



12 February 2024

Dear Suffolk County Councillor,

### **Re: Housing Related Support**

As Suffolk's District and Borough Council Leaders, we are extremely concerned about the proposed changes to Housing Related Support (HRS) set out in Suffolk County Council's Budget proposals for 2024/25. We believe that this proposal would have a catastrophic effect on hundreds of Suffolk's most vulnerable residents.

Whilst we recognise the budget pressures that the County Council is facing, we do not feel enough consideration has been given to the wider impact that the decommissioning of Housing Related Support will bring. In our opinion the withdrawal of Housing Related Support will increase financial pressure on your budget, create what may be unmanageable pressure on our budgets and increase pressure on the wider public purse.

Recently, a Suffolk Public Sector Leaders funded project reviewed the approach to tackling rough sleeping. Housing Related Support was a significant part of the review and the recommendations that would lead to ending homelessness and rough sleeping in Suffolk by 2027. These recommendations were agreed by all councils on 22 September at a Suffolk Housing Members Board meeting - and yet, behind the scenes the County Council was planning to end this critical service.

Also, in 2021, you ceased funding for the Countywide floating support service, in consultation with our councils. This was agreed on the basis that you committed to not reducing the accommodation-based support services and that the same number of beds would be retained across Suffolk. In 2022, we worked together to develop a new model for accommodation-based Housing Related Support, retaining the same number of beds and committing to a five-year contract. You are now ending those contracts early, renegeing on your agreement with us and incurring financial penalties to do so.

The Housing Related Support service provides over 700 accommodation places, delivered through multiple specialist providers. These specialist providers, many of whom are charities, provide support to tenants to help them live independently. This service is not available via any other route, and we understand that there is a waiting list of around 400 people.

Housing Related Support is a vital part of preventing and relieving homelessness in Suffolk. Having a home is widely recognised as one of the foundations of being able to live a healthy life. Once the beneficiaries of Housing Related Support have the skills to live independently, they are then supported by our District and Borough Councils to move into general needs accommodation through Gateway to Homechoice, Home-Link or the Private Rented Sector.

The client groups for Housing Related Support are amongst the most vulnerable in Suffolk. They include 16- and 17-year-olds who have no family with whom to live, 18-year-old care leavers and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

They also include “young families” – young people who are also parents. Without your supported accommodation, many of these children and young people will add further pressure to your Children and Young People Services budget, as you have a range of duties to them.

Clients also include adults with mental health conditions or learning disabilities, a history of drug or alcohol dependency, or those being released from prison. It’s likely that the lack of supported housing for these individuals will place additional pressure on your other Adult and Community Services budgets.

We note that you have recently decided to reintroduce bidding for arts funding following an outcry from a host of famous names about your proposal to withdraw arts support altogether. Vulnerable children and adults must also have their needs heard.

The proposal being put forward to your full Council meeting is that £1M of the Housing Related Support budget is removed during 2024/25 and then a further £2M is removed from 25/26. This means c350 accommodation spaces will be removed by September 2024 and all accommodation removed by the end of March 2025. The proposals refer to the budget cut as “rebalancing the responsibilities” “To be clear there is no “rebalancing” of responsibilities here.

Our statutory responsibility as housing authorities is to provide accommodation to eligible people who are homeless. For the avoidance of doubt not everyone who doesn’t have a home is eligible for accommodation under our statutory duties. This means that there is a significant possibility of rough sleeping numbers increasing significantly over the next 12 months as a result of your proposal - if you see it through.

If people who previously qualified for Housing Related Support, are left without accommodation then rough sleeping will increase. We know that this will impact on these vulnerable people’s health, that they are more likely to begin or continue substance misuse, and to suffer from mental health issues. The impact of this will increase demand on other County Council services which are already stretched.

Some of the providers of Housing Related Support also provide Rough Sleeper Initiative accommodation. They are clear that there is a strong likelihood that the early termination of their Housing Related Support Contracts will render the Rough Sleeping Initiative contracts unviable as the two combined enable economies of scale. There is insufficient affordable housing in Suffolk and as such it’s very hard to meet demand for accommodation including where we have a duty to accommodate someone.

The proposed withdrawal of Housing Related Support will not only increase homelessness it will also put additional pressure on an already impossible situation where demand outstrips supply, while leaving previously occupied accommodation which was part of your Housing Related Support contracts empty. This is simply a perverse outcome.

We recognise that times are tough and that difficult decisions need to be made. But we believe that a decision to end Housing Related Support is short-sighted and will haunt Suffolk County Council in years to come as the implications set out in this letter come to fruition. As a Suffolk System we have a strong track record in working together to tackle thorny issues but have not been given the opportunity to work together on this matter – we should be working together to prevent vulnerable people falling into unsupported situations and to prevent homelessness.

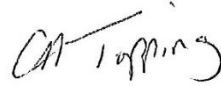
We are prepared for our officers to put time and effort into working with your officers to develop a better solution – recognising the financial pressures that we are all under. We have proven our collective ability to tackle difficult issues together time and time again – not least during the pandemic.

But doing that now would require a reversal of your plan to end Housing Related Support by 2025, as it would take time and effort to develop something that would provide the necessary support to these vulnerable people and reduce the impact on your other budgets. Are you prepared to do that?


Yours sincerely,



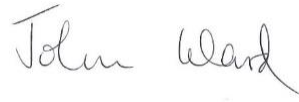
Councillor Neil McDonald  
Leader – Ipswich Borough Council



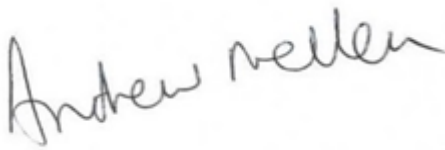
Councillor Caroline Topping  
Leader – East Suffolk Council



Councillor Cliff Waterman  
Leader – West Suffolk Council



Councillor John Ward  
Acting Leader – Babergh District Council



Councillor Andy Mellen  
Leader – Mid Suffolk District Council