

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 16th March 2023

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director, Adult Services

PORTFOLIO: Adult Social Care

SUBJECT: Homelessness Funding Grant Allocation

WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 This Report describes the various grants that have been issued by Central Government to support rough sleepers and people who are, or are likely to become, homeless. It makes proposals for the allocation of these grants for 2023/24.

2.0 **RECOMMENDATION: That**

- 1) **Executive Board note and consider the contents of this report; and**
- 2) **Approve the recommendations for expenditure against the grants, as described in Appendices 1 and 3.**

3.0 **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 **Context**

3.1.1 The Government confirmed the allocation of a key element of the overall investment: funding through the Homelessness Prevention Grant, which is available to local authorities in 2023/24 to support and deliver services to prevent and tackle homelessness.

3.1.2 Halton has been allocated homelessness grant funding of £369.085 for 2023/24. The Government streamlined the funding allocation to simplify the process; with the Homelessness Prevention Grant replacing the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and the Homelessness Reduction Grant.

3.1.3 The funding grant allocation will be ring-fenced to ensure the Local Authority has the resources to take action to prevent homelessness, and utilise the funding to continue to implement the Homelessness Reduction Act.

3.2 Purpose of Grant Funding

3.2.1 The purpose of the Homelessness Prevention Grant is to give local authorities control and flexibility in managing homelessness pressures and supporting those who are at risk of homelessness, and to deliver the following priorities:

- To fully enforce the Homelessness Reduction Act and contribute to ending rough sleeping by increasing activity to prevent single homelessness;
- Reduce family temporary accommodation numbers through maximising family homelessness prevention; and
- Eliminate the use of unsuitable bed and breakfast accommodation for families for longer than the statutory six week limit.

3.2.2 This funding will be provided upfront in April 2023 and can be used flexibly as part of the councils' resourcing to contribute to the costs of statutory duties, including implementing the Homelessness Reduction Act , domestic abuse and supporting with the costs of temporary accommodation.

3.3 Proposed Funding Allocation

The Homelessness Prevention Grant will be allocated to improve and deliver statutory services and develop new initiatives to prevent homelessness. The proposed Prevention grant funding allocation is outlined within Appendix 1.

3.3.1 Prevention

Within the grant allocation funding, there is an additional amount of £60,000. It is proposed that the funding will provide financial incentives to prevent homelessness and offer vulnerable clients financial assistance and support to prevent homelessness and sustain tenancies.

These services have proven successful during the latter years and assisted clients to remain within their homes or have the necessary assistance to move into alternative suitable housing accommodation.

3.3.2 Private Rented Sector

One of the biggest barriers for clients accessing private rented accommodation is the need for guarantors. The LA reviewed the Bond Guarantee Scheme in 2022 and now offers a guarantor service for up to 3 - 6 months. The service enables vulnerable client groups to access properties in the private sector, this has also had positive impact in breaking down barriers to encourage landlords to

work directly with the LA. The scheme will also link in with the Bond Guarantee Scheme to offer longer term support and reassurance to landlords.

3.3.3 Triage Officer

The triage officer will offer front line support to the team to complete initial assessment and ascertain what interim action is required. The officer will manage the temporary accommodation placements and address all identified issues relating to homelessness clients placed within the accommodation. The post will reduce the pressure upon the team, thus allowing officers to focus upon homelessness prevention measures.

3.3.4 Domestic Abuse

The domestic abuse funding of £11,000 will be transferred to the relevant directorate and used to assist victims of domestic abuse to retain tenancy security and offer additional training to officers.

3.4 **Additional Debt Management Officer**

The present economic crisis has affected many households, who struggle with issues of debt and affordability. The CAB presently offer advice services, but are overwhelmed with the level of referrals received, resulting in many clients not accessing the relevant services quickly.

