

Supported Housing

The Missing Link in Social Care Reform

A Call to Action



Partners in Care
and Health



February 2026

Executive Summary

Local authorities are under unprecedented financial pressure, and social care reform is now firmly back on the national agenda. But unless supported housing is treated as core social infrastructure – not a peripheral housing issue – reform efforts will continue to fall short. Without safe, stable homes with the right support, councils remain locked into crisis-driven responses, public money is spent inefficiently, and people are denied the opportunity to live well and independently.

If social care is to become sustainable, preventative and person-centred, supported housing must move from the margins to the centre of policy, planning and investment.

At a glance:

- Supported housing is essential social infrastructure, underpinning independence, prevention and better outcomes.
- Chronic underinvestment drives crisis spending, higher care costs and long-term system failure.
- Local delivery and partnerships show what works – but councils cannot scale solutions without national reform.
- Government needs to act now. The Casey Commission and National Housing Strategy must place supported housing at the heart social care reform, enable investment in supported housing as core social infrastructure, put people first in policy, funding and delivery and ground reform in what people need to live well.

Supported housing as core social infrastructure

Supported housing should be explicitly recognised as a foundational element of social care reform. Without it, councils are forced to rely on high-cost, reactive interventions rather than early support and prevention. Stable, permanent housing with the right level of support enables people to live independently, reduces demand for institutional care, and delivers better outcomes at lower long-term cost.

“We can’t work with someone until they have a roof over their head. Until they are stabilised in quality accommodation, we can’t do any of the trauma work that ultimately prevents deaths.”

Malcolm Putko – Operations Director, Harbour Housing

This is not a niche issue. Supported housing plays a critical role in delivering the Care Act, supporting hospital discharge, reducing admissions to residential care, and enabling people with additional needs to remain part of their communities. Stable housing is a cornerstone of effective health and social care systems. As with schools or hospitals, supported housing should be treated as essential public infrastructure. It is equally integral to joined-up planning between health and social care and requires the same policy focus and investment.

“Being stable, warm and supported is 80% of what enables a good life. Good outcomes rely on good housing and accommodation.”

*Hugh Evans - Executive Director of Adults and Communities,
Bristol City Council*

The cost of inaction

The consequences of continued underinvestment are stark. Adult social care budgets reached £32bn in 2023/24, while councils recorded a £774m overspend in 2024/25 – the third consecutive year of overspending and the highest level in a decade. At the same time, councils spent £2.13bn on temporary accommodation in 2023/24, nearly double the amount spent in 2015/16.

Years of austerity and short-term funding have reduced the capacity of local government to invest in the wider support ecosystem and to join the dots between housing, care and health. Enabling assets such as supported housing have been systematically underfunded, eroding councils’ ability to provide low-level, preventative support.

The scale of the challenge is significant. The UK faces a shortfall of around 325,000 supported homes, requiring an estimated £33.9bn in capital investment by 2040. Without national action, councils cannot close this gap. Yet the costs do not disappear – they re-emerge as rising pressure on revenue budgets across local and national government, in the wrong places and at the wrong time. When early support is cut, more people fall into crisis. Demand rises for expensive, intrusive interventions, creating a damaging cycle that is both financially unsustainable and worse for people.

System-wide partnership is non-negotiable

Supported housing cannot shift from crisis response to sustainable delivery without deliberate, system-wide partnership working. This means aligning housing, care, health, planning, VCSE organisations and providers around shared place-based strategies.

“Adult Social Care must be viewed in the context of Housing and the NHS, otherwise we will get no clear picture of how to do Adult Social Care better in the future.”

*Hugh Evans - Executive Director of Adults and Communities,
Bristol City Council*

Local examples show what is possible. In Cornwall, commissioning and housing teams co-lead the delivery of the council’s supported and specialist housing strategy, embedding housing into strategic commissioning decisions. A clear governance and programme management structure ensures that care and housing teams are consistently at the same table, shaping priorities and unblocking barriers.

In Bristol, long-term contracts with trusted providers have enabled greater market stability, improved outcomes and stronger control over spend. From a provider perspective, Harbour Housing’s partnership arrangements with Cornwall Council and local housing providers have made it possible to deliver specialist housing for people often excluded from mainstream provision.

These approaches underline a simple truth: individual organisations cannot solve complexity on their own. National policy must incentivise and support place-based governance models that bring partners together – including neighbourhood health approaches that explicitly integrate housing, care and health as part of a single system.

“Individual organisations on their own can’t do complexity. All they do is layer inadequate solutions to minimise risk and end up doing the wrong thing as well as they can.”

*Hugh Evans - Executive Director of Adults and Communities,
Bristol City Council*

Long-term planning and market confidence

Supported housing will only move beyond crisis response if partners commit to long-term planning and shared delivery. This requires a robust understanding of local need, alignment across services, and strategies that are jointly owned and embedded.

The Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act is a positive step, particularly in making local strategies a requirement. But its success depends on clear national guidance, adequate funding and capacity to link supported housing strategies to local plans and commissioning frameworks.

Long-term certainty builds market confidence. Where councils provide clarity on priorities, pipeline and partnership expectations, private and VCSE providers are more willing to invest. Over time, this creates a virtuous cycle: increased supply, reduced crisis reliance and better outcomes.

