

# Homelessness Prevention Additional Resource

Cabinet Member: Cllr Angela Lax, Cabinet Member for Housing, Ecology and Climate Change

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Agenda Item: 5

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Key Decision? YES

Local Ward Members N/a



**CABINET**

## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to outline key and emerging issues relating to the council's work to prevent homelessness across the district, including any potential refugee homelessness cases.
- 1.2 The report proposes the appointment of three new fixed-term roles to address homelessness and better support any potential refugee housing and homelessness cases across the district. It also provides an update on a Beam pilot designed to support previously homeless residents into employment.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet approve the appointment of three new two-year fixed-term housing roles: Assistant Housing Allocations and Systems Officer, Housing Options Officer and a Tenancy Sustainment Officer with funding being provided by the Homelessness Prevention Grant Reserve.
- 2.2 Cabinet notes the council's involvement in the Beam trial.

## 3. Background

### Funding background

- 3.1 Every year the council receives Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG)<sup>1</sup> funding from government to help it to deliver services to prevent and tackle homelessness in the district through a range of measures.
- 3.2 The council's 2022/2023 allocation of HPG funding is £208,825. Future years' funding is currently subject to government consultation<sup>[1]</sup>, but the two options being explored would see the council receive a similar or slightly higher amount of Homelessness Prevention Grant each year. This could however be affected by the current financial situation and government review of all spending.
- 3.3 The council's current activity will see £175,531 of this fund invested in 2022/2023, leaving an underspend of £33,294 in year, and forecast underspends in future years.
- 3.4 Any underspend funding is placed in the Homeless Prevention Grant Reserve. Currently there is £427,689 in the reserve. This reserve can only be used to fund homelessness prevention activity and cannot be repurposed for a different use.

<sup>1</sup> Homelessness Prevention Grant: 2022 to 2023 - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))

3.5 The proposals contained in this report would see the annual homelessness prevention fund spent in full every year (for the next two years) and should no further HPG funding from government be forthcoming from 2023/2024, would spend the existing reserve in full. Even if the government reduces funding in future years however, it is highly unlikely the funding would reduce to zero, so these proposals are fully fundable.

### Key local and emerging issues

3.6 The housing team propose to utilise the annual underspend and existing reserves to address key local and emerging issues relating to homelessness and homelessness prevention linked to the energy crisis the cost of living, the potential recession, and an increase in asylum related cases.

### Housing register caseload

3.7 The council has experienced an increase in housing register applications (see table 1), due in part to the cost-of-living crisis. Local and national predictions suggest this case load will continue to rise over the winter months and into 2023.

**Table 1: Housing register applications (including eligible and non-eligible)**

Year	Number of applications up to September (half-year)	Number of applications full year
1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021	/	1,607
1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022	/	2,545 <sup>2</sup>
1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023	1,918*	3,836 estimated

*\* The number of live applications changes daily. Currently there are 332 live applications of which 54 are in the emergency band, 206 are band 1 and 72 are band 2. By property size, there is 147 customers with a need for a one bed property, 54 with a need for a two bed need property, 81 with a need for a three bed need property, 46 with a need for a four bed property, and 4 with a need for a five bed property.*

3.8 If applications remain at the current level, the council could see 3,836 submitted this year – this would represent a 239% increase on 2020-2021’s caseload.

3.9 As a result of this increase in caseload, the team are unable able to spend the necessary time with each applicant, particularly those with complex or additional needs (for example supporting customers to provide necessary evidence). The team are also struggling to find the resource to deliver wider management functions, reporting and quality assurance. The level of work within existing resource is also a risk to the ongoing wellbeing of the team.

### Homelessness caseload

3.10 The council has also experienced an increase in homelessness cases (see table 2), again because of the cost-of-living crisis predictions are that this case load will also continue to rise over the winter months and into 2023.

