

Cheltenham Borough Council
Cabinet – 9th June 2020
Allocation of Homelessness Prevention Funding

Accountable member	Councillor Peter Jeffries, Cabinet Member – Housing
Accountable officer	Martin Stacy, Lead Commissioner – Housing Services
Ward(s) affected	All
Key Decision	Yes
Executive summary	<p>Last year the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) provided the council with a one-off, windfall funding allocation of £107,284, ring-fenced for homelessness prevention. This report sets out how this windfall payment will be allocated, which is principally to increase capacity within Cheltenham Borough Homes' (CBH) Housing Options Service so that there can be greater focus on early intervention measures to prevent homelessness, particularly in terms of supporting young people and vulnerable people with complex needs to remain in their homes. There will also be a focus on strengthening the Housing Options Service's role in supporting rough sleepers (including all households currently accommodated in emergency housing following the COVID-19 pandemic). This focus will complement proposals to increase our funding allocation to support the recommissioning of the county-wide Assertive Outreach Service for rough sleepers, as detailed in the recommendations below and within the main body of this report.</p> <p>In addition, Cheltenham Borough Council was successful in its funding bid to secure £44,000 from MHCLG to support victims of domestic abuse with complex needs to help navigate them through the pathways to suitable housing. This will be a county-wide service, led by Cheltenham, and it is proposed this funding is also transferred to CBH's Housing Options Service in order to best support its delivery.</p> <p>It should be noted that if these recommendations are approved, there may be some delays to implementation as a result of COVID-19. There will, nevertheless, continue to be an immediate focus on providing solutions for rough sleepers, particularly in light of this outbreak.</p>
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To approve the transfer to Cheltenham Borough Homes' Housing Options Service the sum of £107,284; this being a windfall MHCLG homelessness prevention funding allocation made to the council during 2019. 2. To approve the transfer to Cheltenham Borough Homes' Housing Options Service the sum of £44,000, subject to the council receiving this funding allocation from MHCLG during 2020; this being MHCLG's funding allocation to support survivors of domestic abuse. 3. To approve the allocation of an additional £14,000 funding (to

be spread over 3 years) to support the recommissioning of our county-wide, jointly commissioned Assertive Outreach service for rough sleepers; and to note that this funding represents the remaining unallocated element of the MHCLG's Flexible Homelessness Support Grant funding allocation to the council for 2019/20.

4. To delegate authority to the Lead Commissioner – Housing Services, in consultation with Cabinet Member – Housing, to make any changes to these spending plans, if required; noting that the indicative expenditures detailed within Appendix 2 of the report may need to be flexible, depending upon demands of the service, and particularly in light of the COVID-19 outbreak.
5. To delegate authority to Lead Commissioner – Housing Services, in consultation with Cabinet Member – Housing and Executive Director – Finance & Assets, any future allocations of MHCLG homelessness prevention funding (including the MHCLG funding allocation for 2020/21).

Financial implications

As detailed within the body of this report and at Appendix 2. All the funding detailed within this report comes from allocations provided by MHCLG. This funding is ring-fenced to support homelessness prevention activities. It should be noted that a significant proportion of this funding relates to the recruitment of additional, fixed-term posts within the Housing Options Service. In view of the likely timescales involved in recruiting officers to these posts, it can be expected that a proportion of this funding will be carried forward into 2021/22.

With regards to the £44,000 to support victims of domestic abuse, whilst MHCLG have confirmed publicly (i.e. on their website) that Cheltenham Borough Council will receive this funding, we are currently awaiting receipt of the grant determination letter. As noted in the recommendation to cabinet, the transfer of this funding to Cheltenham Borough Homes will be subject to the council receiving it from MHCLG.

Finally, the £14,000 additional funding allocation to support the county-wide Assertive Outreach Service for rough sleepers will be spread over 3 years. This will be on top of the current £15,000/year commitment under the existing Assertive Outreach contract which is due to expire on 31st December 2020.

