

# **West Suffolk Temporary Accommodation Procurement and Placement Policy**

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This policy is an appendix to West Suffolk Council's Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018-2023. The purpose of this policy is to set out how West Suffolk Council will procure sufficient units of temporary accommodation and place households in temporary accommodation.

**Procurement of temporary accommodation to meet anticipated demand will be undertaken following the principles of:**

- achieving value for money for the Council and its residents;
  - providing suitable accommodation for households in housing need; and
  - complying with the Council's contract standing orders.
- 1.2 Temporary accommodation is procured for households for whom homelessness cannot be prevented. It is required for the purposes of:
- accommodating new statutory accepted homeless applicants;
  - accommodating households while homelessness cases are investigated; and
  - reducing the use of nightly paid (bed and breakfast) accommodation.
- 1.3 The Council aims to procure sufficient **temporary accommodation** to accommodate homeless households within the local authority area as far as reasonably practicable or as close to where they were previously living. Temporary accommodation is usually provided on an ongoing short-term basis. The Council understands the resources available for use, the difficulties in procuring sufficient units of temporary accommodation at affordable prices and the need to procure accommodation in nearby authorities.
- 1.4 **Emergency accommodation** is procured on a nightly paid basis in bed and breakfast accommodation, guest houses and hotels and is available for a short period, usually at a point of housing crisis. Due to increasing demand it is not always possible to procure sufficient emergency accommodation within West Suffolk. It is therefore sometimes necessary to procure emergency accommodation out of the area. When this happens it will be in an adjoining district where possible to minimise the distance. The household will be identified as requiring an in area placement and be prioritised for a move.

**Placement of households in temporary accommodation,** both within and outside the area. The Council has a duty to provide temporary or interim accommodation for households who approach the Council as homeless and who meet the criteria set out in The Housing Act 1996, Part VII as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002.

- 1.5 This policy covers both the interim placements made under Section 188 Housing Act 1996, while homelessness enquiries are undertaken, and longer term temporary accommodation placements for households accepted as homeless under Section 193 of the same Act. Within this document, placements under both of these duties will be referred to as temporary accommodation placements.
- 1.6 The Council is dependent on a supply of accommodation to meet the needs of households who have been required to leave their previous accommodation and have not been able to secure alternative accommodation themselves or whilst the Council works with them to prevent their homelessness. In some cases, households have not been given warning and therefore may require emergency assistance to source such accommodation. The Council must have options in place to deal with such emergencies.
- 1.7 In accordance with the Housing Act Section 208 and paragraph 16.7 of the Homelessness Code of Guidance, the Council will, wherever reasonable and practical, try to secure suitable accommodation within West Suffolk to allow a household to maintain their existing networks, such as employment, schooling, medical care as well as family and social support. The Council has to be mindful of current prevailing housing conditions as well as demand and pressures that affect the Council on a daily basis, whilst taking into account the individual needs of the households requiring assistance.
- 1.8 Whilst the Council will have regard to this policy when allocating temporary accommodation, the Council retains its discretion to take into account any particular personal circumstances of an applicant or the household when allocating accommodation.
- 1.9 This policy operates in conjunction with the [Home-Link Lettings Policy](#), the [Discharge of the homelessness duty into the private rented sector](#) and the Council's Asset Management Strategy (note: currently being developed).

## 2. Procurement of temporary accommodation

This section sets out the current levels of homelessness, the need for temporary accommodation, types of temporary accommodation provided and how the Council will look to meet demand.

### Homelessness in West Suffolk

- 2.1 The Council both maintains its own stock of temporary accommodation and has access to temporary accommodation in the area. In addition, the Council has procured additional temporary accommodation, usually in an emergency, from other providers and some of these are out of the area.
- 2.2 Please see Appendix A of the Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy for data on homeless applications, homeless acceptances, reasons for homelessness, number of households in temporary accommodation and the reasons for homelessness.

### Understanding the need for temporary accommodation

- 2.3 Please see section 1 (identifying current and future levels of homelessness) in Appendix A of the Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy. It sets out factors that contribute to people becoming homeless, those most likely to become homeless or be threatened with homelessness and the factors that may affect future levels of homelessness.

