

King's Lynn Night Shelter Impact Report 2025-26

The Rt Rev'd Jane Steen, Bishop of Lynn, our Patron, writes:

The Night Shelter continues to provide a place of refuge and safety for some of the most vulnerable people in King's Lynn. I am continually amazed at the sterling work which Lucy, the staff team and all who volunteer, put in to enable the Night Shelter to operate and I thank them for all that they do. It continues to be an aspiration to open all year round, funding permitting, but many thanks too to all those who contribute so generously to the Night Shelter's work so that fewer people are without safe shelter. Thank you to you all.

Nick Coleman, Chair of Trustees, writes:

A year ago we noted that at the end of the financial year in June 2025 we were able to stay open for the summer and so complete our first year of round the clock availability for the homeless of West Norfolk. In the summer of 2026 however the Board of Trustees sadly had to take the difficult decision to close the Night Shelter for the summer by reason of a number of adverse economic factors, and to review our financial situation. The financial year therefore which this report covers – from July 2025 to June 2026 – ended in the Night Shelter's closure.

Despite the loss of our services, the closure was thankfully limited to three summer months, as by mid-July we were able to take the decision that we were financially stable and could fund our charitable objectives for the new financial year. The Night Shelter therefore reopened at the beginning of October 2026. This favourable decision was brought about by the immense support we received from those who have given to the Charity, both individuals and organisations, all of whom recognise the marvellous work the Night Shelter undertakes to address the reality of homelessness in our community. I would like to express my grateful thanks to all who have donated to the Night Shelter, whether it be money, or time spent. I would also like to give my personal thanks to the Board and the Director, Lucy, for all their hard work. I pay tribute to the staff, the volunteers and all those who give of their time. The Night Shelter is open and hard at work once again, and we intend to ensure that after this brief set back we will use the experience to build long term financial stability to continue to meet our charitable objectives.

Our guests write:

It's a shame the Night Shelter could not remain open all year as they are desperately needed.

The Night Shelter is a wonderful charity and does a wonderful job.

The Director writes:

In 2025-26, the first year in which the Night Shelter had remained open for 12 months, the Charity accommodated 73 guests and supported over 300 people "at the door". This figure represents the greatest number of individuals accommodated in one year since before the Covid pandemic, and demonstrates that the need for short-term accommodation, easily accessible to people in crisis and equipped to manage safely a range of support needs, continues to be with us.

53% of our guests were able to move on to private rented accommodation, social housing, supported accommodation or to long term accommodation with a partner or family, an increase on 27% the previous year and reflecting a year-long initiative to improve outcomes as well as the Charity's participation as a referring partner in the Borough Council's newly created Supported Accommodation Partnership.

Our work continues to be challenging. The Night Shelter receives no local or national Government funding, and the continuation of our service is dependent on the support of the local community in West Norfolk through donations and fundraising initiatives alongside grant funding. We are thankful that at the time of writing, the Night Shelter has been able to reopen after a summer of closure and that our vital work among some of Norfolk's most vulnerable citizens has been able to continue.

The Night Shelter is only able to do the work we do because enough people with the right skills come forward to share in our task, and are supported to do it well. This year has also seen a renewed focus on staff training, with four of our full-time staff now qualified with the Chartered Institute of Housing Certificate in Providing Homelessness Services. The Charity has registered as a Real Living Wage Employer, an acknowledgement of the contribution made to homelessness by the cost-of-living crisis, including among workers in the charity and care sectors. We continue to recruit volunteers as widely as possible in the local community, including as a placement opportunity for college students in health and social care.

The Night Shelter continues to look ahead. We have begun work to extend St John's House, so that we have space for more people who need us. We are exploring how the Night Shelter might have an increased role in our Local Authority's homelessness strategy, and how we can diversify our income sources. Above all, we continue to learn and develop best practice in all aspects of our work, from trauma informed approaches to how we incorporate lived experience at every level of service planning and delivery.

Lucy McKitterick, October 2026



A window on homelessness

Our Impact Report this year explores the idea of looking: looking at how we understand homelessness, at how our guests view their past, present and future as a result of their time with us, and at how our work at the Night Shelter also provides a way of seeing both out and into the community around us.

The illustrations are all images captured at St John's House on our opening day in October 2026. They show a calm, reflective space, but also a very practical one: a big house, with rooms for guests and staff to gather and talk together, but also a room for everyone so that each individual has opportunity for rest, reflection and a space of their own sometimes for the first time in months or years.