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Legal implications	<p>Homelessness support and prevention initiatives and schemes developed and funded through the Department for Communities and Local Government Grant assists the Council in meeting its statutory duties to those threatened with homelessness and homeless applicants, including those placed in Temporary Accommodation under the Homeless provisions of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended). The new resources are expected to be used to strengthen homelessness prevention in the District.</p> <p>Any officer decision taken following the implementation of any of the recommendations in this report will need to be, where necessary, taken, recorded and published in accordance with the Council's constitution and decision making rules.</p> <p>Contact officer: Sarah Farooqi, sarah.farooqi@tewkesbury.gov.uk, 01684 272012</p>
HR implications (including learning and organisational development)	<p>There are no HR implications arising from this report for Cheltenham Borough Council, however, if the proposed activities impact any employees of the Housing Options Service, then these will be managed and supported by Cheltenham Borough Homes' Human Resources Team.</p>
Key risks	<p>Please see risk register at Appendix 1</p>
Corporate and community plan Implications	<p>One of the key priorities within our corporate plan is to increase the provision of affordable housing and create more resilient communities. This priority includes tackling homelessness and rough sleeping.</p>
Environmental and climate change implications	<p>None as a direct consequence of this report.</p>
Property/Asset Implications	<p>None as a direct consequence of this report.</p> <p>Contact officer: Dominic.Stead@cheltenham.gov.uk</p>

1. Background

- 1.1** In April 2018, the Homelessness Reduction Act was implemented across England. This Act significantly increased the statutory duties on councils to prevent and relieve homelessness. To support the implementation of the Act, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) provided councils with New Burdens Funding (approximately £30,000/year for this council over the three year period from 2017 to 2020).
- 1.2** Over the same period, additional funding, known as the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant, was also allocated to the council by MHCLG to support the delivery of more homelessness prevention activities. This funding (approximately £65,000/year for the years 2017/18 to 2018/19) was increased to approximately £220,000 for 2019/20. In February 2019, Cabinet agreed to transfer most of this funding (i.e. £164,000) to CBH's Housing Options Service, to be spent over a 2 year period to end March 2021. The remainder of the MHCLG funding allocation (c.£56,000) remained with the council. £42k is being used to part fund a new Housing Strategy & Enabling post over two years (to March 2021), with a residual sum of £14,000 now to be allocated to support the recommissioning of the county-wide Assertive Outreach Service as detailed at section 2.1 below.
- 1.3** In addition to the New Burdens Funding and Flexible Homelessness Support Grant, a further windfall allocation was made to the council last year by MHCLG. This sum totals £107,284, and it is proposed that this allocation is transferred to CBH's Housing Options Service to support a range of activities as detailed in section 2.2 below.
- 1.4** The council has also been successful in securing a funding bid from MHCLG to the value of approximately £44,000 to support victims of domestic abuse across the county. This funding will enable the creation of a 12 month fixed term post, with a remit to:
- better understand the support and accommodation needs of victims of domestic abuse across the county, and their children; and
 - provide housing options support to victims of domestic abuse, and their children, who may have experienced chaotic lifestyles and have multiple and complex support needs.

This will be a county-wide resource managed by Cheltenham Borough Homes and overseen by the council.

2. Reasons for recommendations

2.1 Allocation of funding of £14,000 to support future commissioning of Assertive Outreach Services for rough sleepers

- 2.1.1** The council currently commits £15,000/year to support the provision of a county-wide, partnership approach to delivering Assertive Outreach Service for rough sleepers. Since the commissioning of this service, the partnership has been successful in a number of funding bids to MHCLG to support a range of services aimed at reducing rough sleeping – the most recent one being a £1m successful bid for the continuation of Somewhere Safe to Stay Hubs and Navigators, both of which support pathways for rough sleepers to independent living. A proportion of the £1m is also being used to enhance the provision of our existing Assertive Outreach Service.
- 2.1.2** Going forward, it is understood that councils will be expected to fund Assertive Outreach services from their Flexible Homelessness Support Grants, rather than relying on opportunistic funding bids to bolster their provision. In view of this, and the fact that the partnership is reviewing its model/specification for Assertive Outreach services ahead of its recommissioning of this service in January 2021, it is appropriate for the council to allocate further funding to support this provision ahead of the recommissioning of this service. The proposed £14,000 will be spread over the period of the contract (up to 3 years). It is anticipated that the council will increase its funding commitment further, once costs for the new Assertive Outreach contract have been finalised

across the partnership. If this is the case, then more approvals will be sought to increase our budget allocation further, utilising the council's 2020/21 Flexible Homelessness Prevention Support Grant funding allocation.

