




Housing Related Support







Consultation Report

October 2023



Contents



	Introduction	2
	Proposed Changes	3
	What we did	4
	What we heard	7
	Conclusions	14
	Recommendations	17

Introduction

During 2023, 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.

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.

A series of proposed changes were developed following discussions with key stakeholders and a wide-ranging consultation sought views on these.

People were also asked how they thought the proposed changes would impact on equalities groups. They were also asked for ideas to minimise any negative impact.



Proposed Changes

Six key proposals 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 disabled people 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 Add 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 would be reduced from 12 months to 9 months and the maximum period for accommodation-based support would 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.

What We Did



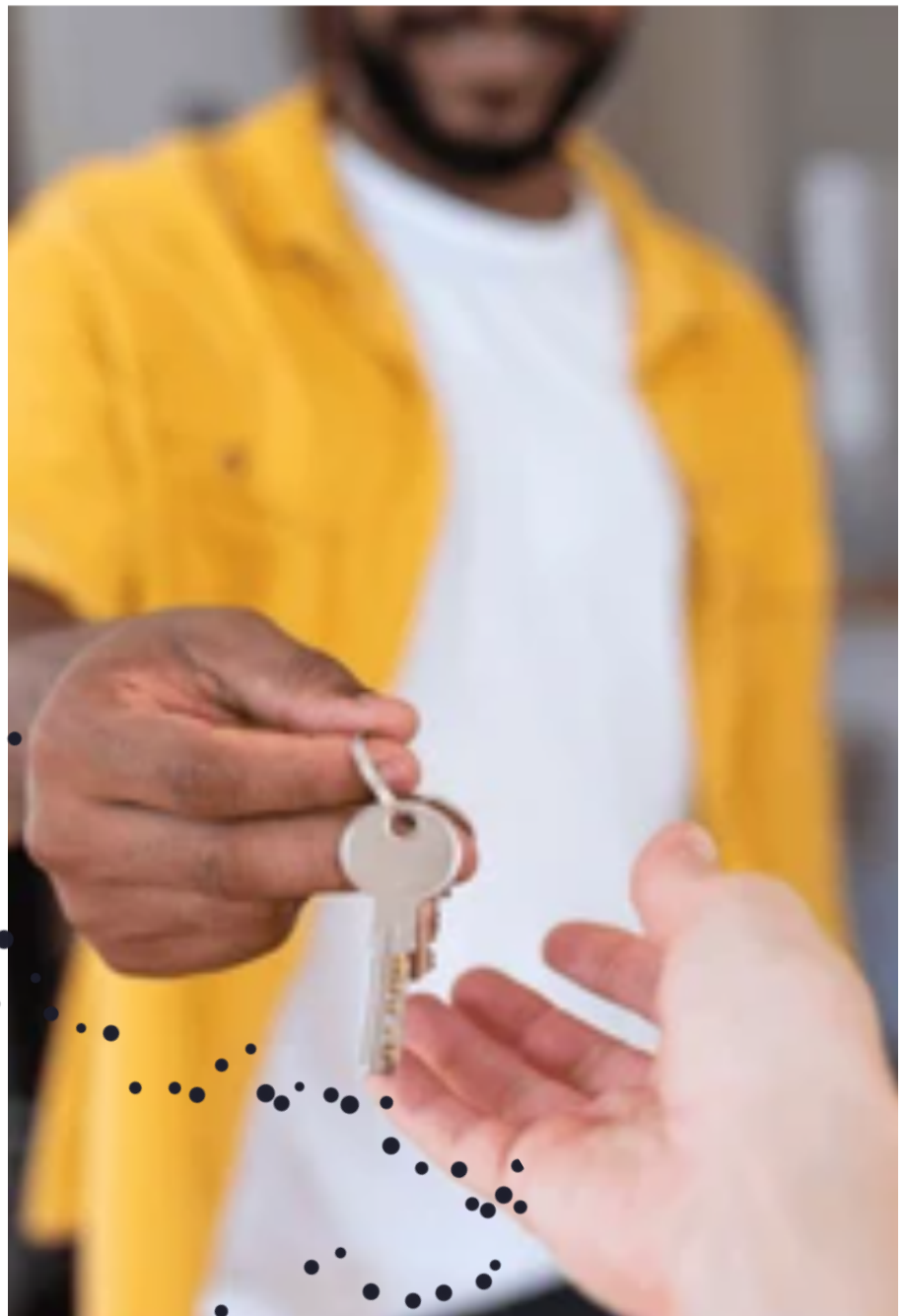
A series of engagement activities gave people the opportunity to share their views on the proposed changes and to contribute ideas and experiences to inform the decision-making for the service redesign.



