

Decision Maker: EXECUTIVE

Date: For Pre-Decision Scrutiny by the Renewal, Recreation and Housing Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee on Thursday 15 June 2023

Decision Type: Non-Urgent Executive Key

Title: HOUSING OPTIONS & PREVENTION OF HOMELESSNESS GRANT DRAWDOWN

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Chief Officer: Sara Bowrey - Director of Housing, Planning and Regeneration

Ward: All Wards

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 The Council's Housing Department has a statutory obligation to provide advice and information to all residents, to prevent or relieve their homelessness in line with the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
- 1.2 The Council receives Homelessness Prevention Grant funding from the Department of Levelling Up, Homes and Communities (DLUHC) to assist it in undertaking these duties, including specialist funding for vulnerable groups within the local authority region. In previous years, this funding has been received on an annual basis; however, in this round, the Council has been allocated £3.75m in funding for 2023/24 and a further £3.78m for 2024/25. Included within this funding is a dedicated Domestic Abuse Allocation of £69k for 2023/24 and a further £100k for 2024/25.
- The Council has also been allocated up to £148k funding per annum for 2023/24 and 2024/25 for the Accommodation for the Ex-Offenders Programme (AFEO) and in addition, £428k for Rough Sleeping Initiative 5 funding for 2023/24.
- 1.3 This report sets out the breakdown of the pots of DLUHC homelessness funding received, how it will be utilised through initiatives and schemes to prevent homelessness, and how it will enhance the homelessness service offered to those fleeing domestic.
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2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 2.1 The Executive is requested to approve the drawing down and spend of the:
- Increase in Homelessness Prevention Grant for 2023/24 of £360k.

- ii. The Accommodation for the Ex-Offenders Scheme grant funding of up to £148k per annum for 2023/24 and 2024/25
- iii. The Rough Sleeping Initiative 5 (2023-24) grant funding of up to £428k.

2.2 To note that the report sets out the planned allocation of resources for the above three Grants..

Impact on Vulnerable Adults and Children

1. Summary of Impact:
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Transformation Policy

1. Policy Status: Existing Policy:
 2. Making Bromley Even Better Priority :
For adults and older people to enjoy fulfilled and successful lives in Bromley, ageing well, retaining independence and making choices.
For people to make their homes in Bromley and for business, enterprise and the third sector to prosper.
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Financial

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1. Cost of proposal: £893k (£169k Domestic Abuse, £296k Accommodation for Ex-Offenders & £428k Rough Sleeping Initiative)
 2. Ongoing costs: Recurring Cost: N/A
 3. Budget head/performance centre: Operational Housing
 4. Total current budget for this head: £7,262k
 5. Source of funding: Department of Levelling Up, Homes and Communities.
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Personnel

1. Number of staff (current and additional): 6 Officers Fixed Term/Secondment
 2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours:
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Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Statutory Requirement:
 2. Call-in: Applicable: Executive Decision
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Procurement

1. Summary of Procurement Implications:
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Property

1. Summary of Property Implications: N/A
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Carbon Reduction and Social Value

1. Summary of Carbon Reduction/Sustainability Implications: N/A
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Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users or customers (current and projected):

The Council provides frontline homelessness services from the Civic Centre, by phone and email, to residents each weekday and emergency out-of-hours services each evening, weekend and bank holiday. In 2022/23, the Housing Options and Support Service received

3165 approaches from households needing housing advice and support. Of these, 1719 households went on to receive a full homelessness assessment. This number is predicted to rise with the current economic crisis, high rents in the private rented sector and the increased mortgage/lending rates.

2. Impact Assessments: Vulnerable Adults and Children

The legislation pertaining to homelessness requires appropriate support and suitable accommodation to be provided to vulnerable people and households with children, at risk of homelessness. This funding allows advice, homelessness assessments and support to be provided to these households, including making referrals for additional support to colleagues in other departments including social care, and other public and voluntary sector organisations. Approx 1,500 families approached the Housing Options and Support service in 2022/23. Funding these services for vulnerable adults and families plays a key part within the Council's overall provision of homeless intervention, prevention and accommodation services.

Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? Not Applicable
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments: N/A

3. COMMENTARY

The Homelessness Prevention Grant 2023-25

- 3.1.1 The Homelessness Prevention Grant is provided to each local authority to work with residents needing housing advice or assistance. This includes undertaking homelessness assessments and the provision of accommodation where customers are deemed to be in priority need. The grant also funds a range of housing options, which help the Officers prevent or relieve homelessness for residents approaching the Council. Bromley has received a Homelessness Prevention Grant for 2023/24 of £3.75m and £3.78m for 2024/25.
- 3.1.2 Bromley continues to face increased homelessness and the associated costs, particularly concerning accommodation placements for homeless families. On the 31 March 2023, the Council had 1547 households in temporary accommodation and 2548 on the Housing Register evidence of the housing need within the borough.
- 3.1.3 Under section 179 (1) of the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, authorities must provide information and advice on:
- Preventing homelessness.
 - Securing accommodation when homeless.
 - The rights of people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, and the duties of the authority.
 - Any help that is available from the authority or anyone else for people in the authority's district who are homeless or may become homeless and, how to access that help.
- 3.1.4 The Homelessness Prevention Grant provides financial support to allow the Council to deliver homeless services within the local authority area. The Housing Options and Support Service also offers outreach within excellent partnership arrangements, including the co-location of services with Bromley Homeless, HMP Probation Services, Women in Prisons and Green Parks House. Our work through this funding will continue to support vulnerable people who are in housing need. They will also be assisted by our Support and Resettlement and Money Advice teams, whose work is crucial in reducing the impact of homelessness.
- 3.1.5 During 2022/23, the Housing Options and Support Service prevented and relieved homelessness for 380 households and accepted a homelessness duty to 589. With the increase of staffing resources and new housing options, the prevention and relief performance outcomes are expected to rise, which will assist in reducing the number of homelessness acceptances.

3.2. Domestic Abuse Allocation

- 3.2.1 Within the DLUHC Homelessness Prevention Grant provision is a Domestic Abuse Allocation of Allocation of £69k for 2023/24, and a further £100k for 2024/25. The Department would like to work with Standing Together to improve the Council's response to those fleeing domestic abuse and to gain DAHA accreditation.
- 3.2.2 Standing Together is a national charity bringing communities together to end domestic abuse. In pioneering the Coordinated Community Response (CCR) to domestic abuse in the UK, their aim is for organisations and agencies to work in partnership to identify and effectively respond to domestic abuse. (These organisations and agencies include the police, criminal justice partners, local authorities, social services, healthcare workers, faith communities, charities and housing services and providing.)

3.2.3 Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA)

In 2014 Standing Together, in partnership with two housing associations - Gentoo Group and Peabody created the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA), to improve how the housing sector responds to domestic abuse. They set up an accreditation process as a nationally recognised charter mark that has been endorsed by central government.

3.2.4 DAHA Framework details standards in eight priority areas, which the Housing Department will engage with, working with internal and external partners:

1. Policies & Procedures
2. Survivor-led case management
3. Publicity & awareness raising
4. Safety-led support
5. Perpetrator accountability
6. Intersectional & anti-racist practice
7. Staff development & support
8. Partnership & collaboration.

The Housing Department will implement practices, systems and policies to ensure they meet each of these standards before applying for accreditation. The Housing Department will be assigned a dedicated DAHA Officer, from Standing Together who will guide and assist us through the accreditation process.

3.2.5 The Department propose to appoint a fixed term Project Officer to lead on this project for 2 years, working alongside managers and officers across the Council. The post and DAHA accreditation and assessment fees will be funded from the Domestic Abuse Act - new burdens 2023 - 2025 funding and additional funding from the Homelessness Prevention Grant.

3.2.6. Accreditation and Assessment Fees

The DAHA accreditation membership annual fee for 2023/2024 will be £1,500 + VAT £300 = **£1800. This will be paid annually.**

The DAHA assessment fee will be **£5000.00**, which will be paid in advance.

Year	Domestic Abuse Allocations funding	DAHA Fee and funding	Project Officer	Remainder
2023/24	£69,000	£1,800	£47,683	£20,517
2024/25	£100,000	£6,800 (Includes £5,000 assessment fee)	£48,878	£44,322

The Housing Department wish to seek agreement to proceed with recruiting a Project Officer and to apply to undertake the DAHA accreditation. The fixed term post, (if not awarded as an internal secondment) will be subject to redundancy due to the duration of the contract. Any redundancy payments will be payable from the the Domestic Abuse Act - new burdens funding. The remainder of the funding (£64k across two years) will be used as a resource to undertake any work or initiatives required to achieve the accreditation and to raise awareness of domestic abuse across the borough.

The outcome for the Council will be more than financial, reducing the cost for housing and the public purse. The DAHA process also improves the quality of services for individuals approaching the Council due to domestic abuse. We want to ensure the services are joined up and delivered in an empathetic and safe manner, utilising all the resources available to us as a local authority. The accreditation will allow residents to know the breadth of our work, ensure services are empathetic and robust in tackling domestic abuse, in line with good practice.