<sup>2</sup> During 2021/2022, 4,152 people registered on the portal. This was however due to the fact the council changed housing portals (from Homes Direct to Jigsaw) and all existing customers had to re-register. For the purpose of this analysis, we have assumed if every live app transferred at the end of March 2021, that a minimum of 2,545 new applications were registered in 2021/2022. However, if some customers chose not to re-register on the new system, a greater number of apps were new.

- 3.11 The latest National Crisis Homelessness Monitor Report (February 2022)<sup>3</sup> predicts that ‘core homelessness’ a concept which captures the most acute forms of homelessness, will be one-third higher than 2019 levels on current trends. It is worth noting the Crisis report was prepared in advance of the impact of the energy crisis, so predicted levels could be far higher when the next report is issued.

**Table 2: Homelessness applications**

Year	Number of enquiries up to September (half-year)	Number of enquiries full year	Number of applications up to September (half-year)	Number of applications full year
1 April 20 – 31 March 21	/	268	/	272
1 April 21 – 31 March 22	/	469	/	348
1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023	203	406 estimated	171	342 estimated

- 3.12 Whilst from the statistics it appears that if applications remain at the current level, they will be slightly lower than 2021/2022’s figures, the winter months tend to generate a far higher level of homelessness cases, so we predict that the full year’s figures will see an increase on 2021-2022, particularly given the impact of the energy crisis. Nationally the homelessness figures are rising.
- 3.13 The caseload is currently shared across four officers, one of which is a temporary agency worker. Currently the caseload for each officer is 49 (as at November 2022), which is above the upper optimal limit of 30 – 35 cases per officer, based on the recommendation of the government’s HAST (Homelessness Advice and Support Team advisor). The current temporary post ends in March 2023, and if this resource is not replaced will see the caseload across each officer increasing to 65 (based on current levels).

### Tenancy sustainment caseload

- 3.14 The council has also experienced a rise in tenancy sustainment caseloads (see table 3). The tenancy sustainment team works with people who are in accommodation to prevent homelessness.

**Table 3: Tenancy sustainment caseload**

Year	Number of applications up to September (half-year)	Number of applications full year	Notes
1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021	/	78	Majority of cases were to do with rent arrears with a registered provider or advice and support regarding affordability
1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022	/	83	Majority of cases were to do with rent arrears with a registered provider or advice and support regarding affordability as well as a small increase in relationship breakdowns
1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023	73	146 estimated	Increased number of cases that are multifaceted and complex, having several vulnerabilities requiring two officers, as lone working would be a potential risk. There is also a greater need to get a multi-agency approach to support households requiring additional staffing capacity.

<sup>3</sup> [Homelessness Monitor 2022 | England | Crisis UK](#)

3.15 This increase in cases, as well as the increase in complexity of cases, is impacting on the time the team has to focus on any one customer, particularly those with additional or complex needs, and could result in customers not receiving the level of support required to positively sustain their tenancies.

#### Asylum related caseload

3.16 The council and district has also seen a rise in the number of asylum related cases, including Ukrainian households (see table 4).

**Table 4: Ukrainian household caseload**

Number of approaches by Ukrainian households	Owed a prevention or relief duty	Accommodated via rematching	Accommodated through an offer of permanent housing	Households currently in temporary accommodation
23	7	6	1	3

3.17 As of 31 July 2022, 79 Ukrainian families had been successfully placed in the district through the Homes for Ukraine scheme and a further 88 matches were being processed.

3.18 Each placement is initially for six months, and several of the existing matches are reaching the six-month point. Currently eight Ukrainian families will need to be rematched and more are likely to need rematching over the coming months. The council is also conscious that several placements within the district may breakdown and require urgent rehousing to prevent homelessness.

3.19 Where a sponsor/guest relationship breaks down and the guest becomes homeless or at risk of homelessness, Staffordshire County Council works with the council to prevent homelessness via a rematch.

3.20 Where this is not possible the council's statutory homelessness will apply, potentially increasing the homelessness caseload in the district. The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) is set to update the Homelessness Code of Guidance<sup>4</sup> to address this issue, as well as provide detail on the consequences for intentional homelessness decisions, where a family chooses to leave a sponsor home.

