



Working in partnership with



Coproducing for the future of Supported Housing in Suffolk

January 2016



Suffolk user forum

The voice for emotional and mental health in Suffolk

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Introduction

Suffolk User Forum is a service user led mental health charity that works with service users, family carers, commissioners and service providers to help gather feedback and ideas that can improve and develop how services are commissioned and delivered.

We were asked to support co-production for the redesign of the contracts that set out the way in which supported housing works in Suffolk, as a new contract from Suffolk county Council will start from 1st April 2018. Commissioners told us that they really wanted to make sure that people who use supported housing could have the opportunity to tell them;

1. What works well now.
2. What doesn't work well now.
3. What could be changed or improved.
4. What the 'perfect' offer of supported housing would include or provide.
5. They also asked to know anything else that people felt would be helpful.

To help us plan how we would meet and have conversations with people, SUF set up a supported housing steering group, which included service users who have lived in supported housing and who have received 'floating support', family carers and housing professionals. Together we discussed ideas for providing the widest opportunities for people who live, work or have family members living in supported housing to be involved so that we could gather as many views, experiences and ideas as possible. We made a commitment to working in co-production.

What is co-production?

Co-production means working together to do something. It enables people with different views and ideas coming together to make things better for everyone.

Co-production is about people who use services, family carers and people who run services working together as equals. Being equal means nobody is more important than anyone else, everybody's view is important.

It also means that commissioners make a commitment to really value the views of everyone, to listen and understand them and to make sure that these are included in the plans for the new contract. This helps us to know that we have been listened to and that our views do matter and can make a difference.



How did we gather people's ideas and experiences to support co-production?

We held six events across the County



At these events we held conversations and discussions with 54 people which included:

- 19 Service users who were living in or had recently moved from supported housing in Suffolk.
- Three family carers.
- Nine staff who work in supported housing or mental health.
- 24 people from the Suffolk Voluntary Sector.



Bury St Edmunds



Ipswich



Lowestoft



Sudbury



Stowmarket



Felixstowe



We designed 'easy to read' questionnaires for service users, family carers and staff working in supported housing schemes.

The service user questionnaires were sent to all supported schemes together with a newsletter. There was a copy for each person living at the scheme. The newsletter told people about the opportunity for them to have their say about supported housing. It explained the reason for the questionnaire and invited people to the six events.

- We sent all supported housing schemes a copy of the staff questionnaire, a family carer questionnaire and a link to the staff on line survey, which was on Survey Monkey.
- We have received **27 completed questionnaires from service users** living in supported housing schemes.
- We have received **four paper copies of the staff questionnaire**.
- We have received **10 on-line questionnaire responses from staff** through an online survey with survey monkey.
- In the spirit of co-production, all recommendations made by service users and staff are included in the body of the feedback provided by staff, family carers and service users.

Key headlines from feedback – People asked for;

1. Real choice about accommodation.
2. Information about supported housing.
3. Welcome pack.
4. Good end of tenancy support so new tenants do not inherit past tenant's bills.
5. Flexible and individualised support that supports independence and personal growth.
6. 'Tenancy Ready' training courses.
7. Flexibility regarding accommodation, length of stay, times of welfare, health and safety checks.
8. The speed of repairs needs to be improved with the majority of housing landlords. The situation with Metropolitan housing needs urgent resolution.
9. More opportunity for social networks and social activities.
10. Family carers to be more involved in supported housing.
11. Service users to be more involved in staff recruitment.



Service users at the 6 events and in questionnaires told us...



1. That the best things about living in supported housing are;

Having a home & safe place, with support, privacy & dignity.

- Having somewhere safe to live 'My own home at last', 'it's given me another chance at life'
- Having support to live alone.
- Having someone there to talk to during difficult times, so I can receive appropriate advice and support
- Privacy.
- Having other tenants around to talk to.
- Getting my dignity back. 'I am treated as an equal with respect but not 'cared for'.
- Helping me to feel normal like other people. Cooking and cleaning.
- Feeling I am treated as an adult being supported to do things for myself.
- Being able to live my life, and be independent to manage money.