The proposal for a new debt management officer is to sit across both the CAB and Housing Solutions to offer a more efficient and robust service to clients. The officer will work directly with the designated Housing Solutions Officer who specialises in repossession orders within the social and private rented sector and the Mortgage Rescue Centre. The purpose of the role is to have a joined up approach to helping clients remain within their homes, tackle and consolidate debt and increase access to prevention/support funding.

3.4.1 Housing Solutions Activity

During the last 10 months the Local Authority has seen an increase in the level of clients approaching the Housing Solutions Team for support and assistance, as many landlords pursue legal possession of their properties. The table below illustrates the level of repossession notices issued within the social, private and home ownership sectors during past two years.

	Home Ownership	Private Rented Sector	Registered Social Landlord
April 2022 – Feb 2023	85	521	337
April 2021 – Mar 2022	69	110	190

Within the Housing Solutions Team there is a designated officer who is actively involved in the court process. The officer works directly with lenders to reach an agreement that will allow the clients to remain within their home. The Mortgage Rescue Scheme and possession process has been identified as a priority and funding allocated to assist homeowners and tenants.

Although the number of private and social rented sector illustrates the highest possession figures, not all will result in the landlord pursuing possession of the property. Staff are working tirelessly with clients and landlords to address any issues and utilise the prevention fund to offset arrears, save the tenancy and prevent homelessness.

There is a robust process in place with the registered social landlords that notifies the housing solutions adviser at early stage of pending action. The process has proven successful with the officer achieving positive outcomes to reduce evictions and negotiations to enable the client to remain within their home. Level of activity during April 2023– Feb 2024 (See Appendix 2)

3.5 Rough Sleepers Initiative Funding

3.5.1 The Rough Sleeping Initiative Funding (RSI) will continue to run upto 2025. The annual funding award of £106,000 is ring fenced and will enable the LA to retain existing services, to ensure the funds are dedicated to achieve the shared ambition of ending rough sleeping.

3.5.2 This funding is described as being made available for local authorities to support people living on the streets. The Local Authority was awarded £106,000 for 2023/24 and the proposed bid to continue with existing services is detailed within Appendix 3.

3.5.3 The identified services are a continuation of the service presently being delivered, which has proven successful and has been highlighted as best practice. The outreach support services will work with all rough sleepers to assist them off the streets and access to short and long term sustainable accommodation.

3.6 External Funding Grants

3.6.1 The Local Authority has been successful in securing a number of

grant funding to improve support and service delivery across Homelessness Services.

3.6.2	Funding Grant	Initiative	Total Award
	Rough Sleeper Grant	Accommodation / Support	£106.00
	Trailblazer Grant	2 x Early Intervention Officers	£90.000
	AFEO – Ex Offenders	2 x Offender Co-ordinator Posts (across Halton & Knowsley)	£100.000

3.6.3 The trailblazer funding is part of the Housing First Programme that funded two early intervention officers for Halton, however, the contracts were due to end March 2022. The Combined Authority successfully securing additional funding via DHLUC for a further three year period to ensure the continuation of the identified services below.

3.6.4 The AFEO funding introduced a new co-ordinator post in 2021/22 to work across offender services and improve service delivery. The post has achieved successful outcomes and there has been a vast improvement in communication, partnership working, subsequently, no offender has been released back to Halton or Knowsley without a full pathway plan and accommodation route. The service has been deemed good practice and the remaining Liverpool City Region Local Authorities are now introducing the same approach.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 There are no policy implications arising from this report.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 The financial implications are as described in this Report.

5.2 The increased demand in homelessness presentations has placed additional pressure upon the team. The funding grant will provide additional staffing to deliver homelessness services and reduce/prevent homelessness and will complement the ongoing delivery of services for homelessness clients, with additional financial assistance to promote lifestyle change and sustainability.

5.3 The funding implication for the new debt advice officer will be for a 12 month period and funded via the Homelessness Prevention Grant.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children & Young People in Halton

The services and support provided by the Housing Solutions Team apply to young people, families and care leavers, as well as to individuals who find themselves homeless. These can be some of the most vulnerable groups in our communities, and many rely on accessing suitable social housing to meet their needs.