Most importantly of all, the Night Shelter's big green front door is open, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Some of our guests come to us from a time of rough sleeping. Others will have been "sofa surfing", often in multiple locations and for an extended period of time, with all the risks this can involve: sexual and financial exploitation, violence, involvement in substance misuse and crime. Others may be homeless for the first time on the day they come to find us. Around three quarters of our guests are self-referrals. Others are referred by other professionals working with them: probation officers, police, alcohol and drug recovery workers. We aim to say "yes" whenever we can.

Alongside our work with our guests, we provide an "at the door" service for anyone who finds themselves homeless or vulnerably housed: we offer advice and signposting, hot drinks and food, sleeping bags, and the use of a phone. Some of the people we see are sleeping rough, or sofa surfing. Others are in temporary accommodation and struggling to budget or access support, or at risk of eviction, or former guests in difficulty and not knowing where to find help. We're here at one in the morning, and on Christmas Day. We are the only service in West Norfolk providing this help.

In this Impact Report we look at some of the stories of the guests who have come to us, the support we give them, and what happens next. We will always have more to learn about supporting people who have experienced homelessness, and not every approach works for everyone. It is however always a privilege to try to help.

I was down and out when I knocked on the door and they helped me out.

A guest

A window on the past

Most of our guests at the Night Shelter will have experienced significant trauma. Homelessness itself is traumatic, as well as exhausting; other experiences can be much more stressful as a result, such as attending appointments, or coping with paperwork or finances. Trauma may be recent, such as a relationship breakdown, a bereavement, or an illness; it may have been going on for some time, such as an abusive relationship, a time in custody, addiction, or sexual exploitation. And it may have begun a long time ago, as a child abused by others, or who witnessed violence in the home, or who grew up in care. Sometimes our guests will share their stories with us. Others may not.

A "trauma-informed" approach takes the basic understanding that people's reactions to the world around them are shaped by their experiences in the past, and uses this to try to provide more effective help with current situations and concerns. It means looking at our guests and asking not "what's wrong with you," but "what happened to you" – and being prepared to see differently as a result.

At the same time, the realities of homelessness in our community can be shocking. The guest who had spent two months in a tent in the cemetery, using a suitcase to store his food, until he opened it one day and the rats came running out. The couple whose belongings were thrown in the river. The man who was urinated on as he slept, and another whose tent was set on fire. The older man who slept in a supermarket recycling bin. The woman whose "sofa surfing" was funding her crack cocaine use by sex working, which in turn drove her drug use to forget how it made her feel.

Many of our guests come to us with negative experiences of "professionals" in the past: of social workers, housing staff, and others who have tried to help. We listen to their experiences, but our work is first of all to build trust. We provide a room of their own, hot food, and time to rest. We make time to listen, and to begin together looking at what happens next.

What helped you feel welcome, safe and valued here?

The staff and the front door. I felt safe and at home.

Can you tell us some of the things you liked about the Night Shelter?

Staff, residents, safety, support and someone to talk to.

Having a warm dry bed every night. *Guest feedback, 2025-26*

Did you know …

• the average age of death for people experiencing homelessness is 45 for men and 43 for women. *Homelessness costs lives.*

• almost all of our guests at the Night Shelter will have experienced significant trauma including childhood abuse, domestic violence, PTSD, or bereavement. *Being homeless is not your own fault.*

• not all our guests have slept rough. Some have been "sofa surfing" … which comes with the risks of violence or exploitation, involvement in drugs, and physical or sexual abuse. It's sometimes called "hidden" homelessness. *Homelessness means having nowhere safe to stay.*

• our guests stay at the Night Shelter for up to 3 months. The youngest came to us on his 18th birthday. Our oldest guests have been in their 70s. We've had parents, grandparents, professionals, offenders, sex workers, care leavers, and many others! *Homelessness can happen to anyone.*



A window on the present

The Night Shelter provides supported accommodation for our guests, which means that each of them meets regularly with one of our intensive support staff as well as benefitting from 24-hour practical help and pastoral care from the rest of the staff team.

These meetings will look at a guest's health: if they are registered with a GP, attending appointments, accessing prescribed medication. A guest's finances: are they in debt, do they need help budgeting. A guest's alcohol or drug use: what are they using, how can we help them keep as safe as possible, do they need support accessing help. A guest's involvement with the Police, or with probation services: who are they seeing, are we in touch, how can we support them to attend appointments, or unpaid work, or to attend court. A guest's future housing plans: where might they be able to stay when they leave us, and what do we need to do to help this happen. We connect our guests with help for victims of domestic violence, we support them to re-establish contact with children or parents, or to claim the benefits they are entitled to, or to access mental health services. We come with them to housing appointments, to hospital appointments, to court.

