

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 24 October 2024

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director, Adults

PORTFOLIO: Health & Wellbeing

SUBJECT: Homelessness Funding Grant Allocation

WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 This Report outlines the grant funding allocated for the period 2024 – 2025. The funding allocation issued by Central Government to reduce and prevent homelessness within the Borough. It makes proposals for the allocation of these grants for 2024/2025.

2.0 **RECOMMENDATION: That**

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

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 2024/25 to support and deliver services to prevent and tackle homelessness.

3.1.2 Halton has been allocated homelessness grant funding of £369,000 for 2024/25. 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 implemented in 2018.

3.2 **Purpose of Grant**

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,
- 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 2024 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**

3.3.1 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.

3.3.2 Prevention

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

3.3.3 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 2023 and now offers a guarantor service for up to 6 - 12 months. The service enables vulnerable client groups to access properties in the private rented sector, enabling officers to remove barriers and encourage landlords to work directly with the Local Authority. The scheme will also link in with the Bond Guarantee Scheme to offer longer term support and reassurance to landlords.

3.3.4 Triage Officer

The triage officer will be a new post, which 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.

3.4 **Debt Management Officer – CAB**

3.4.1 The present economic crisis has affected many households, who struggle with issues of debt and affordability. Currently the Citizens Advice Halton (CAH) designated debt advice officer works across both services, to offer a more efficient and robust service to clients. The officer works directly with the designated Housing Solutions Officer who specialises in repossession orders within the social and private rented sector and the Mortgage Rescue.

3.4.2 The joined-up approach enables both services to reach vulnerable clients, offering an accelerated approach to tackle both housing and debt related issues. The service offers.

- A designated Housing/Debt adviser who has undertaken Homelessness training The adviser has detailed knowledge of council processes/procedures and qualifying criteria.
- Anyone presenting as threatened with homelessness (or actual homelessness) at CAB will be given a detailed assessment of their housing rights and options and crucially would be given an accurate assessment of the likelihood of them being classed as homeless (threatened or actual). Notifying Housing Solutions for further intervention
- By managing client expectation there has been a reduction in speculative appeals and speculative cases being referred to a solicitor (although that is the client's ultimate choice).

3.5 **Housing Solutions Activity**

3.5.1 The Local Authority has seen an increase in the level of clients approaching the Housing Solutions Team for support and assistance, due to many landlords issuing Section 21 no fault notices to gain 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.

Year	Home Ownership	Private Rented Sector	Registered Social Landlord
April 2024 – Sept 2024	35	152	191
April 2023 – March 2024	52	384	499
April 2022 – March 2023	42	336	271

3.5.2 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.

3.5.3 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.

3.5.4 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– March 2024 (**See Appendix 2**).

3.6 **Rough Sleepers Initiative Funding**

3.6.1 The Rough Sleeping Initiative Funding (RSI) will continue to run up to March 2025. The annual funding award of £106,000 was reduced for period 2024/25, this was due to Public Health picking up the associated costs with the Health Nurse Practitioner role. The funding is ring fenced and enables the Local Authority to maintain existing services and ensure the funds are dedicated to achieving the shared ambition of ending rough sleeping.

3.6.2 This funding is described as being made available for local authorities to support people who are street homeless. The Local Authority funding award for 2024/25 was £69,000. This will enable the continuation of the identified support service delivered by Whitechapel across Halton, which has proven successful and 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.

3.7 **External Funding Grants**

3.7.1 The Local Authority has been successful in securing a number of grant funding to improve support and service delivery across Homelessness Services.

Funding Grant	Initiative	Total Award
Rough Sleeper Grant	Accommodation / Support	£69.000
Combined Authority Trailblazer Grant	1 x Early Intervention Officers	£39.000
Combined Authority AFEO – Ex Offenders	1 x Offender Co-ordinator Posts (across Halton & Knowsley)	£60.000

3.7.2 The trailblazer funding is part of the Housing First Programme that initially funded two early intervention officers for Halton, which was reduced to one officer in 2024/25. The contracts are due to end September 2025; however, the Combined Authority has submitted another bid to DHLUC to continue with the service provision, whereby, the funding decision is due to be confirmed September / October 2024.

3.7.3 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 and a consistent approach across Local Authority services. 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 have recently introduced 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. 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. The funding implication for the new debt advice officer is for a 12-

month period and presently funded via the Homelessness Prevention Grant, which will be reviewed.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

6.1 **Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence**

The funding allocation is to provide vulnerable people threatened with homelessness to secure alternative suitable accommodation and promote sustainability, The Prevention funding supports vulnerable clients to remain within their homes by offering financial incentives to support them to resolve homelessness issues and improve health and wellbeing.

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.

6.2 **Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy**

The Funding grant enables the Local Authority to support vulnerable homelessness clients to secure accommodation to promote sustainability within communities.

6.3 **Supporting Children, Young People and Families**

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.

6.4 **Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need**

The Housing Solutions Team support vulnerable clients to resolve homelessness, tackling inequality and ensuring the relevant support is made available to meet the needs of this vulnerable client group.

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

6.5 **Working Towards a Greener Future**

There are no direct implications arising from this report.

6.6 **Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community**

There are no direct implications arising from this report.

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 There are no equality implications arising from the contents of this report.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no implications arising from the contents of this report.

Appendix 1

Proposals for allocation of the Homelessness Prevention Grant

Funding	Service Delivery	Purpose
£36.000	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
£33.000	Debt Consolidation Officer	Staffing resource delivered by CAB, work alongside Housing Solutions Adviser to assist vulnerable clients facing repossession.
£60.000	Prevention Fund	Offer financial funding to prevent homelessness. e.g. rent arrears, safety certificates, deposits etc.
£10.000	No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) – Families	Assist migrant Families (including those experiencing domestic abuse) who have NRPF, whilst applying for immigration status.
£10,000	Rough Sleeper Prevention Fund	Financial assistance for rough sleepers, e.g., enhanced deposits, rent in advance etc.
£25.000	Mainstay & Jigsaw	Homelessness data reporting IT system (Jigsaw) Accommodation and support referral IT system across LCR Mainstay
£40.000	Bond Guarantee Service	Financial uplift for private landlords to encourage engagement and assist with accommodation provision.
£20.000	PRS Guarantor Scheme	The LA will act as guarantor for homelessness clients to enable them to access private rented accommodation and encourage private landlord engagement

Funding	Service Delivery	Purpose
£30.000	Mortgage Rescue	Financial assistance to homeowners to prevent homelessness
£32.000	GIFT Initiative	Furniture package for homelessness clients to assist when undertaking new tenancy.
£5.000	Staff Training	Additional training for staff to ensure they are compliant with Homelessness legal requirements
£40.000	Beam	A pilot scheme implemented, to delivers a service to vulnerable homelessness single clients to support them into private rented accommodation and employment

Appendix 2

Repossession Notice Activity

Registered Social Landlord Activity	Total
Referrals	499
Evictions prevented via Crisis Interventions	159
Evictions prevented via Relief Stage	259
Property Relinquished / Tenant Deceased	9
Total Eviction Loss	28
Court attendance – Suspended Orders	125
Prevention Funding Applications	47 - £22,840
Discretionary Housing Applications	29 - £28,200

Home Ownership Activity

Owner Occupier Activity	Total
Referrals	52
Total evictions prevented	42
Cases carried over 24/25	10
Total eviction loss	0
Sold Property and rehoused via PPP	0