



Independent Living Strategy

2025-2030





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01

Introduction and operating context

The One Vision Housing (OVH) Independent Living Strategy 2025-2030 sets out the medium term aims and objectives for the service and provides operational context.

The Strategy is subject to an annual refresh and is closely aligned with other Strategic Documents including the OVH Strategic Plan, OVH Development Strategy and the OVH Asset Management Strategy.

The Strategy is also closely aligned with the delivery of the Sovini Group-wide vision, mission, shared values, as follows:

Vision: A better future

Mission: Creating opportunities, changing lives

Values: **Success** – we will be the best

Passion – we love what we do

Authenticity – we do what we say

Courage – we dare to be different

Enterprise – we never stand still

This iteration of the Strategy has been informed by a comprehensive consultation exercise of existing OVH Independent Living customers (168 individual responses received), with positive feedback received and no suggestions for changes to service or the aims and objective outlined in Section 3 below.

Underpinning the high level aims and objectives outlined in this document is a detailed Service Delivery Plan that is monitored through the Performance Management System, this is subject to regular progress reporting to the Executive Management Team and a mid-year progress report to Board that is shared with involved customers.

The Independent living service continues to be a key cornerstone of the OVH housing offer and demand for the service remains strong in all areas.

As wider local support services have been subject to budgetary restraints and have become harder to access, we have noticed an upsurge in the numbers of customers that rely on our service to maintain tenancies and live independent lives.

This is not without its challenges as increasingly we are dealing with customers who have multiple and complex needs.

To ensure we are well equipped to meet these needs we have had to adapt our delivery, making improvements to our networking, referral / signposting services and providing specialist training for our excellent staff in areas such as 'trauma informed practice' and 'understanding mental health conditions'.

We have also developed a number of specialisms to enhance our service offer which include dedicated officers, including:

- An Aids and Adaptations Officer (trained to trusted assessor level 4 – to assist customers in successfully accessing aids and adaptations with close partnership working with local authority Occupational Therapists)
- Safeguarding and Domestic Abuse Support Officer (providing support and referral for victims of domestic abuse or who experience safeguarding concerns)
- Care Experienced Young Persons Support Officer (assisting young people to sustain tenancies and form roots in communities)
- Furnished Tenancy Officer (supporting vulnerable customers with full and partial furniture packages to promote independent living and tenancy sustainment)

Our service continues to evolve in other ways in response to our operational context and again over the course of this Strategy we will look to build on the vital support offered by our established domestic abuse refuge, in partnership with Sefton Women's and Children's Aid (SWACA), by exploring options for further specialist housing provision to meet identified needs in our communities.

Work in this area ties in neatly with our drive to be a significant influence in local strategic partnerships e.g. assisting local authorities in our areas of operation to achieve their own aim and objectives.

Over the course of this Strategy, we will continue to improve collection and analysis of customer data, so that we can provide tailored services to meet individual needs as well as promoting meaningful engagement opportunities to help shape wider service delivery.

With this in mind we will continue to undertake detailed customer journey mapping exercises and will also look to facilitate means of bringing our customer base together to drive continuous improvement and collaborative working.

Working with our customers we have also established a Vulnerable Persons and Reasonable Adjustments Policy to ensure we make best use of every customer interaction to meet customers' needs in our service delivery and ensure this information is kept up to date.

Since the last iteration of this Strategy our key achievements over the period 2024/25 include:

- Developed (in test phase) a safeguarding portal with links to the improved housing management system (facilitating better management of customer records, coordinated service response and reporting capabilities)
- Improved technical standard / capability of 'Lifeline' provision in dispersed independent living accommodation (commenced in 2024 and due for completion ahead of schedule in 2025)
- Implemented the findings of the aids and adaptations customer journey mapping exercise alongside a customer focus group to implement suggested improvements and drive efficiency in budget management
- Improved the number of packages and range of support available in the furnished tenancy offer
- Improved strategic influence through participation in the Complex Lives Steering Group (NHS Cheshire and Merseyside) – delivering joined-up services to deliver better health outcomes for customers



Where are we now?

The Independent Living Service

The Independent Living service is comprised of 668 dispersed properties across OVH's area of operations and is provided to individuals and families who require assistance to maintain and sustain tenancies.

The service also includes seven purpose-built Retirement Living Schemes (312 units) providing a service to people over the age of 55 in safe and secure settings (see Table 1) below.

