



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and date of Committee	EXECUTIVE 12TH JULY 2023
Subject	OUR HOUSE FUNDING EXTENSION FOR 2023/2024
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Cllr Geoff Saul Executive Member for Housing Email: geoff.saul@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officers	Caroline Clissold, Business Manager Housing Caroline.clissold@publicagroup.uk Jon Dearing, Assistant Director Email: jon.dearing@publicagroup.uk
Report author	Caroline Clissold, Business Manager Housing Caroline.clissold@publicagroup.uk
Summary/Purpose	To update members on the 'Our House' project since its inception with a recommendation that funding be extended from 1st November 2023 to 31 st October 2024
Annexes	Annex A – Project outcomes Annex B – EIA
Recommendation(s)	<i>That the Executive resolves to:</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><i>1. Approve an extension to the Our House project for one year</i><i>2. That the Council agrees to use Housing Reserves as set out in section 3</i><i>3. That Executive agrees to continue with the current Support Provider via waiver</i><i>4. Delegate authority to the Business Manager for Housing in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing and Social Welfare to make any minor amendments to this funding extension;</i><i>5. Delegate authority to the Business Manager for Housing in</i>

	<i>consultation with the Executive Member for Housing and Social Welfare to apply for external funding should any become available to continue the project.</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	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Chief Finance Officer Cabinet Members with Responsibility for Housing and Finance Monitoring Officer Chief Executive Head of Legal Services

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1** West Oxfordshire District Council has worked with our countywide partners for many years to provide a collaborative approach to ending rough sleeping in the County.
- 1.2** As a result of this collaboration, Oxfordshire has both an established Young Peoples Supported Accommodation Pathway (predominantly for care leavers) and a general needs Adult Homelessness Pathway and has achieved much success in reducing the numbers of those that are sleeping out. However, due to the high concentration of rough sleeping in Oxford City, and the graduation of people from rural areas to the services located in the City much of the funding and supported accommodation projects are located in Oxford.
- 1.3** Many of our local residents however, especially young people who have high support needs, do not wish to be relocated outside of our District or to lose contact with their own support networks in the area. The traditional supported accommodation approach does not work for all with many clients preferring the 'own front door' or to live in smaller shared schemes.
- 1.4** West Oxfordshire District Council therefore created an innovative project called the 'Our House' Project in 2018 by working with our local housing provider, Cottsway and specialist support provider Aspire to address the needs of our local young people who are either rough sleeping, at threat of rough sleeping or are unable to remain at home with family or friends.
- 1.5** The Our House project now provides accommodation with support for up to 12 young people across 3 shared houses located within the District.
- 1.6** Funding was initially secured through government grants however once these ran out, further funding was secured in November 2021 from Earmarked Reserves.

2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1** The current funding arrangements are due to end in October 2023. The cost for continuing the project from November 2023 for a further year and delivering the support element is £75,000 per annum.
- 2.2** The majority of referrals into the project are from young people who were either 'sofa surfing' or 'street homeless'.
- 2.3** As the residents have varying levels of need, a bespoke package of support is identified for each new resident prior to them moving into the property thus unlocking further potential by better managing the support required of the trainees and their own personal journeys towards employment and independent living.
- 2.4** The majority of the residents accommodated in the three properties have had complex and sometimes challenging support needs and mental health issues meaning that the project has often had to be very reactive to certain situations to help reduce further escalations. The continuation of the project in partnership with Aspire will provide experienced and diverse support with a greater variety of resource that can be delivered 'in house' by the Council.
- 2.5** The 'Our House' project has provided some much needed single accommodation for young people within West Oxfordshire and has assisted us with discharging our homelessness

duties. Using the 'Our House' project has significant financial benefits as well as providing better outcomes for our young people.

- 2.6 Residents have been able to access employment and training opportunities and work alongside independent work coaches to establish their own plans and goals towards employment. Given the nature of the project there have been challenges, but these have been overcome through the work of various partnerships the project has created
- 2.7 The cost of providing this accommodation with high level bespoke support averages out at around £133 per week per person. Should funding for the project not be agreed, the cost of providing emergency B&B accommodation would be in the region of £300 - £500 per week, plus additional staffing to offer support to the young people to maintain this.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The Council currently has sufficient funding to meet the costs of extending the Our House project in Earmarked Reserves from an underspend in previous years ring fenced grants.
- 3.2 The proposed Our House support package costs are set out below:

November 2023 – October 2024	£75,000
6 month contingency to 'wind' down the project should external funding not be available in Oct 24	£37,500
Total	£112,500

- 3.3 Should the Council not continue with the project there will be cost implications in respect of other homelessness/ housing benefit costs and these are set out below:-

Annual Cost without Our House	
Temporary accommodation for 12	£187,200
Loss of Subsidy	£134,160
Total	£321,360

- 3.4 In addition to these costs there may be other complex needs support costs.
- 3.5 The tables set out above demonstrate that whilst it is an additional financial cost to the Council it is also an effective cost avoidance programme and therefore is recommended to the Executive for continued funding.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 The Executive may wish to consider not extending the funding for the project any further however this is likely to have a detrimental impact on the finances of the Council.
- 4.2 Should this be the case however, the Council and Cottsway would have to issue notices to the 12 young people to leave their accommodation by 31st October 2023.

- 4.3** If the residents are not able to source their own accommodation, the Council would need to offer emergency accommodation in B&B until such time as alternative accommodation could be found.
- 4.4** Therefore this option is not recommended due to the increased costs that would be incurred and the detrimental effect on the cohort of being moved from their homes into emergency accommodation.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1** Spending allocations need to follow the expectations set out in the DLUHC's allocation of funding instructions and comply with the conditions of any ring fenced grant schemes or funding bid awards.

6. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 6.1** The current twelve residents of the Our House project will need to be served notice and alternative properties sourced for them if we are unable to extend funding for the project into 2023/24. West Oxfordshire has a shortage of social and affordable one bedroom accommodation and the private sector would prove to be unaffordable to those in minimum wage jobs, apprenticeships or training therefore sourcing this type of accommodation is likely to be unachievable.
- 6.2** If move-on properties are not found for the Our House residents, this could force them into homelessness, emergency / B&B accommodation or rough sleeping.

7. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 7.1** Under equality legislation, the Council has a legal duty to pay 'due regard' to the need to eliminate discrimination and promote equality in relation to:
- Race
 - Disability
 - Gender, including gender reassignment
 - Age
 - Sexual Orientation
 - Pregnancy and maternity
 - Religion or belief
- 7.2** The Council also has a duty to foster good relations, and to consider the impact of its decisions on human rights. The law requires that this duty to pay 'due regard' is demonstrated in the decision making process. Therefore a full Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed – Annex B.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

(END)