



Keep our Northern light
shining bright



Caring Together

VSA Strategy 2025-2030



SOS



**Save Our Social
Care Charity**

Introduction

In November 2023, CEO Sue Freeth appointed two independent advisers, Lynne Wardle & Dennis Overtone, to support a collaborative strategy development approach.

Working collectively with VSA, they facilitated the creation of an overarching strategy development process that engaged the board, staff team, stakeholders, and beneficiaries in establishing and committing to a future direction and long-term strategy for VSA. The advisers approached this work with sleeves rolled up, contributing their experience and insights from elsewhere to the skills and expertise of the VSA team.

The approach has followed seven key stages: Establishing the intent; Initiation and orientation of participants; Understanding the context; Problem framing; Identifying and evaluating options for action; Setting the direction; Action planning.

This strategy is the result of that process.

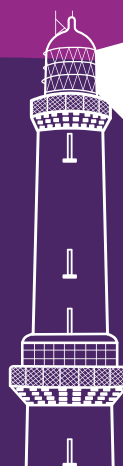


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Section 01: A crucial moment



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The state of social care

The care sector is at a crossroads. The population is aging and living longer with multiple conditions.

This leads to increasing demand for support.

The need for mental health support is increasing at all ages.

Continued austerity and fiscal tightening has reduced public sector funding. Local commissioners are responding by increasing the threshold at which they provide statutory services.

Increased employers' national insurance contributions pose an existential threat for providers in the sector, threatening to further reduce capacity for providing care to those in need.

Responding to increasing demand has meant that investment has not moved 'upstream' and the opportunities for prevention by intervening earlier to support people before they reach a crisis, have not been taken.

Emerging technologies have the potential to both reduce cost and improve the quality of support, but lack of investment and perhaps imagination, has meant that innovation in this area has not happened to the extent that had been expected.

This national care crisis is just as evident locally in Aberdeen City and Shire.

The need is clear. VSA has a duty to care for our communities by building a system that responds to these challenges and makes sure that no one is left behind.



Setting the scene

For over 155 years, VSA has been a pillar of social care in Aberdeen and the North East of Scotland, walking alongside our neighbours in our communities, providing charitable care and support in times of need.

From gifting sacks of coal for winter warmth and flowers for those in hospital, to providing childcare for working women and a labour exchange to support people into work, from our earliest beginnings VSA, as an independent social care charity, has been known for small acts of kindness and bold advocacy for reform.

As 'care' became more commoditised and professionalised, we evolved into a major local employer, providing regulated care services in mental health; older people's residential care and care at home; support for adults with learning disabilities; residential education for children with autism; outreach additional support needs provision for early years; and residential support for adults with enduring mental illness.

In the recent past, this evolution meant that VSA enjoyed reliable and stable income from public sector commissioners.

But now we find that our services are being rationed, so that they can only be accessed by people with higher levels of need, and public sector funding no longer meets the cost of providing quality care services.

We stand at a crucial turning point.

VSA must adapt to the needs of our time and reclaim care as the heart of what it means to be a community.

We must rediscover our spirit of innovation and, together with our Aberdeen City and Shire communities and our local partners, create a cohesive support system of care that wraps around our communities and enables connected, dignified and fulfilled lives.

This strategy presents a roadmap for change. It sets a new direction that will see us improve the care and support we provide locally now, and it will enable VSA to lead the way in redefining care so that it is fair, accessible and empowering for everyone in Aberdeen City and Shire.

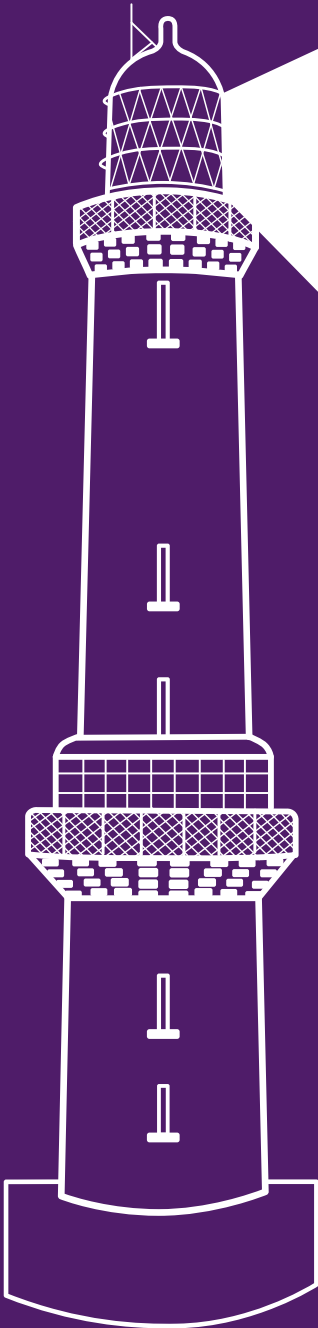
The change will not be easy. We are facing unprecedented challenges to our ongoing operations, in the care sector, and in society at large.

