

Social Inclusion Services Contribution

Report of the Housing & Environmental Health Portfolio Holder

Recommended:

That Cabinet approves the use of £55,000 ring-fenced grant funding from the Homelessness Reserve for the purposes of supporting local social inclusion during 2022/23.

SUMMARY:

- Following the implementation of Hampshire County Council's Transformation to 2019 savings plan, Test Valley's Cabinet has annually approved a contribution of £55,000 from the Homelessness Reserve to support local social inclusion services in the borough.
- This report seeks approval to make a further £55,000 contribution to maintain social inclusion services at current capacity for financial year 2022/23, representing the last year of the current social inclusion services contract extension.
- On 4 November 2021, Hampshire County Council approved a target saving of £360,000 across social inclusion services in Hampshire, and will be working through a process of determining future commissioning arrangements for this service cluster that will take effect from April 2023.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 In November 2020, Cabinet approved the use of £55K of ring fenced central government homelessness grant as a contribution towards the ongoing availability of social inclusion services in Test Valley until March 2022.
- 1.2 As well as having a role in supporting people who may be on the cusp of social care eligibility, social inclusion services are an important aspect of the local strategic approach to preventing and relieving homelessness. This report is, therefore, recommending the Cabinet agrees to fund a further £55K to support social inclusion services during 2022/23.

2 Background

- 2.1 The current Hampshire County Council commissioned social inclusion services grew out of the Supporting People (SP) Programme, which was introduced in 2003. SP commissioned housing and community support services across the county. The SP programme was subject to regular reviews until it was ultimately subsumed into Adult Services' strategic commissioning programme.

- 2.2 In 2015, against a backdrop of increasing social care pressures, the County Council undertook a review and significantly reduced its investment in the social inclusion service cluster. Under the Transformation to 2019 (T19) agenda, investment in this service cluster was reduced by a further £1.8M across the county. The current social inclusion service provider contract was extended until March 2023, under new arrangements reflecting the County Council's spending reductions.
- 2.3 Social inclusion services are strategically important for both the county and borough councils. Not only do they support individuals who are on the cusp of social care, they also prevent and relieve homelessness, including rough sleeping.
- 2.4 Following the County Council's decisions in 2019, Test Valley Borough Council responded by investing in its own housing services, whilst also making a £55K contribution to the County Council's social inclusion services contract in order to maintain local provision, and as part of the borough council's commitment to delivering effective homelessness services in the local area.
- 2.5 Under the current extended contract arrangements, Hampshire County Council funds the following social inclusion services in Test Valley:
- Stage 1 direct access hostel provision (Dene Court) with a low level of outreach support as part of that – approximately £330K per annum.
 - Support to facilitate supported stage 2 accommodation providing move-on from Dene Court – approximately £15K per annum.
 - Limited Community Support restricted primarily to single people with complex needs only, and to support move on from stage 1 accommodation – approximately £29K per annum.
- 2.6 The Transformation to 2019 spending reductions implemented by the County Council in August 2019, resulted in the following identified gaps in provision (that Test Valley Borough Council have been funding annually):
- Outreach to rough sleepers to ensure capacity to meet local need - £10K per annum.
 - Supported housing provision at Bridge House in Andover - £45K per annum.
- 2.7 Test Valley Borough Council has contributed £55K annually since August 2019 (this was pro-rata for the remaining period in 2019/20) to ensure these identifiable gaps did not manifest.
- 2.8 Under the County Council's new "Balancing the Budget" programme, the County Council is reviewing how it may make further savings of £360K (15% of total budget) across this cluster of services in Hampshire from April 2023. This may have implications for Test Valley in terms of how it invests based on competing priorities at that time.

- 2.9 For the time being, and in order to maintain services under the current contractual arrangements, at current capacity, it is necessary for Test Valley Borough Council to target a further £55K from the Homelessness Reserve to support social inclusion services in 2022/23, which will be the final year of the current social inclusion services provider contract extension.
- 2.10 The funding is available in the Homelessness Reserve to cover this cost and has been factored into all other plans for ring fenced homelessness grant allocations from central government that comprise the Homelessness Reserve.

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 includes 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 ongoing 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 homelessness grant to the ongoing delivery of local social inclusion services at current capacity during 2022/23. (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 services 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 in the final year of the current contract extension. Failure to invest the proposed £55K in 2022/23 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 service 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.

7.2 Clearly, anything arising from the County Council's work to reduce spending in this service area further from April 2023 may have consequences for local services and for the borough council. Further reports will be brought to members in due course associated with the outcome of the County Council's ongoing review.

8 Resource Implications

8.1 The Council was awarded Flexible Homelessness Support Grant funding as part of a 3-year determination which expired in 2020/21. For 2021/22, government rolled two specific funding streams into one – the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and Homelessness Reduction Grant were pooled into a new Homelessness Prevention Grant.

- 8.2 In December 2021, the government announced a further allocation of Homelessness Prevention Grant for 2022/23. This grant determination included a suggestion that the allocation of Homelessness Prevention Grant would be subject to review during 2022 with potential for a new allocation formula to be developed and implemented from 2022/23 onwards.
- 8.3 Whilst it is not anticipated the government will cease this grant, there is no certainty it will be an ongoing funding stream, nor that Test Valley will continue to receive the current level of funding.
- 8.4 Due to the Council's prudent financial planning, Flexible Homelessness Support Grant remains in the Council's reserves and will be carried forward to 2022/23. This can be directed to facilitate the ongoing investment being recommended in this report.
- 8.5 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 is the subject of a separate report focused on the resourcing of the Council's in-house housing services from 2022/23 onwards.

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 2022/23, 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 Homelessness Reserve comprises ring fenced central government grant that has been provided 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 2022/23.
- 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 2022/23.

<u>Background Papers (Local Government Act 1972 Section 100D)</u>			
None			
<u>Confidentiality</u>			
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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