**North Somerset Council**

**EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION SERVICE**

**SERVICE SPECIFICATION (updated October 2023)**

**1. Background**

1.1. North Somerset Council (the Council) is commissioning for the provision of Emergency Accommodation to assist with its statutory duty to provide interim accommodation for homeless households. This accommodation is required on a night by night basis for a short period while the Council determines if a longer-term duty is required or more settled accommodation must be found. The accommodation required will be for couples and single person households and households with children. See SQ document for further information on usage figures.

1.2 Suppliers will operate under a framework agreement to provide their accommodation to the Council. The process for assessment and registration onto the framework and the purchasing of accommodation via spot purchase is described in the ***Standard Supplier Questionnaire (SQ)*** document.

1.3 Suppliers who have been assessed and promoted to the framework, will provide accommodation on a night by night basis when required by the Council, as described in this specification.

1.4 On occasion, the Authority may need to ‘block book’ accommodation to ensure that we have sufficient resources to meet need. Where this is the case, the Authority will directly approach the provider to discuss charges and terms.

**Part 1 - ACCOMMODATION STANDARD**

**2. Accommodation**

2.1 The accommodation a supplier makes available to the framework must, as a minimum, meet the requirements of the West of England Rental Scheme Minimum Property Standards (see Appendix E).

2.2 Whilst only a guide, the checklist of standards will assist in assessing the accommodation against the requirements that ensure the property is compliant with the laws relating to all Planning, Building Regulations and Housing legislation, that will ensure it can be used as emergency accommodation.

2.3 All accommodation must have passed all relevant inspections and the provider must be able to provide documentation and proofs that all inspections are up to date and any necessary licences are in place. Any accommodation that does not fully comply will not be included within or will be removed from the framework.

2.4 The accommodation is required across a range of sizes, from single rooms with shared facilities, to one, two- or three-bedroom self-contained accommodation. It is not a requirement for a supplier to provide accommodation of all sizes.

2.5 The Council is looking to maximise the number of units that are accessible to people with a physical impairment and will work with suppliers to help maximise the number of accessible units.

2.6 Accommodation is required throughout North Somerset to place households in areas close to their employment, schools and support network. This will mainly be Weston-super-Mare, Clevedon, Nailsea and Portishead. Other areas can be considered but it is important to ensure that any accommodation has reasonable transport links and access to basic services, such as GPs, launderettes, schools, benefit offices and food shops. It is not a requirement for a supplier to provide accommodation in all areas.

2.7 All accommodation provided in the framework must be secure and fully furnished, ready for occupancy by a household referred by the Council at short notice. This will include but is not limited to bed(s), bedding, wardrobe(s) (sufficient for the number of people who will be occupying the room), chair(s), chest of drawers or bedside table and access to a number of electrical power points appropriate to the room size.

**3. Repairs**

3.1. Suppliers must maintain the accommodation to meet the standards required in the West of England Rental Scheme Standard (Appendix E).

3.2 Any disrepair that compromises the safety and security of the accommodation, results in a lack of hot water or heating or access to adequate bathing facilities, must be remedied by the supplier within 24 hours. Any other repairs must be carried out as soon as possible to ensure compliance with the West of England Rental Scheme Standard.

3.3 The Council is not responsible for any damage caused by any of the households in the accommodation and must be advised by the supplier immediately, where damage has been deliberately or maliciously caused by a household.

**Part 2 - MANAGEMENT STANDARD**

**4. Access to the accommodation**

4.1 Accommodation is required at short notice, usually on the day a household becomes homeless. Bookings are therefore made at short notice and households may stay for a relatively short period of time. Bookings will be made by the Councils’ Homelessness Prevention Team (or Emergency Duty Team who provide out of hours services for the Council), contacting the supplier directly over the telephone, and will confirm the names and ages of the household to be accommodated, the room number(s) that they will be occupying, the agreed daily charge for their accommodation (including VAT) and the time they will be arriving. The Council will send ~~a~~ written confirmation by secure email to the supplier, before the household arrive at the accommodation. A risk assessment of the household can also be sent by email to the supplier if requested and will confirm a named case officer to contact in case of emergency. Suppliers must, therefore, have a responsive **‘booking in’ procedure** to ensure that the household can access the accommodation quickly, easily and safely.

4.2 Suppliers must be available to accept bookings by telephone Monday to Friday, from 9.00am to 6.00pm. Suppliers should also be available outside of office hours to enable The Emergency Duty Team to access emergency accommodation.

