



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and date of Committee	Cabinet – 16 February 2022
Report Number	AGENDA ITEM NO. 9
Subject	Planned Expenditure of the Homelessness Prevention Grant 2022/23
Wards affected	ALL
Accountable member	Councillor Merylyn Davies, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness Email: merilyn.davies@westoxon.gov.uk
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Summary/Purpose	To consider the planned expenditure of the Homelessness Prevention Grant for 2022/23
Annexes	Annex A – Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Local Communities Allocation of Homelessness Prevention Grant Letter, December 2021 Annex B – Equalities Impact Assessment
Recommendation/s	It is recommended that Cabinet: <i>a) Approves the expenditure detailed within paragraphs 2.1 to 2.10 of this report</i> <i>b) Approves the delegation of any amendments to these allocations to the Housing Manager in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness and the Chief Finance Officer subject to compliance with the ring fenced grant conditions</i> <i>c) Approves the delegation of any other uplifts or grants that may be given over the financial year to contain Covid outbreaks or address increased demands on the Housing Service be given to the Housing Manager in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness and Chief Finance Officer subject to compliance with the ring fenced grant conditions as set out in 3.1 to 3.5</i>
Corporate priorities	Supporting and building prosperous and inclusive local communities Meeting the Housing Needs of our Changing Population

	Delivering excellent modern services whilst ensuring the financial sustainability of the Council
Key Decision	YES
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Housing Chief Executive, Chief Finance Officer Monitoring Officer Deputy Chief Executive Head of Legal Services

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. From 1st April 2017 the Government removed the Temporary Accommodation Management Fee from the Housing Benefit system and replaced this with a Flexible Homelessness Grant.
- 1.2. The Council had very minimal expenditure in this area of Housing Benefit and therefore has benefited from this additional Flexible Homelessness Grant funding; which is ring-fenced to activities that will prevent or relieve homelessness. Funding has been provided since 2017/18. Further grants were also provided via the Homelessness Reduction Grant however both grants were combined in 2021/22 to create the Homelessness Prevention Grant.
- 1.3. The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Local Communities (DLUHC) increased the level of funding allocated to homelessness services in 2021/22 to ensure that local authorities have the resources needed to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping.
- 1.4. This level of funding has continued into 2022/23 with an additional small uplift to ensure that local authorities are able to meet any new burdens following the implementation of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.
- 1.5. The funding allocated to West Oxfordshire District Council for 2022/23 is £253,328 plus the Domestic Abuse New Burdens uplift of £6,828 giving a total of £260,156.
- 1.6. The DLUHC set out its expectations on how this fund is to be spent in the letter to Chief Executives dated 21st December 2021. This letter is detailed within Annex A.

2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1. The DLUHC has set out the following delivery expectations from the fund:
 - To fully embed the Homelessness Reduction Act and contribute to ending rough sleeping by increasing activity to prevent single homelessness
 - Reduce the number of families in temporary accommodation numbers through maximising family homelessness prevention,
 - To reduce the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for families and eliminate family B&B placements beyond the statutory six-week limit
- 2.2 It is therefore proposed that in order for the Council to meet the expectation set by the DLUHC, the Homelessness Prevention Grant is allocated as following:

Flexible Prevention Fund	£60,000
Private Rented Deposit Fund	£20,000
Continuation of 2 x Shared Temporary Accommodation Move On Officer Posts – additional 1 year fixed term to be given	£24,000
Families First Officer 1 year contract extension	£34,000
Personalisation Budgets & B&B Move On (Families First / Complex singles/ B&B Move On / Cold Weather funding)	£30,000
Continuation of the contract for the Specialist Domestic Abuse and Rough Sleeper post (until 31/03/2023) – initially funded in part for year 1 through the Domestic Abuse New Burdens grant	£13,250

Continuation of the Complex Needs Project Officer role – currently contracted out to Aspire	£37,000 (to include management costs with Aspire)
Flexible Homelessness Pandemic Response – see 3.	£41,906
Total:	£260,156