Following a review of best practice from the sector, we have implemented a revised means of assessing customer suitability for the service via a 'needs and risk assessment' which focuses on the following key areas:

- Housing Related Support and Advice
- Being Safe and Secure
- Budgeting and Benefits
- Health and Wellbeing
- Repairs and Adaptations

A team of 16 specially trained Independent Living Officers provide an intensive housing management service offering a minimum of fortnightly visits to customers in their homes, helping them to achieve goals set out in a personalised Housing Action Plan (some customers may receive more frequent visits depending on their risk-assessed needs). In addition, there are four specialist officers as outlined above.

The service is supported by a management team who oversee the whole provision offered by the Independent Living service and play a key role in strategic partnerships at the local level to promote the interests of vulnerable customer groups.

Table 1

| OVH Retirement Living Schemes | | |
|-------------------------------|---|-------|
| Scheme Name | Location | Units |
| Bishops Court | Bishops Court West Derby, Liverpool L12 5LE | 35 |
| Brookes Court | Whetstone Lane, Birkenhead CH41 2ZE | 44 |
| Fernley Grange | Fleetwood Road, Southport PR9 9FY | 30 |
| Kenyons Lodge | Aragon Close, Lydiate L31 9PZ | 41 |
| Mill Spring Court | Park Street, Bootle L20 3SE | 52 |
| Orrell Lodge | Rafter Avenue, Bootle L20 6PR | 61 |
| St Johns Court | St Johns Road, Waterloo L22 9RH | 48 |

Each individual property across the whole Independent Living service has a 24-hour lifeline service to access support in case of emergency.

To enable tenancy sustainment, there are also 52 furnished tenancies where furniture packages are provided (via service charges eligible for Housing Benefit) according to levels of identified need, managed by a Furnished Tenancy Officer in the Independent Living Team.

The Independent Living Team also work alongside Neighbourhood Services to manage a Home Starter fund where essential household items such as white goods are provided free of charge to customers who otherwise would not be able to sustain their tenancy.

Working in partnership with specialist providers the Independent Living Service contribute to the demand for specialist housing services via 'agency managed' arrangements.

OVH currently has 71 units in management where external agencies provide intensive support for customers with a range of specialist needs e.g. enduring mental health conditions.

Over 2025 we will also be accepting ownership of eight self-contained bungalows in conjunction with an external partner providing specialist support for customers with neurodiverse needs.

The Independent Living Team also manage the aids and adaptations service across the whole of OVH's social and affordable housing rented stock.

With an annual budget of circa £1.4m allocated for new major / minor adaptations and renewals of existing adaptations (applicable to stock transfer stock in Sefton), the service plays a vital role in helping vulnerable customers to maintain independent lives and stay safe within their own homes.

We also work closely with other local authority partners outside the Sefton area to help facilitate this service and make best use of shared knowledge and financial resources.

Demand for the aids and adaptations service is consistently high and OVH are required to triage requests to ensure the provision is targeted at those most in need.

The Team also provides operational support to enable OVH to meet its safeguarding adults and children responsibilities via dedicated officer and deputy roles, appropriate referral mechanisms, comprehensive training for front line staff, sound policy and procedures and close partnership work with multi-agencies / Safeguarding Boards.

Performance

Table 2

| Customer Satisfaction Survey | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2021/22 | 2022/23 | 2023/24 | 2024/25 |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Independent Living Survey - Overall satisfaction with the service | 98.3% | 100% | 93.8% | 95.5% | 94.5% | 92.7% |
| Independent Living Survey - Satisfaction with service provided by IL Officer | 98.7% | 98.9% | 95.0% | 95.1% | 94.5% | 91.6% |
| Independent Living Survey - Does the service help you to live independently | 96.5% | 100% | 89.0% | 93.7% | 93.1% | 86.1% |
| Independent Living Survey - Satisfaction with the safety and security of your home | 97.4% | 98.9% | 95.1% | 95.5% | 92.6% | 92.3% |
| Aids & Adaptations - Overall satisfaction with the service | 97.1% | 100% | 95.6% | 97.8% | 97.5% | 97.3% |

Although our performance across all indicators is slightly down on the previous year, this is thought to be attributable to a number of staffing issues when we have been operating below full capacity for extended periods of time, over 2024/25.

With these issues set to be addressed over 2025, we will also be closely assessing feedback from customer consultation received in the preparation of this revision of the Strategy, to address any concerns raised and improve satisfaction.



