

Social Inclusion Services Contribution

Report of the Housing & Environmental Health Portfolio Holder

Recommended:

That the use of £55,000 ring-fenced Flexible Homelessness Support Grant funding for the purposes of supporting local social inclusion services during 2021/22 be approved.

SUMMARY:

- In April 2019, Cabinet approved the use of ring fenced central government Flexible Homelessness Support Grant to support the ongoing availability of social inclusion services in Test Valley during the second half of 2019/20 and throughout 2020/21.
- These services are commissioned by the County Council, and delivered in partnership with TVBC and Two Saints (the latter being the service provider).
- Social inclusion services have proved invaluable to Test Valley, contributing to our local capacity to prevent and relieve homelessness, and supporting the Council to maintain its pledge to ensure local residents who may otherwise sleep rough are made offers of emergency accommodation.
- The County Council have proposed an extension to the current arrangements, at the same level of grant funding, to ensure that social inclusion services can continue to be provided at current levels during financial year 2021/22.
- This service cluster is strategically important. In light of the additional challenges and pressures associated with the Covid-19 pandemic, it is in the Council's strategic interests to direct the same level of funding for a further 12 months, to facilitate the proposed contract extension. For this reason, the report recommends ongoing investment by TVBC in local social inclusion services.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 In April 2019, Cabinet approved the use of £55K of ring fenced central government Flexible Homelessness Support Grant as a contribution to the ongoing availability of social inclusion services in Test Valley until March 2021.
- 1.2 Hampshire County Council has recently approached TVBC with a request to confirm our intentions in light of an opportunity to contribute a further £55K. This would facilitate the extension of current social inclusion service arrangements for the duration of 2021/22.

- 1.3 The existing Cabinet approval to fund our contribution expires in March 2021. Social inclusion services are an important aspect of the local strategic approach to preventing and tackling homelessness, and hence this report is recommending TVBC agrees to fund a further £55K to support social inclusion services during 2021/22.

2 Background

- 2.1 Historically, social inclusion service provision across Hampshire was delivered under the umbrella of the Supporting People (SP) programme, and provided housing and community support services for people whose needs did not make them eligible for adult social care.
- 2.2 The SP programme was subject to regular reviews until it was ultimately subsumed into Adult Services' strategic commissioning programme.
- 2.3 In 2015, against the backdrop of increasing pressures on social care services, the County Council undertook a review and significantly reduced its investment in the social inclusion service cluster. Under the Transformation to 2019 (T19) programme, the County undertook another review and reduced its spending on social inclusion services further.
- 2.4 For Test Valley, the outcome of the 2019 review resulted in Cabinet approving the investment of £55K from the borough council, to support the service cluster until March 2021.
- 2.5 During 2020/21, Hampshire County Council has funded:
- Direct access hostel provision (Dene Court) (£330K), including a limited outreach service provision for rough sleepers (representing a £10K shortfall in outreach capacity that TVBC agreed to meet).
 - Stubbs and Turin Court Stage 2 supported move-on provision (£15K).
 - Limited Community Support restricted to single people with complex needs only, and to support move-on from Stage 1 (£29K).
- 2.6 We understand that the County Council will continue to maintain this level of funding during 2021/22.
- 2.7 The County's funding provision for the new social inclusion contract in 2019 resulted in 2 identifiable local gaps in provision:
- £10K to maintain an outreach service with capacity to support Test Valley's strategic aims (as referenced above), and
 - £45K to maintain the supported housing provision at Bridge House in Andover, which the County determined they would no longer fund in their 2019 review.

