



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and date of Committee	EXECUTIVE - 8 FEBRUARY 2023
Subject	PLANNED EXPENDITURE OF THE HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION GRANT 2023-2025
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Cllr Geoff Saul Email: Geoff.saul@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Jon Dearing Assistant Director- Residents' Services Email: jon.dearing@publicagroup.uk
Report author	Caroline Clissold Business Manager - Housing Email: caroline.clissold@publicagroup.uk
Summary/Purpose	To consider the planned expenditure of the Homelessness Prevention Grant for 2023 – 2025 (incorporating the Domestic Abuse New Burden's allocations for 2023- 2025)
Annexes	Annex A – Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Local Communities Allocation of Homelessness Prevention Grant Letter, December 2022 Annex B – Equalities Impact Assessment
Recommendation(s)	That the Executive resolves to: <i>a) Approve the expenditure detailed within section 2 of this report</i> <i>b) Approve expenditure for the Fixed Term Contract posts until 2025, as detailed in paragraph 2.7</i> <i>c) Approve the delegation of any amendments to these allocations to the Business Manager - Housing in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing and the Chief Finance Officer subject to compliance with the ring fenced grant conditions</i>

	<i>d) Delegate authority to the Business Manager – Housing, in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing and Chief Finance Officer, decisions on any other uplifts or grants that may be given over the financial years 2023-24 to 2024-25 to address increased demands on the Housing Service, subject to compliance with the ring fenced grant conditions.</i>
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Putting Residents First • A Good Quality of Life for All • Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	YES
Exempt	YES
Consultees/ Consultation	Executive Member with Responsibility for Housing Chief Executive Monitoring Officer Deputy Chief Executive Head of Legal Services

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1** The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has provided an annual grant allocation to assist with the Prevention of Homelessness for several years in varying different formats and amounts.
- 1.2** Alongside these allocations, in recent years DLUHC has also provided Winter Pressure uplifts, New Burdens funding for Housing following the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act, and other COVID related funds to assist with increased demands on the Housing service and in particular, homelessness.
- 1.3** DLUHC recently undertook a review of the current method of calculating and allocating the Homelessness Prevention Grant and following a full consultation, announced on 23 December 2022 that for 2023 onwards this would be a two year allocation to enable local authorities to plan ahead and provide certainty for staff and service users.
- 1.4** In 2022/23 West Oxfordshire District Council received a Homelessness Prevention allocation of £253,328, plus £33,450 for Housing Domestic Abuse New Burdens. A further Grant allocation to assist with Winter pressures of £40,859 was received in December 2022.
- 1.5** Winter pressures funding tends to be announced in late December each year, with a short turnaround time to spend, usually by the end of March. DLUHC will also sometimes award adhoc ring fenced funding to target specific homelessness pressures. Therefore delegated authority is sought to ensure these additional awards are used in a timely fashion and for their intended purpose.
- 1.6** DLUHC has awarded West Oxfordshire District Council through the Homelessness Prevention Grant £269,927 for 2023-24 rising to £282,704 in 2024-25
- 1.7** A further sum of £35,268 in 2023-24 rising to £35,932 in 2024-25 has been awarded to meet the Housing Domestic Abuse New Burdens
- 1.8** The combined total of the Homelessness Prevention Grant plus the Domestic Abuse New Burdens allocation is £305,195 for 2023-2024 rising to £318,636 for 2024-2025
- 1.9** DLUHC set out its expectations on how this fund is to be spent in the letter to Chief Executives dated 23 December 2022. This is detailed within Annex A.

2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1** DLUHC has ring fenced the Homelessness Prevention Grant to focus on the prevention of homelessness and 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 by maximising family homelessness prevention,
 - To reduce the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for families and eliminate family Bed and Breakfast 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 DLUHC, the Homelessness Prevention Grant is allocated as follows:

Year 1 2023-2024:

Flexible Prevention Fund	£70,000
Private Rented Deposit Fund	£20,000
Personalisation Budgets & B&B Move On (Complex singles / B&B Move On / Cold Weather funding)	£40,000
Domestic Abuse Prevention Fund	£10,000
Domestic Abuse & Rough Sleeping Coordinator	£38,000* (per annum)
Families First Project Officer role	£33,000* (per annum)
2 x Shared Temporary Accommodation Move On Officer Posts	£28,000* (per annum)
Complex Needs Prevention Officer – Partially funded by Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) 2022-2025 (see 2.7)	£16,500* (the remainder RSI funded)
Countywide Partnership contingency fund	£20,000
Flexible Homelessness Response	£29,695
Total:	£305,195

Year 2 2024-2025 (Subject to review in January 2024):

Flexible Prevention Fund	£69,000
Private Rented Deposit Fund	£20,000
Personalisation Budgets & B&B Move On (Complex singles / B&B Move On / Cold Weather funding)	£40,000
Domestic Abuse Prevention Fund	£10,000
Domestic Abuse & Rough Sleeper Coordinator	£39,000*
Families First Project Officer role	£34,000* (per annum)

