

CABINET

10 April 2013

GOLD STANDARD FOR HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION

REPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER)

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RECENT REFERENCES:

CAB2474(HSG) – Tackling Homelessness in Winchester dated 27 March 2013

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The City Council currently acts as host for a specialist national homelessness adviser funded directly by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

The DCLG are proposing to replace the existing national homelessness adviser network with a peer-review accreditation scheme designed to help local authorities to deliver more efficient and cost effective homelessness prevention services.

The DCLG has approached the Council and requested that the above national adviser continue to lead a “practitioner support team” including advisers hosted by other authorities and work with the voluntary sector to deliver the new programme. They have provided £1.73m grant funding for the programme, £1.03m of which is proposed to be granted to the City Council to fund the programme and to cover all administrative costs to the Council.

This report seeks endorsement of the Council’s role in facilitating this national programme and to the Council acting as the “accountable body” for the delivery of key elements of the programme.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 That the City Council's role in facilitating the national Gold Standard for Homelessness Prevention as outlined in this report be endorsed;
- 2 That the request for Winchester City Council to fulfil the function of 'accountable body' in relation to key elements of the programme be approved;
- 3 That Cabinet recommend to Council that the whole of the £1,030,000 grant received as part of the "Gold Standard Challenge" revenue grant determination be used to fund the delivery of the Gold Standard programme.
- 4 The Cabinet approve an initial set up/support budget for the programme of £80,000 as detailed in paragraph 5 of the report.
- 5 That the Assistant Director (Chief Housing Officer) in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, and the Heads of Finance and Legal Services, be authorised to enter into an agreement with Shelter and other partners in the Gold Standard programme and to approve the constitution of the Advisory Committee/Board through which the delivery of the programme will be governed.

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DETAIL:

- 1 Introduction
- 1.1 The City Council currently host a DCLG funded Specialist National Homelessness Advisor. This post formed part of a team of advisors across the country that have in recent years acted as a resource to assist councils to improve services to address homelessness and rough sleeping. The DCLG has provided Homelessness Prevention grant to all councils to help fund additional activities.
- 1.2 The City Council's grant has been supplemented by significant additional provision to meet the cost of the advisor and her expenses and to fund the provision of admin support for the next four years and to cover any potential severance costs. The City Council's annual operational grant was also significantly enhanced compared to other councils in recognition of our hosting role. This has had a direct impact on improving the Council's Homelessness service.
- 1.3 The current percentage distribution of the homeless grant allocation for Winchester (and all councils) has been determined for the next seven years via the business rate retention scheme, with the overall business rate retention scheme pot being confirmed for the next two years.
- 1.4 The DCLG is however changing the focus of the specialist advisors and replacing their work with a new national initiative, The Homelessness Gold Standard. This is a peer-review accreditation scheme designed to help local authorities to deliver more efficient and cost effective homelessness prevention services.
- 1.5 The DCLG has approached the City Council and asked that it assists with the facilitation of the new programme, which has been developed by the Specialist Advisor team working with voluntary sector partners, with the existing specialist advisor assuming a lead role. It has agreed to fund the initiative with over £1m coming to Winchester over two years, which will be used to help train and support all councils to work towards the standard through the peer review process.
- 1.6 The DCLG has offered £40,000 directly to the City Council to cover any administrative costs incurred. This is in addition to the funding for the specialist advisor and her support team, which has already been received

through the Homelessness Prevention Grant. However, the real advantage to the Council is not financial, but the opportunity the programme offers to the Council's own Homelessness team. Having immediate and direct access to the national advisor leading the programme will clearly assist in ensuring the Council's own prevention service meets the needs and expectations of local residents threatened with homelessness.

- 1.7 Details of the funding proposals are included as Appendix 2 (although please note the late announcement means most 2012/13 funding will fall in 2013/14).

2 The Gold Standard Challenge

- 2.1 The Gold Standard Challenge is a peer-review accreditation scheme designed to help local authorities to deliver more efficient and cost effective homelessness prevention services.
- 2.2 Developed by the practitioner support team hosted by Winchester City Council in consultation with voluntary sector and local authority partners, the proposal involves spending £1.73m of resource funding over two years. It is proposed that it be delivered through the team hosted by Winchester City Council and Shelter's National Homelessness Advisory Service (NHAS).
- 2.3 The Gold Standard is based on the ten 'local challenges' set out in the Ministerial Working Group on Homelessness report Making Every Contact Count (see Appendix 2). The scheme is designed to help to stem future increases in acceptances and rough sleeping by encouraging local authorities to deliver comprehensive preventative services for all clients (and not just the families and very vulnerable individuals who would otherwise be owed a statutory duty).
- 2.4 There are clear proven cost benefits to developing preventative services rather than relying on expensive and reactive emergency provision such as bed and breakfast and other temporary accommodation. Preventative services also help avoid the wider costs associated with entrenched rough sleeping which are felt across Government (such as health and criminal justice costs).