Many of our guests arrive in very poor physical health. In one week or month we might see an ulcer as a result of needle use, an abscess, COPD, hepatitis, HIV, a broken arm or leg or nose, impetigo, body lice, and cancer. Supporting them to access medical care, particularly if their lives are very chaotic, or they have had difficult experiences of medical care or hospitals in the past, can take time. Stability, regular meals and sleep can help. Above all, our task is to encourage our guests to believe they are worth the effort.

What help or support did the Night Shelter give you?

The Night Shelter gave me help and support in getting to the GP and to CGL, and finding a place to move on.

They reminded me about my appointments and helped me with my drink diary.

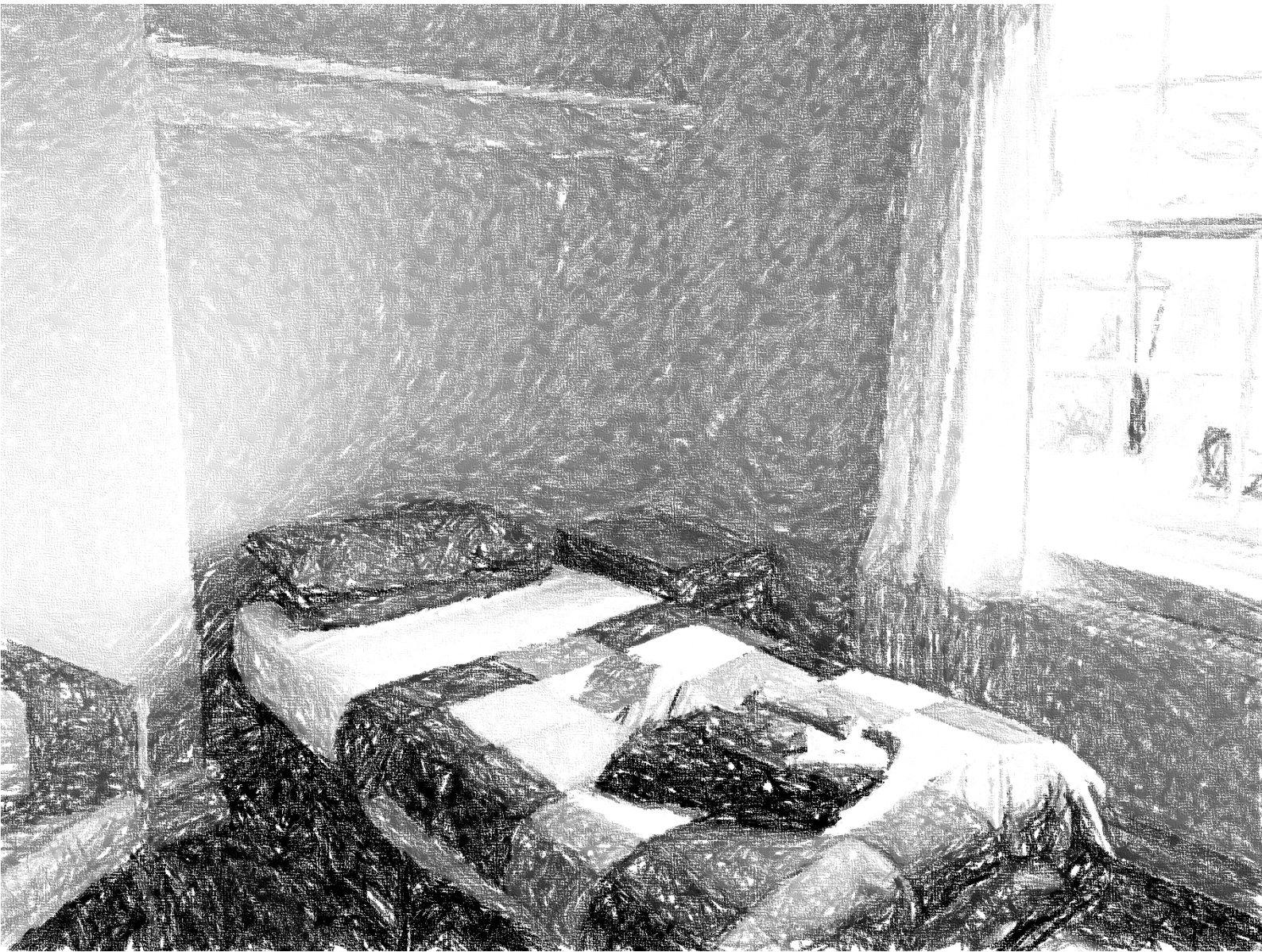
Being at the Night Shelter was my safe space and made me feel calm and relaxed. I was told it was going to be a challenge but it was a nice stay. I had help and support with my housing and mental health issues.

