

Birmingham City Council

Report to Cabinet

14 December 2021



Subject: HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND REDUCTION GRANT FUNDING, FOR VULNERABLE RENTERS

Report of: Managing Director of City Housing

Relevant Cabinet Member: Cllr Sharon Thompson, Vulnerable Families and Children

Relevant O &S Chair(s): Cllr Carl Rice, Chair of Co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny

Report author: Stephen Philpott, Acting Head, Housing Solutions & Support

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|---|---|---|
| Are specific wards affected? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No – All wards affected |
| If yes, name(s) of ward(s): | | |
| Is this a key decision? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| If relevant, add Forward Plan Reference: 009596/2021 | | |
| Is the decision eligible for call-in? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| If relevant, provide exempt information paragraph number or reason if confidential: | | |

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Council's allocation of the Grant for Vulnerable Renters was confirmed by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on 27th October 2021 for the financial year of 2021-22, from a total of £65m, BCC is to receive £1,500,000. This is new, unexpected and is believed to be non-reoccurring.
- 1.2 The funding is to meet the costs arising from the needs of those at risk of homelessness, incurred by Local Authorities and as a result of the ongoing implementation of the Homeless Reduction Act (HRA) 2017 and the ongoing

housing crisis as a result of the pandemic. The grant is paid on the same terms as the Homelessness Prevention Grant.

- 1.3 In writing to Local Authorities, Penny Hobman, Director of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping at DLUHC wrote -

“The purpose of this exceptional one-off payment is to support low-income private renters with COVID-19 related rent arrears to avoid eviction or find a new home where necessary in order to prevent homelessness, with local authorities able to target funding to those who need it most and help them get back on their feet.”

- 1.4 DLUHC explicitly state “We do not expect this funding to be spent on temporary accommodation costs.”
- 1.5 Housing Solutions and Support will establish a process for a range of internal and external partners to refer eligible households into this programme. A Housing Needs Assessment will be undertaken, and a determination made regarding BCC expending funds to prevent homelessness. This will be done directly with the landlord or support provider.
- 1.6 Funds, will expended in line with grant requirements, with expenditure to include – meeting all or some of household rent debts, negotiating access into accommodation through rent deposits, rent in advance, guarantees and furniture for unfurnished properties to enable access for homeless households.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Authorise the acceptance of the additional Grant Funding for Vulnerable Homeless Residents of £1.500,000 for the financial year 2021-2022, and to spend said grant in accordance with the stated aims.
- 2.2 Delegate authority to the Acting Assistant Director, Housing Solutions and Support to use the Grant as permitted under any grant conditions to make further adjustments as necessary to ensure full utilisation of this grant.

3 Background

- 3.1 The figures below are the reasons for homelessness presentations to Housing Solutions & Support Service from April 2021 to October 2021. It should be noted that the eviction ban relating to Covid-19 conditions meant that in 2020-21 the City Council saw 358 presentations as a result of the ‘ending of private rented tenancy assured shorthold tenancy’, while in the first 7 months of 2021-22 we have seen 402. Data also shows other vulnerable renters in supported housing and those in non-assured shorthold tenancies.

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| Family no longer willing or able to accommodate | 877 |
| Other | 566 |
| Domestic Abuse | 507 |
| End of private rented tenancy assured short hold tenancy, | 402 |
| Eviction from supported housing | 258 |
| Friends no longer willing or able to accommodate | 189 |
| Relationship with partner ended (nonviolent breakdown) | 107 |

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|---|-------------|
| End of Private Rented Tenancy – Non-Assured Shorthold Tenancy | 92 |
| Non-racially motivated / other motivated violence or harassment | 83 |
| Required to leave accommodation provided by HO as asylum seeker | 69 |
| End of social rented tenancy | 38 |
| Property Disrepair | 36 |
| Left institution with no accommodation available | 31 |
| Racially motivated violence or harassment | 21 |
| Fire / Flood other emergency | 17 |
| Mortgage Repossession | 4 |
| Left HM Forces | 3 |
| (blank) | |
| Grand Total | 3300 |