3 Process

- 3.1 Authorities will receive comprehensive upfront training – which will professionalise housing options services and put local authority staff in the best possible position to achieve Gold Standard Status. Practitioner support will also be available to help marginal authorities to achieve the standard.
- 3.2 Local authorities will assess each other's performance against the ten challenges using a supporting online statistics database and self-diagnostic tool. This tool (called the Self Diagnostic Toolkit) helps local authorities to undertake a cost benefit analysis of their housing options service and develop an "invest to save" argument for preventative services (i.e. a service optimised by the ten local challenges).

3.3 A board of authorities and voluntary sector partners will be established through which 'Gold Standard' status will be assessed and awarded to those authorities that are able to demonstrate that they are delivering the ten challenges.

3.4 The Gold Standard Board will be comprised of key voluntary sector partners, the first ten authorities receiving Gold Standard status and chaired by Winchester's practitioner support team.

4 The Role of the City Council

4.1 DCLG has requested that the City Council assume a lead role and act as the "accountable body" for a significant proportion of the funding they are investing in the programme. They have already made a payment of £430,000 in the form of a grant paid in accordance with section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003. They propose a further payment in 2013/14 of £700,000 for which the Council will need to account and administer payments to facilitate the delivery of the programme and to participants in the scheme. The proposed areas spend for this grant funding are detailed in Appendix 1 and summarised in paragraph 5 below.

4.2 The impact of this programme on teams across the Council will be limited. The Practitioner Support team hosted within Housing Services will be tasked with coordinating the programme. They will be responsible to the Board referred to in 3.3 above in respect of the delivery of the programme.

4.3 The programme will have some limited impact on Finance and Legal teams. The DCLG has provided grant funding of £40,000 specifically to meet the cost of this and any other administrative costs (such as the management and supervision role of the Assistant Director (Chief Housing Officer)).

4.4 The other key impact on the City Council will be an expectation that the Council's own Homelessness Prevention team work towards an early assessment and compliance with the standard. Direct support will be available from the hosted team to help achieve this and the level of Homelessness Prevention grant received each year means the Council is well placed to be one of the early awards.

5 Funding the Programme

5.1 The DCLG will be providing £700,000 grant funding to Shelter to fund the development of website tools and the delivery of professional training to local authorities. They are providing £1,030,000 grant funding to the City Council to cover:

- a) £40,000 – "Host Authority" funding for the City Council to cover any internal administrative/overhead costs
- b) £190,000 - Set up and support costs. This will include establishing processes, procedures, marketing and promotion and will also include

funding support staff to the Practitioner Support team and the funding of an additional adviser in the north of England.

- c) £500,000 – To fund short term targeted support to marginal authorities to lift them over the Gold Standard line, including additional training and tailored support based on need. This spending will be prioritised by the Gold Standard Board.
- d) £300,000 – Board membership subsidy for the first ten Gold Standard achievers to help cover costs of sitting on the board and to provide peer support to weaker authorities.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

6 CORPORATE STRATEGY (RELEVANCE TO):

- 6.1 The bid directly supports the Council's corporate priority relating to economic prosperity.

7 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 7.1 The grant funding totalling £1,030,000 offered to the Council is detailed in paragraph 5 above and Appendix 1. The funding has been offered in accordance with Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003 and is in line with the DCLG policy to not put any ring fences or terms and conditions on grants to local authorities, other than to say "the purpose of the grant is to provide support to local authorities in England towards expenditure lawfully incurred or to be incurred by them".
- 7.2 The proposal will have no direct impact on the Council's own resources other than limited administrative/overhead costs, for which a provision of £40,000 is included within the grant.
- 7.3 Whilst accounting procedures have yet to be finalised, as the expenditure that will be committed by the Council will exceed £100,000 (albeit to the benefit of other authorities), financial procedure rules require Council approval of the overall budget.
- 7.4 However, the programme need to commence ahead of the next Council meeting, scheduled for July. Initial set up and support costs, that need to be incurred before July (including work to establish the programme and the Board) could amount to £80,000 (the £40,000 set up costs detailed in Appendix 1 and 3/12's of the support costs as set out in the same Appendix). Cabinet approval is therefore sought for an initial budget to support the programme to this amount. Should Council approval for the overall budget not be given in July, it would be necessary to either return all residual grant to the DCLG or forward it to a new host organisation.
- 7.5 The commitment of funding set out in 5.1 c) and d) above will be subject to the approval of the Management Board once this has been established. The

commitment of the “set up and support” costs referred to in 5.1 b) above will need to commence ahead of the establishment of the Board and will be administered by the Practitioner Support team. This will include payments to a northern authority to fund the hosting of an advisor post in that region and the cost of administrative support, which is already employed but currently funded by the Council’s Homelessness Prevention Fund. All spend will be reviewed by the Board once established and will be subject to on-going monitoring by DCLG.

