

BHP029

BUSINESS & HOUSING POLICY COMMITTEE

POLICY COMMITTEE REPORT

REPORT TITLE: THE HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION GRANT – SPENDING PLAN 2022/23

1 MARCH 2022

REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER: Cllr Kelsie Learney, Cabinet Member for Housing and Asset Management

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WARD(S): ALL

PURPOSE

This report proposes and sets out the spending plan for the 2022/23 Homeless Prevention Grant (HPG) of £308,247.00 allocated by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). The grant enables Local Authorities control and flexibility in managing homelessness pressures and supporting those who are at risk of homelessness.

The paper sets out for discussion the proposed spending options to prevent homeless and to support the most excluded within our communities.

This grant incorporates an additional £8152.00 to cover the cost of new burdens associated with the expansion of priority need to those forced into homelessness by domestic abuse in line with the Domestic Abuse Act of 2021.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the Policy Committee notes that a report seeking formal approval of the Spending Plan will be considered by Cabinet in June 2022.
2. That the Policy Committee review and provide comment on the Homelessness Prevention Grant – Spending Plan 2022/23, and in particular consider and comment on:
 - a. The overall approach supporting the Council's Homelessness Prevention service;
 - b. The detailed proposals of the spending plan
 - c. Proposals for managing the existing reserve.

IMPLICATIONS:

1 COUNCIL PLAN OUTCOME

- 1.1 Homes for all
- 1.2 Provision of good quality affordable housing options meet the needs of our most vulnerable and socially excluded residents, maximising opportunities to support people out of homelessness.
- 1.3 Vibrant Local Economy
- 1.4 Provision of good quality affordable housing contributes to the local economy and with greater employment opportunities provides a pathway out of poverty and homelessness.
- 1.5 Living Well
- 1.6 The provision of good quality housing is linked to and has a direct impact on wellbeing and health inequalities often faced by those vulnerably housed or homeless.
- 1.7 Your Services, Your Voice
- 1.8 Working with TACT to ensure tenants have a direct say in service priorities and delivery to include tenant led “scrutiny reviews” of Housing services.
- 1.9 Delivering on the Governments White Paper - ensuring residents in social housing are listened to and have account to redress should things go wrong.

2 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 2.1 Should the council commit fully to its’ agreed 2022/23 spending plan for the Homeless Prevention Grant (HPG) the council will commit to spending its full allocation off £308,247. The grant determination is set each year and so this is a one off spend for the financial year 2022/23. It should be noted that there is no guarantee the council will be awarded this level of funding for future years.
- 2.2 The reserve fund currently stands at £426,000. There is a current underspend of this year’s grant of £200,927 (this figure may decrease by year end). The underspend of grant has been generated through a significant increase over the past two years of HPG awards and a number of exceptional ‘one time only’ grants issued by the government. The government funding is awarded to the council to react to Covid-19 pressures regarding homelessness and in-particular rough sleeping initiatives and these funds are unlikely to be reciprocated in 2022/23.
- 2.3 The current HPG reserve and 2021/22 underspend of grant has been earmarked to support;

- A potential reduction in the government's HPG allocation due to a new formula being applied to local authority grant determinations in 2023/24.
- To prepare for significant funding reductions following the HCC Balancing the Budget consultation and likely cuts to the council's allocation of the social inclusion grant in 2023/24.
- To commission or match fund local established homelessness services that may lose a percentage of funding through the HCC Balancing the Budget consultation to provide continuity of service.
- To reevaluate post pandemic service delivery to meet the increasing complex demands associated with homelessness and appropriate provision, such as new Domestic Abuse duties, private sector evictions and associated increase in homelessness due to a cost of living crisis.

The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) acknowledge that the current formula used to calculate the allocation and local award of HPG needs revising. The grant formula for 2023/24 will change to ensure funds are distributed fairly to those areas in greatest need to protect the public purse and to ensure allocation of grant is best value for money. As mentioned this presents a potential risk to the council if the annual allocation of the government grant is reduced.

'One time only' grants include £62,923 to assist private sector housing tenants (vulnerable renter's fund) to support those who have been adversely affected by Covid-19. And Year 4 of Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI) funding of £132,000.

