

CABINET

2 July 2014

GOLD STANDARD FOR HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION

REPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER)

Contact Officer: Richard Botham Tel No: 01962 848 421 Email:
rbotham@winchester.gov.uk

RECENT REFERENCES:

CAB2478 – Gold Standard for Homeless Prevention dated 10 April 2013

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The City Council currently acts as host for the National Practitioner Support Service (NPSS). The service is wholly funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and is responsible for coordinating the national Gold Standard for Homelessness Prevention scheme.

In April 2013, the DCLG provided a grant of £1.03m to the City Council to fund the programme and to cover all administrative costs to the Council. Additional grants were also made to voluntary sector partners who also support the scheme.

DCLG has now announced an additional grant of £582,218 to further support the work of the NPSS. This will fund the appointment of additional regional advisers, the development of IT systems and the delivery of a national training programme in 2014/15.

This report sets out the details of the grant award and seeks approval of the revised budget for the Gold Standard programme.

Confirmation and announcement of the grant was only received in June and so this report had not been included in the Forward Plan for July. 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..

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Cabinet recommend to Council:-

A General Fund supplementary estimate of £582,218, in accordance with financial procedure rule 7.3, be approved, to be funded by a matching S31 Local Government Act 2003 Government Grant and to be used to fund the delivery of the Gold Standard programme as set out in the report.

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DETAIL:

1 Introduction

- 1.1 All councils with a duty to provide homelessness prevention services receive a specific allocation through the business rate retention scheme to assist with meeting that duty. The City Council receives additional provision to fund the employment of a funded Specialist National Homelessness Advisor, administrative support and an additional supplement in recognition of its hosting role. This additional supplement has had a direct impact on improving the Council's Homelessness service in recent years.
- 1.2 In 2013, the DCLG changed the focus of the national advisory service and launched the national Gold Standard programme, a peer-review accreditation scheme designed to help local authorities to deliver more efficient and cost effective homelessness prevention services against 10 local challenges, which are detailed in Appendix 1. The City Council acts as the "Accountable Body" for elements of the programme and received £1.03m to fund its delivery.
- 1.3 In June 2014, DCLG announced a further grant determination of £582,218 to allow the NPSS to further develop the programme and this report seeks approval to revise the Gold Standard budget to reflect this additional grant.

2 Purpose of the Additional Grant

- 2.1 The original £1.03m grant allocation was for:
 - a) £40,000 – "Host Authority" funding for the City Council to cover any internal administrative/overhead costs (split over 2013/14 and 2014/15)
 - 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 (split over 2013/14 and 2014/15)
 - 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 (all 2014/15).

- 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 (all 2014/15).

2.2 The additional grant recognises that whilst the scheme is progressing well, as set out in paragraph 3 below, there is a need for additional regional and specialist advisers to support local authorities and to develop the existing web site and “on line” support tools. Provision has also been included to support additional good practice training for all local authorities. The grant is broken down as detailed below:

- a) £316,000 - The funding of 3 regional advisers to support the Gold Standard programme generally and a specialist adviser to work with specific authorities on tackling the unlawful use of bed and breakfast accommodation. These posts will be hosted by other councils with employment costs being funded from this grant. They will form an integral part of the NPSS team and be managed by the existing lead adviser hosted by the City Council.
- b) £9,000 – To fund the deliver two sets of “Sounding Boards” across the North, Midlands, South and London. These sessions are invaluable for participating councils to share experience and learn from those with experience of the process.
- c) £82,218 – To fund works to improve the Gold Standard website and associated “on line” tools to assist authorities with the DPR and application process.
- d) £175,000 – To commission and deliver a national training programme focussing on good practice advice on all of the 10 Gold Standard challenges.

2.3 It is recommended that approval be given for the above sums to be included within the General Fund Gold Standard budget for 2014/15.

3 Gold Standard Programme – Progress

3.1 The programme has received positive engagement from 97% of all local authorities. The summary below confirms the overall engagement and take up of the wider programme;

- a) 316 of 326 local authorities have ‘pledged’ a commitment to the scheme, confirming they ‘strive for continuous improvement in front line housing services’
- b) 306 of 326 local authorities have taken up the free legal membership with Shelter/NHAS through the programme
- c) 299 of 326 local authorities have taken up free legal training offered through the programme by Shelter/NHAS

- d) 180 of 326 local authorities have expressed an initial interest in carrying out a Diagnostic Peer Review (DPR)
 - e) 124 of 326 local authorities are in cluster groups (3 or more in a grouping) with initial start dates to commence a DPR
 - f) 17 local authorities are in the process of conducting a DPR
 - g) 11 local authorities have successfully completed a DPR, including Winchester.
 - h) 5 local authorities including Winchester are now in the process of applying for formal accreditation or “Gold Standard Award” against one or more of the 10 local challenges.
- 3.2 The City Council has taken part in and completed a DPR in conjunction with West Berkshire and Hart District Councils. The review of the Council’s service was positive and was sufficient to allow us to commence applications for Gold Standard status. We are currently preparing applications against 3 of the 10 challenges and working hard on delivering our agreed Continuous Improvement Plan to address all challenges.
- 3.3 In the last year, the Council has increased resources for managing homelessness prevention (funded by Prevention grant), established a front line “triage” service, developed a “private sector offer”, improved the working relationship with our partners and implemented a new Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan. The Peer Review process and sharing of expertise with other authorities has really supported the Council in improving its Housing Options services.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

4 COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND PORTFOLIO PLANS (RELEVANCE TO):

- 4.1 The Gold Standard programme directly supports the Council’s corporate priority relating to Active Communities.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 5.1 The grant funding totalling £582,218 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”.
- 5.2 The proposal is fully funded from the Section 31 Government Grant.

- 5.3 As the Supplementary Estimate exceeds £250,000 (albeit to the benefit of other authorities), financial procedure rule 7.3 requires Council approval of the overall budget. The spending plans for the £582,218 are detailed above in 2.2.

6 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Financial risk to the Council is limited. Risks associated with the Council's role in the programme are 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: Local Authority challenges in Making Every Contact Count

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