- 2.8 Cabinet approved the funding of these aspects of social inclusion service provision in the local area from August 2019 until March 2021. This £55K per annum (pro-rata for the period in 2019/20) was identified in the Council's Flexible Homelessness Support Grant reserve.
- 2.9 Subsequent successful bids for MHCLG funding have temporarily bolstered local capacity further, however, the above investment remains critical to enable basic provision to remain available in the local network of services.
- 2.10 In addition to the £55K above, TVBC introduced its own in-house Resettlement Service in 2019. The Council also formalised aspects of a developmental pilot such that it became 'business as usual' in the day to day operations of the Housing & Environmental Health Service.
- 2.11 The Housing & Environmental Health Service has reviewed potential options for future investment in the Council's housing services, and it is apparent that within the current Flexible Homelessness Support Grant reserves, and with member agreement, we should be able to maintain our existing capacity and provision within the HEH Service base budget, bolstered by the current homelessness funding that exists in our reserves, during 2021/22. The broader detail of how this affects the Council's own Housing Services will be subject of a separate report.
- 2.12 Whilst at the time of writing, we await the results of the Comprehensive Spending Review, in order to learn our future allocation of Flexible Homelessness Support Grant for 2021/22 and beyond, the Council has a current FHSG reserve balance of £308K.
- 2.13 The FHSG reserve for 2021/22 means that it will be possible to contribute to the social inclusion services contract for that year, maintaining the current baseline capacity within our local services for single people experiencing homelessness or requiring supported housing. Subject to member approval, this has been factored into the Housing & Environmental Health Service's forward planning for the next financial year and will not require any compromise in terms of the current in-house capacity to support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- 2.14 Future decisions relating to our services from 2022/23 can be made – subject to central government confirmation - with the benefit of a clearer understanding of government Flexible Homelessness Support Grant determinations moving forward.

- 2.15 It is also relevant to note that in March this year, in the context of the unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic, the government issued a directive to all local authorities in England to bring inside anyone who may have been sleeping rough. The directive included requiring local authorities to move anyone residing in shared emergency hostel beds into more suitable accommodation, in the interests of facilitating social distancing and self-isolation. Under this directive, the Council's Housing Service placed over 30 individuals into accommodation who presented during the period of the lockdown. This includes single people who were precariously housed, moving between addresses, along with a handful of rough sleepers. Local social inclusion services were a key partner in meeting the challenges arising through the pandemic and associated lockdown.
- 2.16 The Council has been actively working with its partners to end rough sleeping locally, yet the Housing Service remains under high demand and particularly from single people with complex needs. The provision of social inclusion services directly contributes to meeting local demand. They are also a critical partner in facilitating the ongoing delivery of our pledge; to ensure no local resident who approaches us for assistance, should have to sleep rough without first being made an offer of emergency accommodation to prevent them hitting the street.

3 Corporate Objectives and Priorities

- 3.1 Preventing and relieving homelessness is a high priority for Test Valley Borough Council.
- 3.2 Social inclusion services contribute to achieving our Corporate Plan priorities to support town centres, communities, people and the local environment, by actively contributing to reduced instances of homelessness, supporting vulnerable people and actively contributing to the prevention of homelessness in the borough.
- 3.3 The Council's Housing Strategy 2020 to 2025 identified four key themes. This include preventing and relieving all forms of homelessness. This priority area is further supported by a Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020 to 2023.
- 3.4 Housing and homelessness remain at the top of the national policy agenda, and with a renewed focus in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, our local social inclusion services remain a vital element in our strategic approach to supporting our communities.

4 Consultations/Communications

- 4.1 Operational staff have been engaged in the delivery and review of social inclusion services locally and have been consulted regarding potential implications of the recommendations in this report.
- 4.2 The Head of Housing & Environmental Health has liaised with colleagues within Adult Services commissioning at the County Council to discuss the future of this service cluster and in light of the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic.

4.3 Local social inclusion service provider, Two Saints, has been part of discussions associated with the future of the service cluster and we continue to enjoy a close working relationship with them in the interests of delivering effective homelessness prevention and relief services.

5 Options

5.1 The housing service continues to receive a high demand for housing options and homelessness services, and this is in the context of a complex range of challenges arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. The options available to the Council should be understood and considered in this context.

5.2 There are 2 options available to the Council currently:

- (i) To contribute £55K of ring fenced Flexible Homelessness Support Grant to the ongoing delivery of local social inclusion services at current capacity during 2021/22. (Recommended)
- (ii) To opt not to invest £55K of ring fenced Flexible Homelessness Support Grant in the ongoing delivery of local social inclusion services in the area.

6 Option Appraisal

6.1 Two Saints provide expert support and outreach to people with complex needs in the local area, and offer an effective service to our most vulnerable single people who may be experiencing homelessness or who may be at risk of homelessness in Test Valley.

6.2 The current pandemic, along with the ongoing high demand for housing related services, means that it is not recommended for the Council to withdraw its support for social inclusion services in the borough. Failure to invest the proposed £55K in 2021/22 will invariably result in a reduced level of service and in turn, this risks increasing levels of homelessness, including street homelessness.