2.2 Allocation of MHCLG's windfall grant of £107,284 to CBH's Housing Options Service to support the provision of a range of services, as follows:

2.2.1 More early intervention homelessness prevention

2.2.1.1 Since the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2018, demand on the Housing Options Service has increased significantly. As outlined in section 1.1 above, funding has already been received from MHCLG to help support this increase in demand on the Housing Options Service. The result is that successful homelessness preventions have increased significantly in recent years (from 140 in 2017/18 to an estimated 350 during 2019/20; whilst the number of households who have been accepted as statutorily homeless (because homelessness prevention wasn't possible) have decreased from 106 in 2017/18 to an estimated 60 over 2019/20.

2.2.1.2 Challenges

However, a number of challenges remain. These can be summarised as follows:

- There has been a much higher volume of presentations from vulnerable individuals with complex needs. These individuals often present to the Housing Options Service at the point of crisis, with the result that there is usually not enough time to prevent their homelessness. This includes individuals being evicted from supported housing, some of whom have a history of rough sleeping.
- Current demand on the Housing Options Service means that there is insufficient scope to direct resources towards more proactive casework by implementing earlier intervention measures. The service receives many approaches from households who, whilst not homeless or threatened with homelessness currently, could be homeless in the future. Increasing capacity within the Housing Options Service will enable greater focus on these households.
- Demand for housing via the council's Homeseeker Plus Allocations Scheme remains high. On average there are approximately 120 new applications/month, with a similar number of online changes in circumstances which need to be reviewed by the team. Approximately a third of these new applications are from households who are either homeless or facing homelessness. Households' first interaction with the Housing Options Service is often via our Homeseeker Plus Allocations Scheme. At present it takes the team on average 18 days to process and review an application. Whilst this is within the 28 days specified within Homeseeker Plus Policy, earlier identification of the housing needs of these households would support the team's ability to prevent some of them from becoming homeless.
- It is also worth noting that a significant amount of time is spent by Housing Options Officers providing advice to households on Homeseeker Plus enquires that do not relate to homelessness (approximately 35-45 hours/week) in addition to a further 1-3 hours/week/Officer spent on administrative duties. By allocating resources a little differently, and more efficiently, Officers will be able to place greater focus on their homelessness prevention activities.

2.2.1.3 Solutions

To help overcome these challenges, it is proposed that two additional, fixed-term posts are created (both for an initial period of 12 months): a Housing Options Officer and a Senior Homeseeker Plus Officer. Together, these new posts will enable the Housing Options Service to:

- Undertake early intervention prevention work around negotiation and mediation. This would involve assessments being carried out within the clients' homes (subject to any future MHCLG

guidance in light of COVID-19) and would also involve more intensive negotiations with parents/family members, private rented landlords, supported housing providers and social housing landlords. This approach will support households with complex needs, who might otherwise be evicted from supported housing, through to young people at risk of becoming homeless because of a breakdown in their relationships with parents/other family members. One of the biggest causes of homelessness in Cheltenham is as a result of family/parental breakdown, and we believe there is potential to make significant in-roads into helping families remain together for longer.

- In addition, it is anticipated that these new posts will create more capacity within the team to target resources into better supporting the rough sleeper pathways - in particular, the Assertive Outreach Service and the Somewhere Safe to Stay hub (currently based at the YMCA in Cheltenham). This approach will ensure that the Housing Options Service remain across the needs of rough sleepers in Cheltenham so that the team can add value to the range of services and pathways by identifying potential gaps in service delivery and using the personalisation pot (detailed in section 2.2.2 below) to come up with innovative solutions to resolve outstanding issues.

