

Report to the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee



Report reference: **FPM-022-2016/17**
Date of meeting: **19 January 2017**

**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: **Housing**

Subject: **Homelessness Initiatives**

Responsible Officer: **Roger Wilson (01992 564419)**

Democratic Services Officer: **Rebecca Perrin (01992 564532)**

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

(1) That, subject to the views of the Communities Select Committee (to be reported orally) a bid be made for CSB funding of £32,000 per annum for the appointment of 1 FTE additional Grade 6 Homelessness Prevention Officer in order to deal with the requirements of the expected Homelessness Reduction Act and the additional workload generally due to increasing homelessness pressures;

(2) That, subject to the views of the Communities Select Committee (to be reported orally), the existing Invest to Save Funding of £90,000 now be used for providing applicants with a rental loan of 4 weeks rent to meet the costs of rent in advance when securing accommodation in the private rented sector and/or a landlord deposit in accordance with LHA rates (lodged with a third party by the landlord) with applicants being required to repay loans on an interest free basis over 36 months, thereby recycling the budget to enable others to benefit from the Scheme in the future;

(3) That, subject to the views of the Communities Select Committee (to be reported orally), a CSB Growth Bid of £9,000 per annum from 2017/2018 is made to fund an external company to undertake Homelessness Reviews; and

(4) That, subject to the views of the Communities Select Committee (to be reported orally), a CSB Growth Bid of £2,500 per annum is made from 2017/2018 to fund an external company to provide specialist services to rough sleepers.

Executive Summary:

At its meeting on 17 January 2017, the Communities Select Committee was asked by the Housing Portfolio Holder as part of their Work Programme to consider various mitigation strategies in order to deal with the current and future increasing pressures due to the rise in homelessness. A copy of the report to the Select Committee is attached as an Appendix.

The Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee is asked to consider the Select Committee's recommendations (to be reported orally) taking into account the issues set out in this report and the attached report to the Communities Select Committee.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To ensure that the Council is prepared for the increased pressures due to homelessness and can respond fully to the requirements of the expected Homelessness Reduction Act in the New Year.

Other Options for Action:

1. Not to agree the appointment of 1 FTE additional Grade 6 Homelessness Prevention Officer in order to deal with the requirements of the expected Homelessness Reduction Act and the additional workload generally due to the increasing homelessness pressures.
2. To agree to the appointment of 1 0.5 FTE Grade 6 Homelessness Prevention Officer in order to assist in dealing with the requirements of the expected Homelessness Reduction Act and the additional workload generally due to the increasing homelessness pressures.
3. Not to agree the additional budget of £9,000 for external assistance with statutory homelessness reviews.
4. Not to agree that the existing Invest to Save Funding of £90,000 now be used for providing applicants with a rental loan of 4 weeks rent to meet the costs of rent in advance when securing accommodation in the private rented sector and/or a landlord deposit in accordance with LHA rates (lodged with a third party by the landlord) with applicants being required to repay loans on an interest free basis over an increased period of 36 months and to continue with the current unworkable arrangements whereby landlord deposits are provided held by a third party on behalf of the Council.
5. To agree a different use for the budget set out at Paragraph 4 above.

Report:

Background

1. At its meeting on 17 January 2017, the Communities Select Committee was asked by the Housing Portfolio Holder as part of their Work Programme to consider various mitigation strategies in order to deal with the current and future increasing pressures due to the rise in homelessness. A copy of the report to the Select Committee is attached as an Appendix.
2. As can be seen, the Council has a very effective Homelessness Prevention Service, comprising 6 FTE Homelessness Prevention Officers who provide a comprehensive service with a range of initiatives at their disposal to assist them with resolving the housing difficulties of clients they are seeking to serve.
3. The increasing difficulties of dealing with homelessness can be summarised as follows:
 - The Council's homeless persons' hostel at Norway House, North Weald and Hemnall House, Epping is full most of the time;
 - The Housing Association Leasing Direct (HALD) Scheme originally provided 20 units of accommodation for our homeless applicants. However, as private landlords are becoming increasingly reluctant to lease their properties in this way, Genesis now only has 15 units of accommodation, all of which are now occupied;
 - The Council also provides bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodation for predominantly single homeless applicants. The numbers placed in B&B has increased from single figures to around 20-25 applicants;