The Accommodation for Ex-Offenders Programme

3.3.1 The aim of the Accommodation for Ex-Offenders programme (AFEO) is to increase access to new private rented sector tenancies for ex-offenders who are, or are at risk of becoming, homeless. The project is intended to:

- Reduce the number of homeless prison leavers sleeping rough on release.
- For prison leavers owed a homelessness duty, increase the proportion that secure a PRS tenancy as their outcome, with every individual being in settled accommodation with a minimum expected tenancy length of 12 months.
- Increase in the number of offenders that are in settled accommodation 3-months post release.

3.3.2 The Accommodation for Ex-Offenders programme (AFEO) was first introduced in July 2021 to support homeless prison leavers to access the private rented sector, reducing the chances of this cohort rough sleeping and reoffending. The new funding is available from April 2023 until March 2025 and is intended to build on the progress already made, with the ambition of supporting ex-offenders into sustainable accommodation with a reasonable expected tenancy length of 12 months, wherever possible.

3.3.3 Bromley Council bid for the second phase of the AFEO. The Council has been allocated up to £296,257 funding across the two year period. The proposed spend for the funding is within the table below:

	Accommodation for Ex-Offenders Funding	2023-24 (Year 1)	2024-25 (Year 2)
Fixed costs	Project Support Officer x 1 Fixed Term post Private Rented Sector Officer x 1 Fixed Term post	£90,787	£90,787
Flexible costs	Landlord Incentive Package. £114,684 *This includes the Help2 Rent Insurance Scheme	£57,342	£57,342
	Total	£148,129	£148,129

The following performance outcomes, have been agreed:

30 new tenancies for ex-offenders by end of March 2024
 A further 30 new tenancies by end of March 2025
A total number of 60 tenancies by end of March 2025.

3.3.4 DLUHC schedules payments each year financial year of up to £148,129, split across two payments (April and November), based on the performance outcomes in Council in its quarterly returns. DLUHC will pay the fixed costs within the scheme £181,573 at six-monthly intervals. The variable costs will only be awarded against the successful PRS outcomes and the associated spending by the Department in the previous period.

Challenges to delivering the scheme include attracting landlords willing to accept ex-offenders as tenants. The Council have an obligation to inform the landlord of the tenant's background; often, this can lead to them not being successful in acquiring a suitable property.

Procurement within the borough is increasingly complex due to high rents within a competitive private rented sector market. In Phase 2, we propose to pilot a landlord insurance scheme as an incentive to landlords when asking them to consider ex-offenders as prospective tenants. The Help2 Rent insurance scheme costs, on average, £331 per property, and the Department proposes piloting up to 20 insurance bonds with landlords using this new initiative. At the same time, we plan to review our procurement methods to ensure we maximise the housing options and supply available to re-house this cohort.

3.3.5 The Help2Rent Insurance scheme offers the following benefits to landlords:

- Legal expenses cover up to £25k
- Malicious damages cover up to £5k
- Up to 12 months' rent arrears cover (up to a maximum rent of £2500 pcm)
- £330 of mediation cover
- Underwriter is Royal Sun Alliance
- If a landlord makes a claim it will go straight to the insurance company rather than to the council
- No tenant referencing required
- Help2rent have a PRS team that procure properties at LHA and market on their website, and we are able to invite our clients to register with them to seek PRS.

The Rough Sleeping Initiative 5 Tranche (2023-24 payment)

3.4 The Council receives grant funding from the Department of Levelling Up, Homes and Communities (DLUHC) to enable it to undertake work with to tackle rough sleeping. Following a bid round, the Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI) funding has been allocated to each local authority for a 3 year period. This is the second year of the funding, DLUHC will make payment of £428,111 in two 6 monthly, tranche payments. The funding is ring fenced for Rough Sleeping Initiative services and will be spent on initiatives, resources and staffing as detailed in the table below. Staff will be recruited either by LBB or through a partner agency adhering to procurement rules. All fixed term posts, (which are not awarded as an internal secondment) will be subject to redundancy due to the duration of the contract. Any redundancy payments will be payable from the RSI grant funding.

	2023/24
Rough Sleeping Initiative Funding Award	£428,111
Employment Support Officer (ETE)	£47,256
Support & Resettlement Officer	£43,770
Rough Sleeping Team (Co-ordinator, and support workers)	£85,505
Private Rented Sector Incentives	£100,000
Personalisation Fund	£3,750
Flexible Surge Funding	£120,000
Tenancy Starter Fund	£10,000
Tenancy Sustainment fund	£17,830

3.5 It is proposed that the Council accept the DLUHC Homelessness Prevention Grant, RSI-5 and the AFEO funding to enable the provision of a range of services and housing options to vulnerable residents to prevent or relieve homelessness and to fulfil its statutory duty.

