

Wyre Forest District Council

Record of a Council Decision delegated to be made by an Officer

This includes a record of an Executive Decision made by an officer under Regulation 13, Part 4 of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012

Item decided: To allocate the Priority Needs Order funding received from Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government as per the attached memo.	
Officer who has taken the decision	Mike Parker, Corporate Director; Economic Prosperity and Place, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Wellbeing
Date of the decision	21/03/2019
Reason for the decision/alternatives considered	The funding is allocated for the purposes of Homeless Prevention and dealing with Priority Need Statutory Homelessness. The attached memo outlines the services this allocation will assist to fund over the forthcoming year.
Date and source of Delegated Decision (if appropriate)	Council 27/07/2011
Council/Cabinet member consulted – if applicable	Councillor Ian Hardiman, Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Wellbeing
Any interest declared by the Consultee or officer	NA

Appendix One: Allocation of the 2019/20 Homeless Prevention Funding

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek agreement for the proposed expenditure of the 2019/20 Homelessness prevention funding (Priority Needs Order).

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 It is recommended that expenditure of the 2019/20 Homelessness Prevention Funding by approved by the Director of Economic Prosperity and Place in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Wellbeing.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002 extended that categories of homeless applicants who have a priority need for accommodation. Additional monies have been made available to Local Authorities since 2002/03 for work with homeless applicants including prevention work.
- 3.2 The Council will receive £107,584 in 2019-20 from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). The Council have previously agreed the Head of Strategic Growth can spend £90,000 of this specified grant on homeless prevention plus any underspend on homeless or welfare budgets and previously ear marked reserves and to maintain the current provision of services it is requested that this continues. This is in addition to other funding in the base budget that covers the cost of the housing register, housing advice and homelessness service.
- 3.3 Last year the CLG Homeless Prevention funding was used for the following services:
- The provision of debt and welfare advice through Wyre Forest Citizens Advice Bureau in Customer Service Centre, New Street and CAB offices. 103 households were seen between April and February and either had their homelessness prevented or were assisted to find other accommodation.
 - The continuation of the temporary accommodation and mediation service run by Wyre Forest Nightstop. Approximately 40 young people were provided with advice and assistance on average each month and they provided over 80 mediation sessions young people and/or their families. Nightstop placements are down but this is perhaps an indicator of the effectiveness of alternative accommodation solutions such as the Crash Pad and New Street and the higher complexity of cases making Nightstop less suitable as an accommodation option.
 - Funding the WFDC Rent Bond Scheme, which has been used to prevent homelessness through securing properties in the private rented sector for

homeless households and for the payment of mortgage and rent arrears. Between April and March 50 clients were helped with rent bonds.

- Funding for Whabac CAB: to help clients access the private rented sector. In 2018 they provided advice and assistance to 60 single people and rehoused 21 households into their accommodation.
- Funding towards the County Homeless Strategy Coordinator post. The post has assisted in coordinating countywide prevention projects, developing both the Partnership Plan and Homelessness Strategy and countywide bids for funding including the Rapid Rehousing Pathway funding for Rough Sleepers.
- Funding for the Homeless Prevention Officer (HPO): The post holder has been responsible for the delivery of the sanctuary scheme (for victims of domestic violence) and mortgage rescue as well as developing other prevention projects and overseeing the CLG housing register, housing advice and homeless contracts. This service became delivered directly by the Council in June 2018 and this post holder acted up as Team Leader to guide the team through the transition, alongside the Principal Strategic Housing Officer.
- Private Sector Liaison Officer (PSLO) (part time): The officer has been responsible for the day to day running of the WFDC bond scheme, working with potential tenants and landlords in order to prevent homelessness through the private rented sector. Please see rent bond figures above.
- Tenancy Sustainment Training: The HPO and PSLO provide basic tenancy sustainment training for households accessing the various bond schemes by WFDC and Whabac. The aim is to assist households to develop the skills needed to sustain tenancies and prevent them from becoming homeless.
- No Second Night Out (NSNO) and Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP): WFDC has funded emergency temporary accommodation for people rough sleeping in Wyre Forest, where there is no homeless duty owed, but to reduce the likelihood of death or prolonged periods of rough sleeping from those new to the streets. Between April and February 2019 we have accommodated 22 households through NSNO for a total of 76 nights. Data for the number of households from Wyre Forest accommodated through the Severe Winter Emergency Protocol is not yet available.
- Young People's Pathway Worker: this post works with 16 – 23 year olds to try and prevent homelessness and access suitable housing, education, employment and training. Between April and December 51 young people were prevented from becoming homeless.
- Education Awareness – Nightstop provided housing and homelessness awareness to around 600 pupils across a number of high schools in the District.

3.4 The services listed above have assisted 327 households by either preventing their homelessness or by helping to secure alternative accommodation by the end of quarter three. In addition over 1000 potentially homeless applicants have been given advice and assistance through council officers and the

commissioned services in addition to the work undertaken by the Housing Advice Team..

