

CABINET (HOUSING) COMMITTEE

25 MARCH 2015

HOMELESSNESS IN WINCHESTER

REPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER)

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RECENT REFERENCES:

CAB2478 - Gold Standard for Homelessness Prevention, 10 April 2013  
CAB2549 – Preventing Homelessness in Winchester, 27 March 2014  
OS121 – Outcome and Recommendations of the Homelessness Informal Scrutiny Group, 23 March 2015

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report provides an update on the Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2013/14 – 2018/19. It also seeks approval for proposed expenditure of the Homelessness Prevention Grant (including the Earmarked Reserve) and the proposed expenditure for the Gold Standard Programme through the National Practitioner Support Service (NPSS) (including the Earmarked Reserve).

The report has not been included in the Forward Plan for March. The Homelessness Prevention and Gold Standard Reserves were included as part of the overall General Fund budget, although approving the detailed budgets now included within this report constitute a “key decision” and under the Council’s Access to Information Procedure Rules (Rule 15.1 General Exception), the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has been informed.

The Report includes a summary of the outcome of the Homelessness Informal Scrutiny Group (ISG).

Within its funding from Central Government, the Council receives amounts which are identified to be utilised for homelessness prevention and hosting the Gold Standard Programme and the team managing the programme (NPSS). This report provides details of what has been achieved during the last year 2014/15 and sets out the income and expenditure proposals for 2015/16.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Cabinet (Housing) Committee note:

1. The progress of the Homelessness Prevention Strategy Action Plan directly linked to the homelessness grant will be monitored by the Homelessness Forum and updated in a Cabinet report later in 2015.
2. The outcome of the Homelessness Informal Scrutiny Group detailed in the body of the report.
3. That Winchester has applied for the first two of the Gold Standard Challenges and is in the process of applying for a further challenge.

That Cabinet (Housing) Committee approve:

4. The General Fund spending plans for 2015/16 and associated releases from the Homelessness Prevention Earmarked Reserve as set out in Appendix 1.
5. The General Fund spending plans for 2015/16 and associated releases from the Gold Standard Programme Earmarked Reserve as set out in Appendix 2.

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### HOMELESSNESS IN WINCHESTER

#### REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER)

##### 1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report seeks approval for the proposed use of the Homelessness Prevention Grant (including the Earmarked Reserve) and informs Members of progress made in the District in relation to the homelessness prevention agenda. The report gives an overview of some of the current challenges and emerging priorities in homelessness in the District.
- 1.2 Section 2 of the report highlights the achievements in the Homelessness Prevention Action Plan and sets out objectives for service delivery in the forthcoming year. Members should be aware that there are a range of issues which need to be considered when officers are determining the Council's statutory responsibilities under homelessness legislation. However, in practice homelessness is wider than those statutory responsibilities and all local authorities are encouraged to offer support and identify solutions for all homeless people, and these wider responsibilities are reflected in the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan.
- 1.3 Section 3 provides some explanation of the proposals for budget spend of the Homelessness Prevention Grant for 2015/16 (attached as Appendix 1).
- 1.4 Section 4 details the progress made by the Council's Housing Options service in applying for the National Gold Standard Programme.
- 1.5 Section 5 provides an overview of the ISG outcomes including proposals for future service delivery.
- 1.6 Section 6 of the report highlights the achievements to date of the National Gold Standard Programme hosted by Winchester City Council and sets out objectives for service delivery in the forthcoming year.
- 1.7 Section 7 provides some explanation of the proposals for budget spend of the Gold Standard Programme for 1025/16 (attached as Appendix 2).

##### 2 Preventing Homelessness Strategy Action Plan

- 2.1 The Strategy contains an action plan (Appendix 3) which will be annually reviewed to ensure the document remains relevant and up to date. The review process will be overseen by the Homelessness Forum

and will help the Council maintain best practice within its homelessness prevention services.

