns about potential exclusion or neglect of specific groups if certain additional services were not included in the new service specification. There was an emphasis on ensuring that accessibility and inclusivity remain a priority.

Measuring success

To evaluate the significance of additional services, the group proposed monitoring the number of successful referrals made, assessing the effects of including or excluding such services, and gathering feedback and outcomes from service users to make informed decisions.

Stakeholder focus groups

Warwickshire County Council held 2 focus groups with staff from the council's Social Care and Support team.

22 support workers from the Learning Disability Team and the Physical Disability & Sensory Service Team shared their views on the proposed changes to housing related support services. They strongly favoured that the service would keep its current name rather than changing it to "Supporting independence services".

Element 1 - Retain both Accommodation-based and Floating Support services for young people and adults by allocating the available budget in the same proportions as currently.

Workers felt both accommodation-based and floating support services were needed for young people and adults but considered allocating more budget to floating support services and less to accommodation-based services appropriate as most people they worked with had housing.

Element 2 - Stop commissioning the separate Floating Support service for people with disabilities and meet those needs within redesigned inclusive Floating Support services, one for young people aged 16-25 and one for people aged 25+ years.

Participants agreed that creating inclusive support services instead of commissioning a separate service for people with disabilities could create more simplicity and streamline processes but stressed that inclusive services would need the resources and knowledge to cater to the needs of disabled service users.

Element 3 - Adding a flexible range of shorter interventions that respond to individual needs as efficiently as possible and give earlier, focused support for customers who do not need longer-term support.

In principle, support workers agreed that adding brief interventions and signposting could be beneficial for those clients whose needs could be met this way. However, staff from both teams stressed that support would still need to be tailored to individual customers and that particularly vulnerable individuals would require longer term support with the option of face-to-face contact. According to staff from the Physical Disability & Sensory Service Team, the introduction of any short-term services would need to be accompanied by measuring customer satisfaction to ensure

customers felt they received the support they needed and be communicated clearly to referring agencies.

Element 4 – Reducing the maximum duration of services

The participants saw significant drawbacks in reducing the maximum duration of services, pointing out the difficulty of delivering a personalised service within a tight deadline. It was felt that there was a risk associated with reducing the support available to some clients, who might need longer-term support and that removing support would potentially set them back into crisis. In addition to long-term offers, shorter interventions were felt to be appropriate for people with clear-cut support needs but would not be able to replace long-term support.

Element 5 – A new name for the services

In focus groups with the Learning Disability Team and the Physical Disability & Sensory Service Team, support workers strongly favoured the HRS service retaining its current name rather than changing it to "Supporting Independence Services".

Element 6 - additional services removed from future service specification

Participants agreed that these additional street outreach services were valuable and needed but should not be included in the HRS services, as they did not see these within the remit of Warwickshire County Council social care and support budget. To make sure that these services would be accessible in the future, participants suggested working in partnership with existing hubs (Wellbeing Services and Community bases).

Service user Focus Groups

5 focus groups were held with service users receiving support from Warwickshire Vision Support, the House Project, St. Basil's and Doorway to consider their experiences, reflections on the service and thoughts about future development.

Focus Groups with sight-impaired adult service users

WCC heard from 44 adult service users receiving support from Warwickshire Vision Support. Participants highlighted the need for consistent trauma-informed and non-judgmental support by workers that had a comprehensive understanding of the needs of disabled service users – "the people working should have an understanding of the needs of blind people", a participant stated. This included building a trusting relationship and ensuring the accessibility of all resources and documents. Participants further identified a simplified triage process and good communication between services as characteristics of high-quality support. About the support they received, participants specifically appreciated the range of support offered with particular reference being made to support in learning how to cook and sorting out benefits. However, several participants noted that they did not receive sufficient support for filling out forms.

Focus Groups with young service users (under 25)

19 young people (aged 16-25) participated in the focus groups with some having been supported in this way for over a year. The majority of young people in the focus groups spoke positively about their housing outcomes, highlighting the value of receiving both emotional and practical support that felt flexible and appropriate to their life stage. A number of the focus group participants described complex personal situations; these included being care-experienced, being

a young parent, having mental health concerns or neuro-divergence. Considering their circumstances, they reflected on the importance of a support worker who got to know them, often over an extended period, enabling them to build the trust necessary to share details of their story some were not ready to share at the triage stage. Some commented on the frustration caused when key workers changed or failed to provide timely updates – "we are being kept out of the loop at the minute which is frustrating", a participant said. Often this uncertainty was felt to exacerbate complex situations.