The staff were very kind and went above and beyond to help me.

The Night Shelter provides the safety, stability, and practical support required for individuals to engage effectively with substance misuse treatment and recovery services. By addressing immediate accommodation needs alongside wider social and welfare issues, the service plays an important role in improving engagement, reducing harm to the service and the community, as well as promoting long-term recovery outcomes.

King's Lynn Night Shelter provides more than emergency accommodation. For individuals accessing Change Grow Live (CGL), it offers a stable foundation from which recovery can begin, helping service users engage with treatment, reduce substance-related harm, improve wellbeing, and progress towards long-term housing and recovery goals. In doing so, the service also contributes to wider community harm reduction by reducing rough sleeping, decreasing public health risks associated with homelessness and substance misuse, improving engagement with treatment services, and supporting safer, healthier communities across King's Lynn and West Norfolk.

Holly Tomlins, Team Leader West, Change Grow Live



A window on the future

Our guests are with us for up to three months. During this time our intensive support staff will help them find longer-term accommodation suitable for their needs, including the support and help to sustain it. This work, particularly when guests have higher or more complex support needs, continues to be a challenge.

Some of our guests will be able to find privately rented accommodation. The factors which make this especially hard to access include landlord requirements of a guarantor, the need for a deposit, and a lack of affordable properties for people on benefits income. Others will register for social housing, joining a waiting list of up to two years. Others we will be able to refer to longer-term supported accommodation locally through the Borough Council's Supported Accommodation Partnership. For individuals with higher or more complex support needs however, their options continue to be very limited.

Moving into a new home is not easy. The Night Shelter helps with sourcing furniture and other items so that the concrete floor of "fully unfurnished" social housing feels more like a home. We will look at who will support a guest in their new home, and encourage them to stay in touch. We do not underestimate how hard it can be to manage a property for the first time, or the first time in a while, to keep track of bills and costs, and to be on their own. Sometimes it doesn't work, and our guests become homeless once again. Others have not had a home for many years, and have spent time almost every year staying with us.

At the same time, the Night Shelter has seen some wonderful changes in people's lives. The guest detained under the Mental Health Act while staying with us, who called to tell us he was safe and well in his new home. The guest banned from every pharmacy and housing provider in Lynn, who did well with us, and was given another chance of accommodation elsewhere. Our work can be hard … and enormously rewarding.

Has the Night Shelter helped you feel differently about yourself, or your future?

The Night Shelter made me realise I can stand on my own two feet.

The Night Shelter made me want to sort my life out.

I now feel confident about myself and I'm feeling more confident about the future now.

The Night Shelter has helped me to move on to my new property so I will be forever grateful.



A window on the community

In the last year the Night Shelter has participated in the following events: as fundraising initiatives, to raise awareness, and to encourage understanding in our community of homelessness and what it involves:

In July, talks at Swaffham Baptist Church and Cornerstone Barroway Drove, and a charity stall at Sandringham Flower Show sponsored by local flower growers • in August, two engagement days at the Yard in Ely • in September, a further engagement day at Thaxters in Dersingham, visits to Year 10 and 11 classes at the College of West Anglia, and a visit to London to participate in an event organised by Homeless Link for leaders working in homelessness • in October, talks at the Southery Women's Institute and at a Harvest Supper in South Lynn, a fundraising day at Sainsbury's Hardwick Road, a visit as the charity beneficiary at the West Acre Wild 10k, and a talk to the West Norfolk Model Club • in November, participation in the Rotary Firewalk • in December, a school assembly at Gayton Primary School, and Saturday morning carol singing in King's Lynn town centre • in February, talks at the Stanhoe and Barwick Women's Institute and at the Rosebery School for young people excluded from mainstream education • in April, co-organisation of a Good Friday event visiting and reflecting on front line work among the vulnerable in King's Lynn, including the Night Shelter • in June, an event at the Bishop's House in Norwich among Norfolk charities supported by the Diocese this year, a breakfast hosted at the Night Shelter for church leaders in Lynn, participation in the West Norfolk Model Club annual show, a sponsored walk from King's Lynn to Walsingham along the newly reopened pilgrimage route, and a charity stall at the Royal Norfolk Show alongside Norwich and Yarmouth homelessness charities, as one of this year's President's Charities of the Year • in July, talks at the Retired Sainsbury Group in Lynn and the Sandringham Women's Institute • in September, welcoming 176 visitors to the Night Shelter for Heritage Open Day and organising a Sleep Out for the Night Shelter at King's Lynn Minster which raised over £10,000 …

The NS has been invaluable resource for our client base. The NS staff work closely with other agencies and professionals to ensure the best possible outcomes for their clients, and it is an invaluable resource for our local community.