3 LEGAL AND PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The council holds a statutory homelessness duty under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The legislation places a duty on the council so that everyone who is homelessness or at risk of homelessness has access to meaningful help as long as they are eligible for assistance. Councils must try to prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place.

4 WORKFORCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5 To be resourced within the existing staff structure and through partnership working opportunities with voluntary sector and statutory partners sharing staffing resources and grant funding through the governments Preventing Homelessness Grant and council core grants programme.
- 5.1 Delivering the programme as set out in this report relies on an additional staff resource. It is proposed that two additional posts are funded directly from the HPG grant as set out in section 12.20.

6 PROPERTY AND ASSET IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Recommendations within the report have no immediate impact on council property and assets.

7 CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 7.1 Consultation with local voluntary and housing partners took place on the proposed Preventing Homelessness Grant spending plan through the homelessness pathway group.
- 7.2 The front line Housing Options team were consulted and provided input regarding service delivery gaps and identified future spending needs.
- 7.3 Consultation through a spending review workshop was held with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Asset Management and the Corporate Head of Housing.
- 7.4 Consultation with a partnering local authority acting as a critical friend to provide challenge and advice on the spending plan initiatives and projects.

8 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 Improved city centre environment through reduced street homelessness and associated street activity by offering sustainable housing provision and support, quality housing options, outreach and community support.

9 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSEMENT

Cabinet approved a new Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) policy and corporate approach for the Council on 19 January 2022. This new approach will require every service in the Council to be reviewed with regards to the PSED.

Discrimination against homeless people is acts of treating people, or people perceived to be homeless unfavourably. The spending plan and its initiatives seeks to mitigate such impacts and discrimination.

The spending plan will be Equality Impacted Assessed as part of the Cabinet report for June 2022

10 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 10.1 Any subsequent change to council service delivery and policy will undergo a Data protection Impact Assessment with service privacy statements reviewed.

11 RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk	Mitigation	Opportunities
<p>Financial –. Risk of not committing resources in line with spending plan</p> <p>Risk of Govt not continuing funding in future years.</p>	<p>Core duties met from General Fund budget. Grant used to enhance and improve service provision</p> <p>All proposals set out in report are “one-off” or fixed term and create no long-term liability on the General Fund</p> <p>Budget monitoring and reviews. SLA with partner agencies</p>	<p>Increasing and promoting earlier intervention and homelessness prevention services. Exploring alternative and discretionary housing options.</p> <p>An opportunity to offer enhanced and wider community support to the most excluded and vulnerable residents.</p>
Exposure to challenge	Compliance with the council’s Preventing Homelessness duties is a legislative statutory duty.	
Innovation – Opportunities for the council to work in partnership with statutory and voluntary partners on joint preventing homelessness initiatives above its statutory duties.		Opportunity to positively enhance the council’s reputation through discretionary and joint preventing homelessness initiatives and projects funded through the HPG spending plan.
Reputation- Risk of failing to deliver the councils statutory preventing homelessness duties.	Prevent and relief homelessness duties implemented at the earliest opportunity.	Opportunity to positively enhance the council’s reputation by reducing homelessness and increasing alternative housing options. Good news stories publicly opportunities
Achievement of outcome- Meeting homelessness statutory duties. Making best use of the governments Preventing Homelessness Grant. Demonstrating best practice service delivery through partnership working and discretionary grant funding.	Government statistical returns. Budget monitoring and reviews. SLA with partner agencies.	Opportunity to positively enhance the council’s reputation through discretionary and joint preventing homelessness initiatives and projects funded through the PHG spending plan.

12 SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

12.1 Background

12.2 The 2022/23 Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG) of £308,247 as awarded by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) is to enable local authorities to have control and flexibility in managing homelessness pressures and to support those who are at risk of homelessness.

12.3 It is recognised that the council cannot prevent or solve homelessness alone. As such the homelessness prevention spending plans sets out areas of spend that best support partnership working opportunities whilst underpinning the council's statutory housing responsibilities to ensure preventative initiatives are central to service delivery.

12.4 The HPG is the primary central government funding stream to assist the council and wider community in delivering their homeless services. The grant is ring fenced to ensure local authorities are fully resourced to take action to prevent homelessness and to continue to embed the changes required through implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017)

12.5 The purpose of the HPG grant is to;

- Support the council to continue to meet its legislative duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
- To prevent and end rough sleeping by increasing activities to prevent single household homelessness.
- Reduce the number of families living in temporary accommodation by maximising family homeless prevention opportunities.
- To reduce the use of bed and breakfast and emergency accommodation for families providing more stable interim housing opportunities.