4.3. The ‘booking in’ process for a household will require a member of the suppliers’ staff meeting the household at the accommodation. The Council will issue a set of house rules (Appendix F), that must be signed by the household prior to them arriving at the accommodation, to confirm that they have understood what is expected of them. The supplier will ensure that the household is fully aware of all fire and safety information.

4.4 Where a ‘rent to rent’ model is used by the provider, copies of the current HMO licence issued by NSC or the relevant authority will need to be sent to us when accepting our booking.

**5. Safeguarding and Risk sharing**

5.1. Suppliers will have procedures in place for dealing with allegations of abuse which are fully compatible with North Somerset Council’s current policies and procedures for safeguarding children and adults from abuse.

5.2. Suppliers will be accommodating some of the Councils’ most vulnerable households. Because of this, any of the suppliers’ staff members who come into contact with homeless households need to be risk assessed and have an up-to-date Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check. It will be the responsibility of the Supplier to obtain and assess these checks, sharing resulting information with the Council.

5.3. Suppliers must have in place safeguarding procedures for adults at risk and for children. These procedures must always be followed and must be embedded into the suppliers’ organisation at every level. They must be included in staff induction and staff training and must be fully understood by all staff who come into contact with homeless households. Any safeguarding concerns that arise must be referred to the Councils’ safeguarding team immediately, in accordance with the suppliers’ safeguarding procedures.

5.4. Suppliers will ensure that all staff training on safeguarding children and safeguarding adults at risk is updated every two years or sooner if required.

5.5. Some households may either present, or be especially vulnerable to, certain risks. Relevant risk information will be shared by the Council with suppliers at the time of booking. It is acknowledged that, following the suppliers’ own risk assessment, the risk may sometimes mean that suppliers will be unable to accept a booking.

5.6. Where new information about vulnerability or risk emerges, suppliers are expected to share this information with the Council promptly and will, whenever necessary, agree new risk management arrangements and complete formal incident reporting. Any serious incidents must be reported immediately to the Council’s Homelessness Prevention Team by telephone and followed up by a full written report, sent via secure email, to the named case officer within one working day. This includes any concerns about domestic abuse, other violence or exploitation within the household. Similarly, if the Council becomes aware of additional relevant risk information, this will be shared promptly with the supplier.

5.7. Where a supplier becomes aware of a household needing some additional support (for example mental health support, parenting support etc.) or if there are any concerns for the welfare of the household, the Supplier should inform the Councils Homelessness Prevention Team as soon as possible, so that appropriate support can be arranged. If the household is receiving additional support, the supplier may also need to communicate or liaise with the additional support provider.

**6. Equalities**

6.1 Suppliers must have in place Equality procedures. These procedures must always be followed and must be embedded into the suppliers’ organisation at every level. They must be included in staff induction and staff training and must be fully understood by all staff who come into contact with homeless households.

**7. Occupying the accommodation**

7.1 Suppliers should respect the privacy of the residents of emergency accommodation. They should not enter a households’ accommodation unless they have consent without giving reasonable notice, except in an emergency, when there is a risk to life or limb; or when there is a safeguarding concern in line with the supplier’s safeguarding procedures, or when the behaviour of the household creates a risk to other residents.

7.3 Suppliers must have a daily checking procedure to ensure that households are occupying the accommodation and fulfilling the terms of their stay. Suppliers must inform the Council immediately if they become aware that the household is not in occupation.

7.3 Households must be informed how to contact the supplier, both for routine issues from Monday to Friday 9.00am to 6.00pm and, in case of emergency, at any other times. The supplier must make it clear to the household how to report disrepair and who to contact if there is any damage or disrepair that presents a risk to the household or any other household within the accommodation.

7.4 Suppliers will have discretion whether or not to accommodate a household with their pet or pets. Assistance animals, such as Guide dogs, must be permitted to stay at the property under the Equalities Act 2010. There is no such provision for self-registered ‘support’ animals

7.5 The supplier will not move households from one unit of accommodation to another without the prior agreement of, or request by, the Councils’ Homelessness Prevention team.

**8. Ending a household’s stay in the accommodation**

8.1. If a legal duty to accommodate the household ends, it may be necessary for the household to be booked out of their accommodation at short notice. The Council will advise the supplier by telephone if the Households’ stay in the accommodation is to end and will confirm this in writing via secure email the same day. The supplier will support this process by ensuring that these households do not continue to occupy the accommodation under the Councils contract.