3.21 As of 31 July 2022, a further 195 Ukrainian families had requested accommodation within the district, which when placed, could potentially increase the overall caseload.

3.22 There is a significant requirement on the council to play a key role in county liaison in relation to Ukrainian and wider asylum dispersal agendas. This is set to increase as more initiatives are rolled out and this is placing a resource burden on the team, both at a case level and at a more senior level in terms of the liaison and management input required.

3.23 The housing team overall has been affected by some staff absences, which have resulted in an increase in officers' individual caseloads across the team. This has inevitably started to affect processing speeds of claims from vulnerable individuals and households and has the potential to generate complaints and affect the overall wellbeing of the team. Moving forwards, when the temporary posts are put in place for the fixed-term period, the team will monitor caseloads proactively, and should officer caseloads not drop to recommended levels, it may be necessary to reallocate resource across the team.

<sup>4</sup> [Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities - Guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities)

### Proposed use of funding

- 3.24 The team propose to address the key local and emerging issues by appointing three fixed-term posts for a period of 2 years – a Tenancy Sustainment Officer (Band G, £25,927 - £29,174), a Housing Options Officer (Band G, £25,927 - £29,174), and an Assistant Housing Allocations and Systems Officer (Band F, £23,080 - £25,481). See Appendix 1 for the details of the roles.
- 3.25 The recruitment of all three roles will free up management resource within the housing service to allow the team to better focus on projects and ongoing programmes including targeted support for asylum dispersal and other key projects, including attend all county meetings and providing a link back to the council on all emerging issues/agendas.
- 3.26 Once the future funding picture is clearer with regards to the Homelessness Prevention Grant, it may be possible to make one of the three roles permanent on the establishment to deliver long-term sustainability into the team.

### Proposed use of funding

- 3.27 The council has been receiving single year funding allocations of HPG and the latest grant covers 2022/23. The below table demonstrates that the posts are fully fundable at the existing level of predicted HPG funding from government. Even if the funding was severely reduced from 2023/2024. The below table demonstrates that the proposed three roles are fully fundable:

	22/23	23/24	24/25	25/26	26/27
<b>Reserve Balance</b>	(510,037)	(432,551)	(390,716)	(372,578)	(441,733)
<b>Clawback</b>	82,348	-	-	-	-
<b>Sub Total</b>	(427,689)	(432,551)	(390,716)	(372,578)	(441,733)
<b>Grant Income</b>	(208,825)	(208,825)	(208,825)	(208,825)	(208,825)
<b>Commitments - Estimate</b>	175,531	132,210	136,280	139,670	142,430
<b>Potential New Posts (Split 3m/12m/9m)</b>					
Housing Options Officer	9,833	40,960	31,358	-	-
Assistant Housing Allocations and Systems Officer	8,768	36,530	27,968	-	-
Tenancy Sustainment Officer	9,833	40,960	31,358	-	-
<b>Reserve Drawdown / (Transfer to Reserve)</b>	77,487	41,835	18,138	(69,155)	(66,395)
<b>Reserve Balance</b>	(432,551)	(390,716)	(372,578)	(441,733)	(508,128)
<b>Reserve Balance (excluding Grant from 2023/24)</b>	(432,551)	(181,891)	45,072		

- 3.28 Should the HPG funding be removed entirely from 2023/2024, the three roles and existing commitments would place a £45,072 pressure on the council's budget within year, but removal of the entire funding stream is deemed highly unlikely as preventing homelessness is a recognised government priority, particularly given the cost of living, energy crisis and potential recession.
- 3.29 The Council has provided information to Staffordshire County Council for housing options support in relation to the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Therefore, an element of the costs incurred in supporting this scheme will potentially be reimbursed.

### Wider review

- 3.30 The additional resource will also enable the team's management function to undertake a wider review of processes and procedures across the team to ensure that long-term all opportunities for efficiencies are explored and any opportunities for automation are fully implemented.