- **Ask Warwickshire** - online survey hosted on WCC's consultation and engagement hub. 129 responses were received, nine of these were formal responses received on behalf of organisations.
- **Email** – people could respond to the consultation via email. Four responses to the consultation were received by email. Three of these were from individuals with experience of using HRS services and one was a formal response on behalf of Warwickshire District and Borough Heads of Housing
- **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 three written responses (included in individual interviews)

- **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 three online and in-person sessions and 44 participants in two in-person focus groups with sight-impaired service users.

The questions people were asked in the workshops, outreach, focus groups and Ask Warwickshire were not all the same. Relevant responses are in this report.

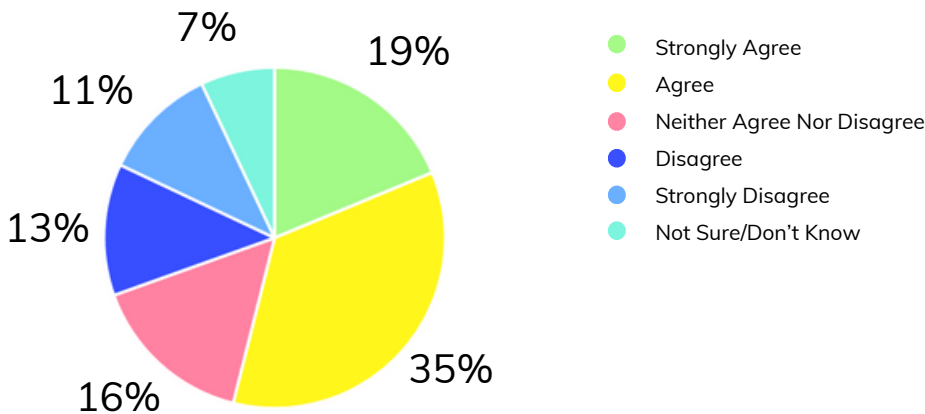


Findings

Proposal 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.

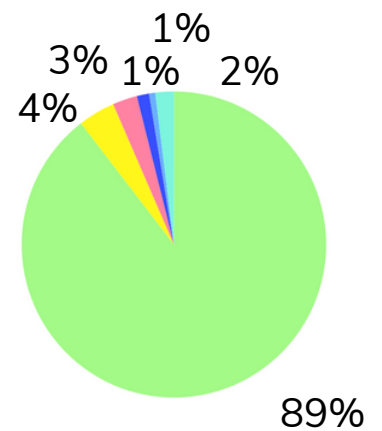
Ask Warwickshire

People were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the proposal



Outreach

Do you agree or disagree with the council's plans 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?



Workshop and focus groups with professionals

Professionals who took part in discussions in a workshop and focus groups felt both accommodation-based and floating support services were needed for young people and adults. Some people felt it might be worth allocating more of the budget to floating support services and less to accommodation-based services as most people they worked with had housing.

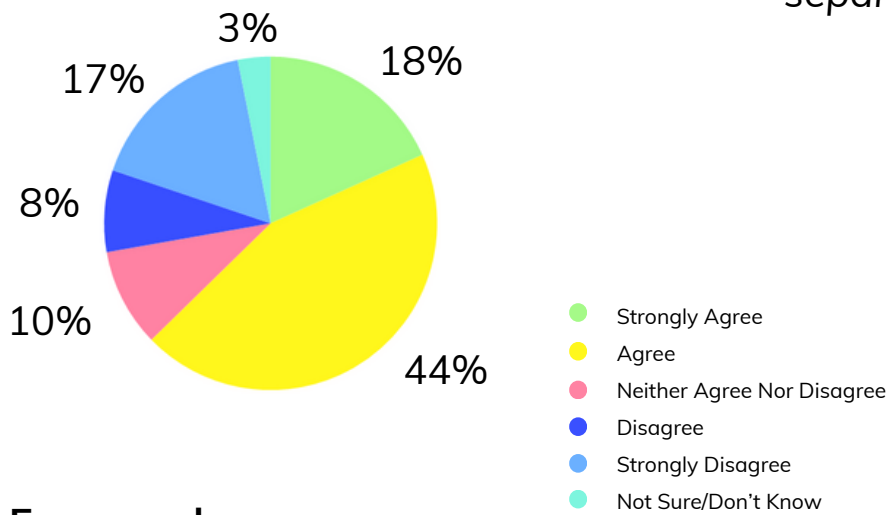
What people who use HRS services said

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.