We need confidence, energy and focus to bring the hopefulness that our communities need and deserve.

Our strategic roadmap

Our 2030 vision

We will have been instrumental in creating a City and Shire where people live in caring communities, are cared for, and supported to care for each other in times of need. Everyone locally will have care and support in a place to call home.



Our strategic roadmap

Our mission

We have identified the following six strategic mission ‘pillars’ to build upon over the next five years and enable us to deliver our vision while driving key revenue, set on a future that we want to achieve:

**An affordable
local system
of care**

**A local
‘careforce’**

**Ageing well and
dying well**

**Support for families
through mental
health recovery**

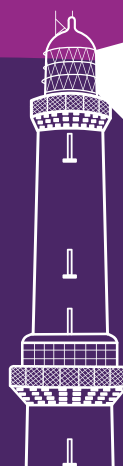
**Recognising
neurodiversity in
lifelong learning**

**No one is
left behind**



Section 02:

The time is now



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Our readiness to respond

Now is the time for VSA to lead the way and be the change we want to see in our community.

We need to be bold, dynamic and innovative and the beacon of hope for a better City and Shire.

VSA's history of caring is woven through generations of families in Aberdeen and the North East.

Our committed staff have developed expertise across the most challenging of regulated services. We have loyal supporters in our local community and amongst local businesses.

Through generous gifts and investments, we have built balance sheet strength. Our scope and scale of service delivery, our history of innovation and advocacy for reform, mean that partners turn to us for leadership in challenging times.

However, we are not immune from the pressures faced by the sector.

The extent of our commissioned services was once a strength but now it has made us vulnerable to underfunding of services, less responsive to changing community needs and dulled our capacity for innovation.

What may once have been best practice in our support functions now needs to be looked at afresh and modernised to enable us to be more responsive and adaptable.

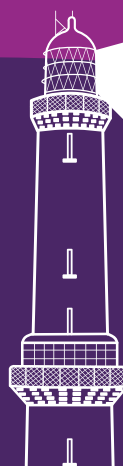
We must attend to our culture, so that optimism, confidence, hope and care spreads through our workforce and out communities.

We must acknowledge the challenges but most importantly, we must grasp the opportunity to rethink care in ways that are community driven, affordable and inclusive.





Section 03: Our response



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What we're going to do

Our duty to our communities is to lead through uncertain times with focus and confidence.

We have identified six 'missions' that respond to the challenges we have recognised, that will also generate crucial income streams through service provision as well as fundraising.

These missions form the strategic pathway that will shape every action the charity takes to deliver our vision by 2030. They represent our dedication to making tangible, positive and lasting change in people's lives.

An affordable local system of care

We will build a cohesive care system that is grounded in communities, where people are cared for without fear of financial burden.

Evolving our operating model will allow us to build sustainable care models, transform and utilise our balance sheet strength, and innovate in personal financial products, which will ensure care is available for everyone while protecting VSA's own future.

A local 'careforce'

We will reclaim 'care', connecting families, carers, neighbours, volunteers and our skilled employees to grow and attract a local VSA 'careforce'.

Caring and being cared for is at the heart of being human and the meaning of 'community'.

We will ensure that everyone that works for or with VSA has opportunities for reliable relationships and maintaining friendships and family bonds.

This will also encourage our 700+ staff to be brand ambassadors championing VSA to friends and family alike as a great place to work.

Aging well and dying well

We ensure older adults feel cared for, valued, supported, and able to live fulfilled lives on their terms.

