

Winter Night Shelter arrangements at Northgate Lodge

West Suffolk councils together with Havebury Housing Partnership have now recruited specialist care staff which will allow a night shelter in Northgate Street, Bury St Edmunds to open every night during the winter, from now until the end of March.

The new winter night shelter which opens tonight in part of Northgate Lodge, can cater for up to 16 rough sleepers from across West Suffolk.

Earlier this month, the Council, with the support of Garland Street Baptist Church, set up an emergency temporary night shelter at The Elven Centre in Garland Street. The emergency centre has been run by volunteers from the Church, The Bury Drop-In Centre, as well as Council staff.

The centre will be by referral to the housing team, although just as with the temporary centre, the Council will continue to assist rough sleepers through referrals via the Bury Drop-In Centre and through speaking to people sleeping rough on the streets. The new centre will offer additional facilities and the chance for people to engage with services.

Cllr Sara Mildmay-White, West Suffolk councils' Cabinet Member for Housing, said: "I want to say a huge thank you to the Garland Street Baptist Church, The Bury Drop-In Centre and the volunteers from partner organisations and the Council's own staff, who have stepped in and help run the emergency shelter during this freezing cold spell. I would also like to say a huge thank you to all those local residents and businesses who have reached out and offered to help."

One way that residents and businesses can show their support is by donating items to the night shelter. The Council and Havebury has put out an appeal for toiletries for men and women, towels, bedding, toilet rolls, washing powder, tea, coffee and other items. These can be taken in to both Havebury's reception and the reception desk at West Suffolk House. Items can also be taken into Tayfen House.

Cllr Mildmay-White said: "The night shelter is just one of the ways that we continue to respond, work to prevent, and try to help those people who are rough sleeping.

"I am delighted to have Havebury's support in helping us set up the night shelter and I hope that those people who are sleeping rough not just in Bury St Edmunds, but across West Suffolk, will use it to get off the streets during these cold nights. We are realistic to the sad facts that some people we know, will not accept the support that we, or other organisations offer – and we cannot force them to accept our help.

"Equally we know that there are some people that our local residents see on our streets, who are not in fact homeless. In many cases we have already found accommodation for them, which is why we always prefer people to give their money to those local charities that help the people who are in need."

Karen Mayhew, Chief Executive at Havebury Housing Partnership said: "We are pleased to work in partnership with West Suffolk councils to provide the winter night shelter at Northgate Lodge and to accommodate those in greatest need.

The increase of street homelessness is a stark reality, and we are keen along with other organisations, to address this acute challenge. It is a regrettable but necessary extension to the services we have provided for many years through our direct access hostel at Tayfen House.

We would like to thank local residents for their kind and generous donations of much-needed items following our social media appeal. We know this is an expensive time of year for many families, so their generosity is particularly wonderful."

The Council will also continue to make use of over 100 units of temporary accommodation, including bed and breakfast, hotels and hostels, all the while trying to help people to find more settled homes.

Referrals from across West Suffolk can be made by phoning 01284 757178.

There will be shelter rules to safeguard other people using the building and anyone breaking these rules may be asked to leave.

Since January, the councils have assisted or prevented more than 450 households from becoming homeless. It works with partners who are specialists in mental health and wellbeing as well as substance misuse. Often people who are sleeping rough have complex needs and through the work of a support officer, the councils try to get the necessary help for those people who are sleeping rough in an attempt to help them get off the streets and stay off the streets.