

**Classification:** Public

**Key Decision:** No

## Gravesham Borough Council

**Report to:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 21 February 2022  
**Reporting officer:** Daniel Killian, Director (Housing)  
**Subject:** Kent Homeless Connect

### Purpose and summary of report:

To inform Cabinet of a decision recently taken by Kent County Council to allow the Kent Homeless Connect contract, which provides specialist housing and support to vulnerable people and households, to come to its natural end in September 2022 and to outline the impact this decision is likely to have locally.

### Recommendations:

1. Cabinet notes the KCC decision and agrees to form a working group to engage with the current providers over the coming months to fully understand the impact locally and explore the potential of protecting the current service provision through alternative ways of working outside of Gravesham Borough Council funding.

<b>Key Implications:</b>	
<b>Item</b>	<b>Implications</b>
<b>Legal</b>	The Council has a statutory duty to provide temporary accommodation to those in priority need. Failure to do so could result in a legal challenge to the Council.
<b>Finance and Value for Money</b>	<p>It is estimated that, as a result of the cessation of the contract, the public sector will inherit costs in the region of £8,049,600 per annum, far exceeding the cost-saving of £5,072,180 made by KCC. In summary, it is estimated that for every pound saved through the cessation of the contract, £1.59 will need to be spent elsewhere to provide services to the individuals that benefit from the Kent Homeless Connect service. These costs will be distributed amongst KCC, districts, and the NHS.</p> <p>In addition to the cost to the public sector, there will be a loss of an additional £1,348,224 in economic value and £563,616 in social value. Economic value refers to the net growth in the local economy from, for example, the improvement in the mental health of homeless risk individuals supported by the service. Social value includes wider social benefits, such as reduced crime and increased safety.</p> <p>Additional analysis is required to fully understand the full impact to Gravesham, which will be undertaken by the working group.</p>

<b>Corporate Plan</b>	#1 – People Commitment – Safeguard Residents – put in place a package of housing measures and creative interventions that support the most vulnerable.
<b>Climate Change</b>	N/A

## 1. Background

- 1.1 The current Kent Homeless Connect contract was established in 2019 by Kent County Council (KCC) and replaced a range of Housing Related Support (HRS) services for vulnerable homeless adults, offenders, and young people.
- 1.2 In creating the business case to review the HRS services it was providing at the time, KCC sought to reconfigure the service areas for vulnerable adults to rationalise, redesign and commission a flexible, coherent service, based on outcomes and ultimately, generate efficiency savings. A copy of the report can be found in Appendix 2.
- 1.3 The report recognised that whilst district authorities have a statutory responsibility with regards to homelessness, the vulnerable cohort that the redesign of the KRS services was seeking to assist rarely qualified for assistance from the district authority as their needs go above and beyond just housing and therefore, beyond the responsibility of a district authority.
- 1.4 As outlined in the original report, due to the level of support required, it was felt that if left unsupported by KCC, it would place a burden on other support services offered by KCC such as Specialist Children's Services, Adult Mental Health, and Safeguarding if no such service existed. In addition to this, other public agencies such as NHS, Probation Services, Community Safety, Public Health, etc. would also see additional burdens.
- 1.5 KCC's recent decision to allow the Kent Homeless Connect contract to come to its natural end in September 2022 and not be replaced with an alternative model, was done so in isolation and without any consultation with either the district authorities or the other supporting partner agencies. In fact, prior to announcing their decision, KCC had established a working group that Gravesham formed part of to create the tender document for the replacement contract.
- 1.6 Despite robust lobbying by Kent Leaders to review their decision and protect the current service model until a full impact analysis had been undertaken, KCC has continued regardless and is still proposing the cessation of this service.

## 2. Kent Homeless Connect Contract

- 2.1 The Kent Homeless Connect (KHC) service is currently available to vulnerable adults living in Kent, aged 18 and over, with complex support needs (such as mental ill-health, substance misuse problems, or learning difficulties) who are:
  - 2.1.1 Rough sleeping – sleeping outdoors or in a makeshift structure
  - 2.1.2 Homeless – living in temporary housing or sofa surfing
  - 2.1.3 At the risk of becoming homeless – at risk of eviction