### Supply of temporary accommodation

- 2.4 We will continue our focus on the prevention of homelessness and wherever possible the Council provides longer-term accommodation before an applicant becomes homeless as a homeless prevention. However, it is sometimes necessary to use interim or temporary accommodation before longer-term accommodation becomes available either as homelessness relief or once the 56 day period ends pending a discharge of any duty owed.
- 2.5 The types of temporary accommodation currently used by the Council are set out below:
  - **Interim and emergency accommodation:** this is normally in the form of hostels, most of which have shared facilities and is provided within the district. This can also be nightly paid accommodation which is located outside of the district with either shared facilities or self-contained.
  - **Temporary accommodation:** provided by either West Suffolk Council or a third party providers usually in the district.
  - **Specialist accommodation:** there are different types of supported housing available for particular groups including young single homeless and rough sleepers, mental health needs, substance misuse and refuge accommodation

and younger families. Allocations to these schemes are determined by Housing Related Support, registered provider or agencies running the schemes (as appropriate). The Housing Related Support contract is managed by Suffolk County Council.

- 2.6 The table below sets out the sources and numbers of units of temporary accommodation supplied both in and out of the district as at July 2019.

<b>Type of unit</b>	<b>Number as at 1 July 2019</b>
Temporary accommodation	
- of which Registered Provider	34
- of which charity owned	53
- of which Council owned	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>91</b>

- 2.7 There are occasions when we use Bed and Breakfast accommodation for emergency or temporary accommodation. In 2018/19 there were approximately 15 families or individuals in Bed and Breakfast accommodation at any one time.

#### **Maintaining supply to meet demand**

- 2.8 The Council will explore ways to maintain the supply of good quality temporary accommodation that provides value for money to meet demand by:
- Seeking to increase the number of landlords engage in the West Suffolk Lettings Partnership;
  - Seeking to reduce the reliance on spot purchased nightly paid accommodation and bed and breakfast as far as possible by increasing the number of temporary accommodation properties available;
  - Seeking to expand the range of properties either in partnership with registered providers or, where value for money can be demonstrated, in the private rented sector;
  - Continuing to explore options for purchasing properties on the open market, subject to business cases and in accordance with the Council's Asset Management Strategy; and
  - Exploring options for working with lettings agencies.
- 2.9 The Council has increased its provision of temporary accommodation in recent years and will continue to monitor its requirements and take action accordingly. The long-term aim is to reduce reliance on spot purchased accommodation and to procure accommodation on a longer term basis whilst maintaining sufficient flexibility to allow for demand fluctuation and avoid a costly over supply of temporary accommodation.

### **Meeting quality standards**

- 2.10 All of our temporary accommodation must meet the appropriate suitability and quality checks. When appropriate, the Council carries out spot checks on nightly paid units. Furthermore the West Suffolk Landlords Forum meets on a quarterly basis to discuss the latest regulations, good practice and landlord obligations. To review the current accommodation offer and future needs. Monthly meetings on management on properties, RPs and providers and monitoring of SLAs.

## **3. Placement of households in temporary accommodation**

This section sets out factors the Council will consider when placing households in temporary accommodation.

### **Suitability of accommodation**

- 3.1 This policy takes into account the statutory requirements on councils in respect of the suitability of accommodation, including the Suitability of Accommodation Order 2012 and has regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, as required by Section 11 of the Children Act 2004.
- 3.2 When deciding if a temporary accommodation placement is suitable, consideration will be given to Chapter 17 of the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities (dated [April 2019](#)) which states that the following factors need to be taken into account:
- a. Needs, requirements and circumstances of each household member**
- 3.3 The needs, requirements and circumstances of each household member should be considered, this includes any identified health or mobility issues, any care or support provided by agencies or the need to access specialist medical services.
- 3.4 The key factor to consider when assessing medical issues is whether the condition itself would make the accommodation unsuitable, for example offering a flat above the ground floor to a household member without the ability to climb stairs.
- 3.5 Consideration will be given to whether the accommodation is affordable for the applicant and their household.
- b. The location of the accommodation**
- 3.6 Factors to be considered include the ability to access the workplace if in paid employment, avoiding disruption to the education of young people, in

particular those who are at critical education points such as those close to sitting GCSE examinations.

