

Agenda Item IMD8

INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION

REFERENCE IMD: IMD 2022/08

TITLE	Homelessness Prevention Grant (2023/24 onwards) Consultation Response
DECISION TO BE MADE BY	Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Housing - Stephen Conway
DATE, MEETING ROOM and TIME	22 August 2022 Council Chamber at 12:30pm
WARD	None Specific;
DIRECTOR / KEY OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Steve Moore

PURPOSE OF REPORT (Inc Strategic Outcomes)

To agree on Wokingham Borough Council's response to the Government's Homelessness Prevention Grant consultation for 2023/24 onwards, for submission by 26th August 2022. This consultation seeks feedback from local authorities and other relevant stakeholders regarding the Government's approach to the Homelessness Prevention Grant for the year 2023/24 onwards.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive Member for Housing authorises Wokingham Borough Council to respond to the Government's Homelessness Prevention Grant consultation for 2023/24 onwards, as set out in appendix 1 of the report.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

This report summarises the response which Wokingham Borough Council intends to submit to central government through its Homelessness Prevention Grant consultation. This response focuses on suggesting a way of allocating funding which accurately reflects the significant homelessness pressures in Wokingham Borough and which also recognizes (in the allocations formula) the numbers associated with early intervention success as well as private rented sector data.

Background

The Government's Homelessness Prevention Grant is intended to provide funding to local authorities to provide services which prevent and tackle homelessness in their local area. Wokingham Borough Council previously received an allocation of the grant for the year 2022/2023, and the consultation currently open is seeking views on the future of the grant from the year 2023/2024 onwards. The consultation is open till 26th August, and the Council proposes to submit a response to central government to reflect its experience relating to homelessness and funding pressures. This will ensure that the views of Wokingham Borough Council are conveyed to the Government regarding the future of this grant, in the light of ongoing work at the council to tackle homelessness, including early intervention where possible.

Business Case (including Analysis of Issues)

Given rising numbers of homelessness presentations and high demand for temporary accommodation in Wokingham Borough, it was proposed that Wokingham Borough Council should submit a consultation response to the Government giving the views and recommendations of WBC on the Homelessness Prevention Grant allocations for 2023 onwards. The Council's consultation response gives views which are based on the Council's experiences, both in terms of the demand on services and the successes of the Council in tackling the issue so far through early intervention and its own housing stock. The proposal for submission provides responses to those parts of the Government's consultation which are most pertinent for Wokingham Borough Council to submit views on, based on its experiences.

The Council's response to the Government's consultation focuses on the first section of the consultation, this being proposed amendments to the funding formula for the grant from 2023/24 onwards. This section will impact the Council the most, as the decision on a funding formula will determine how much Homelessness Prevention funding is received by WBC going forwards. WBC's proposed response answers questions which are posed, before giving comments on the reasoning behind its responses and making recommendations.

Among these comments, some key points which WBC's proposed consultation response intends to convey relate to the significant demand experienced in relation to homelessness presentations, which continues at the level seen during the pandemic, whereas formulae are based on pre-pandemic data; the nature of the homelessness presentation cases as varied and complex, which isn't fully reflected in the possible allocations formulae proposed by the Government; and the additional need to sustain tenancies when other local authorities (e.g. London Councils) place their residents into Wokingham Borough.

There is also a focus on the fact that the allocation formulae (as proposed by the Government) doesn't take into account early intervention data/successes, which mean that homelessness presentations in Wokingham aren't all taken into account as they do not involve a private rented sector end point. Therefore, local authorities are penalized in their grant allocation if they have taken active early prevention steps, as the existence of these presentations isn't included in the numbers used in the formula to calculate the grant allocations. The proposed consultation response recommends that H-CLIC (Homelessness Case Level Information Collection) data records this early prevention work in future.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	N/A (see below)	N/A	
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A	N/A	
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A	N/A	

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

The purpose of submitting a consultation response, as proposed in the first enclosure to this report, is to put forward to Government the views of Wokingham Borough Council on what the future of the Homelessness Prevention Grant should look like. Any financial implications of the recommendation are entirely dependent on whether central government chooses to adjust the method of allocations for the grant as a result of WBC submitting its views. There is no certainty that the views/recommendations of WBC will be reflected in the final decisions, however, any implications of our recommendation being taken up by central government would be positive financially for the Council. This is because our recommendations would mean an increase in funding allocation for WBC.

Cross-Council Implications

The decision to submit this consultation response to central government could have a positive impact on other related Council services, if it results in a greater funding allocation for Wokingham Borough based on the reasoning given in the consultation response proposal. This is because the funding pressure relating to homelessness and temporary accommodation would be alleviated to an extent, this extent being dependent on the specific increase in funding.

Public Sector Equality Duty

As part of this decision, due regard has been taken to the Public Sector Equality Duty. The equalities implications of the recommendation were discussed and an Initial Equality Impact Assessment document has been completed accordingly. A full equalities assessment is not required, due to the fact that the implications of the recommendation on the different groups with protected characteristics – in the event where our suggestions are implemented – would be either positive or neutral in each case.

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Director – Resources and Assets	No comment received.
Monitoring Officer	No specific comments.
Leader of the Council	No comment received.

List of Background Papers
Proposed Homelessness Prevention Grant consultation response – Enclosure 1 Initial Equality Impact Assessment – Enclosure 2

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