Element 1 - Retain both Accommodation-based and Floating Support services for young people and adults by allocating the available budget in the same proportions as currently

Service users participating in focus groups felt both accommodation-based and floating support services were needed for young people and adults and appreciated having access to both depending on their needs. They appreciated the separation between services for young people and people aged 25+ as it provided clarity. A young person remarked that accessing a service for young people meant she did not feel judged - "It felt like I didn't have to know everything, I didn't feel stupid asking questions".

Element 2 - Stop commissioning the separate Floating Support service for people with disabilities and meet those needs within redesigned inclusive Floating Support services, one for young people aged 16-25 and one for people aged 25+ years

While focus group participants mostly agreed that turning separate services into an inclusive service supporting disabled residents could be beneficial, they emphasised the need for specialist training for staff to ensure disabled service users would have a positive experience tailored to their needs. As one participant mentioned, it "is good to have training and listen to the people you are supporting".

Element 3 - Adding a flexible range of shorter interventions that respond to individual needs as efficiently as possible and give earlier, focused support for customers who do not need longer-term support

Clients who participated in focus groups felt that while shorter, flexible interventions might suit some, personalised long-term support would generally produce the best outcomes, as it facilitated a trusting relationship with support workers. Overall, services should be tailored to individuals – "everyone should be given options for support and then choose what is suitable for them", a participant explained.

Element 4 - Reducing the maximum duration of services

In both groups, participants highlighted that clients needed sufficient time to build a trusting relationship with their support worker. Young people in the focus groups felt that support with a duration of 2 years minimum would be most useful and appropriate for young people. Most participants had no idea how long their support was due to continue – "Initially I didn't know anything about a timeframe, I'm assuming my support lasts until I'm 25 but I'm not sure if that's right" one of the young people said.

Elements 5 and 6

Focus group participants were not asked about their opinions on elements 5 and 6 of the consultation specifically, and did not make spontaneous remarks that could be linked to these proposals.

Conclusions

Having engaged a diverse range of professionals, partners and those with experience of housing need and homelessness, the findings show – with a couple of exceptions - a fair degree of consistency across responses on Ask Warwickshire, through the outreach and the focus groups and workshops held as part of the consultation process.

It is clear from the consultation findings that people value HRS services and the support it provides. We heard both from professionals and those who have accessed support through HRS services how well-regarded and valued it is as a service and the practical assistance it provides to those in need. The support it offers tends to be viewed as highly personalised, flexible and appropriate for the needs of service users – something which is appreciated by professionals and customers alike. Whilst there was a general acceptance of the contextual factors which have contributed to a reduction in HRS funding, we found significant concern over budget cuts at a time when many people face considerable hardship in the face of the rising cost of living.

Responses to the consultation underline how challenging it is to make significant savings to HRS services at a time when need continues to significantly outstrip supply, with a considerable number of comments highlighting the need for resources to support homeless and vulnerably housed people. Professionals and individuals facing financial hardship and housing vulnerability consistently expressed the fact that the need for support is ongoing (and many people felt it was increasing), so the need to reduce funding for this important service is likely to have an adverse effect on some of the most vulnerable members of the community.

Many fear that reductions in funding are likely to cause particular hardship for those with the most challenging and complex needs – whose support needs are likely to take longer and be more resource intensive. There is concern that the proposed changes may make it harder for providers to work with these clients as their needs may not be easily compatible with the redesigned service and the additional constraints these pose on delivering long-term, complex support.

Despite this extremely challenging context, we found a significant degree of pragmatism among respondents and perhaps a greater degree of willingness to accept these harsh realities than might be expected. This is testament to the constructive relationships between services providers in the statutory and voluntary sectors that exists across the county.

Element 1 - Retain both Accommodation-based and Floating Support services for young people and adults by allocating the available budget in the same proportions as currently

A slight majority (53%) of professionals and others responding to the Ask Warwickshire survey supported this proposal. The question asked of existing and potential customers of HRS was slightly different – asking about retaining floating support and accommodation-based support services, rather than referring to budget reductions and allocations – support for the retention of these services was even stronger. 143 out of 153 individual interviewees and 122 out of 123 Street Focus Group participants either agreed or strongly agreed. It is clear that among both professionals and service users (and potential service users) retaining these separate services was welcomed.