Strategic Context

Although the Independent Living service provides housing support for vulnerable people of all ages, the customer base is predominately people who are over 55.

The current and predicted demographic trend in OVH's prime areas of operation indicates this cohort of the population is above the national average and is set to dramatically increase over coming years, in particular in Sefton.

- Sefton old age dependency ratio (number of people of state pension age for every 1,000 people of working age) is projected to rise from 363 to 391 between 2022-2032 against an average for England of 287 per 1,000 over the same period (Office for National Statistics 2025)

This weight of numbers in this age group has led to an up-turn in demand for the Independent Living service and is coupled with increased referral for the service from existing OVH customers.

Our success in sustaining tenancies increases pressure on demand for services as the turnover

rates are low (the main reasons for tenancy termination within the service are due to residents passing away or their care needs cannot continue to be met within the accommodation setting).

Recent cuts to local authority budgets and commissioning of services for special needs groups may also have led to an increase in demand for specialist housing services for customers with complex and intensive housing support needs, coupled with reduced options for general housing provision in the private rented sector.

OVH contributes to meeting the demand for specialist housing services by working in partnership with a number of external providers via 'agency managed' arrangements.

Over the course of this Strategy, OVH will continue to seek suitable opportunities to expand its service offer into this area and other forms of housing provision that address health inequalities and wellbeing through its development programme.

Risk Identification and Mitigation Factors

A Government decision to keep supported housing funding entirely within the welfare benefits system coupled with a favourable, index-linked, rent settlement announced in the 2025 Spending Review for the next ten-year period, brings some much-needed stability to the service and has been welcomed by OVH and the sector in general.

This involved a decision to retain funding for supported housing through Housing Benefit (administered by Local Authorities) rather than through Universal Credit (administered by the Department for Work and Pensions).

Whilst it is considered that Local Authorities have a better understanding of needs in their communities and are largely supportive of providers such as OVH, this funding model is not without its risks.

The costs of delivering an independent living service are typically higher than those for general needs housing. Illustrative examples of why costs are higher include:

- The additional staff time required to provide personalised intensive housing support to enable customers to maintain independence within their homes
- The provision of, maintenance, lifecycle replacement and upgrading costs of specialist equipment e.g. lifeline services offering 24-hour assistance to customers in their homes
- The higher and more frequent replacement costs of fixtures and fittings within purpose built 'Retirement Living Schemes' in communal areas
- Provision of ancillary services such as communal cleaning and grounds maintenance

Local Authorities are then able to recoup the additional welfare expenditure needed for higher rents and service charges from central budgets provided they can evidence the services and costs claimed by providers, such as OVH, are matched in reality and that they are fair and proportionate.

If local authorities fail to provide this evidence, they may be subject to 'clawback' arrangements from central government and for this reason the provision of funding is never guaranteed at the local level and therefore constitutes a risk to OVH.

It also means OVH cannot simply expand numbers on service or introduce service enhancements without first reaching agreement with local authorities in its areas of operation.

These risks may increase as local authorities are put under a greater spotlight to ensure standards of supported housing (mostly relevant to 'exempt' forms of service offer) are maintained through greater scrutiny / inspection via the Supported Housing Regulation Act 2023.

OVH mitigates against this risk (protecting current funding levels) and providing a good evidence base for any expansion plans though the following:

- OVH is able to provide full and accurate accounting information for service charge costs and intensive housing support services delivered
- OVH is a key contributor to local strategic forums and can demonstrate the case for independent living services creating cost savings to local authorities in the areas of primary and social care

A further potential risk associated with service charges is the impact it has on customers who are self-funders.

Additional services or costs that are recovered through service charges add to the total amount payable by customers who do not claim welfare benefits leading to a potential situation where the service offer could become unaffordable for them.

OVH mitigates against potential affordability issues by assessing all costs and service improvements before they are passed onto customers to ensure they are reasonable and proportionate, via an affordability assessment as part of the annual rent setting process.

All OVH Retirement Housing schemes will be subject to ongoing viability checks (in line with OVH's sustainability index - which assesses net present value of properties factoring in revenue creation determined by occupancy levels and future demand, against investment costs).

Other emerging risks in 2025 include parts of the Supported Housing Regulation Act that have yet to be enacted, including the proposals for licensing of specialist intensive housing support services (e.g. OVH's current arrangements with agency managed services).