2. When moving into supported housing people said;

They had a feeling of being in a safe place, being welcomed. A sense of freedom, I achieved my dream; beginning to build my life and plan for the future. But, others said;

Choice and decision making about accepting a property

- People said there was little or no choice of accommodation.
- They said they were given very little information about supported housing.
- People would like to know what all providers offer well before the actual housing offer. People said 'I just wished I had known more before'.
- Some people said they never had the opportunity to visit the proposed flat/accommodation before accepting it.
- They needed to make decisions very fast, e.g. within 24 or 48 hours.
- Some people were able to visit a property before accepting the offer. Other people did not get chance to visit before they moved.
- People said that family carers and close friends or important people involved in their network should be involved more in the process.
- In shared accommodation other tenants felt that they should be involved in any new admissions, as new placements can affect their day to day life, wellbeing and recovery.
- They suggested that any person who is looking at a new admission should be able to stay for 2-3 days, so they and others have a chance to get to know each other.
- Some people said that too much choice could be scaring and overwhelming. People could worry about making a 'wrong choice'. So choice needs to be based on individuals needs and pace.

Inheriting outstanding bills and debts from previous tenants

- A number of people reported that it was common for new tenants to acquire the previous tenants outstanding utility bills and debts; this often took a long time to sort out and some people reported that they just paid the bills from their own money, however it was of concern that these were often considerable amounts which were up to £280.00.

Settling in

- Some people need more support to pack/unpack; to make their home and accommodation homely, to understand bills and meter readings.
- People needed a lot of support to buy new furniture for their homes. Everyone said they did not want furniture left behind by previous tenants. They wished to choose their own furniture.
- People said that it could sometimes take support workers many months to help them sort out furniture, in particular if they had bought self-assemble furniture, this could take as long as eight months to have support to assemble it.
- People said they need more support worker time at the beginning of the placement. There is a lot to be considered, including registering with a new GP, as well as all the housing related things.
- More consistency with support workers would be valued. Help with form filling needed. It's all very complicated, takes up one to one time with support worker.

- People felt it would be really helpful to be able to attend 'Tenancy Ready' training courses prior to taking on a tenancy.

Welcome pack and information

- No one had received a welcome pack on arrival or any information about the supported housing scheme, local community or what support workers could help them with. This was felt as very disempowering.
- Everyone felt that there should be a welcome pack, that is simple in its layout, easy to read, as when people first move everything can be very overwhelming.
- People suggested that they should receive a list of things that support workers can help them with and the things that they cannot.
- There should be information about how people manage day to day things within their flat, from changing a light bulb, reading metres, to using a washing machine and choosing furniture.
- There should be information about the local community and local resources, including shops, local club's and activities, all the things you get when you stay in a holiday let for example, things that help you to know what is available.
- Some people said that it may not be helpful to use the term 'my new home', as this may give the wrong message, when the accommodation is temporary. However, others understood that many people move accommodation/move home, and that not everyone has a permanent home.



3. People told us that sometimes some things do not work so well for them;

Knowing my support levels, fear of moving on, being 'looked after' and too many 'checks'.

Assessments beds

- People said that these can appear to give people time to get to know a service and to see if they would feel comfortable being in supported housing. However, people were concerned about the impact of a service user, should they wish to stay but the provider feel the placement is not right for them; this could feel 'like a kick in the teeth'.
- People could worry about making attachments with other service users.

Fears and worries

- Some people were very concerned about the mental health needs of other people in shared living accommodation, and said they often felt scared, unnerved and sometimes too frightened to sleep.

- One person was concerned that they might lose their tenancy should they become unwell and have a period of time as an inpatient. They feared their flat would be taken away.
- A number of people said 'I want to work but cannot afford to with the cost of supported housing'.

Isolation

- Many people in independent flats reported feeling socially isolated

Landlord Repairs

- The length of time it took for repairs by housing landlords were raised as a big issue of concern for many. Particularly in properties are owned by Metropolitan in the Bury St Edmunds area.
- A separate report has been sent to the supported Housing commissioner about these very serious concerns, which includes reports from service users about discrimination by landlord repair contractors who have been verbally abusive and discriminatory to service users accommodated in Metropolitan Housing.

