

Stevenage Borough Council: Oaks Cross Emergency Housing Scheme



The project

Stevenage is no stranger to the housing crisis being faced across many parts of the UK. The council has over 2,000 local families on the waiting list for affordable housing. Last year 382 households were placed into emergency accommodation, including 30 individuals presenting as rough sleeping or sofa surfing.

As part of Stevenage Borough Council's commitment to providing high quality accommodation throughout the town, work was undertaken to deliver Oaks Cross – a highly sustainable, low cost, emergency housing scheme consisting of 11 purpose-built properties, constructed within the space of just six months. Oaks Cross is also being utilised as site for Stevenage's Housing First work. Housing First tackles the most complex problems experienced by homeless residents, via a comprehensive package of wraparound services; vulnerable individuals are offered housing first, and then rigorous support to address the underlying causes of their vulnerability and homelessness. This service offer includes courses to improve the lives of vulnerable residents with some of the greatest need – providing counselling through to managing finances.

The council aims to grow the number of affordable properties managed by 500 before 2025. At present, delivery is on target with 387 finished and 288 further properties under construction. Having adopted the Housing First approach to homelessness, the council has secured an additional £525,000 to fund its rough sleeper initiative for the next three years, from 2022-25. The council has worked in partnership alongside external agencies, providing a joined-up approach. Together it ensures all tenants receive a

fantastic support package assisting them in establishing better foundations to start rebuilding their lives.

The wraparound network includes Spectrum: Change, Grow Live, Mind mental health network, Haven First and No More Service, and the council continue to grow the network.

Haven First is a local organisation that supports homeless people within Stevenage and North Hertfordshire. It has been fundamental in providing extensive support services to those residents in Oaks Cross, including a wide range of courses from counselling to life skills. Hill Construction has been key in the build of these innovative, modern homes and have worked closely with the council to deliver them on schedule and to a tight budget. There are currently 11 installed in Oaks Cross.

The site at Oaks Cross was subject to a successful funding bid to Homes England and the Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities (DLUHC) as part of the Next Steps Accommodation Programme.

The benefits

The project benefits residents currently homeless, facing homelessness or in need of emergency housing. 134 individuals have lived in and benefitted from the support package. 57 people have been moved into permanent accommodation or supported living. The rough sleeper count within a year has reduced by 57% from 14 to eight.

The additional funding for the council's Housing First approach is allowing it to develop further schemes focusing on the provision of intense support alongside a secure and stable home. So far, it has provided an additional 30 spaces to ensure some of the most vulnerable residents have an address and a secure home environment, throughout one of their most challenging life experiences.