

REPORT TITLE: THE FUTURE OF HOMELESSNESS SERVICES AND SUPPORT
IN WINCHESTER

4 JULY 2018

REPORT OF PORTFOLIO HOLDER: LEADER WITH PORTFOLIO FOR HOUSING
SERVICES

Contact Officer: Gillian Knight Tel No: 01962 848 577 Email
gknight@winchester.gov.uk

WARD(S): ALL

PURPOSE

This report sets out Hampshire County Council's Transformation to 2019 (T19) review of local Social Inclusion Services and the potential impact on Homelessness services in the district of the anticipated reduction in resources as a result of the County review. The report considers options for additional investment making use of the Flexible Homelessness Grant the Council receives annually, either to co-commission services with the County Council or to commission them directly through the Council's own grant process to future proof the City Council's homelessness services.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the Committee support the principle of "co-commissioning" of support services in partnership with Hampshire County Council.
2. That the Homelessness Prevention Fund Reserve and Flexible Homelessness Grant be used to fund the commissioning of community and floating support services and that a detailed spending plan be brought back to this Committee to approve proposals for 2019 and beyond.
3. That the Corporate Head of Housing be authorised to respond to the Hampshire County Council consultation on proposed changes to Homelessness Support Services (Social Inclusion Services) on the basis of the above recommendations.

IMPLICATIONS:1 COUNCIL STRATEGY OUTCOME

- 1.1 Delivering quality housing options is the one of the five strategic outcomes of the Council's strategy.

2 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 2.1 The housing options service in 2017/18 received a ring fenced Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Flexible Homelessness Support Grant (FHSG) of £104,246 to support the new Homelessness Reduction Act and subsequent statutory duties.
- 2.2 The Council has for a number of years received Homelessness Prevention Fund grant each year and currently has over £400,000 held in reserve. In addition, it now also receives "Flexible Homelessness Grant" each year (£119,945 for 18/19 and £154,479 for 19/20). It also received a one-off grant to assist with the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act (£9,202 for data work and £27,430 to assist with the new burdens on the Council).
- 2.3 This report recommends that this grant be utilised to help commission additional community support services to assist with preventing homelessness.

3 LEGAL AND PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 Whilst there are no direct legal and procurement implications as part of this report, any future commissioning will be completed in accordance with the usual contract procedure rules. The County Council's Adult Services teams have significant procurement resource and expertise and by co-commissioning services, the City Council will be able to reduce the administrative burden of the commissioning process.
- 3.2 At this stage, the County Council is seeking an indication as to whether the City Council is willing to work jointly to co-commission services or whether it would prefer to commission its own support services.

4 WORKFORCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The City Council is currently establishing a stronger focus on the management and delivery of support services and is establishing a team (within Housing Services) to lead on this. These proposals can be funded within existing resources.
- 4.2 New legislative duties through the Homelessness Reduction Act will impact on current staff capacity with increased case loads and challenges associated with new additional opportunities to relieve and prevent homelessness and review decisions.

5 PROPERTY AND ASSET IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Whilst the recommendations in the report have no immediate impact on Council assets, it is proposed to review the potential for utilising existing temporary accommodation to support the development of a new “Housing First” approach as set out in paragraph 14 below.

6 CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 6.1 Hampshire County Council (HCC) is currently undertaking a detailed consultation with interested stakeholders and service users regarding future funding of support services. This has included Hampshire wide meetings with Housing Options staff from all Hampshire councils. We have also commissioned a housing consultant who is undertaking a local housing options consultation process with partner organisations.

- 6.2 The consultation can be viewed at:

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/aboutthecouncil/haveyoursay/consultations>

- 6.3 This report considers the key issues covered in the consultation and proposes specific responses aimed at achieving best value from both HCC and City Council investment in supported housing services.

7 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 Improved environment to reduce street homelessness through sustainable housing provision, quality housing options, outreach and community support.

7.2 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSEMENT

- 7.3 Hampshire County Council has undertaken an Equality Impact Assessment in respect of the Social Inclusion Services review. Any subsequent change to Council service delivery and policy will undergo an Equality Impact Assessment.

8 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 Any subsequent change to Council service delivery and policy will undergo a Data Protection Impact Assessment with service privacy statements reviewed.