One to one support from Support workers

- Some people did not fully understand what level of support they were supposed to be getting.
- Everyone said that people needed support once they had moved on to independent living, and that the type and length of this support should be assessed on an individual basis.
- People said the support given by support workers can vary. Service users said that 'some workers do not encourage independence', saying, 'I don't want to be looked after'.
- One person felt a burden to their support worker.
- Others said that support workers time was very pressured. They were often late for one to one meetings. This causes stress and anxiety, and reduces the amount of time spent together, making it harder for people to get to know one another.
- Support worker time, (one to one) is for all areas of support, so when moving, it is spent on the functional activities associated with moving rather than care planning, and actual psychological and emotional support. Form filling in particular can use up hours and hours of support worker time.
- Some people said 'staff want to look after me. I don't need that, I want to be able to cope and do things for myself. Just tell me or show me let me try. Those are the best people'.
- Some people said that support staff are based some 20 minutes' walk away from their flats. They were concerned that if they did go to the support worker's office, there was nowhere private to meet and talk, so any conversations were in a public space, which other people are using. This made personal conversations very difficult.

- People stressed that their illness should not come before them as a person.
- Staff said that it was important for them to be human and to understand that sometimes people just need a re-assuring hug; a human spontaneous response.

Tenants meetings

- Communication about tenant's meetings was said by some people to be poor, with them only receive one or two days' notice about meeting dates.

The term 'moving on'

- The term 'moving on' was raised by a number of people as difficult to deal with. People said they did not know what it meant, it was just a term and phrase used.
- People said they found it intimidating, a constant worry and a focus on dates rather than individual needs.
- People have asked whether this term could be reviewed and looked at, with an increased focus on person centred care and with a degree of flexibility regarding the length of placement.
- People who had 'moved on' to independent living commented that moving had worked well for them saying 'now I can cope with things myself'.
- People wanted a permanent home with housing related support.
- People said they felt that residents/tenants are pushed by staff 'to move on', especially when they have been in supported housing over 4 years, but were concerned that there really wasn't anywhere for people to move on to.
- People said that they could on move on once they had proved they could keep their flats clean.
- People complained that gateway to home Choice can take ages; with people waiting months to get a banding. This can be detrimental to people's wellbeing and mental health.
- The bidding system can feel complicated and stressful.

Recruitment of staff

- People overwhelming said that they felt that service users should be involved in the recruitment of staff, so that they could get a 'feel' for the people being considered and support recruitment of staff with the most helpful attitudes for their support roles.

Welfare and health & safety checks

- Many people commented that there were far too many welfare checks and too many health and safety checks. They said that these were intrusive.
- People understood that once they had left a supported housing project they were not allowed to come back.
- For one person being in supported housing reminded them that they had experienced a mental health 'breakdown'.



4. People told us they would like greater flexibility in key areas;

More flexibility regarding provision and staffing arrangements; speedier repairs; Improved socialisation and leisure activities, including pets and Wi-Fi.

Accommodation

- Service users said there needs to be more flats, as it can take a long time to be offered one.
- Placements to be more flexible to ensure that people with very different mental health needs are not sharing the same accommodation.

Social events and activities

- More opportunities for activities with the other tenants or to engage in social or group activities, including accompanied trips out with staff. Many people said individual flats can be isolating, one of the worst problems for people with mental health problems
- Pets should be allowed and cat flaps provided.
- Wi-Fi installation and the opportunity to have Sky TV.

Staffing levels and support worker roles

- Improved and higher staffing levels which could include later shifts in the evening.
- Work more on giving us our skills back. Don't think we are not capable and don't do it for us please.
- The opportunity for support to be flexible to enable people to gain new life skills, and to build confidence.

Repairs

- The speed of repairs needs to be improved.

Welfare, health & safety checks

- More flexibility for welfare checks and housing inspections so they are more convenient for the tenant. It was asked if these checks could be made quarterly, rather than monthly.



5. People told us the following things would support 'perfect' supported housing, please tell us what this would include or provide?

More information, the right support, equal partnerships, careers and employment advice.

Accommodation to be based on similar levels of need

- Ensure that people are placed in shared housing according to similar needs and levels of wellness.

Flexible support

- More flexible support so people receive the right support at the right time, i.e. high 24/7 if very unwell.
- More schemes with staff support resident on site, particularly day time hours, with minimal intrusion, but with the knowledge there is someone there if I need them or when I am unwell.