2.2.2 Personalisation pot to support rough sleepers off the streets

In February 2020, the council was successful in securing cold weather funding (up to £8,000) to support the provision of emergency accommodation for rough sleepers until March 2020. We propose to take this to the next level by putting aside a provisional discretionary fund of £19,155 to be used by the Housing Options Service for a wide range of solutions to support rough sleepers (including those placed in emergency accommodation following the COVID-19 outbreak) into suitable accommodation. . We are committed to ensuring there is no reason for anyone to sleep rough, ever; and we will work hard to ensure that this personalisation fund can support this.

2.2.3 Alternatives to Bed & Breakfast provision

2.2.3.1 Since April 2018, between 9 and 17 single, vulnerable people have been placed into Bed and Breakfast emergency accommodation every quarter. Whilst these placements are on average relatively short term (for example, the average length of stay in Bed & Breakfast for a single person during the period from September to December 2019 was 19 days), the majority of these placements are made outside of the town, due to the lack of emergency accommodation provision locally.

2.2.3.2 It is likely there will be a continued need for emergency accommodation as households can, and do, present to the Housing Options Service as homeless with little or no notice. It is our intention however to allocate funding (provisionally c. £15,000) to explore alternatives to Bed & Breakfast provision within Cheltenham (in addition to improving the furnishing of temporary accommodation that we use for homeless households within our council-owned stock). This could include setting up and managing shared accommodation from within our own council housing – subject to any necessary approvals and any future government guidelines, following the COVID-19 outbreak . Clearly, any solutions we adopt to reduce the use of Bed & Breakfast ,and in particular its use outside of the Borough, is likely to significantly improve the health and wellbeing of the individuals affected, and also reflects best practice.

2.3 Allocation of funding of £44,000 to CBH's Housing Options Service, to support victims of domestic abuse across the county.

2.3.1 Cheltenham Borough Council has recently been successful in its county-wide funding bid to MHCLG to support victims of domestic abuse and their children. This funding will enable the creation of a 12 month fixed-term post that will provide short-term housing options support to households with complex needs who have experienced domestic abuse, whilst also mapping out the support and accommodation needs of victims of domestic abuse (and their children) more generally, with a view to better informing the future commissioning of these services. In view of its operational nature, the post will sit within CBH's Housing Options Service and will complement

the existing team – in particular the Interventions Officer (as this post also has an emphasis on helping households with complex needs successfully navigate pathways to independent living).

3. Alternative options considered

- 3.1** None. The funding proposals detailed above are either very specific in nature or simply the most appropriate in order for the Housing Options Service to direct its resources into areas where it is currently most needed. Some flexibility has been built into the recommendations, however, so that delegated authority is given to the Lead Commissioner – Housing Services to review the indicative expenditures as detailed at Appendix 2 (in consultation with the Cabinet Member – Housing) should the need arise, particularly in light of the Covid-19 outbreak.
- 3.2** It is worth restating that all of the funding detailed within this report is provided by MHCLG, and ring-fenced either for services to support housing options provision for victims of domestic abuse, or more generally for homelessness prevention services.

4. How this initiative contributes to the corporate plan

- 4.1** One of the key priorities within our corporate plan is to increase the provision of affordable housing and create more resilient communities. This priority includes tackling homelessness and rough sleeping.

5. Consultation and feedback

- 5.1** Consultation has been carried out with the Housing Options Team to understand where indicative resources should be placed in order to maximize outcomes in reducing homelessness and support the provision of housing options advice for victims of domestic abuse.
- 5.2** Consultation has also been undertaken with districts across the county, including the county council, to inform the requirements of our funding bid to MHCLG to bolster support provision (by way of housing options advice) for victims of domestic abuse. Our subsequently successful bid was supported by our partners across the county.
- 5.3** In addition, discussions have been underway with partners across the county in preparation for the recommissioning of the Assertive Outreach Service for rough sleepers. It is widely recognised that districts will be required to invest further in this service. Whilst actual funding requirements are yet to be finalised, the allocation of an additional £14,000 by Cheltenham Borough Council over the period of the next contract (3 years) is likely to be the minimum additional contribution required by this council. If a further allocation of funding is indeed required once the new service model is finalised ahead of recommissioning, then further relevant approvals will be sought at that time.

