

## 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

<b>Item decided:</b> To allocate the funding received from Department of levelling Up, Housing and Communities with regards to homeless prevention	
<b>Officer who has taken the decision</b>	Kate Bailey, Head of Strategic Growth in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Wellbeing and Democratic Services
<b>Date of the decision</b>	24/03/2023
<b>Reason for the decision/alternatives considered</b>	To determine how the funding is allocated for the purposes of Homeless Prevention and dealing with Priority Need Statutory Homelessness.
<b>Date and source of Delegated Decision (if appropriate)</b>	Council 27/07/2011
<b>Council/Cabinet member consulted – if applicable</b>	Councillor Nicky Martin, Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Wellbeing and Democratic Services
<b>Any interest declared by the Consultee or officer</b>	NA

15 March 2023

## **Allocation of the 2023/24 Homelessness Prevention Funding**

### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To seek agreement for the proposed expenditure of the 2023/24 Homelessness Prevention funding.

### **2. RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 **It is recommended that expenditure of the 2023/24 Homelessness Prevention funding be approved by the Head of Strategic Growth 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 to work with homeless applicants and rough sleepers including for prevention services, to reduce use of unsuitable B&B and reduce the length of stay in temporary accommodation.
- 3.2 The Council have previously agreed the Head of Strategic Growth can spend £90,000 on homeless prevention plus any underspend on homeless or welfare budgets and previously ear marked reserves in addition to the Homeless Prevention Grant to maintain the current provision of services. 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 Homeless Prevention funding was used for the following services:
- The provision of debt and welfare advice through Wyre Forest Citizens Advice Bureau. 63 households were seen in the first 2 quarters of the year and either had their homelessness prevented, were assisted to find other accommodation or helped with benefits.
  - The continuation of the temporary accommodation and mediation service run by Wyre Forest Nightstop. In the first two quarters 18 attended mediation sessions, 1 had been accommodated with Nightstop.
  - Funding the WFDC Rent Bond Scheme, which has been used to prevent homelessness through securing properties in the private rented sector for homeless households. The officer assisted 13 households with accessing the PRS and set up 5 bedspaces in private sector leasing accommodation.

- Funding for Whabac CAB: to help clients access the private rented sector. In the first three quarters they helped provide housing advice, tenancy sustainment and rehousing into shared housing for 89 households.
- Funding towards the countywide Strategic Housing Partnership post. The post has assisted in coordinating countywide prevention projects and developing both the Worcestershire Housing Strategy and Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy.
- 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.
- 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 15th March 27 people had been accommodated in total and an unusually cold spell meant the SWEP has opened for 38 nights to date.
- School Education Awareness – Nightstop provided housing and homelessness awareness across a number of high schools in the District reaching 765 pupils in the first two quarters.
- 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).

- 3.4 The Housing Advice Team have dealt with formal approaches from 1046 households. The other services listed above have assisted over 200 households by preventing their homelessness in the first two quarters and the winter period (SWEP only).
- 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 over £215,000. The budget is offset by HB (less whatever can't be claimed in subsidy) and individual contributions.
- 3.6 The Council also accommodates homeless households (meeting the interim accommodation duty) in New Street and Raven Street Temporary Accommodation, and within private sector leased accommodation at Albert Road (5 bedspaces), 33a The Horsefair (five flats) and Champney (one flat).

- 3.7 No First Night Out (NFNO): WFDC has funded emergency temporary accommodation for people to prevent 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. To date 85 have been housed for 784 nights. This is funded from Rough Sleeper Initiative 2022-2025 grant.
- 3.8 23 clients were supported into Housing Led and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme tenancies / licenses.

#### **4. FUNDING PROPOSALS FOR 2023/24**

- 4.1 It is proposed that the funding be used for the following purposes:
- Housing Project Officer post (1.5 FTE) – the post holders both coordinate 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
  - Rent Bond Scheme and Private Sector Leasing– This PRSO 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 and support – 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 – funding 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 First Night Out Accommodation –The funding will be used to purchase bed spaces in Wyre Forest to use throughout the year over and above that funded by RSI202225 if required
  - SWEP – to offer emergency bed spaces during the coldest months of the year above that funded by RSI202225 if required
  - Housing Led and Housing First – the continuation of accommodation. Although this is currently funded from RSI202225 the tenancies will last beyond the current funding stream and may require additional resources.
  - 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 fund one off mortgage payments or rent arrears to help prevent possession proceedings. It is also used to give people funding for transport to return home/access accommodation placements out of the district
- 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
- Crash Pad: the Council covers the void loss for St Basils when the crash pad unit is unoccupied
- In addition the following staff posts are funded from HPG; Housing Advice Officer, Senior Housing Advice Officer, Homeless Support Officers, Private Rented Sector Officer and Housing Advice Assistant.

## **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The Council has £90,000 to spend on Homeless Prevention services in addition to the Homeless Prevention Grant.
- 5.2 Failure to use it for the intended purpose could lead to an increase in temporary accommodation and homelessness investigation costs.
- 5.3 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 320 households have been prevented using this funding this is a saving to authority of approximately £795,000. 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 There are several 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 and other accommodation offers are 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 and Homeless Prevention Grant 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 Strategy (draft) and Worcestershire Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy.

## **9. CONSULTEES**

Not applicable

## **10. APPENDICES**

10.1 NA

## **11. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

11.1 N/A