- 3.7 Where possible the Council will avoid placing applicants in isolated accommodation away from public transport, shops and other facilities in order for them to maintain established links with schools, doctors and key services to ensure the wellbeing of the family is maintained.

**c. The size and facilities of the accommodation**

- 3.8 The accommodation provided should have adequate space for the household and this would be assessed by taking into account the needs, requirements and circumstances of the household as outlined above.
- 3.9 Households requiring temporary accommodation will often be placed into accommodation that has fewer bedrooms than a household may be entitled to on a permanent basis. The condition of the decoration, furniture in the property (where applicable), the layout or type of accommodation, provision of parking and lack of access to a garden are extremely unlikely to be classed as acceptable reasons for refusals of offers.
- 3.10 Assessments in regard to suitability of temporary accommodation placement will be completed on a case by case basis to ensure that any temporary accommodation offered is considered reasonable and suitable for the household involved. These assessments are made within the context of the accommodation and resources that are available to the Council.
- 3.11 The individual needs and requirements of a household will be assessed by the Advice and Prevention Officer alongside the Accommodation Officer to confirm the allocation is suitable. Consideration is given to any risks that an applicant may pose to existing residents or members of the public.
- 3.12 Wherever possible, attempts will be made to identify suitable accommodation within the Council's accommodation, local registered provider stock or in the private rented sector.

**Placements**

- **Bed and Breakfast placements**

- 3.13 Circumstances may arise which require short notice placements of households into emergency temporary accommodation and therefore the options available can be very limited. In these cases the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation may be the only option available to fulfil the Council's temporary accommodation duty. In addition, if an applicant contacts the Housing Options team outside of office hours and requires emergency accommodation, Bed and Breakfast will be the only available option.



3.14 Consideration is given to the code of guidance which states that Bed and Breakfast accommodation is not to be regarded as suitable for 16 and 17 year olds or applicants with family commitments, therefore Bed and Breakfast placements for households of this type are only to be used if no other accommodation is available. The Council aims for all Bed and Breakfast placements not to exceed a period of six weeks, however there may be exceptions to this if no other suitable accommodation options can be identified with the six week period. The average length of time a household spent in Bed and Breakfast accommodation in 2018/19 was 19 days.

3.15 Whenever an applicant is accommodated in Bed and Breakfast, action will be taken to identify alternate temporary accommodation as quickly as possible.

- **Out of district placements**

3.16 Wherever possible the Council will seek to provide temporary accommodation within West Suffolk.

3.17 There are circumstances in which the Council needs to place households into Bed and Breakfast accommodation outside of West Suffolk, such as in cases where accommodation is required in an emergency and there is no availability located within West Suffolk with whom the Council has agreements in place.

3.18 Whenever an applicant is placed outside of West Suffolk, attempts will be made to identify alternate accommodation within the district as soon as possible.

3.19 In some circumstances, it may be more appropriate for a placement outside of the area to be arranged, for example where an applicant may be at risk within West Suffolk.

**Offers and refusals**

3.20 Applicants who are provided with temporary accommodation will be made one offer of suitable accommodation. The Council is under no legal obligation to allow the applicants to view this accommodation prior to acceptance.

3.21 For interim placements made under Section 188 of the Housing Act 1996 while homelessness enquiries are being undertaken, applicants do not have the right to request a review of the Council's decision as to the suitability of an offer. However applicants do have a right of review of temporary accommodation placements once accepted as homeless under section 193 of the same Act.

- 3.22 If an applicant refuses an offer of temporary accommodation, they will be asked to provide a reason for their refusal which will be considered by the Advice and Prevention Officer. If the accommodation is still considered as suitable the Council will be under no obligation to offer any further temporary accommodation. The applicant would then need to decide whether to accept the offer or to source accommodation themselves.
- 3.23 If the specified reasons for refusal are considered valid, the offer would be withdrawn and alternate temporary accommodation options would be considered.
- 3.24 Where the Council decides that homeless applicants housed under Section 188 are not owed the main homelessness duty, they will be asked to leave their interim accommodation placement following a reasonable notice period, once being informed of the Council's decision in respect of their homeless application. This length of notice will vary depending on the household individual circumstances.