



To: Executive Councillor For Housing
Report by: Liz Bisset
Relevant scrutiny committee: Housing Scrutiny
Wards affected: All

Homelessness Prevention Grant Funding Programme 2015-16

Key Decision

1. Executive summary

The Council administers a grant funding programme to external partners, which aims to support the Council's strategic objectives in tackling and preventing homelessness. The Council's own funding for these projects is augmented by homelessness prevention grant provided by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). The DCLG grant, despite its title, is not ring-fenced, but the Council renewed its commitment to tackling homelessness by delegating authority to the Head of Strategic Housing to authorise expenditure of these funds until 31.3.2015. Government normally commits homelessness prevention funding in two year tranches but the Council's allocation, announced in September 2014, is for the 2015-16 financial year only. Therefore, this report is required to seek approval for the grant programme to 2015-16 pending a value for money review in 2015.

2. Recommendations

The Executive Councillor is recommended:

- 1) To note, subject to the budget setting process and formal adoption by Council of the 2015-16 budget, the proposed grant funding allocations as outlined in this report, along with approval to spend funds, if awarded, by DCLG as outlined in 3.10.
- 2) To agree the ongoing principle, that DCLG Homelessness Prevention Grant should continue to support initiatives to prevent and alleviate homelessness and, in so doing, support the principles outlined in the Council's proposed Anti-Poverty Strategy

- 3) To agree to consider a value for money review report, along with recommendations for future homelessness prevention fund allocations in the 2015 October cycle
- 4) To approve that authority for new grant approvals should continue to be delegated to the Head of Strategic Housing until 31st March 2016. Thereafter, funding approval will be required from the Executive Councillor for Housing following scrutiny by the Housing Committee, except for grants of less than £5000 which will be delegated to the Head of Strategic Housing to authorise.

3. Background

3.1 Housing General Fund (HGF) grants to housing agencies and DCLG Homelessness Prevention Grant have traditionally been treated separately in respect of committee approvals

3.2 The award of Housing General Fund (HGF) grants to housing agencies have been subject to approval at Community Services Scrutiny and the DCLG homelessness prevention grant has been used by the Council to make funding awards to organisations that fit with the Council's strategic objectives on homelessness. It has been subject to delegated authority to the Head of Strategic Housing. Authority was delegated at Community Services Scrutiny Committee on 17th March 2011 and holds until 31st March 2015.

3.3 DCLG Grant funding is now rolled into the Business Rate Retention Scheme (BRRS) and the allocation of Homelessness Prevention Grant is still visible within this.

3.4 Despite the separate approvals process, both sets of grants are aimed at preventing and alleviating homelessness and are now presented as one for approval in this report

3.5 Both sets of grants aim to align with the objectives outlined in chapter 6 of the Council's Housing Strategy which deals with Housing Advice, Homelessness and Housing Options
<https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/sites/www.cambridge.gov.uk/files/docs/housing-strategy-2012-15.pdf>

3.6 The key objectives contained within the strategy are:

- Prevent homelessness and rough sleeping
- Minimise use of temporary accommodation and maximise use of longer term housing solutions

- Enable people to make informed choices about their housing
- Promote sustained and settled lifestyles and minimise social exclusion

3.7 A number of grant agreements are due to expire in March 2015 and others are covered by agreements up to 31st March 2016. There are an additional 8 grants where agreements are currently being revised and 2 which requires the establishment of a grant agreement for the first time

3.8 The DCLG/HGF grants programme was subject to an Internal Audit inspection in 2014 and a key recommendation from the report was that the Council conducts a value-for-money review of all grants in 2015-16 to ensure that the services funded make strong and effective contributions to the strategic objectives outlined in 3.6 above.

3.9 The grant funding allocations for 2015-16 are outlined in the table in appendix 1. The recipient organisations are:

- Cambridge Link-Up
- Cambridge Cyrenians
- Cambridge Citizen's Advice Bureau
- Cambridge Re-use
- Wintercomfort
- Cambridge Women's Aid
- Riverside English Churches Housing Group
- YMCA
- CHS Group
- Jimmy's Cambridge
- Centre 33
- Cambridge Central Aid
- Cambridgeshire County Council
- Homeless Link
- Cambridgeshire Constabulary
- Crime Reduction Initiatives

3.10 In addition to these proposed grant awards, the Council currently has two bids for funding lodged with the DCLG. These are:

Enhancement of women's refuge services (bid value £100,000)

The Department of Communities and Local Government has announced a £10million fund for local housing authorities to help them strengthen refuge services. The aim is to ensure we have effective national coverage that keeps victims of domestic abuse safe. The funding is available for 2014-15 and 2015-16 and is to be used to provide refuges that adhere to the standards set out by the DCLG. Up to £100,000 will be available to each successful local housing authority for this reason.

Currently Cambridgeshire County Council provides the majority of funding for the Cambridge Women's Aid (CWA) refuge. The current contract has been extended to March 2017 but, as with other services formerly funded from the *Supporting People* programme, has been required to make savings from the annual contract and funding to support the children in refuge has come under greatest pressure. The Council is supporting a bid of £100,000 from CWA to use the funding to ensure the continued provision of a refuge service to women and children and to maintain existing standards. CWA also hopes to use the funding to reduce the barriers women have to accessing refuge. To achieve this CWA aims to enter into partnership with the other two refuges in the county to employ a Community Psychiatric Nurse to offer an improved service to women with mental health issues. Funding will also be used to support women to move between refuges for safety reasons when a travel warrant is not sufficient.

