

CABINET (HOUSING) COMMITTEE

27 MARCH 2013

TACKLING HOMELESSNESS IN WINCHESTER

REPORT OF HEAD OF HOUSING SERVICES

Contact Officer: Steve Tong Tel No: 01962 848298 stong@winchester.gov.uk

RECENT REFERENCES:

CAB2366 Homelessness Prevention Fund 2012/13 - 4 July 2012

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Council receives funding from DCLG specifically to deal with homelessness. This report provides details of the income and expenditure proposals for 2012/13 and projections of the budget model for a further two years.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 That Cabinet (Housing) Committee note the emerging issues and trends in homelessness
- 2 That Cabinet (Housing) Committee note the proposed expenditure on homelessness prevention for 2013/14 and projected spend for the following two years and approve that funding be released from the Earmarked Reserve to meet the 2013/14 proposals.

CABINET (HOUSING) COMMITTEE

27 MARCH 2013

TACKLING HOMELESSNESS IN WINCHESTER

REPORT OF HEAD OF HOUSING SERVICES

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This report provides an update on some of the current issues and challenges in homelessness and on the services being delivered by the Council's Housing Options team. The report also looks at the projected use of the budget available in the Homelessness Prevention Fund.
- 1.2. There has been an upturn in approaches for housing advice and assistance from people facing homelessness and officers are focussing a great deal of attention on delivering an effective package of measures to alleviate the situation. The prevention of homelessness is a key part of the approach since early intervention can avoid the need to take corrective action later on.
- 1.3. There is no sign in the short to medium term of the pressure reducing on the housing options service, and the changes to the welfare benefits system are likely to exacerbate the problem for a number of applicants.

2. HOUSING OPTIONS SERVICES

- 2.1. Housing Services has a statutory duty to assist homeless households under the provisions of Housing Act 1996 (Parts VI & VII) as amended by Homelessness Act 2002. That might include a full rehousing duty or the prevention or relief of their homelessness. Each person who makes an approach to the Council under homelessness is dealt with by the Housing Options team who undertake a full investigation into the circumstances of the household. In considering what duty is owed to each applicant the team have to consider eligibility to seek assistance under immigration rules; whether homelessness exists or is threatened; whether the homelessness has arisen intentionally; whether the household contains a member in priority need (such as a child or vulnerable adult); whether there is a local connection.
- 2.2. Where the Housing Options team concludes that a full housing duty is owed, in most cases the household is offered temporary accommodation and subsequently moves into social rented accommodation with the Council or a Registered Provider. This places a considerable demand upon the limited stock of social rented housing in the District.

- 2.3. The frontline Housing Options service is provided by two Housing Options Officers and two Housing Options Support Officers. The team operates a 'walk in' triage service in the Customer Service Centre for anyone seeking housing advice, with follow-up appointments as required. Every customer receives an advice and assistance letter which confirms the advice given and setting out the housing options available to each customer. This is helpful to the customer themselves and to partner agencies to whom they might also apply for support or assistance.
- 2.4. Pressure is mounting with a growing number of clients approaching the Council for assistance. In the last 12 month period we have received 1403 approaches, including triage approaches and follow up appointments; 48 acceptances of a full housing duty and 106 recorded preventions (including rent deposits, referrals to supported housing projects etc). These numbers are expected to increase during 2013/14
- 2.5. Recent enactment of provisions within the Localism Act 2011 allows local authorities to now offer private rented accommodation as a full discharge of homelessness duty and the Private Rented Sector Offer Policy is presented to Cabinet (Housing) Committee for approval elsewhere on the agenda. The measure is intended to provide flexibility, mobility and choice in their housing and will avoid the pitfall of making an application as homeless being seen as a 'fast track' to social housing.
- 2.6. The Housing Options service benefitted from a service diagnostic carried out by the National Homelessness Specialist Advisor Team in February 2012, and this has proved an invaluable tool in driving improvements in the service. In August 2012, the Ministerial Working Group on Homelessness published their findings in a report entitled "Making every contact count: a joint approach to preventing homelessness" The report set out ten local challenges for local authorities and their partners in tackling homelessness. The ten challenges are attached for information at Appendix 1. The recommendations of the diagnostic and the ten local challenges form the basis of our action plan to provide the best possible standards of service for those in housing need across the district.
- 2.7. To help with delivery of the housing options agenda, officers are working in partnership with neighbouring authorities across North Hampshire on joint initiatives to take advantage of funding provided by DCLG particularly aimed at tackling single homelessness and rough sleeping and Appendix 2 contains a summary of the progress being made by the Council towards the work streams being coordinated at sub-regional level.
- 2.8. A key part of the approach being adopted in addressing homelessness is the principle of a single service offer which seeks to ensure that the council and all its partner agencies provide a consistent, 'joined up'

service so that anyone in need of help will receive the same level of service and support irrespective of which agency or service point they approach for help. The Portfolio Holder for Housing hosted a meeting with a number of key voluntary sector partners earlier this year to discuss some of the current pressures including the need for more 'move on' accommodation, and how we can be effective in achieving a consistent approach. The Council's ability to cope successfully with the demands being faced by people facing homelessness and severe housing need relies in part upon the effectiveness of the work being done, and its relationship with the partner agencies offering services in the community.

