



Council name	COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	CABINET – 7 FEBRUARY 2022
Report Number	AGENDA ITEM 11
Subject	PLANNED EXPENDITURE OF THE HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION GRANT 2022-23
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Councillor Lisa Spivey - Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness Email: <a href="mailto:lisa.spivey@cotswold.gov.uk">lisa.spivey@cotswold.gov.uk</a>
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Summary/Purpose	To consider the planned expenditure of the Homelessness Prevention Grant for 2021/22
Annexes	<b>Annex A</b> – Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Local Communities Allocation of Homelessness Prevention Grant Letter, December 2021  <b>Annex B</b> – Equalities Impact Assessment
Recommendation(s)	It is recommended that Cabinet: <i>a) Approves the expenditure detailed within paragraphs 2.1 to 2.8 of this report</i> <i>b) Approves the delegation of any amendments to these allocations to the Housing Manager in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness and the Deputy Chief Executive subject to compliance with the ring fenced grant conditions</i>



	<i>c) Approves the delegation of any other uplifts or grants that may be given over the financial year to contain Covid outbreaks or address increased demands on the Housing Service be given to the Housing Manager in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness and Deputy Chief Executive Officer subject to compliance with the ring fenced grant conditions as set out in 3.1 to 3.5</i>
Corporate priorities	Delivering our services to the highest standards  Helping residents and communities access the support they need for good health and wellbeing
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Housing Chief Executive Monitoring Officer Deputy Chief Executive Head of Legal Services



## **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1** From 1st April 2017 the Government removed the Temporary Accommodation Management Fee from the Housing Benefit system and replaced this with a Flexible Homelessness Grant.
- 1.2** The Council had very minimal expenditure in this area of Housing Benefit and therefore has benefited from this additional Flexible Homelessness Grant funding which is ring-fenced to activities that will prevent or relieve homelessness. Funding has been provided since 2017/18. Further grants were also provided via the Homelessness Reduction Grant. However, both grants were combined in 2021/22 to create the Homelessness Prevention Grant.
- 1.3** The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) increased the level of funding allocated to homelessness services in 2021/22 to ensure that local authorities have the resources needed to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping.
- 1.4** This level of funding has continued into 2022/23 with an additional small uplift to ensure that local authorities are able to meet any new burdens following the implementation of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.
- 1.5** The funding allocated to Cotswold District Council for 2022/23 is £133,271 plus the Domestic Abuse New Burdens uplift of £5,564 giving a total of £138,835.
- 1.6** The DLUHC set out its expectations on how this fund is to be spent in the letter to Chief Executives dated 21st December 2021. This is detailed within Annex A.

## **2. MAIN POINTS**

- 2.1** The DLUHC has set out the following delivery expectations from the fund:
  - To fully embed the Homelessness Reduction Act and contribute to ending rough sleeping by increasing activity to prevent single homelessness
  - Reduce the number of families in temporary accommodation numbers through maximising family homelessness prevention,
  - To reduce the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for families and eliminate family Bed and Breakfast placements beyond the statutory six-week limit
- 2.2** It is therefore proposed that, in order for the Council to meet the expectation set by the DLUHC, the Homelessness Prevention Grant is allocated as follows:

Flexible Prevention Fund	£46,271
Private Rented Deposit Fund	£20,000
Continuation of 2 x Shared Temporary Accommodation Move On Officer Posts – additional 1 year fixed term to be given	£24,000



Personalisation Budgets & B&B Move On (Complex singles / B&B Move On / Cold Weather funding)	£10,000
Ensuring the new duties of the Domestic Abuse Act are implemented	£5,564
Continuation of the Complex Needs Project Officer role	£33,000
Total:	£138,835

- 2.3 The Flexible Prevention Fund** will allow the Housing Team to assist clients with bespoke solutions (such as addressing arrears, moving costs and providing mediation) to prevent homelessness from occurring at the earliest possible stage, reducing the need for expensive and unsuitable Bed and Breakfast use and provide our clients with the best possible outcomes. This fund will work alongside Discretionary Housing Benefits, benefit signposting, and financial management assistance from in-house Client Support and Third Party agencies. The Flexible Prevention Fund will assist with bespoke interventions depending on the specific clients' needs.
- 2.4 Private Rented Sector Fund.** There will be a modest budget 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 habitable. This Fund will be managed by the Homelessness Lead officer.
- 2.5 Temporary Accommodation Move On Officers.** It is also proposed that a proportion of the fund is pooled with Forest of Dean and West Oxfordshire District Councils to continue the employment of two shared Temporary Accommodation Move On Officers. These roles are dedicated to ensure that the client is moved on from any form of temporary accommodation swiftly and into permanent accommodation that is right for the client. The Temporary Accommodation Move On Officers maximise the options available to us in terms of emergency, temporary and longer term private rented or social rented accommodation. The need for this approach is illustrated by the increasing length of time clients are spending in emergency accommodation during the current pandemic. Both fixed term contracts will be extended for a further 1 year on a fixed term contract, to be reviewed in December 2022 in line with the Grant allocations for 2023/24.
- 2.6 Personalisation Budgets & Bed and Breakfast Move On Fund.** Personalisation budgets will allow the Project Officers (Domestic Abuse Specialist and Complex Needs) to provide fully flexible solutions to suit the individual situation or need. This can include addressing fuel poverty, minor adaptations to properties (for example, providing temporary bedroom divides for older children who need to share). Bed and Breakfast Move On will allow the Temporary Accommodation Move On Officers access to funds to ensure the clients who are in Bed and Breakfast have access to items such as furniture, bedding, and white goods.



