

Information Paper

Social & Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 11th July 2005

The Housing Grants (H22300) Budget 2005/06

This note contains the information to keep Members informed of matters relating to the work of the Committee, but where no decisions from Members are needed.

1. Why has this come to scrutiny?

- 1.1 In July 2004, a scrutiny working group was set up by the Economy and Business Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review scrutiny's involvement in the budget process. This working group concluded that the scrutiny committees could be most effective in this role if they carried out a programme of 'cost of service' reviews during the year rather than only looking at budget issues in the budget setting period. In this way, members would be able to highlight any concerns or issues with a particular area at an early stage and be better informed for their formal review of the budget during the consultation stage. At the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 2nd December 2004, it was identified that the committee would like to commence their reviews by looking at the council's housing grants budget for 2005/06.

2. Summary of the Issue

- 2.1 The council currently awards grants to housing and housing advice agencies to assist the council in meeting the needs of homeless or potentially homeless persons and those identified as being in housing need. Essentially the council wants to be able to assist anybody to remain in their home for as long as they so wish by providing or referring to services which will allow them to do this.
- 2.2 The council has made a commitment in its business plan to;
- provide housing related support for vulnerable people to enable them to remain in their tenancies;
 - reduce rough sleeping, homelessness and repeated homelessness

2.3 The annual review of the council's conditional offers of grant to its voluntary and

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community sector partners was undertaken by a newly established Corporate Funding Review Group in November 2004. The Review Group included council officers representing the Community Services and the Business Support divisions, representation from the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee (3 representatives) and the relevant Cabinet Deputy (either the Deputy Neighbourhood and Community or the Deputy Health, Well-being and Economy).

- 2.4 Following the annual review a report was presented to Cabinet on 25th January 2005 where it was agreed in principle to award three year funding agreements to all of the organisations currently being funded by the Social and Community Group.

3. Summary of evidence/information

- 3.1 Appendix A outlines the costs of providing the grants for 2004/05 and the budgeted costs for 2005/06.

- 3.2 The council currently awards conditional grants to the following organisations:

3.2.1 **Cheltenham Housing Aid Centre** – The Cheltenham Housing Aid Centre (CHAC) currently receives £43,593 of funding support from the Council which contributes towards its core services and staffing costs. The funding is awarded to enable CHAC to carry out the council's statutory duty to ensure that housing advice and assistance is available to everybody who seeks it. More specifically, it relates to those persons whom the council have been unable to assist with accommodation through a homelessness application.

3.2.2 **Cheltenham Community Projects** - Cheltenham Community Projects (CCP) currently receives £40,368 of funding support from the council. This funding is awarded to CCP for the provision of advice and support to young people aged 16 to 25 years of age. The focus of this service is towards providing mediation services for families, accessing supported accommodation for young people and addressing the associated needs of training, employment and support into permanent housing.

3.2.3 **Care and Repair (Cheltenham)** - Care and Repair currently receives £34,000 of funding support from the council which contributes towards its core services and staffing costs in order to serve a mainly elderly clientele through its Home Improvement Agency (HIA). The key objective of the service is to enable those vulnerable people in need of support to maintain their independence, health and well being in their chosen home for the foreseeable future. The HIA can carry out repairs, adaptations and home improvements specifically for older people, people on low incomes and disabled people.

3.2.4 **Shelter – Young Peoples Housing Advice Service.** The council currently contributes £10,700 to a Funding Partnership Agreement which jointly commissions housing advice and support services for young people in Gloucestershire. The Partnership is inclusive of the Gloucestershire county council (Childrens Services) and the other five Gloucestershire district councils. The service assists all the partnering authorities to meet their statutory obligations under the Children Act 1989

and the Homelessness Act 2002 and provides the opportunity for young people to access information, advice and where appropriate, practical help to improve outcomes and enhance quality of life in relation to their housing.

3.2.5 Energy Efficiency – An annual grant of £7,000 is awarded to the Energy Efficiency Advice Centre. The council has an agreement with Severn Wye Energy Agency and all five other Gloucestershire district councils for the provision of the Gloucestershire Energy Efficiency Advice Centre Service to support the Home Energy Conservation Act and associated strategies. The service assists customers through the provision of information, advice, education and promotion of energy efficiency and best practice to households. These services are particularly targeted at those householders most likely to be affected by affordable warmth issues and those most likely to be at risk of cold related illness.

3.3 The housing grants budget also includes the annual rent for the council's Homelessness & Allocations team to provide homelessness services from the new multi agency One Stop Shop opening in Autumn in the Lower High Street.

3.4 Value For Money – The council makes its expectations of its funded organisations clear in its grant conditions and the annual review of the performance of each organisation measures whether or not these expectations have been met.

4 Next Steps

4.1 Funding for the next financial year is built into the base budget, and while there is agreement in principle to award three year cycles, this will always be subject to the budget round and satisfactory performance. As part of the Council's annual budget setting process, Cabinet will recommend which grants are subject to inflationary increases based on the agreements outlined in the conditional offer of grant.

4.2 The next major grant reviews will be conducted in the latter part of 2007 ready for the new 2008-2009 financial years. The interim monitoring of the performance of the grantees will be reviewed annually by the Officer Review Group and its findings reported to Cabinet and the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Background Papers

Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 12th January 2005 - Annual Review of the Council's Conditional Offers of Grant 2004-2005

Cabinet - 25th January 2005 -Annual Review of the Council's Conditional Offers of Grant 2004-2005. Report of the Deputy Neighbourhood and Community

Children Act 1989, Homelessness Act 2002

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Accountability

Cllr. Webster – Deputy Neighbourhood and
Community

Scrutiny Function

Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny
Committee