“The key is developing five year [supported housing] plans that are linked to Local Plans, supported by strategic commissioning teams. This demonstrates the requirement and commitment for supported housing and housing providers will deliver.”

*Neil Revely - Chair of the Housing Policy Network, Association of
Directors of Adult Social Services*

Supported housing should be fully integrated into local housing strategies and planning policy. It is not a separate system, but a vital housing type that responds to the changing needs of our population.

Funding reform: from short-term fixes to invest-to-save

Current funding models rely heavily on short-term revenue funding to meet immediate pressures. This locks the system into crisis management rather than prevention and asset-building.

There is a strong case for invest-to-save approaches that redirect spending away from expensive failures of demand – such as temporary accommodation, emergency placements and premature admissions to care homes – and towards capital investment in supported housing. This approach stands to deliver system-wide savings through safe hospital

discharge, preventative support and readmission avoidance, strengthening the case for joint investment across councils, NHS and VCSE partners.

“There is a compelling business case to be made. Across local and central government, we are funding through revenue in a reactive, unplanned way that does not deliver us a public asset at the end and does not deliver good outcomes for people.”

*Rachael Rothero - Service Director of People Commissioning,
Cornwall Council*

Some councils are already exploring innovative models. Bristol City Council, for example, is considering the role of a council-owned specialist housing provider, allowing income to be retained within the public system and reinvested for social impact. These approaches build lasting public assets, reduce future care costs and provide better value for money.

Regulation as an opportunity

The implementation of the Supported Housing Regulatory Oversight Act (SHROA) is a critical moment for the sector. Without adequate funding and support, there is a risk that regulation could shrink supply rather than strengthen it.

However, where strong local partnerships are in place, regulation can be an opportunity. Harbour Housing’s readiness for the new requirements reflects the value of embedded collaboration and long-term strategic alignment. National policy must ensure that SHROA is accompanied by capacity-building and capital investment to support both compliance and growth.

Our asks to Government

While important progress is happening locally, system change cannot succeed without national leadership and reform. Upcoming national policy changes present a vital opportunity to help local partners connect, align and deliver collaboratively across housing and care.

“Housing is so central to adult social care, but it feels so peripheral in terms of policies and funding... if supported housing is not writ large into the work of the Casey Commission, I am really concerned about the future of adult social care and the people we support.”

*Rachael Rothero – Service Director of People Commissioning,
Cornwall Council*

At a fringe panel discussion at the National Children and Adult Services Conference (NCASC) in 2025, a panel - which brought together representatives from Cornwall Council, Bristol City Council, Harbour Housing, and the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS)- discussed these issues and made a case for a series of asks from Government, focusing on four areas where national action is now needed to unlock real system change.

Policy asks: What Government must do now

1. **Casey Commission:** To review adult social care in context, not in isolation, as part of a wider system that includes the NHS, VCSE organisations and local authority housing and planning teams – and place supported housing at the heart of social care reform, explicitly recognising it as core social infrastructure rather than a peripheral issue.
2. **National Housing Strategy:** To clearly recognise, plan for and enable sufficient specialist and supported housing as essential social infrastructure, embedded in core housing strategies and planning guidance.
3. **Ring-fenced funding:** To allocate dedicated funding for development of supported housing, giving councils the means and providers the long-term certainty to invest at scale. To quantify the systems savings derived from this investment to evidence the economic case for specialist and supported housing policy.
4. **Across Government:** To put people first in policy, planning, funding and delivery, grounding reform in what people need to live well - safe, stable homes and the right care and support at the right time.

Our call to action

Supported housing is not an optional extra in social care; it is one of the foundations on which a sustainable, preventative system depends. Across leadership, trust, long-term planning and investment, the message is increasingly consistent: when housing and care work together, people are better supported and public money goes further. That consensus is strengthening through experience of local delivery and national conversations – including the fringe panel at the National Children’s and Adult Social Care (NCASC) conference in November 2025, which brought together local government, providers and sector leaders around shared system priorities.

The opportunity now is to turn these shared insights into national action, and to build a national network that shares good practice, builds collective learning and speaks with a unified voice to drive reform locally and nationally. As government shapes the next phase of reform through the Casey Commission, the National Housing Strategy and wider cross-government decisions, supported housing must move from the fringes to centre stage as a powerful solution to delivering better outcomes for people. With the right policy framework and system-wide partnerships, we can shift from crisis response to prevention – grounding reform in what people need to live well: safe, stable homes and the right care and support at the right time.

If you would like to join this conversation and contribute to building a stronger national voice for supported housing, please contact us at rachael.rothero@cornwall.gov.uk

Contributors

This article reflects shared insights and priorities discussed at a fringe panel discussion at the National Children's and Adult Social Care (NCASC) Conference 2025, in Bournemouth.

The panel included:

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- **Malcolm Putko**, Operations Director, Harbour Housing
- **Neil Revely**, Chair, Housing Policy Network, ADASS
- **Hugh Evans**, Executive Director of Adults & Communities, Bristol City Council
- Chaired by **Karen Barke**, Director, Inner Circle Consulting