- 2.2 The action plan seeks to address the key themes and priorities contained within the strategy.
- 2.3 The key areas of work that have been implemented as part of the progress on the homelessness action plan include engaging with landlords to improve access to the private rented sector, implementing a 'No Second Night Out'(NSNO) approach to rough sleepers in partnership with the Council's key stakeholders, applying for Central Government funding in partnership with neighbouring districts to prevent homelessness and support vulnerable households (Making Every Contact Count) and applying for the first two local challenges within the Gold Standard Programme.
- 2.4 The Committee is requested to note the progress above against the Preventing Homelessness Strategy Action Plan.

### 3 Homelessness Prevention Grant

- 3.1 The table at Appendix 1 shows the spending on homelessness prevention over the current financial year 2014/2015. As well as proposals for allocating the Homelessness Prevention Fund for 2015/16, the table also includes the homelessness prevention earmarked reserve and shows how that will be used to support spending proposals. The following notes explain some of the key elements of the proposed spending plans in Appendix 1:
  - a) **Employment Costs for the NPSS.** The figures included here show the contribution from the annual Preventing Homelessness Grant towards the running costs of the NPSS. To cover the costs of hosting and running this service, the Council received a one-off grant of £185,000 from DCLG in 2011/12 as well as an annual uplift (currently £115,000) in the value of the Homelessness Prevention Grant. This funding has covered the cost of 1FTE service lead and 1FTE Coordinator for the NPSS since 2011/12.
  - b) **Housing Options Support Officer.** The amount shown represents the employment costs for one of the four frontline officers operating the triage system and directly managing a client caseload. This post was initially funded through the prevention grant in recognition that the front line did not have sufficient resources or resilience and to ensure the prevention approach is at the forefront of service delivery at Winchester, which ultimately prevents the placement of households into high cost bed and breakfast accommodation. As part of the recent Informal Scrutiny Group work on Homelessness Prevention (see paragraph 5 below), the Group have made recommendations that this post be made permanent rather than the current 2 year

fixed term approach. Funding is included within this report for at least a further two years to 2017/18.

- c) **Rent Deposits.** Officers have started to have a little success in encouraging landlords to accept deposit bonds in place of a cash deposit. There remains a vibrant private rented sector across the District, especially within the Winchester town area. Competition from prospective tenants is high and in such a marketplace landlords are understandably reluctant to forego the security of cash deposits and rent in advance. Ongoing work is in place to develop an effective alternative offer for landlords, but it is recommended that the budget available for cash deposits remains at current levels in order to secure private accommodation for housing options clients. It is also recommended that a further £5,000 is available to ensure all applicants have a bank account including setting up accounts through the credit union where necessary.
- d) **Frontline Early Intervention Fund.** This small pot of funding allows front line officers to tailor the early intervention/prevention options to the individual clients needs. This can include paying arrears, purchasing second hand white goods or furniture or other intervention options.
- e) **Making Every Contact Count** – As part of the wider Homelessness Prevention Strategy, officers are working in partnership with stakeholders and other partners to adopt a ‘tell us once’ approach to the prevention service. £10,000 is available in years 2015/16 and 2016/17 to support this approach including achieving the 10 local challenges and sharing data through shared information technology and annual training/ awareness raising events with our partners, Councillors and stakeholders.
- f) **Grants to Partner Organisations.** Working with partners is a key element of the approach to preventing homelessness and it is proposed to utilise £31,300 of the grant to support the work being undertaken by a number of partner organisations, with an additional amount being available to provide a Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP) for rough sleepers (up to £4,700).
  - (i) Nightshelter. £12,000 to contribute towards the employment costs of a full time client advocate who works directly with homeless people to help them access a wide range of statutory and voluntary services as well as building their capacity for independent living and to support the Local Authority to implement the wider actions of the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan. An additional contribution is also proposed for the Nightshelter to run and manage SWEP on behalf of the local authority when the temperature is predicted to be

less than zero on three consecutive nights. The additional contribution will need to be flexible to cover the actual costs of emergency bed spaces as and when they are required but based on previous years this has not amounted to more than £4,000.

