

## RECORD OF DECISION MADE UNDER DELEGATED AUTHORITY

<b>PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT</b>
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Any interest to declare/or conflict and any dispensation granted [ <i>if applicable</i> ]	None
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### **SERVICE DIRECTORATE: REGULATORY**

<b>1.</b>	<b>DECISION TAKEN</b>
1.1	The allocation of Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and New Burdens funding (both provided by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) in order to enable Housing Services to meet increased customer demand created by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
<b>2.</b>	<b>DECISION TAKER</b>
2.1	Ian Fullstone, Service Director – Regulatory
<b>3.</b>	<b>DATE DECISION TAKEN:</b>
3.1	18 December 2019
<b>4.</b>	<b>REASON FOR DECISION</b>
4.1	The key provisions of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA) came in to force between April 2018 and October 2018. The HRA places new duties on English local housing authorities (LHAs) and it represents the most significant change to homelessness legislation since the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977.
4.2	The new provisions significantly extend the Council’s legal obligations to prevent and relieve homelessness. The new duties require an extensive assessment of need and more intensive casework over an extended period of time. The recruitment and retention of skilled staff and services is crucial for the Council to meet its new and expanded legal obligations and Council priorities.
4.3	In addition, the new legislation applies to a much wider cohort of clients. Within this context, many households have complex needs, and specialist services are required for rough sleepers and domestic abuse victims in particular, hence the proposals in this report.
<b>5.</b>	<b>ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED</b>
5.1	None
<b>6.</b>	<b>CONSULTATION (INCLUDING THE EFFECT ON STAKEHOLDERS, PARTNERS AND THE PUBLIC)</b>
6.1	The Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health, Cllr Gary Grindal has been consulted and is supportive of this decision.

## **7. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS**

- 7.1 The HRA provides everyone who is homeless (or at risk of homelessness) with access to assistance, irrespective of their 'priority need' status. There is also a much greater emphasis on prevention work, which is now enshrined within a statutory framework for the first time.
- 7.2 Due to the extra demand pressures created by the new legislation, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) have provided all LHAs with a Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and HRA New Burdens funding since 2017/18. These grants are ring-fenced and have been provided to help LHAs meet the new legal responsibilities introduced as part of the HRA.
- 7.3 In a letter to the Council dated 5<sup>th</sup> November 2019, the MHCLG confirmed that for the financial year 2020-21, *"This Government remains committed to reducing homelessness and rough sleeping and intends, at a minimum, to maintain funding for the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and Homelessness Reduction Act New Burdens at 2019-20 levels"*.
- 7.4 The Council's allocations of Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and Homelessness Reduction Act New Burdens in 2019-20 were £173,376 and £36,755 respectively.
- 7.5 It is proposed the Council's grant allocations for 2020/21 are utilised to extend the duration of a vacant fixed term post (of Housing Register and Accommodation Officer) from two to five years and to also provide some flexible capacity for temporary assistance in the event of future staff shortages. This will help to manage front-line homelessness pressures and also provide capacity to increase the supply of, and access to, the various forms of accommodation, especially privately-rented units.
- 7.6 It is also proposed the funding is used to continue the rough sleeper outreach service, operated by the Haven (from the Sanctuary building in Hitchin) and also to continue to engage SADA (Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse) to provide a specialist service for victims of domestic abuse. Both of these services are proposed to be continued for a further year.

## **8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 amends the Housing Act 1996 Part VII and it places new duties on English LHAs. It came in to force in April 2018, although the MHCLG introduced one of the more significant provisions in October 2018.
- 8.2 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.*

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. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 The Council's allocations of Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and Homelessness Reduction Act New Burdens funding in 2019/20 were £173,376 and £36,755 respectively, which totals £210,131.
- 9.2 The maximum cost of the proposals contained in this report is £210k. Should any grant funding remain unallocated for 2020/21 or the actual amounts of the homelessness grants exceed those of 2019/20, a further report will be submitted for consideration.
- 9.3 There are no specific capital implications arising from this report.

## **10. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 If the staffing situation is not consolidated, there is a risk the duty upon the Council will not be fully met due to the limited capacity of the current staffing resource set. This will result in those who are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless, not receiving an appropriate level of assistance.
- 10.2 There is a low risk that following the General Election on 12 December 2019, the new government withdraws Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and Homelessness Reduction Act New Burdens funding from local authorities for 2020/21. As a result, the proposals in this report are subject to the wishes of the new government and the proposals within this report will only be fully committed to by the Strategic Housing Manager once they have certainty on the grant.

## **11. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 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.
- 11.2 There are no equalities implications arising as a result of this report.

## **12. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS**

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

## **13. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 13.1 The recruitment process for both roles will be undertaken in accordance with the Council's Recruitment and Selection policy.

## **14. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 14.1 Cabinet minutes from the meeting in March 2019 concerning the Housing Strategy (item 127):

<https://democracy.north-herts.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=133&MId=2006&Ver=4>

## **15. NOTIFICATION DATE**

- 15.1 20 December 2019



**Signature of Executive Member Consulted .....**

**Date:** 18 December 2019

**Signature of Decision Taker** 

**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**