## Other initiatives delivered through the Homelessness Prevention grant

3.31 Whilst this report proposed utilising a significant amount of the annual Homelessness Prevention Grant and the related reserve, the team delivers a range of other innovative initiatives with the funding to alleviate homelessness and related issues across the district. These include:

- **Rough sleeper housing pathway scheme** (further detail in 3.33) – In partnership with Cannock Chase Borough Council, the team jointly commissioned a scheme to provide an outreach service to rough sleepers, provide support into accommodation, and support with issues such as substance misuse and mental health. This has recently been expanded to include employment support.
- **Loans and grants to access private sector accommodation** – The council has an agreement with Fusion Credit Union, where the council underwrites loans to enable applicants to fund rent in advance or rent deposits in the private sector. The council is also able to provide grants or loans in certain cases.
- **Target hardening** – The council works with Staffordshire Police to provide funding for the installation of security measures for those applicants who are victims of violence or harassment, to enable them to remain in their current accommodation.
- **Winter provision** – The council procures two rooms at the Hollies for the period January – March to enable any rough sleepers to be accommodated during the coldest weather. Previously the team has worked with Churches Together in Lichfield to provide a night shelter.

3.32 The team will continue to investigate more initiatives moving forwards in addition to the measures included in this report, particularly if the Homelessness Prevention Grant remains at predicted levels.

## Update on Rough Sleeper Pathway & Beam Pilot

- 3.33 The council jointly commissioned (with Cannock Chase District Council) a rough sleeper housing pathway scheme which has seen the council purchase a total of six properties, with an additional two being provided by Bromford to support rough sleepers or those with complex needs who would struggle to access accommodation by the usual pathways (council's housing register or private landlords).
- 3.34 All eight properties have been let and the tenants are being supported by Spring Housing Association, as well as a specialist substance misuse support worker, and as a result have been able to successfully maintain their tenancies. One of the Bromford occupants has even been removed from the scheme as it has been identified that she no longer needs the level of support the scheme provides.
- 3.35 The council is currently working with Midlands Partnership NHS Foundation Trust regarding the secondment of a mental health support worker to the team and have recently launched a 12-month pilot with Beam for them to provide support into employment. This pilot has been funded through the Homelessness Prevention Grant.
- 3.36 The Beam pilot is an innovative new crowdfunding approach to supporting homeless people into work, whereby people are asked to support individuals through donations through the Beam ([Beam Homeless Social Enterprise - Sponsor a Homeless Person in the UK Into a Job](#)) online platform. The pilot in Lichfield District will support 10 homeless people for one year. Each person will be given a dedicated caseworker and will be connected to a supportive online community who provide funding and mentorship. They will also be matched with forward-thinking employers and provided with interview support. The aim of the pilot is to lift people out of homelessness permanently through employment.

Alternative Options	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do not invest the full Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG) and risk government claw back, which is a condition of the funding.</li> <li>2. Do not invest the £427,689 reserve and risk government claw back (this is less likely) or reputational risk by not utilising the funding provided to the council to support its most vulnerable residents.</li> </ol>
Consultation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Insert consultation undertaken with local ward members, task groups, overview and scrutiny committees, the community, service users and stakeholders. Provide details of any statutory consultation required and undertaken in respect of this matter.</li> </ol>
Financial Implications	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The proposals have no impact on the core funding of the council or its Medium-Term Financial Strategy.</li> <li>2. The full cost of the proposals can be met from the Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG) and £427,689 reserve, even should the HPG funding reduce over time.</li> </ol>
Approved by Section 151 Officer	Yes
Legal Implications	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Homeless Prevention Grant is ring-fenced for 2022/23 and is to be spent in adherence with the following principles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To fully enforce the Homelessness Reduction Act and contribute to ending rough sleeping by increasing activity to prevent single homelessness.</li> <li>• Reduce family temporary accommodation numbers through maximising family homelessness prevention and reduce the use of unsuitable B&amp;Bs for families.</li> <li>• Ensure service 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</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
Approved by Monitoring Officer	Yes
Contribution to the Delivery of the Strategic Plan	<p>This report underpins delivery of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019 – 2024 action plan that is a core component of the council’s Strategic Plan and is focussed on three priorities for action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enable people to live in good quality homes that are suitable for their needs</li> <li>• Increase housing choice to meet the need of current and future residents</li> <li>• Prevent or relieve all forms of homelessness including rough sleeping</li> </ul>
Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Implications	The recruitment of additional resource into the team will enable the team to better support customer with additional and complex needs.
Crime & Safety Issues	Ensuring additional staffing is in place will afford the team adequate time to handle more complex case, including those involving ex-offenders, victims of domestic violence and victims of anti-social behaviour, intimidation and harassment.
Environmental Impact	None identified.