- 3.5 Despite this work, homeless approaches are increasing and this is in line with the national picture and is due to the economic situation and policy changes such as the Local Housing Allowance and Welfare Benefit changes. Unfortunately, it is expected that the number of households presenting as homeless will continue to increase and there has been increasing pressure on the Emergency / Interim Accommodation budget as a consequence.
- 3.6 The current spend on emergency/interim accommodation is £109,000 which is substantially higher than the last few years. The budget is offset by HB (less whatever can't be claimed in subsidy) and individual contributions.
- 3.7 Since November 2017 the Council has been able to accommodate homeless households (meeting the interim accommodation duty) in New Street Temporary Accommodation. However demand has outstripped supply and the team will work on identifying / delivering a similar project in 2019/2020..

4. FUNDING PROPOSALS FOR 2019/20

- 4.1 It is proposed that the funding be used for the following purposes:
- Homeless Prevention Officer Post (full time) – the post holder coordinates and provides homeless prevention services. It is anticipated that the main focus of the post holders work will be continuing delivery of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, working with people presenting for mortgage rescue and rent arrears or domestic abuse, working with housing benefits team and the Customer Services Centre and finding housing solutions where required. They will continue to develop homeless prevention services and solutions for households faced with homelessness including the provision of further temporary accommodation.
 - Private Sector Liaison Officer (part time) and Rent Bond Scheme – This post will continue to provide access to the private rented sector through the rent bond scheme. The scheme provides a cashless bond which acts as a rent deposit for homeless (or at threat of homelessness) households seeking accommodation in the private rented sector and would cover payment for rent arrears and damage to the property. This scheme is currently funded through base budget and an existing ear marked reserve. The officer will also be responsible for attracting landlords to the WFDC bond scheme, inspecting properties and providing support to landlords and tenants who access the scheme. During 2019/20 the current postholder will be on maternity leave so additional funding is required to cover these costs.
 - Tenancy Sustainment Training – tenancy sustainment is offered to all households accessing the private rented bond schemes in Wyre Forest.
 - Money Advice – It is proposed that money be given to Wyre Forest CAB to support people who are presenting as homeless who have financial issues and need debt advice and assistance with negotiation with lenders.

- No Second Night Out Accommodation –The funding will be used to purchase bed spaces across the county to use throughout the year. This funding can also be used for periods when SWEF is activated, which provides emergency bed spaces for entrenched rough sleepers if required. This funding is also set aside to make a contribution to void costs for emergency bed spaces at 90 George Street.
- Whabac CAB - this funding is used to part fund an officer who supports single people over 25 in shared housing in the private and social housing sector, advice and assistance and a rent bond scheme.
- Wyre Forest Nightstop and Mediation: This is a continuation of funding for the provision of mediation, emergency accommodation for young people facing homelessness and the schools project.
- Spend to Save: This budget will be used to pay off rent arrears and other accommodation related costs, give people funding for transport to return home/access accommodation placements out of the district and also fund one off mortgage payments to help prevent mortgage possession proceedings.
- County Strategic Housing Partnership Officer; funding to continue the work they do around our housing and homeless strategy development and delivery, funding bids on behalf of the LHAs etc
- Young People’s Pathway Worker: the Council make a contribution to the salary funded by the County Council for this post which works with homeless 16 – 23 year olds.
- Homelessness Reduction Act: any remaining funding will be used to develop new services in relation to the Act.
- Financial Inclusion Officer: an ongoing contribution towards the salary of the FIO who provides income maximisation, benefit and debt advice to households.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 MHCLG has committed £107,584 for 2019/20 for the purpose of delivering homeless prevention services in Wyre Forest. Of this the Housing Services team receive £90,000 to spend on Homeless Prevention.
- 5.2 Failure to use it for the intended purpose could lead to an increase in temporary accommodation and homelessness investigation costs. Prevention work has saved the council substantial costs associated with homeless acceptances (based on the Audit Commission assumption that each statutory homeless case costs around £2.5k and 327 households have been prevented using this funding) this is a saving to authority of £0.8 million. Continued use of the Homeless Prevention Funding will assist with providing appropriate solutions for households facing homelessness and mitigating the expense of homelessness investigations and the provision of interim temporary accommodation.

6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Each organisation will be required to enter into a Service Level Agreement with Wyre Forest District Council which will set out the performance expectations and outcomes.

6.2 Four posts are directly employed by the Council and so there would be further implications in making these staff redundant if the funding didn't continue.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

7.1 There are potential risks to the numbers of people approaching as homeless increasing and therefore on the temporary accommodation budget particularly if New Street is fully occupied.

7.2 There would also be implications both for the Council and our partners who would need to end services and make staff redundant.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8.1 All services commissioned have previously undertaken an EIA as part of the service level agreement with the Council.

9. CONCLUSION

9.1 To date, the expenditure of Homelessness Prevention Funding has assisted the authority in reducing the number of homeless acceptances and the number of households in temporary accommodation. The suggested expenditure will continue to provide services that will prevent homelessness and assist in meeting the actions within the Worcestershire Housing Partnership Plan and County Homelessness Strategy.

9. CONSULTEES

Not applicable

10. APPENDICES

10.1 Proposed expenditure table 2019/20

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 N/A