This has the potential to introduce additional responsibilities and costs to OVH and may have a detrimental impact on external agencies willingness to continue in the sector.

We will be keeping a close watching brief as the final legislation crystallises and will work with our partner agencies to ensure transition is managed effectively, minimising the disruption for customers as far as possible and doing what is necessary to ensure we have the correct resources and procedures in place.

We will also be keeping a close watching brief on the governments welfare reform measures and we will provide timely advice for any of Independent Living customers who may be impacted.

03

Where do we want to be?

Put simply, our primary goal is always to provide exemplary services to our customers to enable them to live independent and have fulfilling lives.

We know from the testimony and feedback that we receive from our customers and the high demand for our services that every day, in no small way, we achieve this goal.

To ensure we continue to deliver this primary goal and in recognition of our key role as a service provider of significant strategic importance, over the course of this strategy, we will deliver on the following high-level aims (linked to aims outlined in the wider OVH Strategic Plan 2024-29):

OVH Strategic Plan 2025-2030 Aim - To provide the environment to deliver business success

Meet all legal and regulatory requirements

Our aim is always to demonstrate full compliance with all relevant legal and regulatory requirements including all aspects of health and safety, buildings safety and the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing.

With close links to OVH's wider asset management function and revised Consumer Standards requirements our current systems and planned improvements for data capture / analysis and automated processes for checking / auditing and resource planning, linked to tight budgetary controls will ensure we continue to:

- Provide safe homes that meet all prevailing property standards and deploy systems that take into consideration the needs of vulnerable customer groups (this includes all requirements set out in the Fire Safety Act 2021, Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 and the Building Safety Act 2022)
- Provide full compliance assurance to customers, the OVH Board, the Social Housing Regulator, commissioning bodies, partner organisations and external enforcement agencies
- Minimise or eliminate the risk of legal challenge and protect reputation

Contribute to key strategic partnerships

Over the course of this strategy, we will look to build on the existing strong links that we have established at the local, regional and national levels for operational and strategic service delivery, planning and transformation.

This will include:

- Contribution into local operational partnerships in the areas of safeguarding, community safety and health and wellbeing agendas by involvement in multi-agency forums e.g. Sefton Adult

Safeguarding Board (and sub-groups), Sefton Childrens Safeguarding Board, MAPPA, MARAC, Sefton Domestic Abuse Partnership, Sefton Children and Young People's Partnership Board

- Membership of the national Housing Learning Improvement Network (LIN) and focus groups on supported housing issues run by the National Housing Federation (NHF)
- Steering group for Complex Lives – Sefton

Achieve long term growth aspirations

The challenges and potential restraints on OVH achieving growth in terms of increased numbers on service and diversification of the range of services provided are outlined above in section 2.4.

OVH is, however, keen to pursue growth opportunities for the Independent Living service and will over the course of this strategy continue

to look for suitable development types and partnership opportunities to develop Extra Care services within its area of operations.

We will also continue to work closely with Local Authority partnerships and third sector service providers with the aim of increasing provision of specialist supported accommodation.

OVH Strategic Plan 2025-2030

Aim - To provide excellent services that meet or exceed customer and stakeholder expectations

Be a key player in delivery of the local 'housing and health' agenda

Over the course of this strategy, we will build on our current involvement and influence with statutory bodies e.g. the Integrated Care Team.

Our overall aim is to develop a co-ordinated approach to tackling the keys issues of:

- The Prevention agenda - helping people to stay safe and well in their homes with minimal clinical intervention (warm, affordable homes mean people have more disposable income for healthier lifestyles and are less likely to become ill, it also takes into account adaptations, assistive technologies and trips and slips prevention)

- Social isolation and the means to prevent it (providing the means for social interaction e.g. access to internet facilities) and social gatherings

The above themes contribute to our customers leading healthy and fulfilling lives / tenancy sustainment and prevents turnover to residential care, protecting OVH rental income and assist in meeting the Consumer Standards requirements.

Provide a modern and future proofed service

To ensure the wider independent living service is competitive and makes the most of modern technologies, OVH will continue to invest in improvements to the appearance of properties and functionality of its digital service.

This will include refurbishments incorporating our award-winning dementia friendly principles and feasibility studies / scoping exercises for implementation of assistive technologies / telecare services.