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

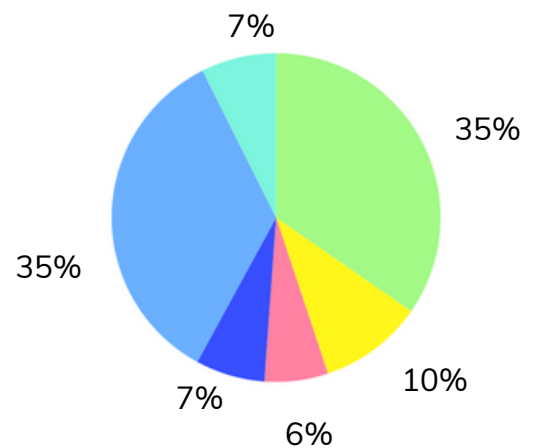
Ask Warwickshire

People were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the proposal



Outreach

Do you agree or disagree with the council's proposal to have a single inclusive service for disabled people and non-disabled people, rather than separate services?



Easy-read responses

92% (23 out of 25) of people who completed the easy read survey disagreed (**28%**) or strongly disagreed (**64%**) with this proposal.

Workshop and focus groups with professionals

Professionals who took part, agreed that creating inclusive support services instead of commissioning a separate service for disabled people could create a simpler and streamlined approach but emphasised that inclusive services would need the resources and knowledge to cater to the needs of disabled service users.

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

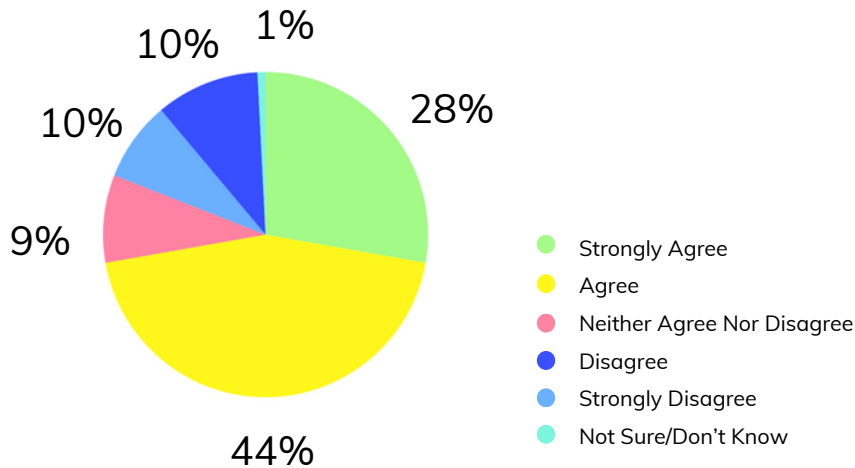
What people who use HRS services said

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.

Proposal 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

People were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the proposal



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 five respondents (**24%**) agreed.

Workshop and focus groups with professionals

Professional respondents felt that alongside long-term support, shorter interventions could be appropriate for people with more straightforward support needs. They were clear that this ought to be in addition to, rather than a replacement for long-term support. Support would still need to be tailored to the needs of individuals.

What people who use HRS services said

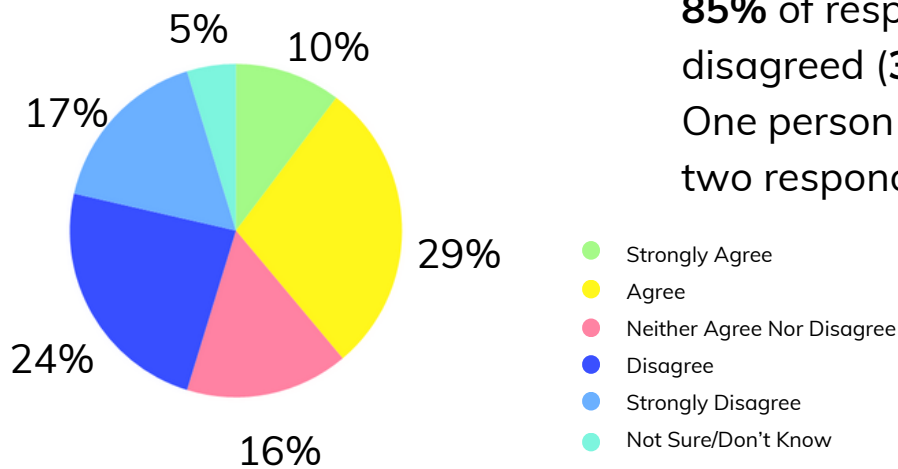
Service users felt that while shorter, flexible interventions might suit some, personalised long-term support would generally produce the best outcomes, as it took time to develop a trusting relationship with support workers.