- In recent months, due to the lack of temporary and interim accommodation, up to 5 families have been placed in B&B which is very costly and if for more than 6 weeks unlawful;
- Gross expenditure on B&B has increased from £113,000 in 2013/14 to £237,000 in 2015/16; taking into account Housing Benefit Subsidy received from Government the net cost to the general Fund was £62,561 in 2013/14 and £114,273 in 2015/16;
- Hotels used for B&B have been full due to placements being made at the Hotels by other Councils. This has left officers with no option other than to use other Hotels in accordance with the delegated authority granted to the Director of Communities;
- Due to the increasing pressure on homelessness, the Council currently has 14 homeless families placed in its own housing stock on non-secure tenancies until their cases are resolved, with the figure is likely to increase;
- Following the agreement of the Cabinet that the Invest to Save funding would be provided, but only for landlord deposits held by a third party as these were more likely to be recovered, this has proven difficult to operate for the reasons set out in the attached report and therefore none of the budget has been able to be used;
- London boroughs are placing their homeless applicants in private rented accommodation in our District paying landlords generous cash incentive which makes it difficult for the Council to discharge its duty in this way;
- The Homelessness Reduction Bill is expected to become law in 2017 and will place considerable additional duties on the Council to prevent and reduce homelessness; and
- The number of Statutory Homelessness Reviews are increasing placing a burden on senior officers.

4. In order to combat the increasing pressures on the homelessness service the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee is asked to consider the recommendations of the Communities Select Committee (to be reported orally), and if recommended, to approve a bid for CSB funding of £32,000 for the appointment of 1 FTE additional Grade 6 Homelessness Prevention Officer and £9,000 for external assistance with statutory homelessness reviews in order to deal with the requirements of the expected Homelessness Reduction Act and the additional workload generally due to the increasing homelessness pressures.

5. In addition, the Committee is asked to consider the recommendations of the Communities Select Committee and if recommended to agree that the existing Invest to Save Funding of £90,000 now be used for providing applicants with a rental loan of 4 weeks rent when securing accommodation in the private rented sector and/or a landlord deposit in accordance with LHA rates (lodged with a third party by the landlord) with applicants being required to repay loans on an interest free basis over 36 months, thereby re-cycling the budget to enable others to benefit from the Scheme in the future.

6. Furthermore, the Committee is asked to consider the recommendations of the Communities Select Committee and if recommended agree that, a CSB Growth Bid of £2,500 per annum is made from 2017/2018 to fund an external company to provide specialist services to rough sleepers.

Resource Implications: As set out in the Recommendations

Legal and Governance Implications: None

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications: None

Consultation Undertaken: None

Background Papers: Report of the Communities Select Committee dated 17 January 2017 attached Homelessness Strategy

Risk Management: If the recommendations are not agreed the Homelessness Prevention Team would be too stretched to deal with the future challenges presented to the Council in dealing with homelessness. In addition, if the Council does not offer rental loans under the Invest to Save Funding then this could result in increased numbers being placed in costly bed and breakfast and other accommodation with missed opportunities to making savings. In addition, by employing the services of an external company to undertake Statutory Homelessness Reviews this will free up much needed time for senior officers which could be used to tackle the increasing work on homelessness. Furthermore, providing a specialist service to rough sleepers in the District will reduce the risk of any harm to this client group.

Due Regard Record

This page shows **which groups of people are affected** by the subject of this report. It sets out **how they are affected** and how any **unlawful discrimination** they experience can be eliminated. It also includes information about how **access to the service(s)** subject to this report can be improved for the different groups of people; and how they can be assisted to **understand each other better** as a result of the subject of this report.

S149 Equality Act 2010 requires that due regard must be paid to this information when considering the subject of this report.

Providing additional resources in order to combat the problems of homelessness in the District will assist all groups who are threatened with homelessness giving them better access to a currently overstretched service. No discrimination issues have been identified.