

RECORD OF DECISION MADE UNDER DELEGATED AUTHORITY

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

SERVICE DIRECTORATE: REGULATORY

1. DECISION TAKEN

- 1.1 The allocation of Homelessness Prevention Grant funding received from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to fund extensions to existing specialist services in the district which support rough sleepers, those facing domestic abuse and young people.

2. DECISION TAKER

- 2.1 Ian Fullstone, Service Director – Regulatory

3. DATE DECISION TAKEN:

- 3.1 10th March 2021

4. REASON FOR DECISION

- 4.1 The Council has received Homelessness Prevention Grant funding of £339,826 from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government for 2021/22. The funding is ringfenced for use in managing homelessness pressures and supporting those who are at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping.
- 4.2 This decision concerns allocation of £161,000 of the grant to extend existing specialist homelessness services; allocation of the remaining grant will be set out in further decision(s).

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 None.

6. CONSULTATION (INCLUDING THE EFFECT ON STAKEHOLDERS, PARTNERS AND THE PUBLIC)

- 6.1 The Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health, Cllr Gary Grindal and the Deputy Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health, Cllr Sean Prendergast have been consulted and are both supportive of this decision.
- 6.2 Further to a debate at Full Council in February 2021 regarding the Survivors Against Domestic Abusive service, Cllr David Levett has been consulted on this aspect of the proposals and is supportive of this element of the funding decision.

7. FORWARD PLAN

- 7.1 This decision is not a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

8. BACKGROUND/ RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 Homelessness Prevention Grant funding, announced in December 2020, combines and replaces two existing funding streams: the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and the Homelessness Reduction Grant (marking a move towards fewer, simpler funding streams from central government). This year, 2020/21, the Council received just over £257,000 from Flexible Homelessness Support and Homelessness Reduction Grants combined. The Government has substantially increased funding via the Homelessness Prevention Grant, underlining its commitment to ending rough sleeping within the current parliament and to fully enforcing the Homelessness Reduction Act. The Council has received £339,826 in Homelessness Prevention Grant funding for 2021/22.
- 8.2 The Flexible Homelessness Support and Homelessness Reduction Grants have been used in part to fund two specialist homelessness services up until the end of 2020/21. It is proposed to use part of the 2021/22 Homelessness Prevention Grant funding to continue to fund these two services for a further three years, over 2021/22 to 2023/24 (see paragraph 8.9 for a funding breakdown).
- 8.3 The first of these services is a rough sleeper outreach and resettlement service provided by Haven First (formerly Stevenage Haven) which the Council has funded since 1 April 2018 (delegated decisions made on 1 April 2018 and 18 December 2019 approved this arrangement). Over the past six months alone, the Haven First service has supported clients from almost 50 referrals via the Council's housing team (most recently, annual referrals have been in the region of 70 cases). As the pandemic has caused a huge uplift in single people requiring their service, the Haven First resettlement pathway has become oversubscribed. To date, they have managed to accommodate over a third of this cohort in move-on or more settled accommodation, including supported housing and private rented accommodation.
- 8.4 Many of this client group have complex needs, such as poor mental health and drug/alcohol dependency. A key element of the Haven First service therefore - beyond the basic provision of emergency accommodation - is the provision of both wrap-around support that brings in additional local support services as necessary (including for the small number who decide against coming in from the street), and ongoing support that continues even once a client has been found settled accommodation. This latter helps reduce the risk of tenancies failing and the cycle of homelessness being repeated.
- 8.5 Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought into focus an additional, much larger group of people who are at risk of rough sleeping, and which the Council has had to accommodate in line with the government's 'Everyone In' instruction. This cohort are typically living unstable, often chaotic lives, moving in and out of employment - and in some cases, prison - and enduring numerous spells of 'sofa surfing' with friends or relatives interspersed with periods of sleeping rough. The Council is currently accommodating 47, mostly single, people in hotels who are at risk of rough sleeping. This is in addition to the usual cohort of 'priority need' households to whom the Council owes an accommodation duty - currently a further 68 households.
- 8.6 The second of the services that it is proposed to extend is an advice and support service for people experiencing domestic abuse, provided by Survivors Against Domestic Abuse (SADA). The Council has funded this service since November 2019 (delegated decision made on 18 December 2019 refers). The SADA service, is provided by Stevenage Borough Council and provides valuable specialist assistance for both North Herts and East Herts clients approaching the Councils due to domestic abuse, and especially so during the pandemic when instances of domestic abuse have soared nationally. Over the course of 2020/21 to date, the Council's housing team has made over 180 referrals to SADA. About one quarter of cases have been resolved following advice from SADA. A further 30% of cases have received further, in-depth support ranging from the sourcing of alternative

accommodation options, to ongoing support to return home, the provision of emergency accommodation or intensive multi-agency involvement to re-build lives.