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

Proposal 4- Reducing the maximum duration of services

Ask Warwickshire

People were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the proposal



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 two respondents (**10%**) agreed.

Workshop and focus groups with professionals

Professionals felt it could be very difficult to deliver a personalised service in a tight deadline. In particular, young people and disabled people might need support for longer, and shortening how long they could be supported for might prevent people from becoming independent in the long run.

What people who use HRS services said

People highlighted the time it takes to build trust with their support worker. Young people said they felt that support for 2 years at least would be most useful and appropriate. Most people had no idea how long their support was due to last.

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

Proposal 5 - A new name for the services. It was suggested that 'Housing Related Support Services' become known as: 'Supporting Independence Services'

Ask Warwickshire

Most people opposed the change and felt the proposed name could be confused with other services and felt it should mention housing. Several people said that the name did not matter as long as there was a high-quality service.

Workshop and focus groups with professionals

Professionals strongly favoured the HRS service retaining its current name.

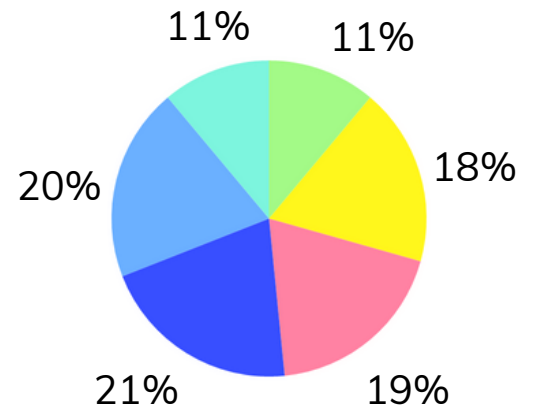
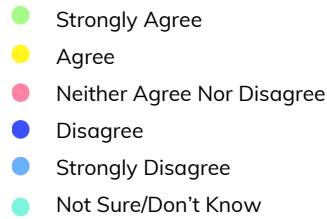
Proposal 6 - additional services removed from future service specification

Workshop and focus groups with professionals

Professionals felt that these additional services were valuable and needed but should not be included in the HRS services.

Ask Warwickshire

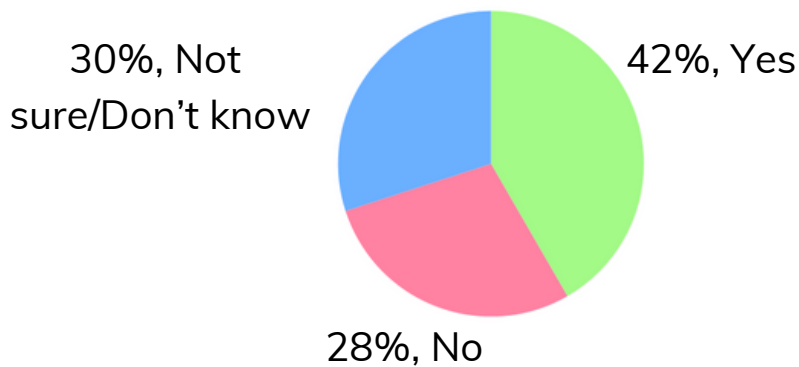
People were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the proposal



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

Ask Warwickshire

People were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the proposal



Easy read findings

There were six responses to the question from easy-read surveys. One respondent (17%) felt that the EIA identified the impacts of the proposals, two respondents (33%) did not and three respondents (50%) said they were unsure or did not know.

People's experience of accessing support with their housing from the outreach

Surveyors were asked a number of questions about their experience of accessing support with their housing. We asked them about support in general and not just from HRS, to learn from their experience, both positive and negative, about accessing support.

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 and **48%** (88 people) said that they had experienced these worries in the past.

Although **32%** of respondents (58 people) said they have never faced such issues, even some of these people went on to tell us how they were worried about different aspects of their finances, housing and social wellbeing.

