



CABINET

14TH SEPTEMBER 2017

AGENDA ITEM (9)

FLEXIBLE HOMELESSNESS SUPPORT GRANT

Accountable Member	Councillor SG Hirst Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Leisure
Accountable Officer	Jon Dearing Group Manager for Revenues and Housing Support 01285 623304 jon.dearing@westoxon.gov.uk

Purpose of Report	To consider the planned expenditure of the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant.
Recommendation(s)	That the proposals for the use of the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant monies (as set out within the Financial Implications section of this report) be approved.
Reason(s) for Recommendation(s)	To ensure that the ring-fenced grant funding contributes to the prevention and relief of homelessness.

Ward(s) Affected	All
Key Decision	Yes
Recommendation to Council	No

Financial Implications	<p>The level of funding allocated to each of the three Housing Partner Councils is as follows:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• CDC: £40,000 for 2017/18 and £40,000 for 2018/19;• FoDDC: £40,000 for 2017/18 and £40,000 for 2018/19;• WODC: £72,545.98 for 2017/18 and £83,471.20 for 2018/19. <p>It is proposed that the three partner councils (CDC, WODC & FoDDC) pool £40,000 per annum; providing a pooled budget of £120,000 per annum. It is proposed that this pooled budget should be utilised as follows (please note that resource costs are estimated as the grading of the posts, will be new Publica posts, has yet to be established):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ £43,500 per annum to fund the creation of a joint Housing Property Manager (on a two-year fixed term contract);
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ £37,500 per annum to fund the creation of a joint Private Rented Sector Liaison Manager (on a two-year fixed term contract); ▪ £39,000 per annum (or adjusted amount if above resource costs are adjusted) to fund the creation of a joint PRS Fund (to be fully utilised, in equal shares per Council, by 31st March 2019). <p>The total (maximum) expenditure in relation to the partner projects will therefore be £240,000 over the two-year funding period; which means that the grant will be fully utilised for the prevention of homelessness. There will be no funding contribution requirement from any of the partner councils.</p> <p>N.B. As West Oxfordshire District Council's allocation significantly exceeds those of Cotswold and Forest of Dean District Councils, the WODC excess grant will be utilised in relation to a WODC specific project.</p>
Legal and Human Rights Implications	None
Environmental and Sustainability Implications	None
Human Resource Implications	None
Key Risks	There is a reputational risk to the Council if it does not effectively use this grant funding to prevent homelessness.
Equalities Analysis	None
Related Decisions	None
Background Documents	None
Appendices	Appendix 'A' - Accommodation Needs Data.

Performance Management Follow Up	The Revenues and Housing Support Service will closely monitor the impact of these measures and the expenditure against the total grant amounts.
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Options for Joint Working	These proposals are made as pooled funding and joint approach between Cotswold DC, Forest of Dean DC and West Oxfordshire DC.
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Background Information	
1.	From 1 st April 2017, the Government removed the Temporary Accommodation Management Fee from the Housing Benefit system. This was in line with the Government's announcement in the 2015 Spending Review and Autumn Statement, that the subsidy for the temporary management fee paid from the Department of Work and Pensions to local authorities on a household basis will end from 2017/18.

2. The Council had very minimal expenditure in this area of Housing Benefit and therefore has benefited from this additional funding; which is ring-fenced to activities that will prevent or relieve homelessness. Funding will be provided for two years (2017/18 and 2018/19) and exact allocations can be found in the Financial Implications section.

3. It should be noted that proposals within this report are not specifically related to the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA), which is due to come into force from 1st April 2018, but they will assist the Council in addressing homelessness. Once funding and procedural/reporting arrangements have been confirmed, a report will be presented to the December 2017 Meeting of the Cabinet in relation to the HRA.

4. The HRA will deal specifically with the Council's legal responsibilities and processes in relation to individuals/households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. It is therefore proposed that the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant is utilised to help us manage the property side of Housing; so we can maximise the options available to us in terms of emergency, temporary and longer-term accommodation. The need for this approach is illustrated by the high waiting lists; high numbers of long-term empty dwellings; and the volumes/costs associated with emergency accommodation provision. Data around these issues is attached at **Appendix 'A'**.

5. This report proposes pooling funding with Forest of Dean DC (FoDDC) and West Oxfordshire DC (WODC) in order to maximise the impact of the funds available. As explained in the Financial Implications section, WODC has received a larger allocation than CDC and FoDDC. WODC will therefore contribute an equal share and utilise the excess grant in relation to a WODC-specific project. However, the way in which the joint service operates means that all three Councils will benefit from all learning from all strands of activity.

6. These proposals are aimed addressing the lack of available accommodation in the three partner Districts. There are limited options and significant costs associated with the provision of emergency accommodation within the Districts, as well as a shortage of longer-term accommodation; particularly within the private rented sector. The Partner Projects are therefore to put in place two dedicated joint Officers (on two-year fixed term contracts) and a joint Private Sector Rental Fund. The specific objectives of each of these aspects are as follows:-

- Housing Property Manager (Joint post) - this Officer's principal responsibilities will be securing and managing emergency accommodation; liaising with Registered Providers to ensure timely move-on from temporary accommodation and minimisation of void periods; reduction of the number of long-term empty properties; and management of any resultant bought/leased residential property.
- Private Rented Sector Officer (Joint post) - this Officer's principal responsibilities (reporting to the above Property Manager post) will be designing and implementing a private sector placement policy that is workable for the Councils and the sector; liaison with Private Rented Sector (PRS) landlords and agents; and management of the new PRS Fund (see below).
- PRS Fund - there will be a modest budget for each Council to fund provision (loan) of cash deposits, fees and payments of rent in advance; as well as payments to help households make their new accommodation liveable. This Fund will be managed by the PRS Officer (see above), who will be responsible for securing repayment and recycling of these 'loans' to ensure that the Councils maximise the value of this budget.

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