4. PERSONNEL CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 Currently there are 7 officers employed on fixed term contracts in the service.

The Fixed-term Employees (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2002 prevent fixed-term employees being treated less favourably than permanent employees.

The ending of a fixed term contract is a dismissal in law and therefore if the grant funding was to cease, there could be redundancy implications if the employees have more than 2 years service. This would be managed in line with the Council's HR procedures for managing change which include the requirement to mitigate redundancies and seek suitable redeployment across the Council.

5. PROCUREMENT CONSIDERATIONS

5.1 This report primarily concerns draw down of grant. Any procurement arising will be subject to the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

5.2 The Corporate Procurement Team will be consulted on the specifics of any procurement arising.

6. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

6.1 This report details the proposed spend of three housing grants totalling £893k as set out below:

	2023/24	2024/25	Total
	£'000	£'000	£'000
Domestic Abuse funding	69	100	169
Accommodation for Ex-Offenders	148	148	296
Rough Sleeping Initiative	428		428
	645	248	893

6.2 The 2023/24 budget already includes a sum of £3,387k for the Homelessness Prevention Grant which is ringfenced for the following principles:

- To fully enforce the Homelessness Reduction Act and contribute to ending rough sleeping by increasing activity to prevent single homelessness.
- Reduce family temporary accommodation numbers through maximising family homelessness prevention and reduce the use of unsuitable B&Bs for families.
- Ensure financial viability of services by contributing to the costs of statutory duties, including implementing the Homelessness Reduction Act and supporting with the costs of temporary accommodation.

The final allocation of £3,747k is therefore an increase of £360k, and it is requested that this is drawn down to the housing budget, with £69k allocated for Domestic Abuse work in line with the grant allocation (increasing to £100k in 2024/25), and the remainder of £291k used to offset increased temporary accommodation pressures.

6.3 The Accommodation for Ex-Offenders grant is ringfenced for spend detailed in the Council’s application, and the Rough Sleeping Initiative grant is ringfenced for the providing Rough Sleeping Initiative funded services that are approved by DLUHC.

6.4 Details of the proposed spend are summarised in the table below:

	2023/24	2024/25	Total
	£'000	£'000	£'000
<u>Domestic Abuse</u>			
DAHA accreditation	2	7	9
Staffing (1 FTE)	47	49	96
Raising awareness/other initiatives	20	44	64
	69	100	169
<u>Accommodation for Ex-Offenders</u>			
Staffing (2 FTEs)	91	91	182
Landlord incentives	57	57	114
	148	148	296
<u>Rough Sleeping Initiative</u>			
Staffing (4 FTEs)	176		176
PRS incentives	100		100
Personalisation	4		4
Surge funding	120		120
Tenancy starter fund	10		10
Tenancy sustainment	18		18
	428	0	428
Total	645	248	893

7. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

7.1 This report requests the Executive approve the drawing down and spend of three grants as detailed in the main body of this report.

7.2 Under the Housing Act 1985 Section 1 (1), the Council is the Local Housing Authority. As such, the Council’s homelessness duties are contained within the Housing Act 1996, Part 7, as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The Council has a legal duty to provide interim (i.e. emergency) accommodation to homeless applicants, if, during their enquiries, there is a reason to believe that an applicant may be homeless, eligible for assistance, and in priority need.

7.3 The Accommodation for ex-Offenders Grant is provided by the Government with the aim of reducing reoffending and homelessness by supporting ex-offenders who might otherwise become homeless to access the private rented sector.

7.4 The Government Grant for the Rough Sleeping Initiative provides councils with long-term funding to support those sleeping rough or at risk of rough sleeping.

7.5 In accordance with the Financial Regulations and Procedures 2015, 3.2.2, “the Executive is responsible for taking in-year decisions on resources and priorities in order to deliver the budget policy framework within the financial limits set by the Council.” The council must abide by any conditions stipulated by these government grants.

Non-Applicable Headings:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT 7. PROCUREMENT AND PROJECT TIMESCALES AND GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS 8. 9. TRANSFORMATION/POLICY IMPLICATIONS. 10. IT AND GDPR CONSIDERATIONS. 11. STRATEGIC PROPERTY CONSIDERATIONS.
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	[Title of document and date]