



Homelessness Prevention Grants to Agencies 2023-24 and proposed procurement of emergency winter provision for rough sleepers

To:

Gerri Bird, Executive Councillor for Housing, Housing Scrutiny Committee,
24/01/2023

Report by:

David Greening, Head of Housing,

Tel: 01223 457997 Email: David.greening@cambridge.gov.uk

Wards: All

Key Decision

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report details the annual bid round for grants made to organisations providing homelessness prevention services. It provides an overview of the process, the grant eligibility criteria and the budget. Appendix 1 details the applications received with recommendations for 2023-24 awards.
- 1.2 The report also recommends that a proportion of the grant budget is set aside in the coming year, and the following two years, to enable us to procure winter accommodation for rough sleepers under a three-year contract. This will replace the previous practice of arranging provision on a year-by-year basis.

2. Recommendations

The Executive Councillor is recommended to:

- 2.1 Approve the award of homelessness prevention grants to voluntary and community organisations for 2023-24, as set out in Appendix 1 of this report.
- 2.3 Approve that funding from this grant programme is set aside so that a procurement exercise can be opened for a three-year contract for winter accommodation for rough sleepers, beginning from the winter of 2023-24.

3. Background

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Bid round process and award recommendations

- 3.1 Each year the Council invites agencies and organisations to submit bids for funding for homelessness-related services. The 2023-24 bid round opened for applications on 2 August 2022 and closed on 3 October 2022. A communications and publicity plan was implemented including a press release, newsletter articles, workshops, emails, networking and targeted conversations to promote the grant fund.
- 3.2 Members may wish to note that bids received totaled £453,200 against available funding of £275,000, excluding the proposed set-aside for winter provision. (When the proposed winter provision set-aside is included the total sum available is £325,000 – the same sum as was available last year). Bids were initially considered by individual officers using a common assessment matrix, and then moderated by those officers meeting as a panel.
- 3.3 Given the significant excess of claims over available funding, not all bids could be supported, or supported in full, leading to some difficult recommendations. Individual bids were assessed principally against the degree to which the proposed service would prevent or relieve homelessness, with services that could directly evidence the prevention of homelessness being particularly favoured. More broadly, officers considered the strategic and operational value of the proposed service, whether the proposed service duplicated or overlapped with an existing service, and the ability of the submitting agency to self-fund in whole or in part.
- 3.4 The Executive Councillor attended a meeting with officers to review the recommendations. The final recommendations are set out in Appendix 1

along with a brief explanation in cases of a nil award, or much reduced award relative to the bid or the previous year's award.

Winter provision procurement

- 3.5 For many years the Council has funded emergency winter accommodation for rough sleepers. Until the winter of 2021-22 provision was intermittent, and usually triggered only when sub-zero temperatures were forecast to last over several days.
- 3.6 This severe weather accommodation provision (or SWEP) was a vital but basic service, with accommodation normally provided in a large communal space. However, with the advent of Covid, communal provision was no longer seen to be a safe approach. Moreover, intermittent provision does not easily lend itself to the intensive and sustained support many people need in order to leave the streets behind.
- 3.7 Learning from the experience of 'Everyone In' – our accommodation for rough sleepers during the worst of the pandemic – from the winter of 2021-22 we have provided 20 individual ensuite rooms continuously throughout the season to locally-connected rough sleepers. During their stay (nominally lasting 14 days but extending for as long as it takes to find them more permanent accommodation) residents are linked into housing options and medical, domestic abuse, employment and other support services. The evidence is that women in particular benefit from a private space in an environment where there is 24-hour welfare and on-site security.
- 3.8 To distinguish this new service from SWEP, we refer to it as 'winter provision'. Winter provision has, naturally, proven significantly more expensive than SWEP.
- 3.9 Given this record of commitment to providing a winter service each year, it is felt that procuring a service over multiple years offers clear advantages. Foremost among these are:
- surety to rough sleepers, and agencies working with them, as to the continuity of the service;
 - the creation of a contract setting out service standards and delivery expectations, but leaving the contractor with scope to innovate and lever-in funding from its own and other sources;
 - surety to the winning bidder of secure funding, allowing better planning, the confident recruitment of staff and the procurement of

premises, and the prospect of introducing planned service improvements;

- a saving on the heavy Council officer resource consequent on the current need to plan the service annually and make decisions daily.

3.10 It is proposed that the contract sum set aside is £50,000 per annum. This is the amount the Council is presently setting aside for this service.

3.11 It is important to note that winter provision has not replaced SWEP. SWEP continues to be offered to anyone, including non-locally connected rough sleepers and people with restricted eligibility for public funding, who may find themselves on the streets of Cambridge in freezing conditions or other types of dangerous weather. SWEP will continue to be offered when the proposed new contract is in place and the responsibility for the administration of SWEP will be added to the proposed contract. The additional expense of providing SWEP will be found from another budget and is not included in the contract sum stated at 3.10, but it is worth noting that with the advent of winter provision SWEP is now a relatively minor expense.

3.12 It is proposed that, should members support the recommendation, the contract will be drawn up and opened for bidding as soon as possible in 2023. Members of this committee will be asked to approve the contract award no later than September 2023 committee.

4. Implications

a) Financial Implications

As set out in 3.2, 3.10 and Appendix 1.

Members are reminded that the award of any recommended grant is subject to the receipt of the annual central government homelessness prevention grant (HPG). On 22 December 2022 the Council was notified of its award of HPG for 2023-24 and we can therefore be confident of funding the grant sums recommended at Appendix 1.

Regarding funding the proposed three-year winter provision contract, the 22 December government notification also confirmed funding for 2024-25, meaning that, subject to committee approval, funding is secure for the first two years of the contract. Year 3 funding can also be confidently assumed, given that in its various iterations HPG has been made available in steadily-increasing amounts for more than two decades.

b) Staffing Implications

None.

c) Equality and Poverty Implications

An EqIA was completed late in 2021 and remains extant.

d) Net Zero Carbon, Climate Change and Environmental Implications

No positive or negative impact identified as the services recommended for grant aid are broadly similar to those supported in former years.

e) Procurement Implications

Please see 3.5.

f) Community Safety Implications

None

5. Consultation and communication considerations

Consultation has been carried out with the Executive Councillor, the Head of Housing and the Assistant Head of Business and Finance Management. In addition, extensive consultation was carried out with partners, service users and others in the formulation of the new Streets to Home service.

6. Background papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

7. Appendices

Appendix 1: Summary of award recommendations

8. Inspection of papers

If you have a query on the report please contact James McWilliams, Housing Services Manager - Housing Advice. Tel: 01223 457813. Email: james.mcwilliams@cambridge.gov.uk.