

**PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

**ALLOCATION OF (ADDITIONAL) HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION GRANT**

REPORT OF SERVICE DIRECTOR – HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: COUNCILLOR SEAN PRENDERGAST

COUNCIL PRIORITY: PEOPLE FIRST

**1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 As a local housing authority, the Council has various legal duties to assist households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, including accommodation duties towards those who are in priority need and unintentionally homeless.
- 1.2 The Council receives Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG) funding from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to support delivery of these services. HPG is ring-fenced for the delivery of services to prevent and tackle homelessness.
- 1.3 The Council has received an additional in-year allocation of £199.9k of DLUHC's Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG) funding for 2023/24, to support Ukrainian households and wider homelessness pressures. This report outlines two proposals for the allocation of this funding.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1. That the Cabinet approves the allocation £186.2k of HPG in order to fund the salary budget shortfall in the housing team to March 2027;
- 2.2 That the Cabinet authorises the remaining amount (of £13.7k) to be used to offset the cost of hotel placements, which are anticipated to grow further over the winter months.

**3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1. The recommendations in this report support the Council's response to the increasing volume and complexity of housing approaches, whilst also meeting the requirements of DLUHC's ringfenced use of the funding.

**4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 4.1 None.

**5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS**

- 5.1 The Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health, Cllr Sean Prendergast and the Deputy Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health, Cllr Dave Winstanley, have both been consulted and are supportive of the proposals contained in this report.

## **6. FORWARD PLAN**

- 6.1 This item was added to the Forward Plan on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2023.

## **7. BACKGROUND**

- 7.1. As a local housing authority, the Council has various legal duties to assist households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, including accommodation duties towards those who are in priority need and unintentionally homeless. The Council receives HPG funding from DLUHC to support delivery of these services. HPG is ring-fenced for the delivery of services to prevent and tackle homelessness.
- 7.2. The Council received £746k of HPG for the two year period 2023/24 – 2024/25 and Cabinet agreed at its meeting of [27 June 2023](#) the allocation of this funding amongst local specialist homelessness services.
- 7.3. In addition, the Council has received a further in-year allocation of £199.9k of HPG funding for 2023/24. As an addition to the existing HPG, this grant is ringfenced for homelessness work to assist those most in need but with a specific focus on support for Ukrainian households who are at risk of/experiencing homelessness.

## **8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS**

- 8.1 To date, the impact of demand from Ukrainian households on the Council's housing services has not been significant with fewer than 30 approaches for assistance and prevention or relief duties owed to only eight households since the Homes for Ukraine scheme opened in March 2022. The Council is currently accommodating three Ukrainian households in temporary accommodation until an offer of suitable settled accommodation can be made to them. Support for Ukrainian households, which is resourced and coordinated by Hertfordshire County Council has been successful in assisting the majority to remain in existing accommodation or to find alternative accommodation in the private sector or with new hosts and we do not anticipate any significant increase in homelessness approaches from this cohort at the current time.
- 8.2 In addition, the Council has secured funding through the first round of the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) in partnership with settle, for three additional social housing properties in the district, which will be available shortly for occupation (Cabinet's decision of [31 January 2023](#) refers). As a condition of LAHF funding, these properties are to be used to accommodate families with housing needs who have arrived in the UK via Ukrainian and Afghan resettlement schemes and we anticipate that at least two will be used to accommodate local Ukrainian families and a third by an Afghan household. There are also a further eight properties due to be delivered under round 2 of the LAHF, in partnership with settle and Home Group, by March 2024.
- 8.3 In terms of wider homelessness pressures, 1942 requests for housing assistance were received by the Council over the financial year 2022/23 with a further 1157 between April 2023 and Sept 2023. In addition, designated temporary accommodation units in the district are usually fully occupied and there is extensive use of hotels as an emergency back-up measure. Due to current challenges in the housing market, especially the accessibility of the private rented sector as well as the cost-of-living challenges, demand levels for housing assistance are not expected to reduce in the foreseeable future.
- 8.4 In early 2020, two post holders in the housing team initially employed on fixed term contracts of five years, fully funded by DLUHC's HPG, were offered permanent contracts in order to provide stability for the housing team. This was due to challenges with the recruitment of housing staff, the growing demands from the public

for housing services and considering employment rights being accrued after two years being the same as that of permanent staff.

