

Cabinet - 8 February 2012

Group funding to prevent homelessness

Portfolio:	Councillor Adrian Andrew, Deputy Leader, Regeneration
Service:	Housing Services
Wards:	All
Key decision:	Yes
Forward plan:	No – the Chair of Regeneration Scrutiny Panel was notified accordingly

1. Summary

In December 2011, the Housing and Local Government Minister announced that £20 million would be made available through designated lead local authorities to assist with the prevention of homelessness. It has been proposed by the Department for Communities & Local Government (DCLG) that Walsall Council act as the lead authority for the West Midlands and Warwickshire grouping, mirroring arrangements that were put in place for the initial rough sleeping funding announced earlier this year.

This report seeks approval for Walsall Council to be the Accountable Body for an estimated £1.1 million funding to be allocated to the West Midlands and Warwickshire local authority grouping. This will be done in accordance with the Accountable Body Protocol.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Council be recommended to give approval for Walsall Council to be Accountable Body for the West Midlands and Warwickshire grouping.
- 2.2 That Authority be delegated to the Executive Director for Regeneration to negotiate and agree any proposed terms of the funding with the Department for Communities & Local Government together with the agreements with the West Midlands and Warwickshire grouping.
- 2.2 That a further report be submitted to Cabinet confirming the funding allocation received.

3. Report detail

3.1 In December 2011, The Housing and Local Government Minister announced a £20 million fund to assist with the prevention of homelessness. This funding is being administered by the Department for Communities & Local Government (DCLG) and will be made available through designated lead authorities.

3.2 Walsall was approached by DCLG on 21 December 2011 to act as the lead authority for the West Midlands and Warwickshire for the distribution of an estimated £1.1m new homelessness funding. The approach is a welcome one and reflective of the credibility built up by the Authority in tackling homelessness over recent years and its developing relationship with DCLG.

3.3 DCLG's stated expectations are that Walsall will act as lead authority and ensure that funding is used to 'bolster' the front line provision across the West Midlands and Warwickshire grouping to prevent homelessness for all households.

3.4 DCLG requested that Walsall confirm:

- A willingness to act as lead authority;
- An ability to take any allocated funding through the financial year barrier;
- Confirmation that the funding will be used for the grouping to prevent homelessness.

3.5 Although the exact amount of funding and expectations remain subject to ministerial approval and will be confirmed in writing at a later date, the initial approach from DCLG to Walsall gave the following guidance on the expectations of the grouping and the likely outputs expected from the funding:

- Developing access routes into the private sector;
- Joint working between internal services (Housing Benefit, Children's Services) and external services (voluntary sector, registered providers);
- Joining up services across grouping and district partnerships;
- Sufficient front line resources to offer advice and assistance to all single homeless households;
- Pathways and move on provision through supported accommodation;
- Emergency options for all homeless households – respite, wayfarers provision;
- Shared good practice examples across the grouping;
- Improved individual prevention "offers" for all applicants approaching for assistance ensuring a single service offer across all agencies – to include a comprehensive advice and assistance letter to all applicants approaching the service;
- No wrong door policy (ensure all partners are working together and the applicant only has to approach one agency for all available support);
- Ensure services are appropriately marketed and sign posted including ensuring front line prevention service is cast as far away from statutory service as possible;
- Produce an action plan and quarterly updates to the specialist advisor to include targets and outcomes (a template will be provided).

4. Council priorities

Activities and interventions linked to preventing and tackling homelessness will support Council priorities and contribute to the Council's shared vision for the Borough.

The health and well being of households who are homeless and those living with the threat of homelessness will be significantly improved by reducing the incidence of homelessness as will the stability of neighbourhoods and communities.

5. Risk management

5.1 A risk matrix and exit strategy have been completed and submitted to the Grants Co-ordinator, and risk will be mitigated by following the guidance in the Council's Grants Manual. The Accountable Officer for this funding will be the Head of Housing within Housing Services. The main risks are:

5.2 Risk 1

Clawback of funding in event of non compliance with homeless prevention grant conditions by Walsall or any of the partners.

Mitigation: Agree governance and legal structures between the main partners (based on existing regional homelessness working arrangements).

A robust steering group and governance structure is already in place (the West Midlands Regional Homeless Forum) to manage the fund in strict compliance with funding conditions.

Legal Agreements to be put in place with other West Midlands and Warwickshire "grouping" Local Authorities to cover Walsall in the event that funding is used in the other Local Authorities in a non compliant way.

5.3 Risk 2

The operational burden of being Accountable Body – unable to cover within existing resources.

Mitigation: Appoint a Programme Manager to oversee the development and delivery of the programme, using £50,000 top sliced from DCLG funding.

6. Financial implications

6.1 Funding received will be entered onto the Council's grant register and the protocol for Walsall Council to act as Accountable Body approved by Cabinet on 17 March 2010 will be followed at all times

- 6.2 As with any grant funding, it is anticipated that there will be a clawback requirement if the grant is not used in accordance with the funding conditions and / or the stated outputs are not delivered. All organisations will need to enter into legally binding agreements with Walsall Council governing the use of the Homeless prevention funds and including clawback provisions.
- 6.3 There is no requirement for any financial contribution from Walsall Council or the other authorities to provide match funding.
- 6.4 There will be costs associated with administering the fund and the production of any necessary legal agreements that are made with the other West Midlands and Warwickshire local authorities. A representative from DCLG has confirmed that funding can be used to cover all such reasonable administration costs.
- 6.5 The process for allocating funds within the West Midlands and Warwickshire local authorities has yet to be determined. It is proposed that funding is allocated by Walsall Council following recommendation by the Regional Homelessness Implementation Group.

7. Legal implications

- 7.1 The Council is often seen by regional and national funding providers as the logical organisation through which to further distribute funds locally. The accountable body's purpose is to manage funding it receives by ensuring robust procedures are in place for its use, expenditure and monitoring to minimise any risk or clawback.
- 7.2 There will need to be a legal process in place to cover Walsall as the Accountable Body. It is anticipated that individual grant agreements will be issued on a project / scheme basis made with other local authorities within the West Midlands and Warwickshire grouping. The purpose of these legal agreements will be to minimise clawback risk to Walsall, if the other local authorities do not abide by the funding conditions set by the grantor. It is anticipated that there will be a period of 2 months of due diligence work / checks following confirmation of the funding. The Council will not enter into any contractual arrangements with the other local authorities until this work has been completed.
- 7.3 Where appropriate compliance with the Councils Contract and Financial Rules, Grants Manual, Partnership Toolkit and Accountable Body Protocol will have been undertaken.

8. Property implications

There are no specific property implications.

9. Staffing implications

DCLG has confirmed that Group Homeless Prevention Funding can be utilised to cover reasonable administration costs associated with the programme and that these can cover the costs of a dedicated Programme Manager. It is therefore proposed that the Council appoint a Programme Manager to oversee the development and delivery of the programme.

10. Equality implications

A process to determine where the funding would be allocated has yet to be agreed. An equality impact assessment will be carried out at that time.

11. Consultation

Officers from West Midlands and Warwickshire local authorities, and the chair of the West Midlands Regional Homeless Forum have been contacted and are supportive.

Background papers

Protocol for Walsall Council to act as Accountable Body

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