There was a widespread perception that demand for support among homeless and vulnerably housed people was already higher than the HRS alone can possibly meet. Consequently, any reduction in funding is going to be regarded as problematic. However, if reductions to the HRS budget need to be made, then the general perception is that doing it this way is both fair and reasonable.

Element 2 - Stop commissioning the separate Floating Support service for people with disabilities and meet those needs within redesigned inclusive Floating Support services, one for young people aged 16-25 and one for people aged 25+ years

This proposal polarised opinion, particularly among those engaged through the outreach, with around one third strongly agreeing and one third strongly disagreeing. The picture was slightly different among responses to the Ask Warwickshire survey, with 60% agreeing (strongly agree or agree), but even there around one quarter disagreed with the proposed change.

The primary concern among those who disagreed with the proposal (and indeed among some of those who supported it) was about maintaining and ensuring the quality of the service provided, in particular to disabled people. Whilst many saw simplifying and streamlining services and reducing systemic inefficiency as a positive development, this was very much conditional on being able to ensure that a consistently high-quality service was maintained.

Amongst practitioners, and to some extent more widely, there was a degree of scepticism that such a move would genuinely generate efficiency savings and maintain or improve the service. So, whilst there was minimal opposition to the intended aim of this proposed change, people were not necessarily convinced that it was likely to realise these laudable ambitions.

It was interesting to note that the level of support for this proposed change was similar among disabled and non-disabled people – with around half of respondents expressing support for the proposal. A notable exception to this was found in responses to the easy read version of the survey however, who were far more likely to disagree with the proposal. Almost all of respondents to the easy read survey (92%) expressed disagreement with the proposed change, the majority of whom reported being disabled.

Wider findings from conducting covariate analysis of the outreach findings suggest that disabled people are more likely to experience housing difficulty and need for support, but that they typically found it easier to access support than other people. Whilst this may in part be due to the current provision of a dedicated service for disabled people, a bigger factor is likely to be the fact that many disabled people will be locally classified as 'priority need', meaning they are more likely to be able to receive the support they require more immediately.

The importance of quality assuring a new general inclusive service to ensure it takes the best of the current dedicated service for disabled people cannot be overstated. Staff training, retention, knowledge, capacity and skills will all be key to providing an efficient and effective service which is able to meet the needs of disabled and non-disabled people alike. This finding is consistent across respondents who disagree with the proposed change and those who support it.

The proposed change may well feel frightening or threatening to current service users of the dedicated disabled people's service – particularly given the high regard HRS services are held in

by those using them. The prospect of losing this, understandably, has the potential to be unsettling and would be the case with recommissioning, even if the service was retained in its current form. Nonetheless it highlights the importance of careful messaging in communicating information about the commissioning process.

Element 3 - Adding a flexible range of shorter interventions that respond to individual needs as efficiently as possible and give earlier, focused support for customers who do not need longer-term support

A majority of people expressed support for this proposed change. It was felt to be a positive and empowering development, if it resulted in providing appropriate support quickly and efficiently. However, given the stated intentions of the proposed change – to provide quicker, tailored, flexible solutions to support people – we should anticipate the appeal of these aims given their inherent benefits. As with all the proposed changes, but even more so for element 3, it will be how it is delivered in practical terms that will determine people's ultimate perceptions of it.

We found an element of uncertainty in people's responses, with a number of respondents appearing to be unclear whether this approach would be in addition to the current service offer or whether it would be replacing existing services. Others wanted to know more about the detail of how this would work in practice and the practical implications of the proposed change. Such findings illustrate the importance of a clear, simple and accessible offer, ensuring professionals and service users understand what support HRS services can provide and how to access it.

Some questions were raised around what such a change might mean for clients with complex and enduring needs, with some fears being expressed that these more vulnerable service users could be excluded from accessing support from HRS if their needs were deemed to fall outside of the range of shorter interventions offered. Steps would need to be taken to ensure that those with most complex and challenging needs are able to get support and that, for service providers, taking on such clients would not adversely affect their ability to successfully deliver the HRS service.

Although this proposed change was generally supported, much depends on the detail relating to precisely what the interventions would be and how they would be offered. The support expressed therefore appears to be somewhat dependent on ensuring that the designed service genuinely meets the needs of those requiring support, that it does speed up the process service users face in accessing support and that any bureaucratic delay can be overcome through this new approach.

Element 4: Reducing the maximum duration of services

The proposal to shorten the amount of time people can be supported through the HRS was quite contentious, with opinion divided among respondents.