- 8.5 Although the individual post holders are employed on permanent contracts, as the initial five-year funding allocation ends in 2024/25, it is proposed that £186.2k of this in-year HPG award is allocated to further fund the budget gap for these two posts until March 2027. This brings this in line with two other permanent contractual changes that were agreed in the housing team (one part-time post increased to full-time and another part-time post with a small increase in weekly hours) that are also due to end March 2027; assuming a pay award of 2% from 2024/25 onwards, the salary shortfall would be around £111k pa from April 2027.
- 8.6 Should the salary proposal be agreed, all future funding options would be considered to cover the salary budget shortfall from April 2027 onwards, including a potential investment proposal (in 2026/27) as part of the Council's Corporate Business Planning process and/or an allocation of future ring-fenced DLUHC HPG should it be forthcoming.
- 8.7 It is also proposed that the remaining amount of £13.7k is allocated to the Council's budget for hotel costs which are likely to increase over the winter months.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1. The Housing Act 1985 Section 1 (1) confirms that the District Council is the Local Housing Authority (LHA).
- 9.2 LHAs' homelessness duties are contained within the Housing Act 1996 Part VII, as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which placed significant new duties on English local housing authorities.
- 9.3 LHAs have a legal duty to provide interim (also known as emergency) accommodation to homeless applicants, if, at any point during their enquiries, there is a reason to believe that an applicant may be:
- homeless
  - eligible for assistance, and
  - in priority need

If an LHA fails to provide interim accommodation, or if the accommodation provided is unsuitable for the applicant, this can be challenged by way of judicial review.

- 9.4 The LHA also holds the 'Relief Duty' which applies when a council is satisfied that an applicant is homeless and eligible for assistance; it requires the Council to take reasonable steps to help the applicant secure that suitable accommodation becomes available for the applicant's occupation for at least six months. This therefore requires the Council to work with the applicant to help them find and retain accommodation to meet this legal duty.
- 9.5 The Cabinet's Terms of Reference provides at paragraph 5.7.15; *"To oversee the provision of all the Council's services other than those functions reserved to the Council"*.

## **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 The Council was informed in June 2023 that it had received a top-up HPG allocation of £199,918 for 2023/24, ring-fenced for homelessness services to target those most in need, specifically Ukrainian households and wider homelessness pressures.

## **11. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 This report concerns one year top up funding, in addition to a two-year allocation of HPG for 2023/24 – 2024/25. There is therefore inherent uncertainty as to what (if any) HPG funding will be available from 2025/26 onwards and thus longer-term stability of homelessness services remains uncertain.

## **12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2. An Equality Impact Assessment accompanied the proposals approved by Cabinet on 27 June 2023 which noted the potential positive impacts the approved allocations of funding would have for some of the most vulnerable residents of North Herts. The proposals contained in this report will support the provision of these services.

## **13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS**

- 13.1. The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report. However, the proposals contribute to social value by providing community benefits that would otherwise not be realised.

## **14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to the proposals in this report.

## **15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 15.1 All four members of the housing team occupying roles that have been financially supported by HPG over recent years are employed on permanent contracts.

## **16. APPENDICES**

- 16.1 None.

## **17. CONTACT OFFICERS**

- 17.1 Jo Doggett, Service Director – Housing and Environmental Health [jo.doggett@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:jo.doggett@north-herts.gov.uk) ext 4470
- 17.2 Martin Lawrence, Strategic Housing Manager [martin.lawrence@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:martin.lawrence@north-herts.gov.uk); ext 4250
- 17.3 Isabelle Alajooz, Legal Commercial Team Manager and Deputy MO [isabelle.alajooz@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:isabelle.alajooz@north-herts.gov.uk); ext 4346
- 17.4 Reuben Ayavoo, Policy and Community Engagement Manager [reuben.ayavoo@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:reuben.ayavoo@north-herts.gov.uk); ext 4212
- 17.5 Jo Keshishian, HR Operations Manager, [jo.keshishian@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:jo.keshishian@north-herts.gov.uk); ext 4314

## **18. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 18.1 DLUHC Homelessness Prevention Grant top-up [Homelessness Prevention Grant: Homes for Ukraine scheme support - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-prevention-grant)