6.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton

None identified.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Key elements of the services for rough sleepers include the provision of an outreach nurse practitioner, and an outreach team to help entrenched rough sleepers to engage with services, move off the streets and address housing and health needs. The nurse practitioner can prescribe and can provide direct health advice and support, thereby reducing pressures on hard-pressed GP and secondary care services.

6.4 A Safer Halton

Although the number of rough sleepers in Halton is small, they can be perceived as being a public nuisance, particularly when associated with begging. The services and supports funded by the grant allocations help to reduce the numbers of people sleeping rough and to manage their situations more effectively.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

None identified.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 On an individual basis, the provision of help and support from the housing and homelessness service is addressing the needs of some of the most vulnerable people in our area.

7.2 The provision of services to support rough sleepers and potentially homeless people is a statutory requirement. Without the services and support described in this Report and funded by grant allocation, the council would be at risk of legal challenge.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 None identified.

9.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 None identified.

10.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF
THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

None under the meaning of the Act.

APPENDIX 1

Proposals for allocation of the Homelessness Prevention Grant

Funding	Service Delivery	Purpose
£34.000	1 x Housing Solutions Adviser	Increased levels of homelessness put additional pressure upon Housing Solutions Team.
£28.000	Triage Officer	Additional officers to meet demand and ensure LA is fully compliant with statutory requirement.
£32.000	Debt Consolidation Officer	Staffing resource delivered by CAB, work alongside Housing Solutions Adviser to assist vulnerable clients facing repossession.
£65.000	Prevention Fund	Offer financial funding to prevent homelessness. E.g., rent arrears, safety certificates, deposits etc.
£15.000	No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) – Families	Assist migrant Families (including those experiencing domestic abuse) who have NRPF, whilst applying for immigration status.
£25.000	Mainstay & Jigsaw	Homelessness data reporting IT system (Jigsaw) Accommodation and support referral IT system across LCR Mainstay
£50.000	Bond Guarantee Service	Financial uplift for private landlords to encourage engagement and assist with accommodation provision
£45.000	PRS Guarantor Scheme	The LA will act as guarantor for homelessness clients to enable them to access private rented

Funding	Service Delivery	Purpose
		accommodation and encourage private landlord engagement.
£30.000	Mortgage Rescue	Financial assistance to homeowners to prevent homelessness.
£30.000	GIFT Initiative	Furniture package for homelessness clients to assist when undertaking new tenancy.
£4.000	Staff Training	Additional training for staff to ensure they are compliant with Homelessness legal requirements.
£11.000	Domestic Abuse Burdens Funding	Funding to be transferred to relevant directorate to allocate towards service improvement for vulnerable clients.

APPENDIX 2**Repossession Notice Activity**

Registered Social Landlord Activity	Total
Referrals	437
Evictions prevented via Crisis Interventions	60
Evictions prevented via Relief Stage	113
Property Relinquished / Tenant Deceased	5
Court attendance – Suspended Orders	53
Prevention Funding Applications	20 – Total £9.000
Discretionary Housing Applications	21 - Total £15.906

Home Ownership Activity	Total
Referrals	85
Evictions prevented at Relief stage	24
Evictions prevented via Crisis Intervention	21
Court attendance – suspended orders	8

APPENDIX 3

Proposals for the allocation of the Rough Sleepers Initiative Grant

Funding	Delivery	Purpose
£17.000	Changing Lives Sit up service	Provide 3 crisis spaces for rough sleepers for upto 3 nights.
£64.000	Whitechapel 1 x Intensive Support Officer 1 x Move On Officer	Outreach support provision for rough sleepers.to source accommodation within the private rented sector
£20.000	Prevention Fund	Financial assistance for rough sleepers. E.g. enhanced deposits, rent in advance etc.
£17.000	Outreach support	Provide intensive support to rough sleepers placed at Lacy St/Market Street accommodation.