Maria D'Aloia, Senior Recovery Worker,
Norfolk Integrated Housing and Community Support Service (NIHCSS)

The Night Shelter currently receives **no national or local Government funding.**

It costs around £350k per year to keep St John's House open for our guests. Around a third of our budgeted income for 2026-27 is Housing Benefit. The rest of our funding has to be sourced from grants, fundraising and donations.

Could you be a Friend? The Friends of the Night Shelter give a regular amount (any amount!) each month. You'll receive two newsletters a year, and an invitation to our annual "Thank You Party" as a mark of our appreciation and a chance to meet with staff, volunteers and guests. Follow the link on this page to sign up, or contact us for a standing order form: www.klnightshelter.org.uk/donate

Are you part of a community group, a church, a school? We can come to you … let us know if you'd like us to come and talk about homelessness and what we do, maybe as part of a fundraiser or special collection. We like questions!

Could your workplace be a Community Partner? You might like to help by donating services or products to help with the running or maintenance of the Night Shelter, or by organising a fundraiser or event … we're always happy to chat about ideas!



Let's keep in touch …

The Night Shelter welcomes donations throughout the year. The best donation is help with the cost of our rent, utilities and round-the-clock staffing. We would not be here without this support.

We also welcome donations in kind. The food for our guests (breakfast, lunch and a hot dinner every day) is all donated, and we publish a list on our website as well as our Facebook page of items most needed. We also need non-food items: toilet roll, sleeping bags, blankets, and new men's and women's underwear and socks. We're open 24/7 so items can simply be dropped off whenever suits.

We recruit new volunteers each year from September to March. Volunteer information evenings are held at regular intervals during this time, with dates published on our website. All over 18s are welcome, even just to find out more.

Our guests need us all!



With warmest thanks to …

29th May 1961 Charitable Trust * Alec Birkbeck * All Saints Briston * All Saints Litcham * All Saints Sharrington * All Saints Shouldham * All Saints South Lynn * Archbishop of York's Youth Trust * Bill Cleydert & Co * Binham Priory * Catenian Association of West Norfolk * Chelsea Square 1994 Trust * College of West Anglia * Collison Cut Flowers * Community of All Hallows * Cornerstone Church Barroway Drove * Dersingham Methodist Church * Downham Market Methodist Church * English Peonies * Forever Green Flower Company * Forresters Friendly Society * Fountain of Life Church, Ashill * Freebridge Community Housing * Fulmodeston Methodist Chapel * Hopestead * Hunstanton Bridge Club * King's Lynn Church of the Nazarene * King's Lynn Churches Together * King's Lynn Evangelical Church * King's Lynn Pagan Moot * King's Lynn Rotary * King's Lynn Trinity Rotary Club * Krusty Loaf * Marks & Spencer King's Lynn * The Mercers Company * Mr & Mrs Philip Rackham Charitable Trust * Morrisons King's Lynn * Norfolk Community Foundation * Our Lady & St Edmund Catholic Church, Hunstanton * Our Lady of Pity Catholic Church, Swaffham * Pott Row Methodist Church * Priory of Our Lady, Walsingham * Rosebery School * Royal Norfolk Agricultural Association * Sainsbury's Neighbourly Fund * St Andrew Congham * St Andrew Holt * St Clement Burnham Overy * St Dominic Catholic Church, Downham Market * St Giles Houghton-in-the-Dale * St James Runcton Holme * St James Sutton St James * St John the Baptist Timberhill, Norwich * St Martin-in-the-Fields Charity * St Mary Burnham Deepdale * St Mary Gressenhall * St Mary Heacham * St Mary Little Walsingham * St Mary the Virgin Amner * St Mary the Virgin Sedgeford * St Mary West Winch * St Nicholas Dersingham * St Peter West Lynn * Sedgeford Village Hall * Shouldham Ladybirds * Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham * Spurge Sewing Raffle * Smith & Munson * Stanhoe and Barwick Women's Institute * Stanhoe Methodist Church * Sutton St James Baptist Church * Swaffham Baptist Church * The Geoffrey Watling Charity * The King's Morris * Trinity Rotary Club * Union Church Hunstanton * West Norfolk Freemasons * West Norfolk Lodge * West Norfolk Priory Group * West Norfolk Wild 10K * Wimbotsham Methodist Church *

Contact us

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