- (ii) Winchester Rent Deposit Scheme: £5,300 to help with running costs of this small housing advice and deposit service. Where help with deposits is given to single households this is often partial help with there being some onus on the individual to make a contribution to the total sum needed. The total funding provided across a financial year equates to more than the total funding granted by the local authority.
- (iii) WACA: £14,000 to fund the costs of administering and supporting the Supported Housing Panel and the Homelessness Forum. The supported housing panels plays an essential part in coordinating the role of supported housing projects in Winchester and the Homelessness Forum will support the strategic delivery of the District's key homelessness prevention aims.

3.2 **Private Sector Stock Condition Survey.** The growing dependence upon the private rented sector to offer solutions to homelessness and housing need makes it imperative that the Council has an up to date knowledge of both the extent and the condition of the stock of private rented property in the District. The survey has provided data and analysis of issues such as fuel poverty, houses in multiple occupation and the private rented sector generally which will enable the Council to develop more effective and better targeted services to address the needs of homeless and potentially homeless clients.

3.3 The Committee is requested to approve the proposed spend of the Homelessness Prevention fund as set out in Appendix 1.

#### 4 Progress Made by the Council's Housing Options Service Against the National Gold Standard Programme

4.1 To date, Winchester City Council has applied for Local Challenge 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) and Local Challenge 10 ( To not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and for no longer than 6 weeks). A further application for Local Challenge 9 (To not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation) is in the process of being submitted and will then be assessed by a sub-group from the National Advisory Committee.

## 5 The Informal Scrutiny Group Homelessness Outcomes

5.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee commissioned an Informal Scrutiny Group (ISG) to consider "How we respond as a City Council to homelessness". The full report (OS121) provides an update on the work of the ISG and the key issues highlighted throughout the process, the key recommendations are listed below:

- a) That the Council makes formal representations regarding County Council proposals for the redistribution of Supporting People funding for excluded groups, highlighting the likely impact on the district and that City Council representatives on the County Council be fully briefed on the issues.
- b) That a campaign be launched to raise awareness of rough sleepers in the parishes and rural areas– including promoting officers email to parish clerks and parishioners/constitutes and producing flyers/stickers advertising how to report a rough sleeper.
- c) That consideration be given to the re-launch/re-promotion of the 'alternative giving scheme' campaign within the town centre to reduce begging and street activity and raise awareness of actual rough sleeping
- d) That a shared data base be established, funded from Homelessness Prevention Grant, to promote a 'no wrong door approach' , ensuring all agencies supporting single homeless households can share data and outcomes of individual cases and all agencies being aware of written advice given and supporting the approach
- e) That a report be brought to Cabinet (Housing) Committee as soon as possible reviewing options for addressing the gaps in stage 2 + 3 accommodation within the district.
- f) That the need to retain the current level of front line resources by making the fixed term Housing Options Officer post permanent be confirmed, to ensure early intervention remains at the forefront of Winchester City Council housing services.
- g) To continue to achieve the Gold Standard Local Challenges and to prepare a progress report for the Cabinet (Housing) Committee in October 2015.
- h) To develop/improve liaison and protocols with all statutory agencies and to establish a district Homelessness Forum to provide opportunities for effective collaboration.

5.2 In addition to the above recommendations made to Cabinet, the ISG report also suggests that:

- a) Officers provide Members with briefing/training updates on current issues and that this training be an annual update event.
- b) Consideration be given to publishing good news stories on the successes of the service.

5.3 The report of the ISG will be considered by The Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 23 March 2015.

## 6 National Gold Standard Programme Achievements to Date

6.1 The National Gold Standard Programme has been hosted and managed by Winchester City Council for the past two years and the take up of the programme has been extremely positive across the country. The programme is designed to support all local authorities to enhance their front line services and ultimately reduce homelessness. The NPSS team promotes and delivers free tools, training and support to all local authorities to enable them to apply for the 10 local challenges as set out in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ministerial Working Group Report. The programme promotes the ethos that attending the free training, sharing good practice examples, reviewing each other's services and using the toolkits will enable authorities to achieve the 10 Challenges. By achieving the 10 local challenges, each authority will have prevention focused successful service that will ultimately reduce homelessness.