12.6 The government has significantly increased homelessness grant funding over the past two years to enable local authorities to respond to the changing complex nature of homeless with focus on reducing rough sleeping and to help meet the challenges and positive changes in practice identified during the pandemic.

12.7 The current HCC commissioning grant for homelessness support services in Winchester totals £407,000 per annum with supporting agency contracts in place until 2023/24. The HCC grant supports the most vulnerable single household clients with complex needs across 52 homelessness beds, with a small contribution towards outreach services targeted at people rough sleeping. However, the grant funding allocated to the Winchester district is proposed to significantly reduce in 2023/24, as part of HCC Balancing the

Budget consultation. The spending plan and decisions within this report takes account of the potential HCC cuts to local homelessness services.

Proposed Spending Plan

<u>Homeless Prevention Activity</u>	<u>Proposed Spend</u>
Social Inclusion Grant to HCC	£50,000.00
Flexible Prevention and Rent Deposit Fund	£40,000.00
SWEP and Cold Weather Placements	£20,000.00
Young Persons Emergency Beds	£10,000.00
The Beacon	£10,000.00
Mental Health Step Out Pathway	£50,000.00
Homelessness Out of Hours Provision	£10,000.00
Enhanced Outreach Service	£20,000.00
Personalised Budget for Outreach Provision	£10,000.00
City of Sanctuary	£15,000.00
Staffing resource(Fixed term contracts)	£72,672.00
Total	£307,672.00

- 12.8 The council's Homelessness Prevention Grant spending plan for 2022/23 focuses on change and building on positive housing sector initiatives, practices and partnership working. The spending plan also supports service recovery plans and meet the objectives of the Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy 2019-2024.
- 12.9 The introduction of the HRA 2017 which was enacted in April 2018 significantly changed the council's homeless statutory duties and administrative burdens. The council now has a statutory duty to prevent homelessness which is blind to priority need and local connection. The Government acknowledged that these new duties were unlikely to be delivered from existing funding sources and as such the allocation of the HPG to the council was significantly increased. If the HPG is not spent on initiatives to prevent homelessness, funds would have to be found from an alternative source or the council would be at risk of not being able to fulfil its statutory duties.

- 12.10 **Social Inclusion Grant.** The council currently co-commission with Hampshire County Council (HCC) accommodation and support for the most complex single homeless households. A contribution of £50,000 secured from the HPG will help support the provision of 29 units of accommodation at West View House and 13 units of accommodation at Sussex Street. HCC's contract has been extended to March 2023 and the joint commission of services ensures that suitable accommodation is available to prevent people from rough sleeping by targeting support to the most excluded and in need. Proposed spending budget of £50,000
- 12.11 **Flexible Prevention and Rent Deposit Fund.** A flexible prevention and rent deposit fund of £40,000 to allow front line Housing Options Officers to prevent and relieve homelessness through spend to save initiatives. Including securing accommodation in the private rented sector to cover rent in advance, deposits and security bonds. The fund offers financial help to prevent homelessness through eviction, assisting with court costs to secure a stay of eviction and help to clear current or historic rent arrears or other debts, acting as a barrier to securing and sustaining accommodation. The fund is critical to prevent vulnerable households seeking high interest loans from loan sharks placing them further into poverty and homelessness.
- The fund will also be used to reduce digital exclusion. The link between poverty and digital exclusion means the poorest and most vulnerable are less likely to be online preventing them to digitally connect with benefit, employment and health services. Officers will be able use the fund to purchase basic mobile devices and/or help with Wi-Fi charges. Proposed spending budget of £40,000
- 12.12 **Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP) and Emergency Cold Weather Payments.** The council has a responsibility to deliver SWEP to ensure safe emergency accommodation is available to anyone sleeping rough during periods of extreme cold or hot weather. The COVID-19 government advice to local authorities is that shared accommodation spaces are no longer suitable as SWEP and expect councils to provide self-contained emergency accommodation. The council works in partnership with Trinity Winchester and Two Saints who offer emergency placements and support within their housing provision to assist the council to meet its SWEP duties. The council offers financial assistance to meet the costs incurred by of both agencies, should demand increase the council may also need to make use of hotel or other accommodation to meet its housing duties. A budget of £20,000 is suggested to cover SWEP costs. Proposed spending budget of £20,000
- 12.13 **Young Persons Emergency Beds.** To continue to fund 2 emergency beds with high level support for local homeless young persons aged 16-21 years that are accommodated at A2 Dominion supported housing project commissioned by HCC. Proposed spending budget of £10,000

