

HOSC meeting 10 March 2022

Statement read by Cllr Ian Stutely on behalf of Norwich City Council

Under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2018 there's an obligation for the hospital to inform the LA in advance if a client can't return home (so is facing homelessness) via a 'Duty to Refer' and for the LA to provide advice and assistance.

Emergency banding would be awarded where the client meets the qualification criteria for Norwich Home Options (so not a homeowner, has a local connection, can manage a tenancy etc). These cases tend to be few and far between but where the criteria is met (e.g. a council tenant who can't return to their upstairs flat), we can generally house them very quickly.

The help we can give is dependent upon the individual's needs, their circumstances and, where appropriate, the availability of suitable accommodation.

I have noted there may be misunderstanding among practitioners of the limitations of what accommodation options LAs can provide.

Many of the clients being discharged from Helleston will have complex issues, risks, dependencies and vulnerabilities. A high percentage of such clients will not be ready to manage an independent tenancy and either have too high risks or would be unable to cope in temporary accommodation or a hostel. These clients fall between the lines of not being ill enough to need a hospital bed but not being well enough to cope with the unsupported accommodation that we, as a LA, could provide.

In Norwich (which experiences by far the highest volume of all hospital discharges), the only specialist mental health supported accommodation is provided by Evolve (evolveeastanglia.com). Spaces are limited and insufficient to meet demand. Previously, there was 'step down' accommodation in the grounds of Helleston hospital, where clients who no longer needed a ward bed but still needed a degree of residential support could be accommodated, pending their health improving to the point where a full discharge was appropriate. It's this lack of 'step-down' accommodation which is the single biggest cause of the issues highlighted. The need for more 'step-down' accommodation has been well known and widely discussed for years, therefore increasing that provision could have a significant and positive impact.

This County Council's 50% cut to the supporting people grant also had a significant negative impact on those who previously benefitted from supported accommodation.

However, I believe it is within the remit of this committee to recommend more step-down accommodation and reinstate fully funded tenancy supported services for vulnerable people. How can we take that forward please?

[end]