Whilst some saw the proposal as a positive opportunity to avoid dependency and encourage independence, others expressed concern that clients' needs can't easily be 'fixed' in this way. Clearly there is widespread acknowledgement that everyone is different and the whole premise of the HRS is to provide personalised support which is tailored to individual needs. Nonetheless, for some any move to restricted the duration was met with opposition.

There was particular concern among young homeless and vulnerably housed people about imposing stricter time constraints. This was echoed by professionals supporting young people who highlighted the fact that a young person being supported may reach the maximum duration

before they are 18 and in a position to take on their own tenancy. Clearly such a situation would be counter-productive and run contrary to the principles of the HRS services.

It is clear from people's responses that current practice within HRS services is to continue support beyond the maximum duration in exceptional circumstances. This discretionary and flexible approach may not (understandably) be widely known. Nonetheless it is likely that such flexibility will be required should the maximum duration approach be implemented (notwithstanding the need to address the specific issues relating to young people). It may be possible to allay the fears of those who did not support the proposal by acknowledging the circumstances where extension will be permissible. This point highlights the importance of providing clarity of the HRS 'offer'.

Element 5: A new name for the services.
We are proposing to change the name of these services from 'Housing Related Support Services' to 'Supporting Independence Services' and would like to know if you have any views on this

The proposal to change the name of the HRS services was not strongly supported. Whilst some respondents were in favour of emphasising independence, a more substantial number were not in favour of the change. Respondents felt that 'supporting independence services' lost the explicitly housing-specific focus which HRS services has, and felt that this should be retained.

However, a wider and potentially more significant finding is the feeling that changing the name is a distraction from the wider issues and bigger challenges that are currently faced. Some expressed the opinion that even focussing on the name was a waste of money and effort and did not benefit those in housing need in any way. Given the significant budget reduction that HRS services now faces, focussing any attention, time and money on the name of the service risks alienating or irritating people who might perceive it to be a waste of precious resource which would be better directed to protecting service funding.

Whilst in reality it is likely that little actual resource is being, or will be expended, in rebranding the service with a new name, the perception may still pose a reputational risk which could be avoided.

The findings from the consultation suggest that it is not currently clear what problem with the current name is that would necessitate a change. There was no evidence of disaffection with the current name or that the new name proposed would improve outcomes for homeless and vulnerably housed people in the county.

Element 6 - additional services removed from future service specification

Opinion was fairly divided on the proposal not to include additional services in the revised service specification, although the findings suggest views were not particularly strongly-held. Around one in three respondents either didn't know, or had no clear opinion about this.

Public sector procurement practice – in particular the way that social value is secured through contracts – is a somewhat technical process which relies on a degree of specialist knowledge. It is not clear whether service users, members of the public or even those responsible for delivering services are necessarily familiar with this process. Despite the attempt to explain this within the consultation, it is unclear whether people would necessarily understand the current approach and how it might differ in a new service specification.

What we can see from contributions to the consultation is that these additional services tend to be valued by respondents and that they provide an important role in supporting the needs of homeless and vulnerably house people. As a result, one might reasonably conclude that these additional services could usefully be part of the core services available to support homeless and vulnerably housed people. However, given the need to reduce the HRS budget significantly, there would appear to be no realistic prospect of these additional services being directly commissioned. Consequently, it would seem there is little option but to remove them from the service specification and hope that any potential supplier was willing and able to offer such additional services as part of their proposal.

Impact on equalities groups

Whilst a substantial minority (40%) believed the EIA accurately reflected the impact of the proposed changes, many respondents said they either did not know or felt that the EIA did not capture the likely impact. We observed a significant variance in responses from HRS service providers and service users – service providers were twice as likely as service users to say the EIA did not identify the proposals' impact. It is clear that HRS providers hold a markedly different view on this to other groups, suggesting further engagement and discussion with them over equalities concerns may be prudent to further develop the EIA.

Respondents identified a range of vulnerable groups who might be adversely affected by the proposed changes. Some of those mentioned – young people and disabled people – were included in the EIA; but that it did not reflect what they perceived to be the true impact on them. Other groups mentioned, such as offenders and asylum seekers, whilst potentially vulnerable, do not have protected characteristic status. Nonetheless WCC's interest and ambition to mitigate the impact on vulnerable groups does extend beyond the scope of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) . As such further consideration of these groups would be beneficial.

