

RECORD OF DECISION MADE UNDER DELEGATED AUTHORITY

*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

SERVICE DIRECTORATE: REGULATORY

1. DECISION TAKEN

- 1.1 The allocation of £135k of Flexible Homelessness Support and Homelessness Reduction Grant (both provided by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) to enable Housing Services to meet increased customer demand arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. DECISION TAKER

- 2.1 Ian Fullstone, Service Director - Regulatory

3. DATE DECISION TAKEN:

- 3.1 12th August 2020

4. REASON FOR DECISION

- 4.1 The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in unprecedented pressure on the services provided by the Council's Housing Services team. In large part this has been due to the government's 'Everyone In' instruction, requiring local authorities to provide emergency accommodation for all people sleeping rough in their areas.
- 4.2 Further pressure is additionally likely to arise in the very near future with the ending of both the nationwide eviction ban on 23rd August and the furlough scheme at the end of October.

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 has been consulted and is supportive of this 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 COVID-19 has led to unprecedented pressures on the Council's Housing Services and will continue to do so for some time yet. In line with the government's 'Everyone In' instruction, the Council has accommodated around 120 (mostly) single households at risk of homelessness or sleeping rough, the vast majority of these in

local hotels initially. We are still working with around 85 customers to assist them into settled accommodation.

- 8.2 In addition to this current demand, we are also anticipating a further significant upsurge in the near future. settle and First Garden Cities Homes (formerly Howard Cottage Housing Association) have already informed us that over 100 of their tenants are facing imminent possession action once the nationwide ban on evictions is lifted on 23rd August. The number of private tenants at risk of eviction is unknown but the widespread belief in the sector is that this could be significant nationwide.
- 8.3 More widely, employment prospects have been significantly damaged by the impact of the pandemic and current prospects for a quick recovery do not look promising. Official figures for July show that in North Herts, 16,400 people have been furloughed. With the closure of the Job Retention Scheme due at the end of October, it is likely that increasing numbers of people locally will face unemployment, reduced incomes and associated difficulties with affording their housing costs.
- 8.4 Officers are in the process of submitting a bid for further funding from the MHCLG's 'Next Steps Accommodation Programme', in collaboration with Haven First and Hertfordshire County Council. This contains a variety of proposals that support Haven First's pathway for rough sleepers, from living on the street into independent accommodation, bringing in specialist support services along the way depending on the needs of each individual. The outcome of the nationwide bid programme should be publicised by the MHCLG in early September.
- 8.5 The Council's existing allocations of MHCLG Flexible Homelessness Support and Homelessness Reduction Grants in 2020/21 were £173,376 and £83,992 respectively, a total of £257,368. A previous delegated decision was taken on 18th December 2019, committing part of this allocation.
- 8.6 It is proposed to use the remaining £135k of the MHCLG grant allocation on a dual approach to address both the current pressures resulting from the 'Everyone In' initiative and to support homelessness prevention work with applicants approaching us soon.
- 8.7 It is proposed to allocate £60k of the existing grant to support the resettlement of single homeless people via Haven First's pathway. In the event the MHCLG funding bid is *unsuccessful*, this allocation will be used to fund an increase in the capacity of supported housing and enable people to leave hotels and benefit from accommodation with dedicated support. Should the MHCLG bid be *successful*, as the expenditure of the MHCLG funding must occur by the end March 2021, the existing funding would be used to support the service beyond this date (i.e. April 2021 onwards) if it remains viable.
- 8.8 The remaining £75k will be provided as grant funding to a Credit Union to provide homelessness prevention/relief loan services for a minimum of three years. It is anticipated this service will be a key means by which we will be able to help people facing eviction to remain in their existing homes or to secure alternative accommodation, as many are unable to access mainstream lending.

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 LHAs.
- 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.

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.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The use of ring fenced MHCLG homelessness grant as proposed in this report should contribute to lower levels of homelessness, whilst also reducing the cost of hotels for the Council.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 If additional funding is not provided, there is a significant risk that homelessness in the district will rise as the eviction ban is lifted and the economic situation deteriorates. There is very little capacity within temporary accommodation (especially for singles) and further increases in homeless applicants are likely to result in increased use of hotels with associated impacts on costs and individuals' outcomes.

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 MHCLG's Next Steps Accommodation Programme (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/next-steps-accommodation-programme-guidance-and-proposal-templates>)

17. APPENDICES

- 17.1 None.

NOTIFICATION DATE

14 August 2020

Signature of Executive Member Consulted - Cllr Gary Grindal approved via email so as to not delay decision

Date14/08/20.

Signature of Decision Taker  **13/08/2020**

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