Shared Temporary Accommodation Move On Officer Posts	£31,000* (per annum)
Complex Needs Prevention Officer – Partially funded by Rough Sleeper Initiative 2022-2025 (see 2.7)	£17,500* (the remainder RSI funded)
Countywide Partnership contingency fund	£25,000
Flexible Homelessness Response	£33,136
Total:	£318,636

*all staffing figures are approximate and inclusive of all associated costs of employment including redundancy and on costs

- 2.2 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 and 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 Third Party agencies. The Flexible Prevention Fund will assist with bespoke interventions depending on the specific clients' needs.
- 2.4 Private Rented Sector Fund.** There will be a modest budget to fund the provision of cash deposits, fees and payments of rent in advance as well as payments to help households make their new accommodation habitable.
- 2.5 Personalisation Budgets, Domestic Abuse Prevention Fund & Bed and Breakfast Move On Fund.** Personalisation budgets will allow the Project Officers (Temporary Accommodation 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 dividers for older children who need to share). Bed and Breakfast Move On will allow the Temporary Accommodation Move On Officers access to funds to ensure the clients who are in Bed and Breakfast have access to items such as furniture, bedding, and white goods.
- 2.6** These Funds will be managed by the Housing Finance Project Officer in consultation with the Business Manager – Housing and the relevant Housing Lead Officer.
- 2.7 Continuation of the current Fixed Term Contracts for 2 years as detailed below:** The Homelessness Prevention Grant has traditionally been awarded for 1 year at a time, leaving the council with no option but to offer 1 year fixed term contracts to the officers employed to assist with meeting the grant conditions. It is therefore now possible for new contracts be offered for 2 years to give both the officers stability and the projects longevity. (Costs in salary and on costs such as redundancy payments have been included in this calculation as the two of the officers will have now been in post for more than 2 years):
- **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.

- **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.
- **Continuation of the Complex Needs Project Officer role** - This role was outsourced previously to Aspire however the contract is now at an end. It is proposed to bring this back 'in house' with the aim of providing invaluable 'upstream' Housing advice to those clients who are threatened with homelessness at an early stage with the aim of preventing Homelessness wherever possible. The previous post holder within Aspire typically held a caseload of 30 applicants at any one time with the aim of preventing them from becoming homeless. On average the Complex Needs Officer will prevent around 50 – 60 households per annum from becoming homeless. Partial funding of £16,500 for this role was secured via the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) 2022-2025 therefore both funding streams being confirmed for 2 financial years mean that the new contract will be for 2 years.
- **Temporary Accommodation Move On Officers.** It is proposed that the proportion of the fund that is pooled with Cotswold and Forest of Dean District Councils will continue to employ two shared Temporary Accommodation Move On Officers. These roles are dedicated to ensure 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 in terms of emergency, temporary and longer term private rented or affordable rented accommodation.

2.8 Allocation for 2024-2025. A review of the current Homelessness circumstances in the district will be carried out in January 2024, and further report will be presented to the Executive if a change in direction is needed

3. FLEXIBLE HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE & PARTNERSHIP CONTINGENCY FUND

- 3.1** Currently there are numerous Countywide projects being discussed as part of the Oxfordshire Homelessness Steering Group around the provision of accommodation for rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping (i.e. 'sofa surfers').
- 3.2** Rough Sleeper Initiative Funding has been secured for 2022 -2025 for the Oxfordshire partners to deliver a number of countywide and local schemes targeted at reducing rough sleeping. These schemes include direct access supported accommodation, longer term supported accommodation and a new, joint Housing First project.
- 3.3** However, from time to time, new initiatives or the need to provide targeted interventions arise (such as Covid, extreme weather etc.). The rising costs of providing accommodation (such as utilities, wages, move on costs) mean that additional local authority contributions may need to be made to ensure the effective running of countywide accommodation services.
- 3.4** Therefore, it is proposed that the Flexible Prevention & Countywide Contingency portion of the funds be used if needed to meet the changing demands on the service and

homelessness pathways as the pandemic continues, the Cost of Living Crisis develops and government guidance changes.

- 3.6** 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, assist with the Cost of Living Crisis or address increased demands on the Housing Service, delegation of the spending of these be given to the Business Manager - Housing in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing 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 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** All proposed spending plans are supported by ring fenced government grants so will have no impact upon the Council's net approved budget or financial strategy.
- 4.5** 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.
- 5.2** Save from the above there are no other legal implications arising directly from this report.

6. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 6.1** There is a reputational risk to the Council if it does not use this grant funding effectively for the specific purposes set out in the DLUHC letter to Chief Executives on the 23 December 2022
- 6.2** DLUHC require a full financial breakdown of how the Homelessness Prevention Grant has been spent. If it has not been spent in full, or has not complied with the conditions of the Grant, West Oxfordshire Council could be required to return all or some it.
- 6.3** There is also a risk that rising demands on the service from ongoing financial and housing challenges facing residents of the West Oxfordshire District Council area during the

ongoing pandemic and Cost of Living Crisis could impact on the Council's ability to deliver a full statutory Housing service if fixed term staffing contracts are not extended

7. EQUALITIES IMPACT

7.1 Please see attached Equalities Impact Assessment – Annex B

8. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

8.1 None

9. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

9.1 None considered as the allocation is ring fenced to specific outcomes.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None