

Birmingham City Council

Report to Cabinet

14th February 2023



Subject: Homelessness Prevention Grant Winter 2022-23

Report of: Paul Langford, Acting Strategic Director, City Housing

Relevant Cabinet Member: Cllr Sharon Thompson, Housing & Homelessness
Cllr Mosquito, Finance & Resources

Relevant O&S Chair(s): Cllr Mohammed Idrees, Housing and Neighbourhoods
Cllr Akhlaq Ahmed, Resources

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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: 010925/2023		
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 On 30th November 2022, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) announced a £50m top-up of Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG) in order to address homelessness pressures over winter. Birmingham's allocation is £1,156,671.
- 1.2 7th June 2022 Cabinet approved the receipt and expenditure of £2.632,759 New Burdens Grant, the non-core part of the annual Homelessness Prevention Grant.

Additional homelessness pressures mean that this will be fully utilised so the additional £1,156,671 is welcomed.

- 1.3 Expenditure must take place by 31st March 2023 and be in line with HPG criteria “ringfenced for homelessness to target those most in need and to ensure local authorities are resourced to take action to prevent homelessness and continue to implement the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017”.
- 1.4 It is proposed to utilise the additional funding to – further resource Housing Solutions case work for prevention activity at point of presentation; to increase resources for the Accommodation Finding Team (AFT) in order to enable access to the private rented sector for homeless households; and to target those in temporary accommodation who are ‘stuck’ bringing resources to secure move-on, enable access to accommodation, relieve rent arrears that are a barrier to move-on, and fund staffing to enable this work.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet retrospectively: -
 - 2.1.1 Authorises the acceptance of the Homelessness Prevention Grant Top-Up Winter 2022-23 of £1,156,671 for the financial year 2022-2023.
 - 2.1.2 Authorises the expenditure programme set out in 7.3.2 which focuses upon homeless prevention activities.
 - 2.1.3 Delegates authority to the Acting Director, Housing Solutions and Support Service following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing & Homelessness, to use any unallocated Grant as permitted under any grant conditions to make further adjustments as necessary to ensure full utilisation of this grant.
 - 2.1.4 Delegates the approval of procurement strategies for any projects arising from the recommendations in this report above the procurement threshold of £177,897 and also delegates the award of any contracts to the Acting Strategic Director for City Housing in conjunction with the Assistant Director, Procurement (or their delegate), the Strategic Director, Council Management (or their delegate) and the City Solicitor and Monitoring Officer (or their delegate).
 - 2.1.5 Authorises the City Solicitor (or their delegate) to negotiate and complete any agreements to give effect to the above decisions.

3 Background

- 3.1 Annually Birmingham City Council receives government grant to prevent and relieve homelessness. This reflects the statutory duties upon the Local Authority, primarily set out in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. For 2022-23 Birmingham’s allocation was £7,307,394 made up of £7,171,359 Homelessness Prevention Grant and £136,035 Domestic Abuse New Burdens.

- 3.2 On 30th November 2022, without prior notification, DLUHC announced an additional £50m for Homelessness Prevention Grant for winter pressures. Birmingham's allocation is £1,156,671, funds that must be spent by 31st March 2023. As the grant is greater than £500,000 revenue, decisions are subject to Cabinet approval. Officers have pursued the quickest available timetable to bring this to Cabinet for approval. Officers have with Cabinet Member and Director approval mobilised resources to expend the grant by 31st March 2023. Not doing this would have resulted in the grant not being fully utilised. This report is therefore seeking retrospective approval of these recommendations.
- 3.3 Pressures upon homelessness services within the city have increased. Average weekly presentations to Housing Solutions are in 2022, 30% higher than 2020 and 20% higher than 2021. There are currently (15th December 2022) 4448 households in temporary accommodation, of which 715 are in B&B/hotels and 466 households with dependents have been in B&B/hotel for more than 6 weeks. It is a business priority to reduce the number of households in B&B/hotel accommodation due to the impact upon households and the cost to the Local Authority. A B&B elimination plan focuses upon the prevention of homelessness, better temporary accommodation provision and greater move-on options.
- 3.4 Homelessness Prevention Grant is used to fund a wide range of interventions, including – prevention hubs, landlord incentives, mediation services, private sector leasing, contact centre cover and prevention of eviction interventions.
- 3.5 The additional Homelessness Prevention Grant will be used according to grant requirements. Indicatively it is proposed to target £200,000 towards the work of the Accommodation Finding Team (AFT) securing homes in the private rented sector for homeless households at either prevention or move-on stages, this will increase temporary staff administration support as well as the number of landlord incentives available. A further £56,671 will be available to Housing Solutions Case Workers undertaking Housing Needs Assessments and Personal Housing Plans, investing in any prevention opportunities that present.
- 3.6 The remaining £900,000 will be utilised to enable move-on out of temporary accommodation, to unblock households stuck in forms of temporary accommodation and free up capacity within temporary accommodation. This will support the work of the Complex Case Team within temporary accommodation. Funds will be used to enable accommodation access for move-on, secure furniture, deal with debt, address arrears that exclude from move-on and support direct offers for those with exceptional needs in temporary accommodation. This will include the use of additional staffing via overtime and agency cover to accelerate work for the limited available time period.
- 3.7 This approach is in line with the overall work to eliminate the use of B&B accommodation as temporary accommodation and ultimately reduce the level of temporary accommodation. Housing Solutions & Support has been through a redesign process in the last 2 years resulting in a focus upon prevention. This has