3. NATIONAL HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION INITIATIVE

- 3.1. The Council has derived considerable benefit from hosting the National Homelessness Specialist Advisor Team Leader on behalf of DCLG since April 2011. From April 2013 the Council has agreed to host a new National Homelessness Prevention Initiative to promote best practice in homelessness and housing options services across all local authorities. Details of this initiative will be presented to Cabinet in April 2013.

4. HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION FUND

- 4.1. The City Council has benefitted significantly in recent years from the annual Homelessness Prevention grant funding aimed at specifically supporting additional services improve prevention of homelessness in the district. The City Council's allocation has been enhanced compared to other authorities as a result of the hosting arrangements for the DCLG National Adviser post.
- 4.2. In 2013/14, Homelessness Prevention grant of £229,170 has been provided and the same amount has been assured for 2014/15. Funding is received as part of the Revenue Support Grant. In addition, it has been confirmed that Homelessness Prevention will continue to form the same proportion of the overall Government Grant allocation for the following seven years, although the total allocation has yet to be determined and will be subject to the spending review.
- 4.3. The table at Appendix 3 shows the Homelessness Prevention Earmarked Reserve with spending proposals for 2013/14 to 2015/16. Funding the 2013/14 programme will require additional funding being released from the Earmarked Reserve and it is recommended that this be approved. The total release for 2013/14 is forecast to be £70,330, an additional £54,000 compared to the existing budget.
- 4.4. Rent Deposits. The expenditure on rent deposits during 2012/13 has exceeded the budgeted amount and the budget for 2013/14 and beyond has therefore been adjusted to reflect current demand.

- 4.5. Staff Salaries. The Homelessness Prevention grant received annually includes specific provision to fund the Specialist advisor post and administrative support. The fund is also used to provide additional resource to the Homelessness team to meet the increasing demand in this area.
- 4.6. Additional Project Funding. Provision has been included to allow the Homelessness team to fund initiatives to support the emerging national priorities of “No Second Night Out” and to meet the local challenges included within “Making Every Contact Count”. In addition, responding to these initiatives effectively will require some minor improvements to systems supporting homelessness work and additional one off provision (and for on-going support) has also been included to address this.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

5. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND CHANGE PLANS (RELEVANCE TO):

- 5.1. The Sustainable Community Strategy Active Communities outcome contains a commitment to ‘support local people in accessing high quality and affordable housing which meets their needs’.
- 5.2. The Strategy also contains the stated principle that the Winchester District Strategic Partnership will ‘prioritise those who most need our help in the community and make sure they have access to the support they need’

6. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 6.1. The proposed expenditure outlined in this report is fully covered by the DCLG Preventing Homelessness Funding specifically allocated to help the Council fulfil its obligations under the national homelessness agenda. From 2013/14, this funding is a specifically identified element of the Revenue Support Grant. This grant is therefore in line with the Governments policy of providing un-ringfenced funding to enable greater flexibility in local decision making.
- 6.2. The Homelessness Prevention Funding for 2013/14 has been confirmed in the 2013/14 settlement at £229,170 and is identified at the same level in the 2014/15 provisional settlement. In Appendix 3 this funding has been projected at the same level in 2015/16.
- 6.3. As shown in Appendix 3, a total release of £70,330 is required from the Homelessness Prevention Earmarked Reserve in 2013/14, in order to fund both the Employee and Project budgets. This is an additional release of £54,000 compared to existing budgets and leaves a projected balance of £280,218 at the end of 2013/14.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. The projected spend is based upon an expectation that government funding in relation to homelessness will continue at current levels. Indications to date suggest that this is a reasonable assumption. However, expenditure on homelessness prevention in future years will need to be adjusted to reflect any changes in grant income for this purpose.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None

Appendices:

1. Local Authority challenges in *Making Every Contact Count*
2. Feedback from WCC to Sub-Regional Group
3. Homelessness Prevention Fund – 2012-2016

Appendix 1

Local Authority challenges in *Making Every Contact Count*

1. To adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services
2. To actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs
3. To offer a Housing Options prevention service to all clients including written advice
4. To adopt a *No Second Night Out* model or an effective local alternative
5. To have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that include appropriate accommodation and support
6. To develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both client and landlord
7. To actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme
8. To have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually to be responsive to emerging needs
9. To not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation
10. To not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and for no longer than 6 weeks