No one need die alone. We will provide end-of-life care that is compassionate and respectful, supporting families so that everyone can have a dignified and peaceful end-of-life journey.

Supporting families through mental health recovery

We will ensure that no one recovers alone.

When a loved one is living with a long-term mental health condition, we will support families to maintain connection, helping them to feel included, equipped and confident as partners in care.

We will nurture mentally healthy communities, tackling the root causes of mental distress, fostering relationships and connections for mental health care.

Recognising neurodiversity in lifelong learning

We recognise the unique strengths and challenges of neurodivergent people.

We will champion inclusive education, and employment, providing a welcoming centre of excellence.

We will ensure that neurodivergent people and their families receive the support they need at every stage of life, from early childhood, to adulthood so they can learn, grow and contribute to their communities without unnecessary barriers.

No one is left behind

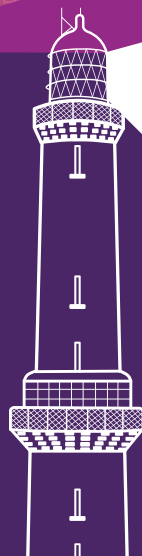
We will re-engage with VSA's core charitable objectives.

We will ensure that no one is left behind without the care, support and connection they need to thrive.

We will ensure that everyone can benefit the opportunities and resources that Aberdeen and the North East provide. We will challenge inequalities and create real opportunities for people, regardless of their background or circumstances, so that they can live, learn and work in a community where they belong.



Section 04:
**Our strategy
in action**



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Our strategy in detail

An affordable local system of care

2025-27 – Building foundations

- Operational restructure to future proof the leadership and management of VSA services
- Measures in place to make crucial savings
- Self-funding OPS placements and packages launched to market to drive additional revenue
- New financial products discovery research phase to investigate new revenue streams
- Mobilise fundraising campaign to double fundraising income stream
- Improve estate utilisation to maximise resources
- Support functions organised to deliver transformation and maximise efficiencies
- Review of procurement to make savings and maximise efficiencies
- Financial strategy for balance sheet leverage and full transparency

2027-30 – Achieving the Mission

- Launch new mutual approaches to care funding
- A financially resilient, future proofed, VSA thanks to operational restructure
- Diversified funding streams fully operational including self-funding and payment by results
- Strengthened partnerships with City and Shire organisations to facilitate the most cost-effective solutions
- Strong fundraising campaign momentum continuing to deliver a significant increase of funds
- Community access to affordable care to have more impact
- A reshaped balance sheet to future proof the organisation
- Technology enabled care to make us as efficient and as cost effective as possible

A local 'careforce'

2025-27 – Building foundations

- Terms and Conditions Review to ensure our workforce reward and condition is fair, efficient, followed and fit for purpose
- Restructure of operations to enable the organisation to deliver the most effective, efficient and best practice care in the current environment
- HR operations review to ensure efficiencies and modern ways of working are established and embedded
- Implementation of self service HR system to drive additional efficiencies
- OPS Nurses recruited for residential OPS to plug current gaps in our ability to care effectively
- Volunteer development to mobilise volunteer skills and potential, supporting an efficient workforce
- Ensure locality-based working to create efficiencies
- Greater family and carer involvement to empower community connection and efficiencies

2027-30 – Achieving the Mission

- Hospice at home nursing care to help people stay at home for longer
- Palliative care in the community, in peoples' homes not just VSA homes.
- Integrated care provided with families and carers to help increase impact without increasing cost
- Integrated volunteers to maximise a cost effective 'care' force for good and increase impact
- 'VSA' Nurses in place to provide flexible nursing care including specialist Dementia care, in VSA homes and beyond, wherever needed
- Integrated care at home and circles of support to help people stay at home for longer

Ageing well, dying well

2025-27 – Building foundations

- Broomhill Activity Centre becomes a vibrant community hub to engage the community and drive potential rental income
- Review of current service user demographics to fully understand our audience and service users' needs
- Self-funded respite and day care launched to drive additional revenue
- Self-funded domiciliary and flexible care at home launched to drive additional revenue
- Partnerships with local community organisations launched to drive efficiencies and impact
- Technology enabled care to ensure VSA is operating most efficiently and effectively at the highest level of care provision