- 2.2 The service also helps those move away from homelessness for good, by bringing together elements of outreach, supported accommodation, and floating support to offer tailored support to:
  - 2.2.1 vulnerable people
  - 2.2.2 enable them to be healthy
  - 2.2.3 find a stable home
  - 2.2.4 Manage their tenancy or their finances.
- 2.3 The current service believes in working in partnership with the people they serve and together they build on confidence and skills whilst finding ways to break the cycle of negative life experiences.
- 2.4 The Kent Homeless Connect service within Gravesham and neighbouring boroughs (Dartford and Swale) is delivered by two commissioned partners – Porchlight and Look Ahead who work with a network of organisations, cutting across geographical and service boundaries, to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping in the County. Local government, charities, housing, health, and social care teams all work together to coordinate a response and support our local communities.
- 2.5 The Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities, published by DLUHC states (at paras 17.48 -17.62) that housing authorities are advised to develop policies for the procurement and allocation of accommodation which will help ensure that suitability requirements, including the location of the accommodation, are met.
- 2.6 The current KHC contract collaborates resources to where they are needed most so that support can be provided to vulnerable people as quickly as possible. The main aim of the service is to help people who are at risk of losing their homes, providing the necessary support to enable service users to obtain housing. The contact also supports people who are sleeping rough by finding them safe housing and giving them help with finances, employment, improving their health, and their daily needs.

### **3. Current Position**

- 3.1 Within Gravesham, the Kent Homeless Connect service operates two supported accommodation facilities, offering 13 individual supported housing units. Given how the service operates, supported accommodation is not ring-fenced for customers that originate from a particular borough within the county, and therefore, whilst there are 13 units within Gravesham, currently 9 of these units are being occupied by Gravesham residents, with the remaining 4 being from other boroughs.
- 3.2 Within the service, there is a large supported housing facility located in Swale and this facility has 60 individual units in total. In the past, Gravesham has made numerous referrals to this provision, predominantly through the 'Everyone In' initiative at the start of the pandemic, but also where local provision couldn't accept someone in need of support at short notice. Despite the original remit of KHC being for those with low to medium needs this has more often been the case that we are working with those that have far more challenging requirements.
- 3.3 Since April 2019, the accommodation in Swale has accommodated 6 households from Gravesham within the scheme of which 5 are still there. Whilst living within

this facility, support workers focus on four key areas with residents, including money advice, physical health, mental health, and substance misuse.

#### **4. Look Ahead Service Provider**

- 4.1 Look Ahead provides supported housing, but they also offer support services too such as tenancy sustainment, community support, prevention support, and rough sleeping outreach services in the framework. Some of these areas are sub-contracted to other providers including Porchlights delivery of the rough sleeping service within Gravesham. Since the start of the contract, Look Ahead has received 708 referrals from Gravesham, across all service areas.
- 4.2 When a referral is made, clients are triaged, assessed, and assigned a key worker depending on location, nature of support, need, and vulnerability. Look Ahead also offers a waiting list for supported accommodation and their contracted homeless prevention resources work with the customer to either prevent their homelessness differently or until they obtain a vacancy within a supported provision.
- 4.3 There are 13 units of supported accommodation in Gravesham of which nine are residents from within the borough. The other four residents are from surrounding boroughs. All clients who are currently in KHC supported accommodation in Gravesend have been assessed and achieved a RAG rating of red concluding that they had a combination of high support needs and risks. Combined with the five placements in Swale, Gravesham currently has 14 people in supported accommodation.
- 4.4 There have been 241 accommodation referrals into Look Ahead accommodation. The support service has provided 98 households with alternative accommodation resulting in successful homeless prevention work.

#### **5. Porchlight Service Provider**

- 5.1 Porchlight offers a range of support to customers, commissioned as part of the Kent Homeless Connect service and their team operates 3 drop-in sessions a week within Gravesham and a weekly vulnerable female drop-in in partnership with the Medaille trust. They also deliver outreach support weekly, creating risk assessment /safety plans and support plans for rough sleepers. These can include advocacy, DWP support, and training/leading on modern-day slavery. Porchlight delivers a helpline and there have been 348 referrals through this line of households stating they are homeless or at threat of being homeless
- 5.2 Since the KHC contract commenced, there have been 503 referrals into the Porchlight service. Referrals can be made by anyone including professionals, the customer themselves and these would be triaged to determine whether the person is vulnerable and has a primary and additional need e.g. homeless and using substances. These referrals have resulted in 363 individuals being supported by Porchlight which is in addition to the service Gravesham also provides locally (some clients had multiple referrals into Porchlight which is the reason for the difference between the number of referrals and those being supported). Of the 503 initial referrals, there have been 459 onward referrals that can include GP, social services, drug and alcohol support, or other support agencies.