9 RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk	Mitigation	Opportunities
Community Support – risk of not preventing homelessness and	Joint commissioning of specialist social inclusion service with HCC. New	Opportunity to positively enhance the Council’s reputation by reducing or

reducing street homelessness.	'Housing First' provision. Upskilling staff.	ending visible street homelessness.
Timescales - current uncertainty due to early stage of HCC Social Inclusion Service review and consultation outcome.	Close working with HCC. WCC won't hold all the risks. Scoping of alternative independent in-house solutions.	Opportunity to test for future WCC led commissioning roles and strengthen relationships with HCC.
Project capacity – impact of final HCC review and change in national homelessness initiatives.	Joint project management and monitoring with HCC.	Opportunity to positively enhance the council's reputation by reducing homelessness.
Financial / VfM - A failure to directly invest in services would risk a considerably reduced local service offer for people who are homelessness or at risk of homelessness, and at a time of significantly increased statutory obligations to prevent and relieve homelessness.	Joint commissioning of specialist social inclusion service with HCC. New 'Housing First' provision.	Opportunity to positively enhance the council's reputation by reducing homelessness and increasing alternative housing options and community support.
<i>Legal – Failure to comply with procurement rules and risk of challenge</i>	Joint project management and monitoring with HCC	Opportunity to positively enhance the Council's reputation by reducing homelessness and create a closer working relationship with HCC.
<i>Innovation</i> Opportunity to test for future WCC led commissioning roles and strengthens relationships with partner organisations.		Opportunity to positively enhance the Council's reputation by reducing homelessness and increasing alternative housing options and community support
Reputation – minimal risk of failing to deliver commissioned services and to prevent homelessness. Reduced public confidence in the Council as a local housing provider	'Good news' Publicly opportunities. Robust performance monitoring with HCC Shared risk with HCC	Opportunity to positively enhance the Council's reputation by reducing homelessness and increasing alternative housing options and community support
<i>Other</i>		

10 SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

10.1 Background

- 10.2 The Hampshire Supporting People programme was introduced in 2003. The programme commissioned housing and community support (floating support) services from district councils and third-party providers for people whose needs did not make them eligible for Adult social Care.
- 10.3 The Supporting People programme was subject to regular reviews until it was ultimately subsumed, in 2015, into the overall Adult Service commissioning programme when investment in Social Inclusion Services was reduced by £2.7m.
- 10.4 As part of HCCs Transformation to 2019 (T19) agenda, the County is currently required to make further savings of £2m against a £4.2 residual budget remaining after the 2015 changes implemented from April 2016.
- 10.5 Whilst Social Inclusion Services are a key aspect of our local strategic homelessness response it is important to note that it is the Council rather than HCC who hold the statutory homelessness duty. HCC are responsible for meeting eligible social care needs of vulnerable people but they have no legal responsibilities to provided specialist homelessness services. However, HCC recognise the value of investing £2.2m in Social inclusion Services working in partnership with districts to agree a 'local core service' offer.
- 10.6 In recent months, the City Council has led on the establishment of a local Social Inclusion Group with representatives from all agencies involved in supported housing in Winchester. Winchester is fortunate to have a wealth of local services and there is potential capacity to improve coordination of those services.

11 Social Inclusion Services

- 11.1 Existing Social Inclusion Services funded by Hampshire County Council in the Winchester district include:
- a) "Stage 1" (direct access, complex needs supported accommodation) Nightshelter provision with 18 beds
 - b) "Stage 1" supported accommodation project with associated outreach support for single homeless people.
 - c) "Floating and Community support" including tenancy support which supported 23 council tenants (snapshot) in March 2018.
- 11.2 The HCC core service offer for Winchester from August 2019 will focus on services included in a) and b) above with little funding available for floating and community support. "Stage 1" services are critically important to the prevention of homelessness and the commitment from Hampshire to continue

to fund these services is positive. Floating and community support is important to the Council in its “landlord” role as a positive means of helping tenants sustain their tenancies and the City Council would want to improve services particularly to reflect increasing demands in relation to mental health services. By working with Hampshire and utilising flexible homelessness grant, it should be possible to enhance the existing offer.

12 Emerging Pressures on Homelessness and Supported Housing

12.1 Central Government is reforming the funding of housing costs for short term supported housing currently due to be implemented in April 2020. The reform is likely to mean that the housing costs will be allocated to HCC as the upper tier authority through a grant which will then be redistributed to districts to cover housing costs. Local Housing Benefit teams will define short term supported accommodation including Council temporary accommodation. Many Registered Providers due to current uncertainties are nervous to invest in supported housing going forward.

12.2 Universal credit is due to be rolled in through out Winchester for new claimants in July 2018. The Council has already undertaken a lot of work with the DWP to mitigate against increasing homelessness levels. But there is a risk that there will be an increase in homelessness amongst hard to reach groups such as those who are rough sleeping and who are already not claiming DWP benefits due to the digital method of applying and the complexity of system processes.

12.3 The Council’s statutory homelessness duties have significantly increased through the new Homelessness Reduction Act 2017(the “HRA”). The HRA came in to effect on 3rd April 2018 and considerably extends the Council’s duties to prevent homelessness. It means housing authorities must have a sharper focus on preventing homelessness as early as possible and for all households not just those in priority need and owed a statutory housing duty. Bespoke Personal Housing Plans must be in place for all applicants and must consider the holistic needs of all household members with at least one face to face interview undertaken. This places extra resource implications and pressures on an already overstretched preventing homelessness team.

12.4 The HRA is the biggest change in homelessness legislation in 20 years and a really positive change for homeless people. But it comes at a time when services supporting homeless and vulnerable households are being reduced and with other local contributing factors being introduced.