2027-30 – Achieving the Mission

- VSA model of all age end-of-life care launched and active
- VSA service users are living well with complex needs met through the integrated support in the community to help keep them in their own homes longer
- Effective rehabilitation to help service users remain in their own homes
- VSA Hospice at Home support to enable continuity of care at home
- Carers feel supported and cared for at loved one's end of life to provide wider impact and support beyond our immediate service users

Supporting families through mental health recovery

2025-27 – Building foundations

- Service user and community engagement to increase impact without increasing cost
- ‘Discovery’ research to understand prevalence and prevention to inform our decisions to increase our impact and provide more cost-efficient services
- Mental health rehabilitation review to inform better decision-making for cost savings and wider impact
- Partnership working to increase impact without increasing cost
- Outreach provision to increase impact without increasing cost
- Mental health support in OPS to integrate service delivery and provide continuity and improve quality of life and person-centred care

2027-30 – Achieving the Mission

- New model of mental health support and pathways to independent living to increase impact without increasing cost
- Vibrant peer support groups to increase impact without increasing cost
- Families are supported and stay connected in time of crisis broadening our impact and help our service users maintain connections
- Integrated care in the community increase our impact, without increasing costs and providing continuity of care
- Reduced anxiety and antidepressant prescriptions enable payment by results via collaboration with the council to achieve impact

Recognising neurodiversity in lifelong learning

2025-27 – Building foundations

- Project leadership support for design and construction appointed with responsibility to accelerate build of new school
- Linn Moor refurbishment to ensure continued referrals pending new school
- Linn Moor digital upgrade to ensure continued referrals pending new school
- ‘Discovery’ research of best-in-class autism support to future proof the school
- ‘Discovery’ research of adult learning and support requirements to ensure continued referrals pending new school and extend impact into adult services
- New campus requirements specified and agreed to accelerate build of new school
- Additional Support Needs Advisory Projects (ASNAP) service active in communities beyond nursery schools e.g. in community centres working in partnership increasing impact and income generating sustainable service through self-funding and grants

2027-30 – Achieving the Mission

- Campus design approved to help future proof the school
- Site identified and acquired suitable for a new state of the art school for students with complex learning needs
- Outreach service active and established creating more impact in the community while maintaining cost-efficiencies
- Build commenced to accelerate new school opening
- Transition plan for Linn Moor agreed
- Self-funded offer growing for sustainable income for the school

No one is left behind

2025-27 – Building foundations

- Community development partnerships such as working in partnership to build a hopeful community with connection and inclusion reducing loneliness by developing the Broomhill Activity Centre and Easter Anguston Farm as community destination hubs
- Partnership development working with volunteers and other charities to help combat isolation and poverty bringing their beneficiaries to the farm, and accessing the fuel fund
- Peer support groups formed to connect and support isolated individuals
- Easter Anguston commercial manager appointed to deliver a sustained public benefit and grow a commercial revenue income stream
- Wellbeing and community benefit plan for Easter Anguston to maximise the farm's full potential to the local community and support wider work of VSA
- Benefit maximisation support for staff and communities
- Poverty action e.g. reducing poverty and supporting low-income families through initiatives such as the VSA Fuel Fund

2027-30 – Achieving the Mission

- Support for women's microenterprise working in partnership with Credit Union
- Support for families at times of crisis – unemployment, relationship breakdown, bereavement working in partnership to prevent mental health breakdown
- Build secure attachment and resilient communities post-COVID working in partnership to deliver family support and childcare
- Access for all to learning and skills for energy transition working in partnership with Just Transition Fund
- Vibrant volunteer network to help us reach and support more people

Caring together

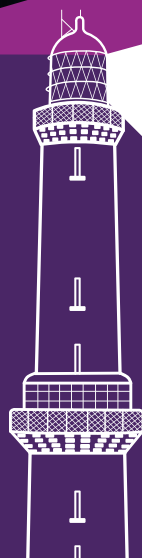
By 2030, we live in a caring community, where people are cared for and supported to care for each other in times of need. Everyone VSA cares and supports in a place we call home.