Increase social opportunities

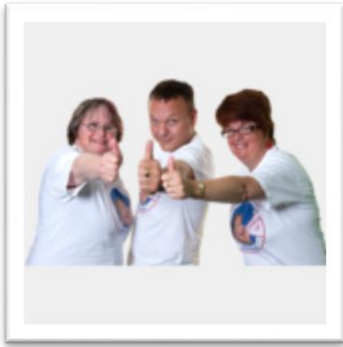
- Improve social opportunities.

Information

- More written information and guidelines.

Support at all stage of recovery

- An equal partnership between service users and support workers that allows good support at all stages of recovery, promoting increased independence as people grow in self-confidence.
- Support to manage individual goals such as reducing medication; planning for discharge from mental health services.
- Post recovery support
- Support to access employment, work and career advice.



6. People said the following things would be helpful to them

A wider offer, more properties; offer of permanent tenancies; and more flexible support.

- To make 'supported housing' (if it is isolated flats) permanent to give people more stability so there is no move on
- Get rid of the low individual flats and just offer separate support with permanent tenancies and a lower rent. This would be a great help to someone who wants to move on and work.
- To ensure that only very permanent sick people should be living together in one home.
- More properties available with support.
- It is important that these services continue to be provided for those who need them, despite the funding and financial challenges. The accommodation is great; I live with love and everything is perfect.
- I liked choosing and buying my own things for my flat. I do not want other people's things or for a flat to be set up for me, that doesn't make it my own. I feel a pride in saving up and waiting for my things like other people do.
- Very happy here – very pleased that staff have a noticeboard sharing activities.
- I am satisfied with the one to one support I receive.
- Living in 24-hour support has done a lot for my confidence and helped me to budget before I move on.



Staff who completed questionnaires & who attended our events said...

1. Mental health supported housing support people to build their future.

- It can assist people to learn the basic skills needed to be able to live independently.
- Enough support time to enable attendance at services they need.

- Supported Housing organisations are likely to receive more referrals with multiple and complex needs, including physical disabilities in the future. Currently our training is limited as to how we can fully support people with physical disabilities. Training programmes need to be aware of this and provide adequate training with regards to moving and handling.
- Promote social inclusion and meaningful use of time. People should not be left to sit in rooms or flats with no constructive use of time as this is unhelpful.
- By building on individuals' existing strengths and equipping them with new skills and new ideas that can help them to overcome the difficulties that they experience on a daily basis. Letting individuals regain faith in themselves and letting them see their dreams as conceivable plans.
- Ensure that support focuses on goals and aspirations, as well as needs.
- Working in partnership with others and to implement care plans.
- By providing a safe and supportive environment in which people can develop personal strength, confidence and skills which will help them to gain and sustain greater independence.

2. Mental Health Supported Housing can focus more on individual happiness and quality of life?

- It can help people learn how to lead an independent life as possible thus finding out their strengths and weaknesses.
- Be in areas where there is adequate access to services.
- Supported housing is very well equipped to build independence and enable move on to people's own tenancies. However, staff require adequate training to assist with the growing requirement to support physical as well as mental health issues. Staff also require better training to deal with benefits issues as things like review forms and Work Capability Assessments are becoming more frequent. This causes individual's significant anxiety and staff are required to have the relevant knowledge to assist them in completing these promptly and effectively.
- More staff need to be available. Supported housing is becoming more like warden supported housing.
- By creating an environment where individual growth is most likely.
- By inspiring hope and providing holistic care
- By empowering people through strength model.
- Ensure all organisations have personalised paper work so that it is completely individual and not fitting into boxes.
- Encourage community access, education and activities
- Supported Housing will act as safe place to gain confidence, skills, expand social network, engage in meaningful activities and daily living skills.
- By giving more money to the agencies running them so they can assist people to find out what they do and don't like by being about to accompany them to cinema's, theatre etc.

- Run a service that is similar to sheltered housing with good staffing levels.
- Julian Support's ethos and paperwork already allows for person-centred planning and support to be administered. The recovery approach also utilised by the organisation also allows to work in a strengths-based manner.
- By helping individuals face the challenges that they need to meet in order to grow and develop. There is a fallacy amongst people in general that one's happiness and quality in life is based upon your external circumstances. A lot of the service users I work with believe their life would be radically different if they had a girlfriend and their own flat but, like anyone irrespective of if they have 'mental health problems' or not, if they are unwilling to face up to the challenges in their lives that hold them back then they will also feel conflicted by these.
- Promote a person centred approach and not one which just needs to tick all of the right boxes.
- Individual recovery and happiness unique to each person. Local community and realistic approach to the pursuit of happiness can be achieved with appropriate support.
- By seeing the service user as a person and not a target and developing support around their individual needs and aspirations.