#### **6. Local Impact within Gravesham**

- 6.1 The delivery of tenancy support will leave a significant gap within existing provisions and failure to provide this within the borough could result in loss of tenancies resulting in homelessness. This will be an additional burden for the

- local authority homeless team and the risk of street homelessness for those that do not meet the threshold for priority need under the Housing Act 1996 (amended 2002). This would undo the good work achieved by national rough sleeping services and go against the directive from the government to end rough sleeping by 2027.
- 6.2 The loss of supported accommodation services will result in 14 single Gravesham residents being faced with losing their homes and support. This will put pressure onto the council housing registers and import needs into existing stock where these households require more than just general needs housing as all 14 are considered to have complex needs (drug and alcohol abuse, mental health, etc.). In addition, with 26 supported accommodation referrals on the waiting list and 50 households receiving tenancy support from the prevention team, these households will need intervention from the district council whether this is to sustain a home or source a new suitable housing pathway.
- 6.3 Gravesham has limited access to the private sector and only a small proportion of move-on options meaning that residents in crisis will have fewer housing options available to them placing an additional burden on local authorities, temporary accommodation, and scarce social housing.
- 6.4 There may be an assumption that the loss of these services can be picked up at the district level however, as a general needs provider, with an increasing platform of homelessness, this will be challenging. As Councils 'mop-up' the aftermath of lockdown, the lift on the ban of evictions, and the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act this will give additional pressure on already demanding and challenging workloads.
- 6.5 The greatest impact will be on vulnerable single people who already have barriers when faced with accessing accommodation with a single room rent allowance. The loss of valuable accommodation options will affect those people significantly.

## **7. Financial Impact and Next Steps**

- 7.1 The current service providers have used The Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) Research Team's [cost-benefit analysis \(CBA\) methodology](#) to estimate the potential fiscal cost (costs only to the public sector) per annum to KCC, districts, and the NHS as a result of the cessation of the Kent Homeless Connect (KHC) service. A copy of their analysis can be found in Appendix 3.
- 7.2 Their initial findings suggest that for every £1 saved by KCC through the cessation of the KHC contract, £1.59 will need to be spent by the public sector across the County by various agencies, estimated to be a fiscal cost of £8m per year with the largest proportion of that cost being borne by district authorities.
- 7.3 To understand the financial, social, and economic impact locally, it is proposed that Cabinet endorse the creation of a working group, chaired by Cabinet Member for Housing Services, to ensure that sufficient information is generated and supplied to the KCC Cabinet Member responsible for the portfolio to be considered over the coming months as part of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) KCC is responsible to complete. The working group will also be responsible to try and establish an alternative service delivery model at no additional cost to the local authority.
- 7.4 The Director (Housing) will liaise with the current service providers to schedule working group meetings and will extend the invite to third sector partners.

- 7.5 Discussions have also taken place with Department for Levelling-up, Communities & Housing (DLUCH) and potential future funding assistance to help mitigate the impact the KCC decision is likely to have on services to single people. They have confirmed that whilst it is possible to include additional resources that would ordinarily assist with the rough sleeping delivery, there are no guarantees that this will be approved as ultimately, they do not want to fund services that KCC have a responsibility to deliver (Mental Health, Public Health, etc.).

## **8. Appendices**

- 8.1 The following documents are to be published with the report:
- 8.2 Appendix 2 - VULNERABLE HOMELESSNESS SERVICE REDESIGN REPORT

## **9. Background Documents**

- 9.1 The following background documents were used:
- 9.2 VULNERABLE HOMELESSNESS SERVICE REDESIGN – Kent County Council Adult Social Care Cabinet Committee – 23 November 2017
- 9.3

**Lead Officer:** Daniel Killian, Director (Housing)

**Email:** [daniel.killian@gravesham.gov.uk](mailto:daniel.killian@gravesham.gov.uk)

<b>Secondary Implications</b>	
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	KCC's decision to cease the KHC contract, and not replace the current service provision is likely to have a significant impact on budgets, workloads and homelessness figures. To mitigate the impact, a working group will be formed to ensure that KCC is provided with relevant and meaningful data to be considered as part of the EqIA they are required to do.
<b>Data Protection Impact Assessment</b>	<p><i>A data protection impact assessment (DPIA) should be carried out at the start of any major project involving the use of personal data or if you are making a significant change to an existing process.</i></p> <p>a. Does the project/change being recommended through this paper involve the processing of <a href="#">personal data</a> or <a href="#">special category data</a> or <a href="#">criminal offence data</a>? A definition of each type of data can be found on the Information Commissioner's Office website via the above links. No</p> <p>b. If yes to question a, have you completed and attached a DPIA including Data Protection Officer advice? n/a</p> <p>c. If no to question b, please seek advice from your nominated DPIA assessor or the Information Governance Team at <a href="mailto:gdpr@medway.gov.uk">gdpr@medway.gov.uk</a>. n/a</p>
<b>Equality Impact Assessment</b>	<p>a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community? If yes, please explain answer. No</p> <p>b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality? If yes, please explain answer. n/a</p> <p><i>In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above</i></p>
<b>Crime and Disorder</b>	The provision of suitable housing related support and specialist accommodation reduces the risk of households becoming homeless which helps prevent them being victims of crime or becoming involved in criminal activities.
<b>Digital and website implications</b>	None
<b>Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults</b>	The provision of suitable housing related support and specialist accommodation contributes towards meeting the needs of / safeguard children and vulnerable adults by providing appropriate and safe accommodation.