Source: Birmingham City Council, H-CLIC data from Northgate System

- 3.2 Citizens often approach Housing Solutions and Support when they are already homeless, and the tenancy is unable to be rescued. The Housing Solutions redesign, which is currently underway emphasises the need for early intervention and prevention, so that vulnerable renters are protected from crisis, homelessness, and the need for temporary accommodation.
- 3.3 Through this fund it is intended to provide additional support to vulnerable households at risk of homelessness in the private rented sector, to prevent them from becoming homeless. This is further supported by the priorities within the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

4 Options considered and Recommended Proposal

- 4.1 Do nothing – considered as a loss to Birmingham City Council and citizens of Birmingham. Would fail to take up and result in the loss of £1.5m opportunity to prevent homelessness amongst vulnerable renters. This in turn would place further pressure upon homeless services.
- 4.2 Procure the services of other organisations to undertake this work on behalf of Birmingham City Council – considered not feasible due to the time constraints attached to this funding. The funding not being expected, announced 27th October 2021, and due to be expended by 31st March 2022. The timetable not allowing for any procurement process.
- 4.3 Birmingham City Council, Housing Solutions and Support establish a process for a range of internal and external partners to refer eligible households into this programme. A Housing Needs Assessment will be undertaken, and a determination made regarding BCC expending funds to prevent homelessness. This will be done directly with the landlord or support provider. This is the recommended approach.

5 Consultation

- 5.1 In order to design the process and ensure effective partnerships around the delivery of the requirements of this grant, officers have consulted with a range of public,

private and voluntary sector partners. This includes, City Housing, Neighbourhood Advice Services, Citizens Advice Bureau, Birmingham Private Landlords Forum, Private Rented Service – City Operations Directorate, Birmingham & Solihull Women's Aid, St Basil's, Sifa-Fireside, Trident Reach, Spring Housing.

- 5.2 In addition, consultation has been embedded in Birmingham's Homeless Prevention Strategy 2017+ with the Homelessness Partnership Board. This focuses on preventing people from becoming homeless in the first place and supporting those who are homeless to build a more positive future.

6 Risk Management

- 6.1 If the grant is not accepted and revenue expenditure approved, there is a risk the duty upon the Council will not be fully met due to the limited capacity of prevention resources. This will result in those who are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless, not receiving an appropriate level of assistance. In addition, there is a therefore the risk that they may have to make a homeless approach the following negative outcomes:
- 6.2 Increased temporary accommodation costs.
- 6.3 Increased rough sleeping in Birmingham.
- 6.4 Reduce early intervention support to limit the impact of homelessness, help people to recover from homelessness, and prevent becoming trapped in a cycle of homelessness.
- 6.5 A reputational risk to the Council.

7 Compliance Issues:

7.1 How are the recommended decisions consistent with the City Council's priorities, plans and strategies?

- 7.2 This report supports the delivery of one the Council Priorities as set out in the Birmingham City Council Plan 2018 – 2022.

"Birmingham is a great, clean and green city to live in".

"We will work with partners to tackle rough sleeping and homelessness. We will have the appropriate housing to meet the needs of our citizens."

7.3 Legal Implications

- 7.3.1 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 amends the Housing Act 1996 Part VII and it places new duties on English LHAs. It came in to force in April 2018, although the MHCLG introduced one of the more significant provisions in October 2018. The Act requires local authorities to carry out additional duties to prevent and relieve homelessness and to intervene earlier when it is likely that an applicant will become homeless with 56 days. It is under these responsibilities that the City Council will be acting.

7.4 Financial Implications

7.4.1 Funds will be received as grant from Department of Levelling Up Housing & Communities. This will be on the same terms as the Homelessness Prevention Grant already received, funds will be accounted for in the same way.

7.4.2 Funds are to prevent homelessness. This may benefit City Housing tenants resulting in a reduction to arrears, this may reduce homeless presentations in crisis and requiring emergency, temporary accommodation. Until mobilised it is not possible to confirm specific financial outcomes.

7.5 Procurement Implications

7.5.1 There is no procurement activity intended

7.6 Human Resources Implications (if required)

7.6.1 This will be undertaken by existing staff, primarily Neighbourhood Advice Service and Housing Solutions.

7.7 Public Sector Equality Duty

7.7.1 Equality Impact Assessment is complete.

8 Background Documents

8.1 None

List of appendices accompanying this report:

Equality Impact Assessment