8 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Financial risk to the Council is limited, although the governance arrangements to be agreed with other partners with regard to the Board to administer the scheme will need to address financial monitoring controls. Risks associated with the Council’s role in the programme is more likely to be in relation to reputational risk of the programme not delivering its intended goals. This is mitigated by the commitment and support and funding by the DCLG, the express commitment of the Housing Minister to the programme and the direct link with lead agencies in the sector.

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1: Gold Standard costs and spend profile and Grant Funding

Appendix 2: Local Authority challenges in Making Every Contact Count

Gold Standard costs and spend profile**Year one - 2013**

| | | |
|--|-----------------|---|
| Shelter membership recognition payment <i>Payment to NHAS / Shelter (single body) via pre-existing funding arrangement</i> | £50,000 | Upfront payment to Shelter to allow them to set up a Gold Standard Shelter membership scheme. Will cover free online legal advice for housing options staff (proposal one membership per regional grouping allowing access for up to 100 staff per grouping). |
| Year one NHAS Training Fund (for more practical prevention, advice and assistance training) <i>Payment to NHAS / Shelter (single body) via pre-existing funding arrangement</i> | £100,000 | Upfront bespoke professional/legislation based training package for all LA s to be delivered by Shelter based on the outcomes of the authority peer reviews. |
| Gold Standard verification process set up costs <i>Payment to Winchester City Council</i> | £40,000 | Includes standard operational costs of setting up the board and the procedures / processes required for it to operate. Developing assessment process/ accompanying forms/ peer review process structure, branding, printing and marketing. |
| Host funding authority overheads/administration <i>Payment to Winchester City Council</i> | £40,000 | To cover admin costs of setting up budgets, delegations, commissioning, grant allocations and administering the overall funding allocated to the authority to deliver a National Gold Standard Award. |
| Data base package to support Self Diagnostic toolkit <i>Payment to NHAS / Shelter (single body) via pre-existing funding arrangement</i> | £150,000 | This will allow for automatic quarterly statistics updates to the benchmarking tool with the most recent statistics, an online web based application process for the peer review and gold standard application, including good practice area and bench marking tools. Shelter and Acclaim have quoted costs to allow the tool to be linked to their existing IT system. |
| Support costs – Adviser and Admin support plus learning events and materials <i>Payment to Winchester City Council</i> | £150,000 | To fund one adviser post hosted in the north for the year and to also provide admin and secretarial support (preparation and circulation of papers, minute taking and other meeting prep) for the gold standard application process and related training programme/peer review process (Costed on 1 scale 4 admin staff member for 2 years (plus overheads)). Also Covers the cost of meetings, learning events, online learning network, good practice guides. This includes some contingency funding which will allow rapid up scaling of scheme if take up exceeds expectations. |
| Support for marginal authorities <i>Payment to Winchester City Council</i> | £200,000 | Short term support to help marginal early adopters reach Gold Standard status, this can include one off payments to authorities or groupings showing gaps in service through the needs and gaps analysis or peer review process. The Gold Standard board will prioritise which LAs receive this assistance including training and tailored support. |
| 2013 total | £730,000 | |

| | | |
|--|----------|---|
| <i>Of which payment to Winchester City Council</i> | £430,000 | Includes support costs and host funding overheads / admin. |
| <i>Payment to Shelter / NHAS</i> | £300,000 | Includes Shelter funding for database support package, memberships, NHAS training. We already have a funding agreement with Shelter / NHAS (same body) which will allow us to grant this funding. |

Year two 2014

| | | |
|--|-------------------|--|
| Year 2 CIH Training Fund (for legislation and professional training) <i>Payment to NHAS / Shelter (single body) via pre-existing funding arrangement</i> | £250,000 | Upfront bespoke gold standard based training for LA applicants. NHAS/ Shelter will commission this with potential delivery partners including CIH, Crisis and Homeless Link. |
| Year 2 NHAS Training Fund (for more practical prevention, advice and assistance training) <i>Payment to NHAS / Shelter (single body) via pre-existing funding arrangement</i> | £150,000 | Upfront bespoke professional/legislation based training package for all LA s to be delivered by Shelter based on the outcomes of the authority peer reviews. |
| Short term support to help marginal authorities to meet the Gold Standard <i>Payment to Winchester City Council</i> | £300,000 | Short term targeted support offered to marginal authorities to lift them over the gold standard line. Will include training and tailored support based on need. The Gold Standard board will prioritise which LAs receive this assistance based on need and peer review outcomes, including any Regional or National priorities. |
| Board membership subsidy for 1st 10 Gold Standard Achievers <i>Payment to Winchester City Council</i> | £300,000 | To help cover costs of sitting on the board and provide peer support to weaker authorities – including staff time (10 x Head of Housing level), establishing own internal arrangements (e.g. admin support) travel to meetings / visits etc. |
| 2014 total | £1,000,000 | |
| <i>Of which payment to Winchester City Council</i> | £600,000 | Includes support for marginal authorities and board membership subsidy |
| <i>Payment to Shelter / NHAS</i> | £400,000 | Includes CIH and NHAS training fund. NHAS will commission legislation training from CIH |
| Overall total over 2 years | £1,730,000 | |

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