

RECORD OF DECISION MADE UNDER DELEGATED AUTHORITY

*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

SERVICE DIRECTORATE: REGULATORY

1. DECISION TAKEN

- 1.1 The allocation of £91,625 of grant funding received from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to Keystage Housing for the provision of an accommodation scheme for ex-offenders that will support people in the private rented sector.

2. DECISION TAKER

- 2.1 Ian Fullstone, Service Director – Regulatory

3. DATE DECISION TAKEN:

- 3.1 6 August 2021

4. REASON FOR DECISION

- 4.1 The Council has received funding of £91.6k from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) following a successful bid to its Accommodation for ex-Offenders Scheme.
- 4.2 Keystage Housing is the only local provider of specialist accommodation and support services for ex-offenders and is therefore best placed to provide this new scheme for the district.

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.

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 The Accommodation for ex-Offenders Scheme provides government funding for local authority schemes which will create and sustain private rented sector (PRS) tenancies for prison leavers who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The scheme thereby aims to reduce rough sleeping and reoffending.

8.2 The Council has been awarded grant funding of £91,625 to deliver a scheme which aims to assist 20 prison leavers (mostly single people) into PRS accommodation. Specifically, this funding covers the interventions as listed below:

- For 20 service users
- Funding towards 1 housing support officer
- Funding towards 1 part time housing support manager
- Financial tenancy support package

8.3 The tenancies are to last a minimum of 12 months wherever possible. This scheme will be delivered in North Herts by Keystage Housing, which specialises in providing accommodation and housing related support for single homeless people involved with the criminal justice system. They currently run two successful projects in Luton and Northampton and have recently worked with the Council to open a small 5 bed scheme in Hitchin. Their local presence in Hitchin and Luton enables Keystage to deliver the required service efficiently.

8.4 The Keystage scheme will run for one year initially and will provide service users with pre-tenancy support such as help with money management, claiming benefits and assistance with finding and securing suitable PRS accommodation. The small support team (two posts have been grant funded) will also have a key role to play in liaising with all other relevant agencies, including prison and probation services as well as bringing in support from specialist providers where appropriate. Once in a property, tenants will receive ongoing tenancy sustainment support including help with living skills such as cooking and cleaning and liaison with landlords around any tenancy issues.

8.5 The scheme will provide a further accommodation and support option for single homeless people in the district and all clients will be referred via NHDC. This service will help to meet current and future demand from ex-offenders and will also complement existing services (such as the Haven First hostel) with people moving between schemes to ensure they receive appropriate support.

8.6 Analysis undertaken to evidence our bid reveals that over 2020/21, some 45 single households who were placed in temporary accommodation by the Council had an offending history and almost two-thirds of this group had a history of repeat homelessness or rough sleeping. All but one of these households reported at least one other support need, the most common being: mental ill health (70% of the cohort); addiction issues (40%); and physical ill health (40%). Of the 45 households, 36 were accommodated due to the pandemic (in response to the government's "Everyone In" directive) and in normal circumstances would not have been offered accommodation because there was no reason to believe they were in 'priority need'.

8.7 Keystage Housing will liaise with landlords/estate agents and will source the properties directly, with some of the funding earmarked to provide incentives as required. Keystage are looking to commence the scheme before the end of September 2021.

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 interventions detailed at paragraph 8.2 meet the MHCLG requirements for use of the Accommodation for ex-offenders' scheme grant and are also consistent with the aims and objectives of the Housing Strategy (2019-2024), which has a stated priority to improve accommodation provision for single homeless people, especially those with complex support needs.

9.4 Following completion and approval of the necessary procurement processes, a funding agreement will be produced to cover the duration of the Keystage scheme.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1. The grant funding of £91,625 has been provided for use as detailed in the Council's bid to the MHCLG of 13 May 2021, summarised in paragraph 8.2 above. Funding is to be made available for 2021/22, in two tranches, so schemes need to be in a position to mobilise and spend the grant provided as soon as possible. The second tranche will be dependent on progress made towards agreed scheme targets.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Specialist services such as the Keystage scheme 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 Keystage Housing's website: <https://www.keystagehousing.co.uk/>

17. APPENDICES

17.1 None.

NOTIFICATION DATE:

Signature of Executive Member Consulted: Cllrs Gary Grindal and Sean Prendergast confirmed their support via email on 6 August 2021 and 7 August 2021 respectively.

Date: 6 August 2021

Signature of Decision Taker:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ian Fullerton".

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