- 2.3 The Flexible Prevention Fund** will allow the Housing Team to assist clients with bespoke solutions (such as addressing arrears, moving costs and providing mediation) to prevent homelessness from occurring at the earliest possible stage, reducing the need for expensive and unsuitable Bed & Breakfast use and provide our clients with the best possible outcomes. This fund will work alongside Discretionary Housing Benefits, benefit signposting, and financial management assistance from in house Client Support and 3rd party agencies. The Flexible Prevention Fund will assist with and bespoke interventions depending on the specific client’s needs.
- 2.4 Private Rented Sector Fund.** There will be a modest budget to fund provision of cash deposits, fees and payments of rent in advance; as well as payments to help households make their new accommodation livable. This Fund will be managed by the Homelessness Lead officer.
- 2.5 Temporary Accommodation Move On Officers.** It is proposed that a proportion of the fund is pooled with Forest of Dean (FODDC) and Cotswold (CDC) to continue the employment of two shared Temporary Accommodation Move On Officers. These roles are dedicated to ensuring that the client is moved on from any form of temporary accommodation swiftly and into permanent accommodation that is right for the client. The Temporary Accommodation Move On officers maximise the options available to us in terms of emergency, temporary and longer-term private rented or social rented accommodation. The need for this approach is illustrated by the increasing length of time clients are spending in emergency accommodation during the current pandemic. Both fixed term contracts will be extended for a further 1 year on a fixed term contract, to be reviewed in December 2022 in line with the Grant allocations for 2023/24.
- 2.6 Families First.** The Families First Officer post has proved to be a success over the past two years with a decrease in families presenting as homeless. Funding for the post to be extended was included in the 2021/22 allocation therefore the 2022/23 allocation will be used to fund this for a further year.
- 2.7 Personalisation Budgets & B&B Move On Fund.** Personalisation budgets will allow the Project Officer’s (Domestic Abuse Specialist, Families First and Complex Needs) to provide fully flexible solutions to suit the individual situation or need. This can include addressing fuel poverty, minor adaptations to properties (for example providing temporary bedroom divides for older children who need to share). B&B Move On will allow the Temporary Accommodation Move On Officer’s access to funds to ensure the clients who are in B&B have access to items such as furniture, bedding, and white goods
- 2.9 Continuation of the contract for the Specialist Domestic Abuse and Rough Sleeper post –** Initial funding for the 1st year of the post was provided by the Domestic Abuse Act New Burdens grant allocation. The post was created to ensure that all of the new Housing duties of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 are fully adhered to and all Rough Sleepers receive an appropriate offer of accommodation. The role includes ensuring that West Oxfordshire Housing Team is fully represented at countywide meetings for both Domestic Abuse and

Rough Sleepers. The role will manage a Domestic Abuse Sanctuary Scheme whereby properties are made secure or sanctuary rooms are created avoiding the need for victims to move away from their home and support network.

- 2.10 Continuation of the Complex Needs Project Officer role – currently contracted out to Aspire** – This role is currently providing invaluable ‘upstream’ Housing advice to those clients who are threatened with homelessness at an early stage with the aim of preventing Homelessness where ever possible. The post holder has been in place for 18 months and has so far prevented around 50 applicants from becoming homeless.

3. FLEXIBLE HOMELESSNESS PANDEMIC RESPONSE:

- 3.1.** Currently there are numerous countywide projects being discussed at any one time around the provision of accommodation for rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping (i.e. ‘sofa surfers’). During the height of the pandemic West Oxfordshire District Council worked with our county partners to procure specific hotel accommodation and security.
- 3.2.** Although this was needed initially to address the increase in homeless clients following the ‘Everyone In’ directive in 2020 and into 2021, with ongoing pressure on services following the development of Covid variants (such as Omicron), a further call from DLUHC in December 2021 has been issued to provide accommodation to all known rough sleepers.
- 3.3.** Costs in 2020 and into 2021 were partially met from the COVID-19 Government grants given to the Council, alongside adhoc Homelessness Uplifts specifically for providing accommodation therefore further unplanned payments or uplifts could be made in 2022/23.
- 3.4.** Therefore it is proposed that a portion of the funds be used flexibly to meet the changing demands on the service as the pandemic continues and government guidance changes. This could include working with partner agencies to source temporary accommodation, long term accommodation with support or both, in district or by contributing to countywide projects as opportunities arise.
- 3.5.** It is further proposed that should DLUHC issue any further uplifts or Housing and Homeless specific funds over the financial year to contain Covid outbreaks or address increased demands on the Housing Service, delegation of the spending of these be considered in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness subject to compliance with the ring fenced grant conditions

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1.** There are multiple complex funding streams supporting the work of the housing team particularly with regard to homeless prevention. Some of these funding streams are subject to bids and some are allocations. Often these come through at short notice and require officers to investigate options and put together work packages in short time frames.
- 4.2.** The proposals set out in section 2 are aimed at addressing the expectations set out by the DLUHC and available accommodation in the West Oxfordshire district. There are limited options and significant costs associated with the provision of emergency accommodation within the District, as well as a shortage of longer-term accommodation.
- 4.3.** The proposal is therefore aimed at reducing the use and time spent in expensive short term, emergency accommodation benefiting both the Council and the client.
- 4.4.** A contingency fund for prevention of homeless activities is also proposed to be set aside.

4.5. All these spending plans are supported by ring fenced government grant so will have no impact upon the Councils net approved budget or financial strategy.

4.6. Any staffing related costs will require appropriate contract variations to the Publica Contract.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Spending allocations need to follow the ring fenced grant schemes.

6. RISK ASSESSMENT

6.1. There is a reputational risk to the Council if it does not effectively use this grant funding for the specific purposes set out in the DLUHC letter to Chief Executive's on the 21st December 2021.

7. EQUALITIES IMPACT (IF REQUIRED)

7.1. Please see attached Equalities Impact Assessment – Annex B

8. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS (IF REQUIRED)

8.1. None

9. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

9.1. None considered as the allocation is ring fenced to specific outcomes however members may want to consider other options that have not been referred to within the report

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1. None