

## **Evesham House Closure**

### **1. Background**

1.1 Evesham House is a 6 bedded supported accommodation unit for people with problematic alcohol use. The service provides supported accommodation for people with problematic alcohol use. The length of stay is up to a maximum of 2 years, at which point users are reintegrated into their own accommodation, without further intensive support. The average length of stay for users is 12 months. The service was procured with Action Homeless in 2009, for on-site residential support to sustain long term independence in the community, as part of the Supporting People programme. Since then the contract has been extended through contract waivers, and the current contract is due to expire March 2014. The service is on the corporate procurement plan to be re-procured in line with corporate procurement guidelines, with new services to be available from April 2014. The building is owned by LCC, and the night cover staff is 2 LCC employees.

1.2 The current proposal to close Evesham house has been developed in response to two main changes in National Policy:

- (a) The model of service provision at Evesham House has been more focused on harm reduction rather than on helping people to recover from their substance misuse. National policy in this area is now focussed on recovery and therefore the model of support at Evesham House needed to change; and
- (b) The implementation of the benefits cap has made the current model unaffordable and has prompted early re-provision.

Both of these issues are explored in more detail below.

### **2.0 Commissioning Review**

2.1 A strategic review has considered the needs of substance misusers in relation to their housing need and a redesigned service is due to be procured in 2014. The new model is both responsive to the needs of city residents, and also delivers a service in line with national policy directive of recovery. The previous model of Evesham house was procured prior to the 2010 National Drug Strategy, and since then the ambition of substance misuse treatment services, has moved from one focused on the reduction of harm to individuals and communities to one of full recovery from substances of misuse. Therefore, the model under which these services were procured is outdated and duplicates many services provided through substance misuse treatment services such as breath analysis, care planning and counselling.

### **3.0 Welfare Reforms**

3.1 The impact of the Welfare Reforms, and the benefit cap, in August 2013, had an adverse impact on the Evesham House project. The welfare reforms impacted on all six residents within Evesham house. None of the residents were in receipt of the support element of Employment Support Allowance, therefore were not entitled to an exemption from the benefit cap of £350 per week. This shortfall over the period of the remaining financial year equated to approximately £59,400 deficit risk to Leicester City Council.

3.2 The financial position created by the impact of the welfare reforms created a need to consider options for Evesham, ahead of the future procurement of a newly designed service.

3.3 A number of options were considered to manage the financial deficit, and continue to provide a service to support the current residents. These are included at appendix 1. The option that was viable was option 3, 'To decant and re-locate residents into suitable and affordable alternative accommodation to an agreed timetable, and introduce a peripatetic approach to meet the support needs of the residents.'

3.4 Further to legal advice, a 6 week period of statutory consultation with the residents and staff took place. This intensive piece of work included residents being informed through letters which were delivered by hand, and then a series of individual meetings, and focus groups were delivered to explore the impact of the proposal to close the service. The consultation findings were presented to The Executive, with a recommendation to close Evesham House.

### **4.0 Plans for Service Users**

#### **4.1 Current Users**

4.11 The maximum length of stay at Evesham house is 2 years. Of the 6 residents at Evesham House at the time of consultation, the average period within the service was approx. 1 year.

4.12 Of the six residents in Evesham House at the time of consultation, 4 residents were already at a stage in their recovery where a move from Evesham House to a more independent living arrangement was being considered as part of their recovery process. In fact 2 residents were already 'bidding' for properties to enable them to live independently. Each resident has made progress as follows:

- Resident 1 has moved in to housing association accommodation
- Resident 2 has moved in to a property under the empty homes project managed by Action Homeless

- Resident 3 has moved in to private rented accommodation and has a social care package of support in place.
- Resident 4 has moved in to LCC housing department accommodation at Hannon Court.

4.13 All of these residents are now successfully resettled, and are receiving a transitional floating support service from Action Homeless. The new arrangements are working well for each of these residents.

4.14 The two remaining residents will require alternative accommodation with support. This will be arranged if a decision to close is agreed. If a decision to close is agreed the residents will be served with 'notice to quit' which will increase their points in relation to rehousing. The support service will be delivered through a floating support model which will continue to be delivered by Action Homeless through a community hub model at the Action Homeless Engage harm reduction suite based at St James Terrace. The level of floating support delivered will be tailored to the individual needs of each resident. Each resident receives a support visit daily or several times daily if needed. Support is available from 8am – 10pm, 365 days per year. In addition to the floating support service delivered to residents in their homes, the availability of the 'hub' provides users with a place they are able to access away from their homes, for further support if they so wish.

## 4.2 Future Service Users

4.21 The need for these services for the future will be met through the newly designed services, as identified through the strategic commissioning review.

4.22 The new service model retains a small amount of on-site accommodation based support but also expands the provision to include floating support, thereby increasing overall service provision. Recent financial modelling work undertaken by LCC housing department (as part of the work for the review and procurement of homelessness services in the City) has been used to underpin this model, and concludes that the new model with a floating support element increases service provision by 60%.

4.23 This model therefore provides better value for money than current provision, with increased coverage, reduced duplication, and an emphasis on supporting outcomes, within a reduced financial envelope.

4.24 Potential service users, ahead of the planned procurement, will still have access to the Heathfield house accommodation based support service for substance misusers, and Action Homeless will offer a floating support and advocacy service to other potential referrals to assist with maintaining current tenancies. All potential service users will continue to have access to the full range of community substance misuse treatment services and LCC housing

services. In addition Action Homeless will offer a full floating support model if required, to new services users through a community hub model at the Action Homeless Engage harm reduction suite based at St James Terrace.

## **5.0 Impact on Staff**

5.1 Two of the staff who support the delivery model of Evesham House are LCC staff. Consultation has taken place with the staff, and discussions within the Housing Department indicate that the staff can be redeployed within the Housing department, if Evesham House closes.

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## **Appendix 1**

Option 1 - Do nothing. This is not an option because the cost of the housing benefit will leave significant deficit in rental contributions affecting both service users and Leicester city Council.

Option 2 – The City Council housing department to reduce its housing management costs – discussion have been had with housing management and due to the nature of the project it is not possible to either reduced the night time staffing cover or the wider housing management costs to such an extent that would mitigate the financial risk

Option 3 – To decant and re-locate residents into suitable and affordable alternative accommodation to an agreed timetable, and introduce a peripatetic approach to meet the support needs of the residents. This will require consultation.

Option 4 – The council to subsidise the financial deficit of the impact of the Welfare reforms. There is an earmarked reserve which was set-up to offset any overspending in the HRS service. The 2013/14 balance for ASC is £248k; however this is for all the affected HRS projects within ASC. The reserve has been disaggregated and there is 17k available for the Evesham project which is not sufficient to offset the deficit. However, a proportion of this may be required if the proposed closure and decant of residents is delayed.