- 8.7 In addition, it is proposed to allocate a small amount of Homelessness Prevention Grant to the No More Project (formerly known as the SOS Project and the Youth Action Project). This countywide project has been running since July 2019 and supports children and young people who are involved in, or are at risk of becoming involved in, serious violent crime including county lines, gang crime and drug dealing. All these behaviours put individuals at risk of homelessness, particularly when they try to withdraw their involvement in criminal behaviour. The Project provides intensive one-on-one support with the aim of reducing negative behaviours and increasing clients' engagement in positive activities such as education, training and employment opportunities. Over the period July 2019 – September 2020, the project has engaged and supported 22 children and young people in North Hertfordshire.
- 8.8 The Council's Housing Strategy, which incorporates our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, runs from 2019/20 to 2023/24. The Homelessness Prevention Grant funding received will enable us to put in place a programme of planned interventions to cover the remaining life of the Strategy (with the additional benefits that stability and continuity of service provide).
- 8.9 In total, it is proposed, subject to procurement, to allocate £161,000 of the Homelessness Prevention Grant that the Council will receive for 2021/22 to funding the activities detailed in paragraphs 8.3 – 8.7 above. This is broken down as follows:
- £105,000 – extension of the Haven First rough sleeper outreach and resettlement service for a further three years, over 2021/22 to 2023/24 (per annum costs of £35k);
 - £50,000 – extension of the SADA domestic abuse service for a further three years, over 2021/22 to 2023/24 (requested per annum costs of £10k, £20k and 20k); and
 - £6,000 – contribution to the No More Project for one year, 2021/22.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Local authorities' homelessness duties are contained within the Housing Act 1996 Part VII, as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which placed significant new duties on English local housing authorities.
- 9.2 When agreeing the Adoption of a new Housing Strategy (2019-2024) in March 2019, the Cabinet also resolved the following:
- In the event the MHCLG provides homelessness funding beyond the financial year 2019/20, the Cabinet authorises the Service Director – Regulatory, in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health, to decide on the specific allocation of the funds in order to meet homelessness priorities, for the duration of the Strategy.*
- 9.3 The proposals in this report meet the MHCLG requirements for use of the ring-fenced grant and are also consistent with the aims and objectives of the Housing Strategy (2019-2024) that has a specific focus on actions regarding the prevention and management of homelessness.
- 9.4 Following completion and approval of the necessary procurement processes funding agreements will be produced covering the duration of these arrangements that detail the agreed specification with each of the three service providers.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1. In addition to Homelessness Prevention Grant funding, two further sources of homelessness grant funding are available to the Council for 2021/22 and currently remain unassigned:

- An emergency accommodation allocation of £60,000 to be paid to the Council in April 2021. This is a one-off uplift to help with additional emergency accommodation for rough sleepers; and
- A remaining £60,000 of unassigned Flexible Homelessness Support and Homelessness Reduction Grants from the Council's 2020/21 allocation. A previous delegated decision taken on 12 August 2020 agreed that this would be used to support the Haven First's resettlement 'pathway' from April 2021 onwards.

10.2 The table below summarises the homelessness grant funding available in 2021/22:

Funding stream	Available funding	Amount allocated (proposed)	Amount unassigned
Homelessness Prevention Grant	£339,826	£161,000	£178,826
Emergency accommodation allocation	£60,000	-	£60,000
Flexible Homelessness Support and Homelessness Reduction Grants	£60,000	-	£60,000
Totals	£459,826	£161,000	£298,826

(A) further delegated decision report(s) will be submitted with proposals for allocating the remaining £298,826 of grant funding in due course.

10.3 The Homelessness Prevention Grant is ring-fenced for use to prevent homelessness and for continued implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act. It will be paid to the Council in April 2021.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Specialist services including the rough sleeper outreach and resettlement service, the domestic abuse support service and youth services form a key element of the Council's work to prevent and manage homelessness in the district and to reduce rough sleeping. Without these services, people at risk of homelessness, or those who are homeless, may not receive the appropriate level of assistance. Many of this cohort are vulnerable and often have complex needs which require specialist assistance.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

12.2 There are no equalities implications arising as a result of this report.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1 The Social Value Act and "go local" policy do not apply to this decision.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this report.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 There are no human resource implications.

16. BACKGROUND PAPERS

16.1 The MHCLG's Homelessness Prevention Grant:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-pledges-further-310-million-to-tackle-homelessness>

16.2 Haven First's website: <https://www.havenfirst.org.uk/>

17. APPENDICES

17.1 None.

NOTIFICATION DATE: 12th March 2021

Signature of Executive Member ConsultedCllr Gary Grindal confirmed his support via email

Date10th March 2021

Signature of Decision Taker 
Service Director - Regulatory

Please Note: that *unless urgency provisions apply* EXECUTIVE decisions cannot be implemented until 5 clear working days have elapsed after the decision has been taken to allow for scrutiny call-in.

Call-in does not apply to NON-EXECUTIVE DECISIONS