13 “Housing First”

13.1 Introduce a ‘Housing First’ model of direct access provision for street homeless people in partnership with an established supported housing provider. Leasing an empty council property (Sussex street hostel), co-

locating outreach services and with the potential of a secondment of a temporary accommodation support worker.

- 13.2 'Housing First' supports people with high needs and histories of entrenched or repeat homelessness to live in their own home. It has been widely adopted in the USA and many European countries with successful pilots in the UK and is considered as a viable option to reduce or even end rough sleeping.
- 13.3 Mainstream services are often not equipped to support homeless people with multiple and complex needs. Whereas 'Housing First' models have been shown to be effective in supporting people with histories of street homelessness as there are no conditions around 'housing readiness' before being provided a home. Instead it is viewed as a stable platform from which multiple and complex needs and other key issues can be addressed through wrap around and personalised support. It is reasonable to suggest due to the low numbers of street homeless people in Winchester compared to national statistics that this form of housing provision if adopted could end rough sleeping in the City by 2023.
- 13.4 Whilst it is proposed that HCC will continue to fund stage 1 accommodation, a move towards funding services that reflect the Housing First model set out above could make a significant contribution towards addressing housing need in Winchester.
- 13.5 The City Council is currently discussing options with a number of housing and support providers regarding how a "Housing First" model could be established in Winchester, potentially utilising existing Council owned temporary accommodation, such as Sussex St.
- 13.6 If proposals for co-commissioning services as set out in this report do proceed, opportunities for future funding of such services would need to be considered as part of the final agreement.

14 Proposed Way Forward

- 14.1 Senior officers have been working closely and in partnership with HCC to establish a mutually acceptable local 'core service offer' as part of the Social Inclusion Service review.
- 14.2 At the beginning of the review it was clear that HCC's commissioning of community support was unlikely to be a strategic priority within the Adults Health and Care budget. Current commissioned provider data outcomes also demonstrated that most accessing community support were social housing tenants and as such could be supported by their landlord. There is no statutory requirement for HCC to support tenants to sustain tenancies although there is a clear collective saving to the public purse if homelessness is prevented.
- 14.3 Therefore it is proposed that:

- a) The proposal for HCC to continue to commission stage 1 services be supported.
- b) That the Council makes use of the ring fenced Flexible Homelessness Support Grant (FHSG) to co-commission street outreach and community/floating support services (ensuring specifications for future Social Inclusion Services meet the Council's homelessness strategic aims and local need. With all contract monitoring, managing and inspections carried out jointly with HCC)
- c) To introduce an in house tenure blind community support service through an element of existing housing support services and staff resources across the Tenancy (HRA) and Housing Options(General fund) teams. The team will aim to reduce duplication across council teams and to help sustain tenancies and prevent homelessness (this new team is in the process of being established now).
- d) To further develop the senior level strategic partnership Social Inclusion Group (SIG) with a group pledge to 'end street homelessness by 2023' in line with government policy.
- e) To review the Preventing Homelessness Strategy to align objectives with the new Homelessness Reduction Act, Social Inclusion Services review outcomes and mitigating proposals as outlined in this report.

15 Conclusion

- 15.1 The outcome of the T19 review of Social Inclusion Services will determine what a future model of service provision may look like in Winchester. HCC is seeking to reduce their investment in this area, which is directly relevant to the Council's strategic approach to preventing and tackling homelessness.
- 15.2 HCC's preferred option as supported by officers is, from August 2019, to continue to fund Stage 1 direct access provision (Winchester Nightshelter and 9 stage 1 supported housing units) but to de-invest in local "Community Support" provision. The use of the City Council's own flexible homelessness grant to fund a jointly commissioned service model could mitigate for the negative impacts of a reduction of HCC funding.
- 15.3 The Council is the local housing authority that is subject to statutory homelessness duties. Co-commissioning with HCC and new Council led services provide opportunities to develop a new and innovative local Social Inclusion Service model, aligned to the Council's future role in preventing and relieving homelessness.

16 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- 16.1 The City Council has the option of directly commissioning all Social Inclusion services itself and HCC has indicated that it would be prepared to consider passing its remaining funding to the district councils to support such an

approach. This has the potential of limiting opportunities for larger “cross-border” commissions and may achieve less value for money overall. It would also increase the “procurement/administrative burden on district councils and at this stage, a “co-commissioning” approach is recommended, subject to ongoing review of potential outcomes and shared objectives.

- 16.2 There are also real strengths for the Council to lead on commissioning local homelessness services. Currently we are reliant on HCC’s model of provision and support and as such our local services are available and accessed Hampshire wide. Commissioning ourselves would allow us to strengthen our position as the statutory authority for homelessness and have a greater influence on local services and providers to ensure in the first instance that we prioritise help for local homeless clients. However, whilst this remains an option if shared objectives cannot be agreed, it is not recommended at this stage as set out above.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:-

Previous Committee Reports:

None

Other Background Documents:

None

APPENDICES:

None