Gypsies, Roma and Travellers were also identified as a vulnerable group which had not been explicitly referenced in the EIA. Given that in some, but not all, circumstances Gypsies and Roma come within the PSED's protected characteristics, consideration ought to be given to the impact on them of the proposed changes as it is not clear that this has been done to date. Whilst we understand that Gypsies, Roma and Travellers were considered in WCC's assessment process, the aggregation of them within 'other' classification has resulted, understandably, in people highlighting their absence. Concerns raised about the omission of the travelling community can therefore easily be addressed by communicating this point and by avoiding raising doubts by including them as a distinct group in reporting, despite potentially small numbers involved.

Wider findings from the outreach suggest that disabled people may be more likely to experience housing difficulty and to need support, but that they typically found it easier to access support than other people. Young people, and women too, also reported more positive experiences of accessing support. This may be due to the increased likelihood of these groups falling within 'priority need' local definitions, within Local Authority allocation policies, and therefore being able to access broader housing support which would otherwise be available, however the provision of dedicated services for disabled people and young people (and in some instances for women too) may also be contributing to more positive experiences.

Recommendations

Whilst we recognise that decisions about the proposed changes and the future of HRS services will rest with the Cabinet, we consider it our responsibility to offer our professional, independent assessment of the evidence in relation to each of the proposed changes. First, we set out our recommended design features, in relation to the wider service redesign which might be incorporated into the future specification.

Desirable design features for HRS services

Flexibility
One of the perceived strengths of the current HRS services was 'flexibility'. The way HRS services is currently configured enables support providers to respond to the individual and their needs and this flexibility is something which is felt to be extremely important to embed in a redesigned services going forward.

Securing simplicity whilst managing complexity
The proposed change which received the greatest support from respondents was for the introduction of early intervention with focused and targeted support. It is apparent that respondents see considerable potential in simplifying and streamlining processes. The challenge in redesigning and then delivering the new service will be in ensuring that people are genuinely able to access support more quickly. As ever, the detail will be crucial in ensuring that the stated ambitions – to simplify, speed up and streamline the service – can be realised.

Whilst simplicity is inherently desirable in designing services, it is equally important to acknowledge that the lives and the support needs of many HRS service users are highly complex, multi-faceted and potentially long-term. Consequently, there needs to be an accommodation of complexity within the service and support offer. There remain legitimate concerns about the impact of reduced face to face interaction on those who require long term support and also how this aligns with the provision of trauma-informed care for those who need it.

Consistency and quality assurance
We found discrepancies in the speed with which different groups of service users were able to access support and of the usefulness of the support received. Whilst this reflects their experience of accessing support more broadly than solely HRS services, it does suggest a degree of inconsistency in the experiences of homeless and vulnerably housed people. While this may arise from a variety of factors, not least the provision of dedicated services available for young people and disabled people, and from different District-level definitions of priority need, understanding and addressing these to ensure a consistently high-quality service would be beneficial.

However, the findings also illustrate differences in other aspects of accessing support among different groups, such as the ease of accessing support and its usefulness. Whilst acknowledging that disabled people and young people are likely to fall within local definitions of priority need and may consequently find it easier to access support with accommodation, the differences in their experiences are worth noting. The consequences of merging the current dedicated service into an inclusive service may have an adverse effect on the experience of disabled people, unless stringent measures are put in place to ensure consistency and quality assurance. The gender disparity which we found is also something that ought to be considered in future service redesign.

Clarity of offer and brand positioning

A number of findings point to the importance of a clear HRS service offer and brand positioning. It is crucial that homeless and vulnerably housed people understand clearly what HRS services offer, how it can support them and that it is a service which is relevant to them and their needs. Indeed, a lack of clarity is likely to create additional administration and it may in turn lead to less good outcomes.

Our research with young people revealed a lack of clarity which would be beneficial to address. Specifically, we heard that their initial contact with HRS services was often by chance – hearing about it from another young person, a social worker or work colleague. This initial conversation had opened the route but even when receiving support, they were unclear of the scope or duration. This lack of understanding can be disempowering and underlines the need for clarity over what is available, signposting to other resources, and the duration of the support available.

Something worth considering in relation to the clarity of the HRS services offer is the sources of support available. In many instances individuals are likely to be in need of a wider range of support than simply housing-related. This is clearly understood both within HRS services and among other support providers. There exist a range of statutory services and voluntary sector support (or should be) for carers, or people in further education etc. Naturally, housing related support is likely to be one aspect in the wider needs of the individual and it is worth considering what aspects of support may be better delivered by other organisations. Within our research we heard about a wide range of support including emotional and budgeting, being provided by HRS services. When reviewing HRS services offer it may be useful to consider what aspects are best/can only be delivered by HRS and what other aspects might require signposting to another agency or source of support.