Augmentation of the Single Homelessness Service (bid value £202,617)

The Council is the lead authority in an existing sub-regional Single Homelessness service and was advised on 9th December 2014 that the following bid, which will expand the existing Single Homelessness Service, had been successful:

Part 1 – Supported Lodgings Scheme

This part of the project will focus on homeless individuals with one or more support needs that are located within Cambridge City, South Cambridgeshire, East Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire district councils as there is a shortage of affordable housing for single individuals, compounding non-housing problems these individuals also have.

Accommodation will be provided through the supporting lodgings scheme based on the existing and successful model piloted by Hope Cambridge and YMCA. The scheme matches existing community volunteers to act as hosts providing either short-term relief, "room-only" or supported lodgings accommodation for individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Part 2 – Chronically Excluded Adults Service

Under this part of the project, the Chronically Excluded Adults (CEA) service, based in Cambridgeshire, will be extended to include Peterborough. The service will work with those with complex and, often multiple needs who are homeless or at risk of homeless,

ensuring that this group receives a person-centred approach and supported pathway into accommodation.

The CEA service will employ 2 coordinators to cover 1 full time and 1 part time post in Peterborough to provide support to this hard-to-reach group through joined-up local services and development of support packages tailored to the individual customer's needs. Customers will be supported and matched to suitable accommodation in Peterborough's private rented sector. The established project manager will focus on building further strategic relationships with service providers and commissioners across the sub- region and, in particular, Peterborough to ensure a joined-up person-centred approach.

The CEA service will enable complex needs customers in Peterborough to access an essential service to offer support and access to services. This holistic approach is based on Cambridgeshire's successful Chronically Excluded Adults (CEA) project which has received national recognition for its work with this client group. As a direct result of the project, there was a significant fall in crime and mental health costs for this cohort of 15 customers. Over the two year period since the project has been running there was an average cost saving of £958 per month per customer.

3.10 The proposed grant to Cambridge Central Aid (CCA) is in direct response to the uncertainty surrounding the future of the Cambridge Local Assistance Scheme (CLAS). It is proposed that this grant award goes ahead even if CLAS continues beyond 31st March 2015

3.11 The funds identified for CCA, CHS Group along with those funds marked as 'unallocated' have been redirected from a resource normally used to bolster Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) funds used to temporarily fill shortfalls in housing benefit entitlement and prevent homelessness and debt. For 2015-16, however, officers estimate there are sufficient carried forward funds in the DHP budget. This position will require careful review next year.

3.13 The DCLG Homelessness Prevention Grant allocation of £563,471.56 was announced in September by the National Practitioner Support Service (NPSS), which is DCLG-funded service aimed at highlighting and supporting best practice within local authority housing options and homelessness services. Accompanying the announcement was a statement encouraging authorities to spend the grant monies on homelessness services despite the fact that the grant is no longer ring-fenced. The statement read:

We would always encourage local authorities to use their Preventing Homelessness Grant allocation to support the development and enhancement of front line housing services, which will ensure that services for anyone homeless, threatened with homelessness, or rough sleeping in your area are available and are of a high quality.

3.14 Included with homelessness prevention funded services is a contract to provide street and mental health outreach services to rough sleepers and single people at risk of rough sleeping and homelessness. This is highlighted, along with other allocated grants at appendix 1.

4. Grant funding review and future grant funding approvals

4.1 The homelessness prevention grant programme will be comprehensively reviewed in 2015 and the findings of a value-for-money review will be brought back to Housing Scrutiny Committee in October 2015

4.2 In order to ensure transparency in the process of awarding grants moving forward officers will seek approval for grant awards and renewals with an annual value in excess of £5000 via committee from 1st April 2016. Grants of a value lower than £5000 will continue to be awarded under delegated authority to the Head of Strategic Housing

5. Implications

(a) Financial Implications

The financial implications of the homelessness prevention grant programme are outlined at appendix 1. The DCLG grant of £563,471.56 per annum is awarded until 31st March 2016 and so there are break clauses in all grants and contracts in order to mitigate against the risk of DCLG funding being withdrawn or reduced for future years.

(b) Staffing Implications

There are no City Council staffing implications

(c) Equality and Poverty Implications

The services outlined in this report are targeted at vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups or those suffering financial disadvantage. There are no proposals to remove or reduce funding to any of these organisations and, therefore an Equality Impact Assessment has not been carried out.

(d) Environmental Implications

+L - funding of furniture recycling by Cambridge Reuse helps to prevent landfill. There are no known adverse implications arising from the award of funding to any of the organisations contained within this report.

(e) Procurement

The Street and Mental Health Outreach Service contract exceeds the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) thresholds for service contracts and will be the subject to an OJEU compliant tender process when the service is re-tendered next year.

(f) Consultation and communication

As part of the full grants value-for money review process planned during 2015 and the Housing Strategy review, partners will be consulted on strategic direction for homelessness prevention services via the Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group

(g) Community Safety

The contract for Street and Mental Health Outreach Services is specifically shaped to improve community safety by targeting street-based anti-social behaviour.

A number of grant recipients listed above in appendix 1 make a significant contribution to community safety. For example, Cambridge Women's Aid provides refuge and support for victims of domestic violence and makes a significant contribution to community safety in so doing. Evaluations of the Chronically Excluded Adults Service have shown significant reductions in costs to the Criminal Justice System.

6. Background papers

None

7. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Homelessness Prevention Grant and contract awards 2015-16

7. Inspection of papers

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact:

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