	An affordable local system of care	A local 'careforce'	Ageing well, dying well
2025/26	- Financial resilience - Self-funders - Finance product 'discovery' - Fundraising Campaign - Estate Strategy	- OP Nursing Care - Revised Terms and Conditions - Restructured ops - HR Review (L&D Recruitment) - HR System	- Vibrant and connected Broomhill Activity Centre - Partner connections - Care At Home integrated into residential settings
2026/27	- Strong Financial management - Asset utilization - Balance sheet leverage and evolution - Campaign momentum	- Residential Nursing Care - VSA Nurses - Volunteer development - Locality working - Family involvement	- Integrated care at home - Connected in communities - Respite and day care
2027/28	- VSA financially resilient - Shared ownership - Partnerships - Personal fin products - Technology enabled	- Hospice Nursing Care - Palliative Care in the community - Integrated Care	- All age end of life care - Living well with complex needs - Rehabilitation
2028/29	- Affordable care - New mutual approaches to care funding - Payment by results - Community contribution	- Integrated Volunteers - Excellent workforce - Family and carers	- Hospice at Home - Excellent end of life care - Living well for longer - Caring and cared for

	Providing family support through mental health recovery	Recognising neurodiversity in lifelong learning	No one is left behind
2025/26	• Service User engagement • Prevention 'Discovery' • Mental Health Rehab relocation	• Project Lead appointed • Linn Moor refurb • Complex needs education 'discovery'	• Community development partnerships • Peer support • Poverty action
2026/27	• Adult Autism Discovery • Partnership working • Mental Health Rehab review • Outreach	• Campus requirements spec'd • Site identified • Linn Moor digital upgrade • Adult ed 'discovery'	• VSA in communities • Local partnerships • Volunteering opps • Benefit maximization • Supported housing
2027/28	• New model of mental health care • Support for independent living • Peer support groups	• Campus design approved • Funding identified • Partnerships formed • Outreach service	• Learning and skills for energy transition • Social enterprise • Family Support • Support for women • Community initiatives as Easter Anguston Farm
2028/29	• Families stay connected in times of crisis • Care in community • Payment by results	• Build commenced • Transition plan for Linn Moor • Community based services launched	• Inequality gap reduced • People foster secure attachments • Support through life transitions • Wellbeing at Easter Anguston Farm



Section 05: Driving and sustaining action



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Work has already started

Work has begun to build the foundations for this strategy.

VSA's Transformation Programme has identified and scoped projects to improve the financial performance of the charity and deliver progress in the strategic direction.

Executive Directors are accountable for the delivery of these projects.

The Transformation Programme provides the bridge between VSA's previous 'business as usual' and the strategy set out here.

This will form the basis of the Executive's objectives, and the Board will hold the executive to account for the delivery of this plan.



A return to our roots

This strategy marks a powerful return to the heart of our Aberdeen City and Shire community, to the spirit and purpose that inspired VSA's inception 155 years ago.

Just as our early founders built trusted relationships through kindness, curiosity, and practical support, we too are reimagining how we show up for the people we serve.

In delivering this strategy, we will remain true to our guiding principles agreed last year and demonstrate the following characteristics and behaviours:

- **Care and pride for our service users, colleagues, partners and mission**
- **Dynamic, adaptable and responsive action**
- **Equality and inclusion in our workforce and with our partners**
- **Reliability, transparency and integrity**
- **Independent thinking, collaborative acting**

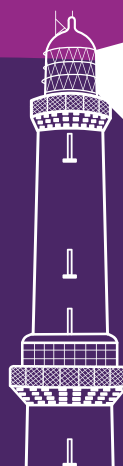
By stepping beyond our walls and into the lives of families across our communities, we will increase our impact, make our services more cohesive, responsive and sustainable, and reignite the connection between VSA and the city and shire it was built to support.

This is not just a strategy, it's a movement back to our roots and forward to a bold, community-powered future





Appendices



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Appendix A: Thank you

The Board guiding strategic intent

- A series of 4 facilitated workshops with trustees and convenors established a focus on achieving the charitable objects, innovation, sector leadership and ensuring the optimum organisational structure for delivery.
- A further workshop introduced interim findings and good governance practice

Staff participation

- A Strategic Development Group (SDG) was formed of staff representing all services and support areas
- The group participated in workshops to build their capacity for person-centred strategy development
- SDG members undertook research, analysis and identified areas for innovation and focus within the strategy
- The SDG members were Brodie Hird, Carolyn Slessor, Hayley Beason, Susan Coutts, Jenna Gilbert, Jennifer McDonald, Holly Leiper, Ann Corbin, Carol Nicholson and Jenny Ewen.
- The SDG facilitated engagement with service users and families.