Appendix 2**Feedback from WCC to Sub-Regional Group (Feb 13)**

Topic	Feedback
Peer Review Toolkit and Ten Local Challenges	We are actively planning to undertake the peer review in partnership with two other authorities. We recognise that we have quite a lot of work to do to meet the ten local challenges, but feel the Peer Review and application process will be very helpful to us in developing our Housing Options service.
Allocation policies	Winchester City Council is a partner with four other local authorities in Hampshire HomeChoice (HHC), a sub-regional choice-based lettings scheme. The allocations policy for the sub-regional scheme has been re-drafted to reflect changing priorities as a result of welfare reform, and the Council is working on a revision of its own allocations policy which sits underneath the HHC scheme.
Private Rented Sector Offer	We are working on a pilot project with CRISIS to develop a much improved landlord offer to help us gain access to PRS for clients coming through the Housing Options service. We are also writing a PRSO Policy which will be submitted to Cabinet (Housing) Committee in March for approval, to allow us to discharge homelessness duty into the PRS.
NSNO and StreetLink	Limited activity generated through StreetLink – only one referral received so far. We are making good progress with putting together our NSNO service. We have two voluntary sector housing providers who are prepared to receive people overnight and can offer six emergency bed spaces for people sleeping rough to deliver NSNO.
Single Homeless Funding	We are running a pilot project with our homelessness day centre to provide a personalised budget to support entrenched rough sleepers off of the streets. The arrangements we are putting in place for NSNO aim to offer a pathway to single homeless people. Our Housing Options service provides advice and assistance to single people and the landlord offer includes provision for single people and couples as well as for families. SWEP provision (up to 5 beds) offers short-term assistance to single homeless people in severe weather
Feedback generally: main challenges	We have good support from elected members who are taking an active interest in homelessness. This helps us retain our Homelessness Prevention Grant to support our services. However, demand has grown substantially. We have not used B&B for 12 months, but have 39 units of TA plus an additional 12 units of general needs housing currently in use by homeless households.

Homelessness Prevention Proposals & Earmarked Reserve Forecast

	2011/12	2012/13	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
	Outturn	Budget	Forecast			
	£	£	£	£	£	£
Expenditure Forecasts						
National Homelessness Advisor Post	75,000	75,000	75,000	77,500	80,000	82,000
Specialist Advisor Homelessness Support Officer			2,500	30,000	31,000	32,000
Homelessness Team Admin Support		22,000	18,000	19,500	20,500	21,000
Housing Options Support Officer		30,000	27,000	29,000	30,000	31,000
Trinity Pilot Project	20,185	39,815	40,000	30,000	30,000	
Wet Shelter (Capital)					50,000	
Repairs to 27 Eastgate Street	6,000					
Repairs to Barnes House - contribution to HRA		10,000				
NET Rent Deposit write-offs / short term accommodation	105,207	55,000	75,000	75,000	75,000	50,000
Homelessness Grants (allocated)		22,000	22,000	22,000	22,000	22,000
Homelessness Grants (unallocated)		1,500	1,500	1,500	1,000	1,000
Mortgage Repossession work		5,000		5,000	5,000	5,000
Front line Early Intervention Fund		5,000		5,000	5,000	5,000
Money Advice / Credit Union initiatives		5,000		5,000	5,000	5,000
Budget to support "No Second Night Out" Initiative				10,000	10,000	
Budget to respond to "Making Every Contact Count"				20,000	20,000	
Homelessness IT Module				10,000	1,000	1,000
Total	206,392	270,315	261,000	299,500	354,500	254,000
Funding						
Local Services Support Grant	190,470	190,470	190,470	229,170	229,170	229,170
Additional one-off Grant	185,000					
Rental Income (additional £8.5k to Estates)		6,000	7,000			
Gosport Borough Council Contribution	5,000					
DCLG Preventing Repossessions	30,000					
Total	410,470	196,470	197,470	229,170	229,170	229,170
Homelessness Prevention Earmarked Reserve						
Opening Balances	210,000	414,078	414,078	350,548	280,218	154,888
Expenditure	(206,392)	(270,315)	(261,000)	(299,500)	(354,500)	(254,000)
Funding	410,470	196,470	197,470	229,170	229,170	229,170
Transfer to / (from) Earmarked Reserve			(63,530)	(70,330)	(125,330)	(24,830)
Forecast Closing Balances	414,078	340,233	350,548	280,218	154,888	130,058
Expenses and Winding up costs for Specialist Advisor (received in 2010/11)						80,000
Currently has no spending plan / contingency						50,058

* Funding shown for 2015/16 to remain at 2013/14 levels but is subject to future confirmation

Committed Expenditure - 2013/14 & 2014/15	178,000	161,500
--	----------------	----------------