- 2.7 Continuation of Shared Specialist Domestic Abuse and Rough Sleeper Secondment Post within Housing** – Initial funding for the 1<sup>st</sup> year of the post was provided by the Domestic Abuse Act New Burdens grant allocation. The post was created to ensure that all of the new Housing duties of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 are fully adhered to and all Rough Sleepers receive an appropriate offer of accommodation. The role includes ensuring that Forest of Dean and Cotswold's Housing Teams are fully represented at Countywide meetings for both Domestic Abuse and Rough Sleepers.
- 2.8 Continuation of the Complex Needs Project Officer role** - This role is currently providing invaluable 'upstream' Housing advice to those clients who are threatened with homelessness at an early stage with the aim of preventing Homelessness wherever possible. The post holder has been in place for 9 months and has so far prevented around 30 applicants from becoming homeless.
- 2.9 Growth Bid for 2023/24** - The Homelessness Prevention Grant funding (in both its current and previous formats) has allowed for the creation of these new and innovative roles within the Housing Team. These roles have had a real impact preventing homelessness at the earliest possible stage. Although during the Pandemic, the Housing Team have seen a significant rise in the need for emergency accommodation for clients no longer able to remain with vulnerable relatives, the impact on the service would have been much higher if the grant funded roles had not been in place. Although there is no reason to believe that the Grant will not be received in future years, in order to retain the excellent staff that we currently have in place, a Growth Bid may be put forward as part of the 2023/24 budget setting process.

### **3. FLEXIBLE HOMELESSNESS PANDEMIC RESPONSE**

- 3.1** Currently there are numerous Countywide projects being discussed at any one time around the provision of accommodation for rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping (i.e. 'sofa surfers'). During the height of the pandemic Cotswold District Council worked with our County partners to procure specific hotel accommodation and security.
- 3.2** Although this was needed initially to address the increase in homeless clients following the 'Everyone In' directive in 2020 and into 2021, with ongoing pressure on services following the development of Covid variants (such as Omicron), a further call from DLUHC in December 2021 has been issued to provide accommodation to all known rough sleepers.
- 3.3** Costs in 2020 and into 2021 were partially met from the COVID-19 Government grants given to the Council, alongside adhoc Homelessness Uplifts specifically for providing accommodation. Therefore further unplanned payments or uplifts could be made in 2022/23.
- 3.4** Therefore, it is proposed that the Flexible Prevention portion of the funds be used if needed to meet the changing demands on the service as the pandemic continues and government guidance changes. This could include working with partner agencies to source temporary accommodation, long term accommodation with support, or both, in District or by contributing to Countywide projects as opportunities arise.
- 3.5** It is further proposed that, should DLUHC issue any further uplifts or Housing and Homeless specific funds over the financial year to contain Covid outbreaks, or address



increased demands on the Housing Service, delegation of the spending of these be given to the Housing Manager in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness subject to compliance with the ring fenced grant conditions

#### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1** There are multiple complex funding streams supporting the work of the housing team particularly with regard to homeless prevention. Some of these funding streams are subject to bids and some are allocations. Often these come through at short notice and require Officers to investigate options and put together work packages in short time frames.
- 4.2** The proposals set out in section 2 are aimed at addressing the expectations set out by the DLUHC and available accommodation in the Cotswold District. There are limited options and significant costs associated with the provision of emergency accommodation within the District, as well as a shortage of longer term accommodation.
- 4.3** The proposal is therefore aimed at reducing the use and time spent in expensive short term, emergency accommodation benefiting both the Council and the client.
- 4.4** All these spending plans are supported by ring fenced government grants so will have no impact upon the Council's net approved budget or financial strategy.
- 4.5** Any staffing related costs will require appropriate contract variations to the Publica Contract. A Growth Bid may be put forward as part of the 2023/24 budget setting in order to maximise staff retention.

#### **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1** Spending allocations need to follow the ring fenced grant schemes;
- 5.2** Save from the above there are no other legal implications arising directly from this report.

#### **6. RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 6.1** There is a reputational risk to the Council if it does not use this grant funding effectively for the specific purposes set out in the DLUHC letter to Chief Executives on the 21st December 2021
- 6.2** There is also a risk that rising demands on the service from ongoing financial and housing challenges facing residents of the Cotswold District Council area during the ongoing pandemic could impact on the Councils ability to deliver a full statutory Housing service if fixed term staffing contracts are not extended



**7. EQUALITIES IMPACT (IF REQUIRED)**

**7.1** Please see attached Equalities Impact Assessment – Annex B

**8. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS**

**8.1** None

**9. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

**9.1** None considered as the allocation is ring fenced to specific outcomes. However, Members may want to consider other options that have not been referred to within the report

**10. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

**10.1** None