6. Performance management – monitoring and review

- 6.1** Regular performance monitoring meetings are already in place between the council and the Housing Options Service. Outcomes, and expenditure against these outcomes, will be monitored; and where necessary, the indicative proposals detailed within this report may be changed if this is in the best interests of reducing homelessness and providing value for money. Any such changes will be agreed with the Lead Commissioner – Housing Services, in consultation with Cabinet Member – Housing.
- 6.2** For the avoidance of doubt, there will also be close monitoring between the council and the Housing Options Service of the outcomes relating to the domestic abuse support service. These outcomes will be shared with the districts across the county on a regular basis.

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Appendices	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Risk Assessment2. Summary of indicative costings
Background information	

The risk				Original risk score (impact x likelihood)			Managing risk				
Risk ref.	Risk description	Risk Owner	Date raised	Impact 1-5	Likelihood 1-6	Score	Control	Action	Deadline	Responsible officer	Transferred to risk register
	If staffing levels within the Housing Options Team are not supported through the utilisation of MHCLG funding as detailed within this report, then the team will be less equipped to deal with the increase in the number of households approaching the service, and the time expected to manage each individual case as a result of the Homelessness Reduction Act.	Martin Stacy	9.3.20	2	3	6	Reduce	Cabinet to accept the recommendation within this report	June 2020	Paul Tuckey (CBH)	
	If alternatives to B&B accommodation are not managed effectively, then this could lead to anti-social behaviour in the immediate neighbourhood.	Martin Stacy	9.3.20	3	4	12	Reduce	Further work will be undertaken to scope out the options and to manage associated risks before final approvals are given.	Autumn/winter 2020	Paul Tuckey (CBH)	
	If funding for Assertive Outreach Services to support rough sleepers is not increased, then the resulting service will	Martin Stacy	9.3.20	3	4	12	Reduce	Cabinet to accept the relevant commendation within this report	June 2020	Martin Stacy	

	have insufficient resources to cope with the required demands.										
	If the domestic abuse post is not sufficiently specific in its remit, then the postholder is likely to be overwhelmed in case work and the overall effectiveness of the post will be reduced.	Martin Stacy	9.3.20	3	4	12	Reduce	The council will liaise closely with the Housing Options Service to ensure this risk is not underestimated and that the role of the post is made as specific as possible and that this is communicated effectively to all relevant agencies across the county.	Summer/Autumn 2020	Paul Tuckey (CBH)	
	If Cabinet makes a commitment to allocate funding to the Housing Options Service to enable the creation of a domestic abuse post, and MHCLG's funding offer is then subsequently withdrawn, the council may be required to find this funding from other sources.	Martin Stacy	9.3.20	2	1	2	Reduce	Cabinet to accept the recommendation that the transfer of funding to the Housing Options Service will be on the proviso that the council has received the relevant funding from MHCLG.	June 2020	Martin Stacy	
	If this homelessness prevention funding is allocated by cabinet, then the council may be less placed to tackle subsequent emerging homelessness	Martin Stacy	19.5.20	4	3	12	Reduce	Flexibility has been built into the recommendations to enable changes to the indicative expenditures to be made if necessary. The current allocation			

	<p>priorities arising as a result of covid-19.</p>						<p>enables greater focus on early intervention and supporting those with complex needs, as well as reducing rough sleeping – all of which will contribute towards supporting the council in tackling current priorities arising as a result of the covid pandemic.</p> <p>There is likely to be a delay in implementation (again, because of covid) and this will provide further opportunities to review how the funding is allocated, should this be necessary.</p> <p>The 2020/21 Homelessness Prevention Grant Funding will be allocated later in the year (c.£280k). This will provide the council with the opportunity to focus on any other emerging priorities, should they arise and require solutions beyond the scope of the allocation of funding as detailed within this report.</p>			
<p>Explanatory notes</p>										

Impact – an assessment of the impact if the risk occurs on a scale of 1-5 (1 being least impact and 5 being major or critical)

Likelihood – how likely is it that the risk will occur on a scale of 1-6

(1 being almost impossible, 2 is very low, 3 is low, 4 significant, 5 high and 6 a very high probability)

Control - Either: Reduce / Accept / Transfer to 3rd party / Close