12.14 **The Beacon Winchester.** To cover void costs incurred by The Beacon Winchester when homeless clients referred by the council fail to attend. Funding the loss of revenue incurred by The Beacon Winchester provides the financial security to allow them to hold the vacancy for a limited time and to continue to prioritise council referrals above other agency referrals. The fund helps to support local homeless people out of rough sleeping. Proposed spending budget of £10,000

12.15 **Mental Health Step Out Pathway.** There has been an increase in people accessing mental health services during the pandemic. Households who leave mental health in-patient services are more at risk of being placed in unsuitable accommodation on discharge increasing demand on statutory services. Households with complex mental health needs are also at a higher risk of losing their home. Identifying and securing suitable housing pathways is identified as a significant enabler for successful discharges and sustainment of tenancies.

The mental health step out pathway is a specialist area of work for the housing options team to undertake and the HPG allows an opportunity to trial a secondment with a dedicated Mental Health Practitioner to bridge the knowledge and skill gap between homelessness services and mental health services. Providing an in house specialist resource to direct mental health assessments and coordinated support for a complex caseload of service user's unable to move on from the council's temporary accommodation. The post will support those rough sleeping who present for assistance with undiagnosed or crisis mental health issues. The post will work in partnership with the Community Mental Health Team to meet joint homelessness outcomes. Proposed spending budget of £50,000.

12.16 **Homelessness Out of Hours Provision:** The council has a statutory duty to provide a comprehensive homeless service that requires members of the team providing a homelessness duty service on evenings, weekends and bank holidays throughout the year. The associated cost for the out of hour's service standby rates is £10,000 per annum. Proposed spending budget of £10,000

12.17 **Enhanced Outreach Service:** Gaps have been identified in the current outreach service to help people out of rough sleeping. An enhanced outreach service will include working evening and weekend shifts and include support across the wider Winchester district. The council will work in partnership with Winchester Trinity and The Beacon Winchester to scope objectives and requirements to provide an enhanced outreach service with joint identified outcomes to prevent rough sleeping. Proposed spending budget £20,000

12.18 **Agencies Personalised Housing Budget.** To provide Winchester Trinity and The Beacon Winchester with a small grant of £5000 each to fund non statutory interventions that prevent homelessness and help to reconnect households to their home area. Proposed Spending Budget £10,000

- 12.19 **City of Sanctuary.** To continue the council's commitment for Winchester to be a City of Sanctuary, enabling households who are fleeing violence and/or persecution to settle and remain in the district, creating sustainable communities. Working in partnership with key charities, community groups and other support organisations to support the building of cohesive communities that welcome households seeking sanctuary to make their home in Winchester. Proposed Spending Budget £15,000
- 12.20 **Staffing Resources.** To continue to employ, on fixed term contracts, a front line Housing Options Officer and Strategic Housing Support Officer paid through the homelessness grant to manage the increased burdens and the council's responsibilities under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. The additional resource provides the staffing resilience to meet the council's statutory preventative homelessness duties. Proposed spending budget of £72,672
- 13 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED
- 13.1 The option of not committing the grant for the whole year is rejected as it would significantly reduce early intervention and preventative homelessness work due to a short term commitment of funding. With a potential to increase costly statutory duties to accommodate homeless households when councils are required to prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place.
- 13.2 The option of retaining the HPG grant to balance the general fund or to underpin the core homelessness service is rejected as not sustainable as the government grant is not guaranteed and is awarded on a yearly basis.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:-

Previous Committee Reports:-

[BHP004, PREEVNTING HOMELESSNESS & ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY & ACTION PLAN 18 JUNE 2019](#)

[BHP019 HRA WELFARE FUND AND HOMELESSNESS PREVENTING GRANT SPENDING PLANS 22 June 2021.](#)

Other Background Documents:-

None

APPENDICES:

None