6.3 The recommended option (i) will ensure that we are able to deliver a local social inclusion services baseline capacity. This will reflect the current service delivery and will enable the continued provision of both supported housing units to assist vulnerable people as they move to independence, along with outreach support to people who find themselves street homeless and/or who may otherwise be precariously housed.

7 Risk Management

7.1 An evaluation of the risks associated with the matters in this report has previously been reported to members on 17 April 2019. The risk assessment has been reviewed and no new risks identified.

8 Resource Implications

- 8.1 The Council was awarded Flexible Homelessness Support Grant funding as part of a 3-year determination. This current determination is due to expire in 2020/21. Whilst it is not anticipated the government will cease this grant, there is no certainty it will be an ongoing funding stream.
- 8.2 Due to the Council's prudent financial planning, there remains, however, £308K of Flexible Homelessness Support Grant in the Council's reserves that will be carried forward to 2021/22, and which can be directed to facilitate the ongoing investment being recommended in this report.
- 8.3 Ongoing investment in social inclusion services has been factored into the Housing & Environmental Health Services' forward planning. The remainder of the available ring fenced homelessness reserve will be the subject of a separate report focused on the resourcing of the Council's in-house housing services from 2021/22 onwards, and this will be brought forward in due course.

9 Legal Implications

- 9.1 The Council has statutory duties to prevent and relieve homelessness and must comply with the Housing Act 1996, Part 7 (as amended, including most recently by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017).
- 9.2 The Council will work with Hampshire County Council to support the ongoing provision of social inclusion services by the current provider, Two Saints, for the duration of 2021/22, including the ongoing availability of supported move-on accommodation at Bridge House and a continued outreach service for single people experiencing homelessness.

10 Equality Issues

- 10.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA) was completed in April 2019 and has been revisited in light of this report.
- 10.2 The recommendation contained in this report does not create any new equalities concerns and falls within scope of the Council's Housing Strategy and Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy aims.
- 10.3 The recommendation in this report is targeted to mitigate potential negative impacts on vulnerable people in the local area, and in the interests of ensuring individuals in need are able to receive services that are accessible and that proactively seek to prevent and relieve homelessness for all residents.

11 Other Issues

- 11.1 Community Safety – the ongoing investment in local social inclusion services will contribute positively to reducing community safety issues including anti-social behaviour and harmful street activity in our towns.
- 11.2 Environmental Health Issues – the recommendation in this report will contribute to sustaining low levels of rough sleeping (with the aim to ensure no-one has to sleep rough in Test Valley) and any associated Environmental Health concerns that may otherwise arise.
- 11.3 Sustainability and Addressing a Changing Climate – no issues identified.
- 11.4 Property Issues – no issues identified.
- 11.5 Wards/Communities Affected – the local social inclusion service cluster supports residents from across the borough.

12 Conclusion and reasons for recommendation

- 12.1 The Council has an opportunity to continue to contribute to local social inclusion services at the current level, and at a level that has been planned for by the Housing & Environmental Health Service.
- 12.2 The Flexible Homelessness Support Grant is ring fenced for the purposes of preventing and relieving homelessness, and cannot therefore be used for any other purpose.
- 12.3 The Council has a positive working relationship with both the County Council and the local service provider, Two Saints, and the partnership successfully prevents and relieves homelessness for vulnerable people.
- 12.4 In light of Covid-19, it is vital that the local area is geared up to meet the needs of single people who may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless more than ever, and with ongoing high demand for housing and related services, social inclusion services will continue to be greatly needed in 2021/22.
- 12.5 The recommendation in this report is intended to continue to meet locally identified priorities and maintain strong partnership arrangements in the interests of meeting the needs of vulnerable people in our communities. It can be achieved through the adoption of a targeted contribution of £55K of ring fenced government grant funding for 2021/22.

Background Papers (Local Government Act 1972 Section 100D)

None

Confidentiality

It is considered that this report does not contain exempt information within the meaning of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and can be made public.

No of Annexes:	0	File Ref:	N/A
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(Portfolio: Housing & Environmental Health) Councillor P Bundy

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Report to:	Cabinet	Date:	4 November 2020
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