been added to through the more recent Target Operating Model (TOM) work and further through the new Temporary Accommodation Strategy.

4 Options considered and Recommended Proposal

4.1 The options that have been considered are:

4.1.1 Do nothing:

This option would risk the Council not meeting its statutory duties to those threatened with homelessness and those who are experiencing homelessness including those placed in Temporary Accommodation under the Homeless provisions of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended). It would also require the Council to decline £1,156,671 of grant funding.

This option is not recommended.

4.1.2 Accept grant allocation and expend as proposed:

Enable prevention of homelessness as well as securing move-on for households in temporary accommodation.

This option is recommended.

4.2 There are no equalities implications arising as a result of this report.

5 Consultation

5.1 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 Homelessness and housing need present a significant risk to the Council. The Council has statutory duties to prevent and relieve homelessness. These duties are under pressure, made more explicit with cost of living pressures.

6.2 Homelessness Prevention Grant is used to undertake statutory duties including the provision prevention services, access to temporary accommodation and the means to secure a permanent home. Additional winter pressures funding supports this work to manage homelessness and the risks homelessness brings, including harm to households and cost to the Council.

7 Compliance Issues:

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

The proposal supports the delivery of the following Council Priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan 2022 – 2026; -.

- An Inclusive Birmingham: through a focus on tackling poverty and inequality, empowering citizens, promoting diversity and civic pride, and supporting and enabling all children and young people to thrive.
- A Safe Birmingham: through a focus on making the city safer, safeguarding vulnerable citizens, increasing affordable housing, and tackling homelessness.

In addition, the proposal is aligned to the 2017 Homelessness Prevention Strategy.

7.2 Legal Implications

7.2.1 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 DLUHC 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.

7.3 Financial Implications

7.3.1 The additional £1.1m grant allocation for 2022/23 and the homelessness prevention activities proposed by the service will help reduce the budgetary pressures currently reported in temporary accommodation.

7.3.2 The funding will be put towards initiatives which reduce the pressure on Temporary Accommodation, either existing or new, but will not in itself cause any financial commitment beyond the value of the grant.

7.4 Procurement Implications (if required)

7.4.1 There are no procurement implications with the recommendations in this report. Any procurement required as a result of the proposed spend will be subject to separate reports and will be compliant with the Council's Procurement and Contract Governance Rules.

7.5 Human Resources Implications (if required)

7.5.1 Any recruitment processes will be undertaken in accordance with the Council's Recruitment and Selection policy. Any overtime or agency use will be undertaken in accordance with relevant policies and procedures.

7.6 Public Sector Equality Duty

7.6.1 An initial equality assessment has been prepared based upon available knowledge and information. There is no adverse impact. A copy is appended to the Report, signed and dated.

8 Environment Sustainability Assessment

8.1 An Environmental Sustainability Assessment is not required.

9 Background Documents

- 9.1 Letter to Local Authority Chief Executives, 30th November 2022 from Penny Hobman, Director of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

List of appendices accompanying this report:

Appendix 1 Equality Impact Assessment