8.2 If a households’ behaviour results in them being asked by the supplier to leave the accommodation, the Council’s Homelessness Prevention Team must be informed by telephone immediately, preferably before the household leaves, so that arrangements can be made to accommodate that household elsewhere if necessary. This must then be followed up with written confirmation from the supplier by secure e-mail, within one working day. It is expected that by working with the Council and with other partner agencies, the numbers of households being asked to leave in this manner will be very small.

8.4 Suppliers will need to ensure that the accommodation is safe and secure, which will include changing the locks periodically to ensure that previous residents cannot access the accommodation.

**9. Flexibility to meet the needs of households**

9.1 As well as the provision of accommodation, the Council expects the supplier to be flexible and, as far as is reasonable, available to meet the needs of households that are accommodated. At the Council’s request, this might include helping households to get to important appointments, dealing with correspondence etc.

9.2 If a household does not speak English or has other communication needs (e.g. BSL), the supplier must ensure that there is a way to communicate essential information, for example in writing or through telephone or face-to-face interpreting.

**10. Partnerships**

10.1. Suppliers will need to work closely and collaboratively with other agencies in North Somerset, who might be supporting households in emergency accommodation. This will include the Council team that made the booking and may also include other support agencies, for example the Social Work team, floating support, drug and alcohol support, mental health support etc. The supplier will liaise with these services when necessary, to ensure that households are supported effectively.

**11. Local Amenities**

11.1 The booking-in process will include ensuring households are aware of local amenities including places of worship, particularly if the households are new to the area or the country.

**Part 3 - ADMINISTRATION STANDARD**

**12. Information sharing**

12.1 All information sharing must comply with the General Data Protection Regulations and the supplier’s own data procedures.

12.2 Suppliers will share, when requested by the Council, accurate information about all households currently being accommodated, including name, household size and ages, contact details and address. This will include information about any concerns, issues or warnings. Because of the sensitivity of the information, any personal information will need to be sent to the Council via secure email.

12.3 The supplier will pass messages from the Council to a household or advise them if the Council needs to contact them.

**13. Data protection**

13.1. Suppliers must have up to date data protection procedures that comply with relevant legislation and ensure it is adhered to at all times, so that households’ personal information is kept safe and is not shared with others without cause or consent.

**14. Complaints**

14.1. Suppliers must have a complaints procedure. Information about how to complain should be made available in an understandable format to households, and the procedure should cover timescales for response and how the complaint will be escalated if not satisfactorily dealt with. The complaints procedure must be adhered to at all times, a complaint is made, and the Council’s Homelessness Prevention Team will only become involved in a complaint, if the suppliers’ complaints procedure has been followed and the complaint remains unresolved.

**15. Financial arrangements**

15.1. Charges for the Households’ accommodation will be calculated at the agreed daily rate including VAT and Suppliers will submit Invoices for payment on a weekly basis. Invoices must be accurate and submitted to North Somerset Council electronically. The Council will check and pay the invoice within 30 days of submission.

**16. Service charging and Council Tax**

16.1. The amount agreed for the provision of the accommodation must be inclusive of any charges and the household will not be charged any other amount by the supplier.

16.2 Suppliers must provide a breakdown of the daily charges and expenses included in the amount agreed for the accommodation (e.g. gas, electricity, cleaning, etc.).

**17. Key Performance Indicators**

17.1 Suppliers of accommodation will be monitored to meet the following targets:

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| 17.2 **Invoicing:** Invoicing requirements are described above – it is the responsibility of the supplier to ensure that invoices are submitted in a timely and accurate manner.  **Target 1 - Suppliers must submit accurate weekly invoices no more than 10 working days in arrears;** |
| 17.3 **Evictions:** Evictions must be kept to an absolute minimum and all possible steps taken to prevent a household being evicted from accommodation must be explored. If at any time a supplier needs to evict a household from accommodation, this should be notified to the Councils’ Homelessness Prevention team at the earliest opportunity, providing clear reasons for the eviction. At this stage the team may wish to discuss the situation further with the supplier before the eviction takes place.  The process must be supported by the supplier making a written statement about the eviction which must be submitted to Council within one working day of the eviction taking place.  **Target 2 - Suppliers are targeted to evict no more than 3% of households**  17.4 **Abandonment:** If the supplier becomes aware that the Household has moved out of the accommodation without the request or knowledge of the supplier or the council, the supplier must notify the council as soon as possible and the accommodation booking must be cancelled.  **Target 3 – Suppliers must notify the council that a household has abandoned the accommodation within 24 hours of their vacating;** |