

Chichester District Council

CABINET

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Homelessness Prevention and Relief Fund

1. Contacts

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Cabinet Member:

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2. Recommendation

2.1 That Cabinet:

2.1.1 approves the revised Homelessness Prevention and Relief policy at the Appendix which will supersede the existing Homelessness Prevention Fund policy

2.1.2 approves delegation to the Divisional Manager for Housing, and Housing Options Manager to approve payments under the policy

2.1.3 approves delegation to the Divisional Manager for Housing following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, Communications, Licensing and Events to make minor amendments to the policy as required

2.1.4 notes the remaining funding budget of £39,800

3. Background

3.1 In February 2016 the Homelessness Prevention Fund was established with a budget of £50,000 and with the objective to help prevent homelessness as a consequence of the then new welfare reforms.

3.2 In March 2019 the policy was reviewed and revised to specifically address cases where a significant housing related debt was preventing access to the Housing Register from those in temporary short stay accommodation ie bed and breakfast and Westward House. The purpose of the fund was to reduce the time households

spent in short stay housing as this was creating a 'bed blocking' situation. At this point the funding stood at £43,000.

- 3.3 It has always been a principle of the scheme that any funding provided via this scheme was on a grant basis rather than as a loan. This was for two reasons, firstly so as not to add further repayable debts to residents already in financial difficulties and to prevent complications from the Council acting as a money lender in these circumstances.
- 3.4 The current scheme has proved too restrictive in its approach and the number of conditions to comply with has meant only one grant has been awarded since March 2019 and the policy has been unable to achieve its objective.
- 3.5 The current policy is defined too narrowly so that it is not possible to assist rough sleepers or those who are homeless but do not have a relief or preventative duty owed.
- 3.6 The revised Homelessness Prevention and Relief Policy and funding is supportive to, and supported by the DHP policy (an allocation from central Government of £250,037 for 2020/21) and the service level agreement with Stonepillow to provide furniture packs to homeless households in the sum of £35,000 per annum via the Crisis Furniture Support Project.
- 3.7 The Community and Housing theme Covid Recovery Group has recently considered proposals to assist with the recovery for housing and in particular to support aspects which will help the service to access housing for homeless households. One of those was to improve the Homelessness Prevention Policy.

4. Outcomes to be Achieved

- 4.1 The revised policy is designed with the outcomes to prevent and relieve homelessness, to provide access to housing, help people to retain housing, reduce costs to the Council and enable a flexible person centred approach.
- 4.2 The policy fits within the Councils strategic housing priority and will deliver on several of the Councils key Housing Strategy objectives:
 - To provide support for those that need it.
 - To prevent homelessness through early intervention and support
 - To reduce the number of placements into nightly paid accommodation eg Bed and Breakfast
 - To tackle rough sleeping
 - To ensure housing is used effectively and is fit for purpose
- 4.3 The policy will have been successful if the aims in 4.1 above can be evidenced as having been delivered and there is an improvement in how many people the Council can assist to prevent or relieve their homelessness.

5. Proposal

- 5.1 The objectives of the revised policy are set out in the attached appendix. The principle of the approach is to create a flexible, bespoke, person centred approach on the basis of 'what matters is what works'.

5.2 If Cabinet is minded to agree the proposed policy it can be implemented quickly so as to enable maximum benefit to those who need help. Officers will develop a procedure to support the delivery of the policy. The relevant staff teams and partner agencies will be briefed. It is proposed that implementation would be with effect from 2nd January 2021.

6. Alternatives Considered

6.1 One option was to continue with the policy as it is currently set out however this does not extend the range of help which is needed to the range of people who need it and has also meant that very little of the budget has been spent in the last 20 months.

7. Resource and Legal Implications

7.1 The Homelessness Prevention and Relief Fund is an existing budget and will be managed by existing staff and there are no additional running costs to administer the use of this fund.

7.2 Payments are made to the creditor rather than direct to the resident.

7.3 The policy does not state a maximum award per household to allow flexibility but as a guideline it is anticipated that a total payment made under this scheme would generally not exceed £5k. The invest to save assessment works differently for different types of household eg the amount payable to prevent or relieve homelessness for a family of ten would be very different to that for a single person. The officer approving any request will therefore have the discretion to make payments over this level where it makes sense to do so.

8. Consultation

- a) Internal – Housing Advice Team, Housing Accommodation Team, Rough Sleeper Team, legal and finance colleagues.
- b) External – Stonepillow have given their support to the proposal and consider it will be a valuable tool in helping rough sleepers to move out of hostel or supported accommodation and into a longer term home. It will also mean that more of their clients will be able to access the Councils Housing Register.
- c) Members – the Covid Community and Housing Recovery Group were consulted on the principles of a revised policy and endorsed a more flexible invest to save approach.

9. Community Impact and Corporate Risks

9.1 The resource is limited to the remaining funds in the budget (£39,800) and cannot assist everyone who may need it. There is a need to prioritise those who most need the help or where there is the most impact. Discretion is key to making this policy work effectively. The fund has lasted longer than originally anticipated back in 2016

and the team are confident that they can help a number of different people in different situations.

9.2 The general impact on the community is a positive one for every person we can help avoid or relieve homelessness, particularly those who are more visible for example rough sleepers

10. Other Implications

	Yes	No
Crime and Disorder - aiming for a positive impact as those in debt and with significant housing problems can feel forced into behaviour to obtain money/incomes which may become criminal and/or anti-social.	x	
Biodiversity and Climate Change Mitigation		x
Human Rights and Equality Impact - the revisions to this policy will mean additional residents can be helped and in different ways so it will positively impact on additional groups of people.	x	
Safeguarding and Early Help - as with other implications in this section, safeguarding can be greatly exacerbated for families with debt and housing problems.	x	
General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) – personal data will be processed in order to assess applications and to make payments as required, this will be undertaken in line with the Councils data processing statement and the GDPR legislation.	x	
Health and Wellbeing – a positive impact as those in debt face significant health challenges particularly for their mental health due to the constant worry and lack of hope regarding their debts and housing situation.	x	
Other (please specify)		

11. Appendix

11.1 Appendix – Homelessness Prevention and Relief Policy document