3. We can ensure there is a good culture within the supporting organisation by...

- Good communication between service users and the service provider.
- Training, good staffing levels, clear vision and ethos.
- To ensure that staff are working to the same values and ethics and when crises arise, they all pull in the same direction in order to resolve matters efficiently.
- By being as transparent as possible, by setting ideals and goals to work towards. By equipping staff with resilience to hope even when morale is low.
- Regular feedback from clients. Looking at what works well and what could be
- closer working, involving service users and carers
- By reviewing the practices in place.
- Ensuring the Service User is in the centre of everything we do. Person entered approach, good training for staff and clear/effective systems in place. Everything should be audible that is done by a staff member in order to offer support.
- By recruiting staff who have the right attitude and approach and offering excellent training and development.

4. We can ensure that senior managers lead and run the organisation well by...

- More input from commissioners or managers higher above so that staff feel they are being listened to.
- By picking leaders who are open to new ideas and who are never satisfied in terms of pursuing excellence.
- Good communication structures allowing managers to know what is occurring on a day-to-day basis. Managers can also spend more time at projects to get to know each site's characteristics.
- Regular appraisals and supervisions and occasionally meeting with the employees to ask how everything is going, bypassing their manager to ensure there is nothing going on and being missed.
- Be involved and local to their area.
- Valuing staff
- Good communication network in the service. Senior Managers to produce and submit extensive report monthly that demonstrate all aspect of service standards are met.
- By recruiting staff with the right attitude.
- Ensure more money is put into staffing as the more cuts are made the quality of experienced staff will drop
- Consultation and flexible referrals.

5. Supported Housing Staff said they felt valued and supported by their organisation.

60%	Yes
40%	Sometimes
0%	No

6. Supported Housing Staff said other things could be done to develop supported housing for the future?

- If supported housing is only able to run with minimal staff, there isn't the opportunity to engage and support clients in their recovery. Services offering 8-12 hours of support a week are unable to deliver. In short, the most vulnerable are unable to manage. Hospital readmissions increase and people are then considered for residential and this is more expensive.

- Cutting supported housing budgets is a false economy and should be measured in readmissions and discharges from secondary mental health care services, not survey moneys or graphs of a client's move forward.
- I think the economic model that shapes the way services are viewed needs to be revised. Ironically by looking at efficiency savings and how the services can be cut we end up with more expensive services which are far less effective. One respondent stated *'Take the diabolical situation with our NHS mental health trust. They cut the posts within teams, froze recruitment etc. to save money so that the majority of nurses, social workers and OTs left within the teams became overwhelmed so then long term sickness went up and, because they were running on skeleton staff, had to be replaced by agency staff that cost more and are less committed and less effective. The staff that don't go off sick end up lowering their expectations in an effort to survive and end up giving up due to the general futility of the situation. So to summarize cuts = more costs due to sickness and agency and a less effective service. The same thing is slowly creeping into the supported housing sector with cuts to funding etc. If I had my own supported housing company I would look to pay as high as I could in order to recruit the best staff, this would work out best for everyone. From my experience good staff always want to upstage one another in what they can do within a project so you end up with a centre of excellence. Centres of excellence move service users on quicker saving money, achieving better outcomes, they also are more resilient more forward thinking and are more reliable. When we use an economic model we look at costs, we do not consider the added value that individual can bring but that ironically is what the service industry is all about!'*
- Service user involvement and staff involvement.
- Reassure, only make changes when necessary.
- The funding needs to be increased by at least 50% because most of the support staff are on lower salary band. These are staff who are the key to deliver quality support to the service users. In addition, the new contract should be given at least for ten years for consistency of the service. Too much change too often causes chaos; service users and staff members suffers from it.
- More flexibility, recognising that the one size fits all approach doesn't work.



We would like to thank everyone who took part in our events & survey's and supported us to deliver coproduction for the new supported housing tender & contract.