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 (127 people) 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. **26%** of respondents (45 people) said they had not accessed or received such assistance.

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%**) said they had either had help finding a new place to live or assistance where they already live. However, **37%** said they had not accessed this sort of such housing support.

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



People had very different experiences of accessing housing support. **28%** of respondents (37 people) had positive experiences (either 'very easy' or 'easy'), whilst **20%** (27 people) said it had been 'neither hard nor easy'. However, over half the people we heard from said they had found it difficult to get the support they needed - **22%** (29 people) found accessing the support 'hard', while **30%** (39 people) described the process as 'very hard'.

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

46 people said they had never been able to get the support they wanted. **19%** of respondents (26 people) waited more than 6 months. **7%** (10 people) received support within a 3-6 month period and **11%** (15 people) received help within 1-3 months. **9%** of respondents (12 people) said they had received support in less than a month and around 1 in 5 (25 people) got it within a week or immediately.

“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.”

How useful was the support you received?

131 people answered this question and **55%** of them (72 people) said the support had been positive, with **37%** (49 people) finding the support 'very helpful' and **18%** (23 people) 'helpful'. However, **13%** (17 people) found it 'unhelpful', and **15%** (19 people) 'not at all helpful'.

Conclusions

The consultation findings indicate that people value HRS services and the support it provides, which is seen as personalised, flexible and appropriate for the needs of service users. Whilst there was a general acceptance of the reasons why HRS funding is being reduced, there was concern over reducing budgets at a time when many people face considerable hardship due to the rising cost of living.

Many fear that less funding will 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.

Proposal 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, however people felt that demand for support was already higher than the HRS alone can possibly meet. This approach was felt both fair and reasonable.

Proposal 2 - Stop commissioning the separate Floating Support service for disabled people 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 respondents to the easy read survey disagreed with it and among those engaged through the outreach opinion was divided. The primary concern for respondents was about maintaining and ensuring the quality of the service provided, in particular to disabled people. Whilst people saw simplifying and reducing inefficiency as a good thing, they wanted to be sure that a consistently high-quality service was maintained.

Proposal 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 meant people got the right support quickly. However, many people wanted to know more about how this would work in practice and what it might mean for people with complex and enduring needs.

Proposal 4 - Reducing the maximum duration of services

This proposal divided opinion. Some saw it as a positive opportunity to encourage independence, but others were concerned that people's needs can't easily be 'fixed' in this way. There was particular concern about young people reaching the maximum duration before they are 18 and in a position to take on their own tenancy.

Proposal 5 - A new name for the services.

There was little evidence of being being dissatisfied with the current name and the proposal was not strongly supported. People felt that 'supporting independence services' lost the housing focus which HRS services has, and thought that this should be retained.

Proposal 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.



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 people who said they either didn't know or didn't feel it did wholly capture the likely impact.

People mentioned a range of vulnerable groups who were felt might be negatively impacted by the proposed changes and were not explicitly identified within the draft EIA. Some of these – young people and disabled people – were included in the draft EIA. Others, such as offenders and asylum seekers, whilst potentially vulnerable, do not have necessarily have protected characteristic status. Nonetheless WCC wants to minimise the impact on vulnerable groups beyond the scope of the Public Sector Equalities Duty, as offenders were included in the full EIA.

Gypsies, Roma and Travellers were also identified as a vulnerable group which had not been explicitly mentioned in the draft EIA. Whilst we understand that Gypsies, Roma and Travellers were considered in WCC's assessment process, including them within 'other' means that their apparent absence was highlighted by some people.



Recommendations

Decisions about the future of HRS will rest with the WCC Cabinet. However our independent assessment of the evidence and general thoughts on design features for future HRS services is set out here.

Flexibility - A perceived strength of HRS is '**flexibility**'. The way the HRS is currently delivered allows support providers to respond to the individual and their needs. This flexibility is felt to be extremely important to retain in a redesigned service .

Securing simplicity whilst managing complexity - Respondents saw considerable potential in **simplifying** and **streamlining** processes. The challenge in redesigning the new service will be to ensure that people are able to get support more quickly. Whilst simplicity is good, it's also important to recognise that the needs of people who use HRS services are often **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 experiences 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.



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

Proposal 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.

Proposal 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.

Proposal 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.

Proposal 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.

Proposal 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.

Housing Related Support Consultation Report

www.social-engine.co.uk