6.2 The latest monthly update information confirms 98% of all local authorities have pledged to strive for continue improvement through the programme. 92% of all local authorities have attended free legal training, with 56% of all local authorities attending the bespoke operational training that commenced in September 2014 and is due to run until March 2016. 180 of 326 local authorities are in peer review groups with dates confirmed to review each other's front line housing service. 42 local authorities have undergone a peer review of their front line services and 15 local challenges have been awarded, with a further 50 applications excepted within the next 3 months.

## 7 National Gold Standard Programme Budget

7.1 The table at Appendix 2 shows the spending on the Gold Standard Budget over the current financial year as well as the proposals for 2015/16. The table also includes the Gold Standard Budget Earmarked Reserve and shows how that will be used to support spending proposals. The following notes explain some of the key elements of the proposed spending plans in Appendix 2:

- a) **Employment Cost for the wider NPSS team:** The figures included cover the overall employment costs for the wider NPSS team. This includes 0.4 FTE Coordinator for the programme, 3.4 FTE Local Practitioners for the programme and 1FTE National Practitioner for the programme.



- b) **Bespoke Training Programme:** The figures included here cover the costs for the bespoke training programme agreed and funded by DCLG. The bespoke training commenced in September 2014 and is due to run until March 2016. The expectation is at least 90% of all local authorities will attend the bespoke operational training to support them with the operational delivery of their front line housing services.
- c) **Toolkits to support the delivery of the Programme:** To support local authorities with assessing each others services, bench marking their services against their peers and applying for the local challenges a range of toolkits have been produced and the funding for the toolkits has been agreed and funded by DCLG and is included within the figures.

#### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

#### 8 COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND PORTFOLIO PLANS (RELEVANCE TO):

- 8.1 The Community Strategy Active Communities outcome contains a commitment to 'support local people in accessing high quality and affordable housing which meets their needs'.
- 8.2 The District Community Strategy also contains a number of aims which can be supported through an effective homelessness prevention service. Most relevant are:
  - a) 'providing support when and where it is most effective to our vulnerable and disadvantaged residents'
  - b) ensuring housing is available to meet the diverse needs of our communities, including an adequate provision of affordable housing'
  - c) 'helping people to make positive changes to their lifestyles for better physical and mental health'

#### 9 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 9.1 The proposed expenditure outlined in this report and shown in Appendix 1 is covered partly by the non ring-fenced Government grant allocated specifically to help the Council fulfil its obligations under the national homelessness agenda. Funding of £225,741 has been confirmed for 2014/15 and it is assumed to remain at this level in each year of the forecast period to 2017/18. The remaining funding is fully covered by two bespoke grants from DCLG to Winchester City Council to run and manage the National Gold Standard Programme. The grants were for 1,030k in 2013/14 and 582k in 2014/15.
- 9.2 A Homelessness Prevention Fund budget of £276,378 is proposed for 2015/16 as detailed in Appendix 1. This will involve a release of

£225,741 from the Homelessness Prevention Earmarked Reserve in 2015/16, resulting in a forecast closing balance of £255,680.

- 9.3 A Homelessness Gold Standard budget for 2015/16 is detailed in Appendix 2. This will involve a release of £458,911 from the Gold Standard reserve in 2015/16, resulting in a closing balance of £662,492.

## 10 RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The homelessness grant budget for 2015/16 is based upon the sum already announced by DCLG and there is no risk therefore of changes to the amount of grant. The sum payable reflects a 1% cut in budget from 2013/14 as previously notified. Expenditure on homelessness prevention in future years will of course need to be adjusted to reflect any changes in grant income for this purpose, although no substantive changes to this funding stream are envisaged.
- 10.2 The Gold Standard Programme budget for 2015/16 is based upon the sum already received by DCLG for Winchester City Council to manage and host the programme.
- 10.3 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on the Preventing Homelessness Strategy

### BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None

### APPENDICES:

APPENDIX 1	Homelessness Prevention Fund - Proposed Budget
APPENDIX 2	The Gold Standard Programme – Proposed Budget

**Homelessness Prevention Financial Projections & Earmarked Reserve Forecast**

	2014/15 Budget	2014/15 Forecast	2015/16	2016/17
	£	£	£	£
<u>Expenditure Forecasts</u>				
National Homelessness Advisor Post	72,508	72,508	74,504	79,052
Specialist Advisor Homelessness Support Officer	30,477	27,600	27,600	28,290
National Practitioner Support Service Expenses	12,015	7,500	10,000	10,000
Housing Options Support Officer	27,720	26,616	27,174	28,949
<u>NET</u> Rent Deposit write-offs / short term accommodation	75,000	75,000	75,000	75,000
Homelessness Grants (allocated)	34,000	34,000	36,000	60,000
Front line Early Intervention Fund	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000
Money Advice / Credit Union initiatives			5,000	5,000
"No Second Night Out" Initiative	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000
"Making Every Contact Count" Initiative			10,000	10,000
Homelessness IT Module	10,000	10,996	1,100	1,100
Private Sector Stock Condition Survey	30,000	30,000		
<b>Total</b>	<b>301,720</b>	<b>294,220</b>	<b>276,378</b>	<b>307,391</b>
<u>Funding</u>				
Local Services Support Grant *	225,741	224,873	224,873	224,873
Private Sector Housing Grant repayment		15,000		
<b>Total</b>	<b>225,741</b>	<b>239,873</b>	<b>224,873</b>	<b>224,873</b>
<u>Homelessness Prevention Earmarked Reserve</u>				
Opening Balances	359,796	359,796	305,449	253,944
Expenditure	(301,720)	(294,220)	(276,378)	(307,391)
Funding	225,741	239,873	224,873	224,873
<b>Forecast Closing Balances</b>	<b>283,817</b>	<b>305,449</b>	<b>253,944</b>	<b>171,426</b>
<u>Expenses and Winding up costs for Specialist Advisor (received in 2010/11)</u>				
<u>Currently has no spending plan / contingency</u>				

\* Funding shown for 2016/17 and 17/18 assumed to remain at 2014/15 levels but is subject to future confirmation

**Gold Standard Programme Financial Projections & Earmarked Reserve Forecast**

	2014/15 Original	2014/15 Forecast	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
	£	£	£	£	£
<b>Expenditure Forecasts</b>					
Professional Practitioners / Advice / Administration	264,836				
National Practitioner Post 1FTE		70,000	70,700	71,400	73,510
Local Practitioner Posts 3.4 FTE		120,865	191,900	193,820	45,000
Coordinator Post 0.4FTE		12,190	12,311	12,440	12,802
National Practitioner Support Service Expenses	16,000	9,000	9,000	9,000	9,000
Toolkits for the Programme		9,000	10,000	10,000	
Gold Standard Training Programme	50,000	34,760	100,000	15,000	
National Practitioner Support Service administrative costs		15,000	15,000	15,000	9,000
Software/Website development			50,000	10,000	
Additional Support to Marginal Authorities				110,000	26,356
Management Overheads/Support Services			20,000	20,000	
<b>Total</b>	<b>330,836</b>	<b>270,815</b>	<b>478,911</b>	<b>466,660</b>	<b>175,668</b>
<b>Funding</b>					
Local Services Support Grant *	582,218	582,218			
Additional one-off Grant					
Rental Income (additional £8.5k to Estates)					
Gosport Borough Council Contribution					
DCLG Preventing Repossessions					
<b>Total</b>	<b>582,218</b>	<b>582,218</b>			
<b>Homelessness Prevention Earmarked Reserve</b>					
Opening Balances	809,836	809,836	1,121,239	642,328	175,668
Expenditure	(330,836)	(270,815)	(478,911)	(466,660)	(175,668)
Funding	582,218	582,218			
<b>Forecast Closing Balances</b>	<b>1,061,218</b>	<b>1,121,239</b>	<b>642,328</b>	<b>175,668</b>	