

DATE OF COMMITTEE
30th May 2012

REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR HOUSING

TITLE OF REPORT
Homelessness Prevention Funding

EXEMPT INFORMATION

None

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the use of Department of Communities and Local Government Preventing Homelessness Grant to support the delivery of key homelessness prevention projects.

Tamworth Borough Council has received Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Preventing Homelessness Grant since 2003 to support the delivery of the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan and associated prevention activity. The coalition Government, despite cuts elsewhere in public sector budgets, has confirmed an intention to provide the grant for a further three years to 2013/2014.

The use of DCLG Preventing Homelessness Grant as proposed in this report will further develop the Councils approach to Homelessness prevention and support the delivery of Council's Homelessness Strategy. This Strategy is currently under review and will be presented to Cabinet for approval in a report in July. It is anticipated the proposed use of resources as presented in **Appendix A** will form the basis of the refreshed Homelessness Strategy Action Plan and support the delivery of priorities identified by the Tamworth Strategic Partnership and within the Council's Healthier Housing Strategy. Where resources are allocated to support new schemes and policies these will be subject to further reports to Cabinet as required.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet approves the use of Department of Communities and Local Government Preventing Homelessness Grant allocated to the Council to support homelessness prevention activity to 2015 as shown in **Appendix A**.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2003, the Council has received Department of Communities and Local Government Preventing Homelessness Grant to support the delivery of the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan and associated prevention activity. Subsequently, these resources have been utilized to develop numerous projects and initiatives that have prevented homelessness in Tamworth, supported residents to access a range of housing options, ensured the provision of timely and effective housing advice to customers and increased the capacity of the Strategic Housing Service to deliver innovative and value for money services to customers.

The Coalition Government confirmed an intention to provide the grant for a further three years to 2013/2014. The Council has been allocated £163K per annum across this three year period.

It is therefore proposed that these resources should continue to be used to continue established homelessness prevention activity and develop new initiatives that will equip the Council with the tools and capacity to enhance levels of advice and assistance available to customers. This will be increasingly important as proposed welfare and social housing reforms are introduced that will affect many local residents in a period of continuing economic recession.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

By implementing an approach to homelessness which is based on prevention the Council is able to achieve significant financial savings. For example during 2007/08 before an embedded homelessness prevention approach was in place the Council spent £186,968 on bed and breakfast accommodation costs. During 2010/2011 when prevention approaches had been adopted the cost of such expenditure was £28,798.

Work and initiatives to prevent homelessness will remain a key priority for the Council. The Government have acknowledged that tackling homelessness will be a demanding task over the coming years due to the ongoing economic uncertainty. Homelessness acceptances, both nationally and locally, are increasing and difficulties with meeting housing costs continue to affect many local people, a position that could be exacerbated by further cuts to Housing Benefit in 2013. Repossessions and mortgage arrears continue to affect many residents and Tamworth has already been identified as a hotspot for mortgage repossessions, and this recognition has resulted in additional funding from DCLG for 2012/13.

Preventing Homelessness Grant is not ring fenced but is clearly allocated by Central Government for the purpose of preventing homelessness.

The list of activities to be undertaken in relation to Homelessness Prevention is shown in **Appendix A** with associated costs and sources of funding shown.

The total grant received from DCLG for 2011/12 was £163,270. Additionally, during 2011/12 the Council received additional funding totalling £50,797 to support homelessness prevention activity. Identified resources carried forward for 2011/12 equates to £186,811. This amount has been incorporated into the proposed plan and has been added to the grant to be received in 2012/13 and 2013/14.

The plans shown at **Appendix A** represent a total expenditure of £512,811 across the period to 2014/15. The plan takes into account DCLG grant that will be available to 2013/14. Funding for key projects in 2014/15 has been allocated from existing resources. A review of funding to cover this period and beyond will be undertaken to assess the availability of grant and other funding sources in order to continue key projects and initiatives in the future.

LEGAL/RISK IMPLICATIONS BACKGROUND

A key risk will be to not continue and further develop the prevention approach to

homelessness as this will place an increased financial burden on the Council at a time it can least afford to do so. Consequently, effective use of the DCLG funding will be required to further develop the Council's approach to prevention and enable appropriate responses to increases in demand on services generated by welfare reform, continued economic problems or the availability of housing to meet need in the Borough.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Delivery of projects identified in the Preventing Homelessness Grant spend plan will contribute to improved health outcomes for local residents. The prevention of homelessness and other associated outcomes will contribute towards the delivery of key priorities identified by the Tamworth Strategic Partnership and within the Council's Healthier Housing Strategy and refreshed Homelessness Strategy.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since 2003, the Council has received DCLG Preventing Homelessness Grant to support the delivery of the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan and associated prevention activity.

The Council has utilised government grants to fund a number of projects and services in recent years to assist in the objective of preventing homelessness in the Borough. These have included:

- Introduction of a Homelessness Prevention Fund
- Money Advice and Court Desk services
- Homelessness Education Programme
- Private Sector Leasing Scheme
- Bond Scheme

In order to continue and further develop this work, it is proposed the Council deploys available resources as detailed in **Appendix A** to ensure value for money prevention and advice services are either continued or initiated.

Additionally, it is proposed that a review of the Council's Homelessness Strategy 2009/12 be undertaken in the broader context of the Governments Housing Strategy for England and reform in the public sector and more specifically in the health and wellbeing, criminal justice, welfare and social housing sectors. The updated Strategy will incorporate the proposed use of homelessness funding to deliver against priorities identified by the Tamworth Strategic Partnership and within the Council's Healthier Housing Strategy.

It will be important to continue the provision of effective, value for money homelessness prevention services in order to avoid incurring additional costs to the Council. Consequently, having a well thought out strategic response and making effective use of available resources will be required to further develop the Council's approach to prevention and enable appropriate responses to potential increases in demand on services generated by welfare reform, continued economic problems or the availability of housing to meet need in the Borough.

REPORT AUTHOR

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

APPENDICES

A: Proposed Use of Homelessness Prevention Funding 2012-15