<b>GDPR / Privacy Impact Assessment</b>	None identified.
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	<b>Risk Description &amp; Risk Owner</b>	<b>Original Score (RYG)</b>	<b>How We Manage It</b>	<b>Current Score (RYG)</b>
A	Not delivering the additional resource could increase staff absence due to staff wellbeing	Likelihood: Red Impact Red	Appointment of fixed term posts as identified in the report.	Likelihood: Green Impact: Green
B	Not delivering the additional resource could increase in complaints due to caseload	Likelihood: Red Impact Red	Appointment of fixed term posts as identified in the report.	Likelihood: Green Impact: Green
C	Not delivering the additional resource could reduce the quality of service to customers with complex needs	Likelihood: Red Impact Red	Appointment of fixed term posts as identified in the report.	Likelihood: Green Impact: Green

	<b>Background documents</b> Appendix 1 <b>Detail of roles</b>
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	<b>Relevant web links</b> None
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## Appendix 1 Detail of roles

### **Post 1: Tenancy Sustainment Officer (Fixed term post – 2 years)**

*This role already exists within the establishment and will:*

- *help to prevent new homelessness cases by keeping people in their current home by delivering additional capacity into the team and specifically support housing tenants with complex needs – ranging from signposting drug and alcohol support through to mental health, security, domestic violence support, financial support and signposting and liaison with other partners to provide in the round support.*
- *be recruited at band G (£25,927 - £29,174) and can be funded from current Homelessness Prevention reserve.*
- *report to the Senior Housing Options Officer and will provide capacity to the Senior Housing Options Officer to focus on projects and ongoing programmes including targeted support for asylum dispersal and other key projects.*
- *play a role in helping to sustain tenancies amongst asylum seeker households, including Ukrainian households.*

### **Post 2: Housing Options Officer (Fixed term post – 2 years)**

*This role already exists within the establishment and will:*

- *help to prevent homelessness by dealing with applications from customers who have made a formal homelessness application and are homeless, or threatened with homelessness, within 56 days.*
- *be recruited at band G (£25,927 - £29,174) and can be funded from current Homelessness Prevention reserve.*
- *will report to the Senior Housing Options Officer and provide capacity to the Senior Housing Options Officer to focus on projects and ongoing programmes including targeted support for asylum dispersal and other key projects.*
- *will also play a role in helping to respond to homelessness enquiries from asylum seeker households, including Ukrainian households.*

### **Post 3: Assistant Housing Allocations and Systems Officer (Fixed term post - 2 years)**

*This role already exists within the establishment and will:*

- *deliver additional capacity into the housing allocations team, help to prevent homelessness by getting people onto the housing register more quickly, and help to speed up processing of applications and housing offers. The core duties will include processing applications, answering customer queries, supporting customers to supply/submit evidence.*
- *be recruited at band F (£23,080 - £25,481) and can be funded from current Homelessness Prevention reserve.*
- *will report to the Housing Allocations and Systems Officer and will provide capacity to the Housing Allocations and Systems Officer to focus on projects and ongoing programmes including targeted support for asylum dispersal and other key projects.*
- *will also play a role in helping to respond to housing register applications from asylum seeker households, including Ukrainian households.*