



WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Name and Date of Committee	<b>EXECUTIVE – 22 JULY 2024</b>
Subject	<b>OUR HOUSE PROJECT FUNDING EXTENSION 2024-2026</b>
Wards Affected	All
Accountable Member	Councillor Geoff Saul – Executive Member for Housing and Social Welfare. Email: <a href="mailto:geoff.saul@westoxon.gov.uk">geoff.saul@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Accountable Officer	Jon Dearing – Interim Executive Director. Email: <a href="mailto:jon.dearing@publicagroup.uk">jon.dearing@publicagroup.uk</a>
Report Author	Caroline Clissold – Business Manager, Housing. Email: <a href="mailto:caroline.clissold@publicagroup.uk">caroline.clissold@publicagroup.uk</a>
Purpose	To update members on the ‘Our House’ project since its inception with a recommendation that funding be extended from 1st November 2024 to 31st October 2026.
Annexes	Annex A – Our House Annual Report 2023-24 Annex B – Equalities Impact Assessment
Recommendations	That the Executive resolves to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Approve a 2-year funding extension for the Our House project from 1 November 2024 to 31 October 2026;</li><li>2. Agree to continue with the current Support Provider via waiver;</li><li>3. Delegate authority to the Business Manager for Housing, in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing and Social Welfare, to approve the delegation of any minor amendments to this funding extension;</li><li>4. Delegate authority to the Business Manager for Housing, in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing and Social Welfare, to apply for external funding should any become available;</li><li>5. Recommend to Council that it agrees to utilise Housing Projects Reserves as set out in section 4 of the report.</li></ol>
Corporate Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Putting Residents First</li><li>• A Good Quality of Life for All</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working Together for West Oxfordshire</li> </ul>
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	<p>Cabinet Members with Responsibility for Housing and Finance</p> <p>Monitoring Officer</p> <p>Chief Executive</p> <p>Deputy Chief Exec / Chief Finance Officer</p> <p>Head of Legal Services</p> <p>Deputy CEO, Cottsway</p>

## **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1** The Our House Project was initially launched by West Oxfordshire District Council in 2018 in partnership with Cottsway Housing Association to address a rising concern with homelessness in young people.
- 1.2** The project was relaunched in 2021 to include Aspire who would take over the support element. Early learning identified that the best approach for the residents was to separate the support element from tenancy management to maximise their readiness for moving on into independent accommodation.
- 1.3** The aim of the project remains to provide young people with accommodation and support them into employment, education, training and into their own independent accommodation.
- 1.4** Funding to extend the project for another two years is available from Housing reserve funds.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1** West Oxfordshire District Council has worked with our countywide partners for many years to provide a collaborative approach to ending homelessness and rough sleeping in the County.
- 2.2** As a result of this collaboration, Oxfordshire has both an established Young Peoples Supported Accommodation Pathway (YPSA) which is 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 in Oxford.
- 2.3** Many of our 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.
- 2.4** The traditional supported accommodation approach does not work for all with many preferring the 'own front door' or to live in smaller shared schemes. High rents within supported accommodation can also prevent residents from moving into employment.
- 2.5** 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 Oxfordshire, accommodation is provided 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.
- 2.6** The Our House project now provides accommodation with support for up to 11 young people across 3 shared houses located within the district.
- 2.7** Funding was initially secured through government grants however once these were fully utilised, further funding was secured in November 2022 from Housing Projects Reserve funds.

### **3. MAIN POINTS**

- 3.1** The current funding arrangements are due to end in October 2024. The cost for continuing the project and delivering the support element is £73,500 for 2024-2025 rising to £75,500 per annum for 2025-2026. The total contract value for the two-year period is £149,000.
- 3.2** Most referrals into the project are from young people who were either 'sofa surfing' or 'street homeless' and would otherwise be placed in unsuitable B&B accommodation.
- 3.3** 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 for the young people and their own personal journeys towards employment and independent living.
- 3.4** Most 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 resources that can be delivered 'in house' by the Council.
- 3.5** 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 for both the Council and the residents, providing better outcomes for our young people.
- 3.6** Working in partnership with Cottsway means that each resident is paying on average around £300 per month in rent compared with an average of around £1300 per month within the wider counties supported accommodation pathways. By keeping the rents to such a low level, young people are not prevented from working due to affordability of high rents.
- 3.7** 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.
- 3.8** The Our House Project does not have any minimum or maximum time limits set for how long a person can remain in the accommodation as each resident will have different needs to be addressed before they can move on, the average length of their stay is around 12 months.
- 3.9** More information about Key Outcomes and the success of the Project so far can be found in Annex A
- 3.10** 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.

#### **4. PROPOSAL**

- 4.1** Housing currently has sufficient funding to meet the costs of extending the Our House project in earmarked Housing Project Reserves from underspends in previous allocations of ring-fenced grants. The current balance of the Housing Project Reserves is £293,000.
- 4.2** The remaining balance of the Housing Project Reserves will be used to fund additional Housing Projects such as expanding Housing First offers, expected rising costs of within Countywide Accommodation Pathways, and additional staffing to meet rising demands on the Housing service in general.
- 4.3** The ethos of the Our House Project meets the requirements set out in the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Homelessness Prevention Grant allocation instructions.
- 4.4** Aspire are currently providing high level support and are achieving excellent outcomes for young people leaving the project.
- 4.5** There are currently no external funding opportunities however the Housing Team will continue to search for options for additional funding.
- 4.6** Proposed Support Package costs:

<b>Year 1 November 2024 – October 2025</b>	<b>£73,500</b>
<b>Year 2 November 2025 – October 2026</b>	<b>£75,500</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>£149,000</b>

#### **5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 5.1** Alternatively, the Executive may wish to consider not extending the funding for the project any further.
- 5.2** Should this be the case however, the Council and Cottsway would have to issue notices to the 11 young people currently resident to leave their accommodation by 31st October 2024.
- 5.3** 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.
- 5.4** 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.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1** There are multiple complex funding streams supporting the work of the Housing Team particularly regarding homeless prevention and project work. 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 or bids within brief time limits.
- 6.2** The Our House Project is aimed at addressing the expectations set out by the government under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and maximising the use of 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.
- 6.3** The proposal is therefore aimed at reducing the use and time spent in expensive short term, emergency accommodation by utilising the funds from Housing Projects Reserves.
- 6.4** It is recommended that the £149,000 cost of extending the Our House project is met by the homelessness earmarked reserve, which is made up of the underspends of grant income received since 2017. Reports have gone through Executive each year to approve what our allocation of Homelessness Prevention grant (formerly Flexible Homelessness Prevention grant) is spent on, normally a split between specialist posts and projects. Due to the difficulty of recruiting in the last few years, fixed term contract posts were not filled for 12 months of the year, thereby creating underspends against grant funding received. The available balance in the earmarked reserve as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 is £293,000.

## **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1** The council should exercise its functions regarding its duties to homeless persons under part vii housing act 1996.
- 7.2** The council has a statutory duty to follow the expectations set out in the homelessness reduction act 2017 to prevent homelessness and help people threatened with or who become homeless.
- 7.3** The council must also provide suitable accommodation where homelessness cannot be prevented.

## **8. RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 8.1** The current residents of the Our House project will need to be served notice and alternative properties sourced for them if approval to extend funding for the project into 2024 – 2026 is not agreed.
- 8.2** 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.
- 8.3** 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.

**9. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

9.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment is attached – Annex B

**10. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 None

**11. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

11.1 None

(END)