Element 1 - Retain both Accommodation-based and Floating Support services by allocating budgets in the same proportions as currently

Recommendation – Reducing the available funding to support homeless and vulnerably housed people through HRS services is likely to have an adverse effect on those in need. However, it is widely felt to be important to maintain the current floating support and accommodation-based services. Furthermore, if funding reductions need to be made then it is generally acknowledged that maintaining the current proportion to allocate available resources is a fair and reasonable way to do this. Our assessment of the consultation findings is that there is sufficient support for this proposal for WCC to proceed with this change.

Element 2 - Stop commissioning the separate Floating Support service for disabled people

Recommendation – both those supporting the proposed change and those opposing it highlighted the importance of ensuring a consistently high-quality service that meets the needs of disabled and non-disabled people. This measure undoubtedly poses a potential risk, given the specific needs many disabled people will have, to ensure that a generic service is truly inclusive. We therefore recommend, on the basis of the consultation findings, that WCC proceed with this proposed change only if guarantees around consistency and service quality can be secured.

Element 3 - Adding a flexible range of shorter interventions

Recommendation – aiming to reduce inefficiency and provide more tailored support more quickly is something few would oppose. Consequently, many support this proposed change, although

particular concerns were expressed over working with those who require long-term support. Many questions remain about precisely how these aims will be realised and the specific interventions which will be offered. We therefore recommend, on the basis of the evidence from the consultation response, to proceed with this proposal but with clear explanations of how this will be delivered and with clear guidelines to ensure support for clients with complex and enduring needs.

Element 4: Reducing the maximum duration of services

Recommendation – the idea of HRS services providing time-limited, focused, support was felt by many to provide positive opportunities to foster independence. One of the strengths of HRS services is their flexibility, and assurances are needed to clarify that exceptions to these maximum durations will be, in exceptional circumstances, permitted. There are also specific issues relating to supporting young people, who may not be able to access support when it is still needed under the proposed changes and these should be addressed. On the basis of the responses to the consultation, we recommend that the new time limits for young people are not taken forward, but that other proposed changes proceed but with clear allowance/permission for exceptions where they are necessary to support clients with long-term support needs.

Element 5: A new name for the services

Recommendation – there is little support for the proposed change – though some were enthusiastic about the reference to independence – and few see the need to move away from the existing name. Furthermore, there is a real risk of negative perceptions arising from focusing on the name of the service at a time when budgets are being reduced. The lack of support for this proposed change and the potential risks of adverse perceptions of doing so, lead us to conclude that WCC should not proceed with the proposed name change.

Element 6 - additional services removed from future service specification

Recommendation – the additional services offered by current HRS providers were valued and there are arguments for them to be included in the revised service specification. However, this would necessitate adequate funding to deliver these additional services – which would appear not to be realistic given current budgetary constraints. Given that, our assessment of the consultation findings is that WCC proceed with this proposed change.

Conclusion
It is clear from the consultation that HRS services are highly valued by professionals and service users alike and the support they offer is practical, appropriate and flexibly delivered to meet the specific needs of homeless and vulnerably housed people. Despite this, there are clearly improvements that can be made to ensure that those in need are able to consistently access the support they require easily and quickly. As such, the aims of the proposed changes are cautiously welcomed and reflect the experience and opinions of respondents in improvements that could be made to the service.

The significant reduction in the HRS services budget is inevitably going to be a challenge to continuing to support those in need, particularly at a time when many face increased pressures and hardship. There appears to be general acknowledgement and understanding of the financial realities faced by WCC and the implications of this on funding levels for HRS services. Any changes will need to be made carefully, being sensitive to the risks such changes pose in service design and delivery to mitigate, as far as possible, adverse impacts on the most vulnerable.

List of Appendices to the report

The following appendices to this report can be found separately:

Appendix A - Research & Engagement Plan

Appendix B – Who we heard from (demographics of respondents)

Appendix C – Ask Warwickshire Consultation Survey

Appendix D –Easy-Read Survey

Appendix E – Outreach survey (individual interviews)

Appendix F – Outreach survey (Street Focus Groups)

Appendix G – Social Engine Focus Group discussion guide

Appendix H – Formal responses on behalf of organisations

Appendix I – Consultation Workshop participating organisations

Appendix J – Location of outreach

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