

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

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|---|---|
| Item decided: To allocate the Priority Needs Order funding received from Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government | |
| Officer who has taken the decision | Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity and Place |
| Date of the decision | 15/04/2021 |
| Reason for the decision/alternatives considered | The funding is allocated for the purposes of Homeless Prevention and dealing with Priority Need Statutory Homelessness. |
| Date and source of Delegated Decision (if appropriate) | Council 27/07/2011 |
| Council/Cabinet member consulted – if applicable | Councillor Nicky Martin, Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Wellbeing and Democratic Services |
| Any interest declared by the Consultee or officer | NA |

17 March 2021

Allocation of the 2021/22 Homeless Prevention Funding

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek agreement for the proposed expenditure of the 2021/22 Homelessness prevention funding.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **It is recommended that expenditure of the 2021//22 Homelessness Prevention Funding by approved by the Director of Economic Prosperity and Place in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Wellbeing and Democratic Services.**

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 have previously agreed the Head of Strategic Growth can spend £90,000 of the 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. 91 households were seen in the first 3 quarters of the year 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 43 young people were provided with advice and assistance and they provided over 54 mediation sessions young people and/or their families. 11 young people were accommodated with Nightstop hosts for a total of 296 nights.
 - 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 February the service

had over 50 referrals and were able to directly assist 19 clients with rent bonds.

- Funding for Whabac CAB: to help clients access the private rented sector. In 2020/21 between April and December, they helped provide housing advice to 35 households, helped 24 sustain tenancies (for the previous 6 months) and rehoused 7 households through the supported accommodation provided through Community Housing Group.
- Funding towards the countywide Strategic Housing Partnership post. The post has assisted in coordinating countywide prevention projects, developing both the Partnership Plan and Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy and countywide bids for funding including the Rough Sleeper Initiative rounds 2, 3 and 4 for Rough Sleepers and Next Steps Accommodation Programme.
- Funding for the Housing Project Officer (HPO): The post holder has been responsible for the delivery of various homeless prevention services and projects including the sanctuary scheme (for victims of domestic violence) and developing alternatives to Bed and Breakfast.
- Private Rented Sector Officer (PRSO): The officer has been responsible for the day to day running of the WFDC social lettings agency, private sector leasing and the bond scheme, working with potential tenants and landlords in order to prevent homelessness through the private rented sector.
- Tenancy Sustainment Training: The team provided tenancy sustainment or pre-tenancy training for 173 households including rough sleepers, those in temporary accommodation or those accessing the bond scheme provided by WFDC.
- No Second Night Out (NSNO): WFDC has funded emergency temporary accommodation for people rough sleeping in Wyre Forest and Worcester City, 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 Dec 2020 we have accommodated 33 households through NSNO for a total of 288 nights. This is an increase in previous years.
- Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP): Data for the number of households from Wyre Forest accommodated through the Severe Winter Emergency Protocol has not been finalised for the year but up until 8th March 13 people had been accommodated in total. The range was between 0 and 5 people accessing in a single night. The SWEP was activated on 15 separate nights in addition to being open throughout the Christmas and New Year. This is an increase both in activation and number of people accessing the facility.
- Young People's Pathway Worker (part time): this post works with 16 – 24 year olds to try and prevent homelessness and access suitable housing, education, employment and training. Between April and March 74 young people were prevented from becoming homeless or assisted into accommodation.

- Education Awareness – Nightstop provided housing and homelessness awareness across a number of high schools in the District.
- Crash Pad at St Basils – this funding covers the rent on the unit when void and part rent when it is occupied (as there are some restrictions to the HB subsidy).
- Spend to Save: This budget is 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 or rent arrears to help prevent possession proceedings. In 2020/21 it assisted 3 households to access or sustain accommodation.

3.4 The Housing Advice Team and services listed above have assisted over 700 households by preventing their homelessness. In addition, over 800 potentially homeless applicants have been given advice and assistance through council officers every month.

3.5 Despite this work, homeless approaches remain high and this is in line with the national picture and there has been increasing pressure on the Emergency / Interim Accommodation budget as a consequence. The current spend on emergency/interim accommodation is £241,000 which is higher than the last few years. The budget is offset by HB (less whatever can't be claimed in subsidy) and individual contributions.

3.6 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 have worked throughout 2020/21 to identify alternative accommodation in the private rented sector and at Raven Street / Bridge Street.

4. FUNDING PROPOSALS FOR 2021/22

4.1 It is proposed that the funding be used for the following purposes:

- Housing Project Officer post (full time) – the post holder both coordinates and directly 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 and rent arrears or domestic abuse, working with the Housing Advice Team, 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 alternative temporary accommodation provision.
- Private Rented Sector Officer and the Rent Bond Scheme – This post will continue to provide access to the private rented sector

through the rent bond scheme, social lettings agency and private sector leasing scheme. The officer will also be responsible for attracting landlords to the various schemes, inspecting properties and providing support to landlords and tenants who access the scheme through the “Help to Stay” initiative.

- Pre-tenancy / Tenancy Sustainment Training – tenancy sustainment is offered to all households in temporary accommodation or accessing the private rented bond schemes in Wyre Forest and those at risk of homelessness.
- 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. This will be critical as we come out of lockdown and furlough schemes etc come to an end.
- No Second Night Out Accommodation –The funding will be used to purchase bed spaces in Wyre Forest to use throughout the year.
- 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 or rent arrears to help prevent possession proceedings.
- 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 in part by the County Council for this post which works with homeless 16 – 24 year olds.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Council has £90,000 to spend on Homeless Prevention services.

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 nearly 400 households have been prevented using this funding) this is a saving to authority of approximately £0.9million. 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 Three 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 and Rough Sleeper Strategy.

9. CONSULTEES

Not applicable

10. APPENDICES

- 10.1 Proposed expenditure table 2021/22

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 N/A

Appendix One

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

| Scheme | £ (000) |
|---|--------------------|
| Staffing posts; Homeless Prevention Officer, Young Persons Pathway Worker and Private Rented Sector Officer | 45,000.00* |
| Wyre Forest Nightstop and Mediation Service | 15,000 |
| CAB Money Advice | £15,097 |
| Whabac CAB PRS scheme | 10,500 |
| NSNO accommodation | 3000.00*** |
| Pre-tenancy Training | 8,000 |
| Spend to Save | 2,000.00 |
| Crash Pad (partially recovered by HB)* | 5000.00*** |
| Funding for the County Strategic Partnership Officer | 6300.00 |
| TOTAL | £109,897.00 |

* Part of this funding is met by an ear marked reserve

** Part of this funding will be met through the Welfare Assistance fund

*** Estimated costs

Please note the funding to Nightstop, Whabac CAB and Wyre Forest CAB are notional as the funding bids haven't been signed off.