Our Independent Living properties will also be included in wider OVH schemes to improve energy efficiency, (as part of delivery of the Sovini Group Carbon Reduction and Environmental Management Strategy) the requirements of the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023 and any revisions to the Decent Homes Standard.

Over the course of this strategy the Independent Living service will play a key role in wider OVH objectives of developing a better understanding and analysis of customer data to drive service improvement and ensure individual needs are met.



Maintain excellent performance and achieve high customer satisfaction

Working closely with the Customer Experience Team, the Independent Living Team will analyse intelligence gathered through customer journey mapping, transactional surveys, complaints and attendance at best practice groups to identify opportunities for continuous improvement.

Through excellent performance in the delivery of independent living services OVH will be able to:

- Retain existing customer loyalty and maintain healthy future demand through quality service offer
- Assure funding providers (local authorities) that the service offer meets expectations for continuation of existing arrangements and to provide evidence base for expansion
- Demonstrate track record of delivery for partnership working initiatives
- Meet Consumer Standards requirements

Identify and meet specialist housing needs

Through the 'needs and risk assessment' process OVH often identify individuals who would not be suitable for the independent living service due to their high level or specialist support needs.

When attempting to signpost and make referral for these individuals and through attendance at strategic forums where local housing supply is monitored, OVH is able to identify gaps in local service provision to meet specialist housing needs.

Where possible, OVH looks to address these gaps in provision by working in partnership with other service providers usually on an 'agency managed' arrangement and will explore possibilities of developing new partnerships over the course of this strategy.



04

How are we going to get there?

To achieve the aims over the course of this strategy, OVH will deliver a series of objectives and set specific actions within the Service Delivery Plan (which will be refreshed on an annual basis).

The objectives set out below will be cross-cutting and may contribute to one or more of the strategic aims set out in Section 3.

Table 3

| Objective | Actions and Outcomes |
|--|--|
| Enhance support for safeguarding and domestic abuse victims | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Explore options to join the 'White Ribbon' campaign (engaging men and boys to prevent violence against women and girls)Continue local strategic influence via membership of the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board, the Corporate Parenting Board, MARAC Steering Group and the Adults Safeguarding Partnership Board (Sefton)Strengthen relationships with Social Care departments in local authorities for better referral routes and joined-up partnership working so families and individuals get the support they needBring the digital safeguarding dashboard into management and move away from paper records to improve reporting and case tracking |
| Explore options for specialist housing provision | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Continue discourse and explore options with local authority partners for specialist housing provision, in line with their strategic objectives in areas of unmet needs |
| Enhance the 'Roots' service – (provision for care experienced young people) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Embed the Roots service into operational practice and provide impact assessment report when it reaches the 10-month milestone (November 2025)Establish better links with education and employment providers to deliver positive outcomes for Roots service usersSupport the 'Care Leavers Career Commitment' charter (Sefton) within the Sovini Group to promote career options e.g. provision of appropriate apprenticeships, mentoring and 'meet the professionals' events' |
| Ensure that the IL service continues to support customers' needs and evolves to remain fit for purpose | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Complete a 'Customer Journey Mapping Exercise' (over 2025/26) for the Independent Living service and develop subsequent action plan for improvement |
| Further strengthen our links with Health | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Continue strategic influence via membership of the Child poverty Steering Group (Sefton)Establish links with Alder Hey Children's Hospital to consider preventative measures for children with respiratory conditions |

05

How are we going to measure it?

The high level aims and objectives outlined in this strategy will guide a detailed Service Delivery Plan which ensures actions are assigned, appropriately resourced and monitored for progress, with intervention measures where any targets have not been met.

The OVH Executive Management Team and OVH Board will receive regular updates on Service Delivery Plan progress as well as Key Performance Indicator reporting and collated information from transactional customer surveys and complaints monitoring.

OVH also provide periodic, detailed performance reports to the customer representative Service Review Group on all aspects of service delivery, including independent living.

The results of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures will be benchmarked against peer providers and will drive improvement plans to be incorporated into future revisions of this strategy for any identified dip in performance.

OVH will also request progress reporting of how its contributions have made a difference to the aims and objectives of wider strategic plans through its involvement with partner and statutory bodies.



If you need assistance understanding the information in this document, please contact us on **0300 365 1111**.

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Lithuanian – Jei norite, kad Jums kas nors padėtų suprasti šiame dokumente pateiktą informaciją, prašome su mumis susiekti tel 0300 365 1111.

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