Stakeholder Engagement

- A series of stakeholder lunches were hosted to engage with stakeholders and build their commitment and support for the future of VSA:- Ken Milroy, Aberdeen Colleges; Donella Beaton, VP Economic Development, RGU; Lis Lyall, Pastor, Fraserburgh Church of God; Linda Tinson, Partner, Burness Paul; Sylvia Halkerston, Lord Dean of Guild of the City, Burgess; Fiona Mitchelhill, Chief Officer, Aberdeen City Health & Social Care Partnership; Sally Ann Kelly, CEO, Aberlour Trust; Dan Wright, Supply Chain Lead, Flotation Energy; Bob Keiller, CEO, Our Union Street; Dee Fraser, CEO, Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (IRISS); Francis Clark, MD NorSea; Prof Mandy Ryan, Aberdeen University, Director of Health Economics Research Unit (HERU); Fiona Rae, CEO Community Food Initiatives North East (CFINE); Susan Webb, Director of Public Health, Grampian NHS Foundation Trust; Chief Inspector Darren Bruce, Police Scotland; Lord Provost of Aberdeen, David Cameron, SNP.
- Conversations with: Wood Foundation, Inchgarth Community Centre, Aberdeen Meninsheds, Greyhope Café, Step Change in Safety, Torry & Holburn GP Practice, Aberdeen Social Housing Landlords, Kay Diack ACC Police Scotland, Aberdeen Energy Transition Zone, Aberdeen Community Planning

Appendix B: Personas

Tony - Community Recovery Through Connection

Age: 52

Condition: Schizophrenia

Mission: Supporting Families Through Mental Health Recovery

- Tony will join a VSA partner peer support group where he connects with others facing similar challenges, meeting regularly for volunteering at Easter Anguston Farm and social events
- The group will be supported by one trained volunteer and one professional support worker, enabling 30 people at a time, to receive structured social support at a fraction of residential costs
- Tony can stay in his own home, maintaining his independence while reducing loneliness and avoiding costly inpatient care

Strategic value

This model significantly reduces staff costs and maximises impact, helping VSA reach more people without requiring large care home investments. It also promotes mental wellbeing, resilience, and community connection, reducing the risk of crisis.

Martha - Living Well with Early-Onset Dementia

Age: 64

Condition: Early-onset dementia

Mission: Ageing Well, Dying Well

- A specialist dementia nurse from VSA will visit Martha at home, offering personalised support to both her and her husband
- This includes practical advice for the carer on managing daily routines, communication, and behaviour changes, as well as emotional support to reduce stress and prevent carer burnout
- Our VSA nurse can coordinate other services as needed, ensuring Martha's evolving needs are met without forcing a move to residential care too soon

Strategic value

This approach keeps people like Martha at home longer, reducing the need for costly residential care and providing continuity of care that respects their independence and emotional wellbeing.

Joe - Combatting Loneliness Through Community

Age: 78

Condition: Frailty and isolation

Mission: No One Left Behind

- Instead of moving to sheltered housing, Joe will join a daycare activity group that keeps him socially engaged without leaving his home
- Regular meet-ups, group meals, and community integration activities will offer Joe the social connection and structure he needs, reducing loneliness and increasing his overall wellbeing
- With just a small team of trained volunteers and support workers, these activities can reach dozens of people like Joe, keeping them connected and independent

Strategic value

This approach reduces the need for costly residential placements, cuts isolation, creates connection and community, and improves overall health, which reduces demand on other health services.

Leo - Continuous Care Across Changing Needs

Age: 72

Condition: Previously severe mental health issues, now dementia

Mission: An affordable Local System of Care

- At Crosby House, Leo will be able to receive integrated mental health and dementia care, avoiding the disruption of multiple moves
- VSA's new approach means Leo can access residential, mental health, and dementia care in one setting, with the nursing support needed to stay in familiar surroundings
- This continuity of care reduces stress, maintains dignity, and provides a home for life, eliminating the need for another move as his dementia progresses

Strategic value

This fully integrated model streamlines VSA's care pathways, creating operational efficiencies and ensuring residents can age in place without constant upheaval, reducing stress for both residents and their families.