



East
Northamptonshire
Council

Policy and Resources Committee – 16 January 2011

Homelessness Grant 2011/12

Purpose of report

This report seeks member approval for the release of funds during 2011/12 for a specific project, and the carry forward of funds to 2012/13 from the Homelessness Grant 2011/12.

Attachment(s)

None

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The Homelessness Grant is a grant paid to the council annually by Communities and Local Government (CLG) for use in the prevention and reduction of homelessness. The grant for East Northamptonshire for 2011/12 is £50,000.
- 1.2 At its meeting on the 3 February 2011, the Finance Working Party recommended the allocation of the Homelessness Grant 2011/12 to the Homelessness Budget. This was approved by the Policy and Resources Committee on 17 January 2011 (minute 388).
- 1.3 At the meeting on the 4 July 2011, Policy and Resources Committee agreed (minute 81) that £5,000 be allocated to the Sanctuary Project; that £15,000 of the funding should be allocated as external grants, and that £30,000 should be held as a contingency for any projects or requirements that should arise during the year.
- 1.4 The table below shows expenditure and expected expenditure since July 2011, all of which has been approved by this Committee:

Project	Amount Allocated
Sanctuary Project	£5,000
Severe Weather Protocol	£3,000
External Grant – Rushden Night Shelter	£5,000
External Grant – Rockingham Forest HA	£5,000
Remaining external grant to be allocated	£5,000
Total	£23,000

- 1.5 In addition, it was also agreed at the Policy and Resources Committee meeting on the 11 April (minute 473) that some of the contingency element of the grant could be used to help with any overspend on Discretionary Housing Payments. Revenue and Benefits officers estimate that £10,000 will be needed for this, based on current expenditure levels.
- 1.6 Therefore, there is £17,000 of the grant remaining.
- 1.7 This report seeks Member approval to allocate £10,000 of this remaining budget to the Empty Homes Project.

2.0 Empty Homes Project

- 2.1 This joint project began in March 2011 with Corby Borough Council (CBC) using funding allocated to both Councils and South Northamptonshire Council from

Communities and Local Government.

- 2.2 A consultant has been employed to work one day a week with both East Northamptonshire Council (ENC) and Corby (CBC). A list of all of the long term empty properties has been provided by our council tax department; and the owners have been written to asking for their intentions with the property. Each property was then assessed using a risk based scoring system to determine our top 50 properties for the consultant to begin work on. Those that received the highest scores were those that had been empty the longest, had received complaints from members of the public or elected members, had legal notices served on them and were in areas of high housing demand as provided by the Strategic Housing Team.
- 2.3 Since the consultant has been working with us 25 properties out of his initial top 50 list are now occupied and full council tax is being received. In addition, from the other empty properties that have been written to from December 2010 and July 2011 council tax lists, a further 19 have been brought back into use (44 in total to date). Other achievements include the demolition of a number of problematic properties that were, in most cases, no longer on the council tax list such as the properties on High Street South, which had had a lot of elected member involvement, Marshalls Road and 34 and 36 Grove Road owned by Rushden Band Club. This project has received good press coverage for both ENC and Corby; with the filming of the next series of BBCs Empty Homes, Look East and BBC Northampton reports.
- 2.4 The funding for this project from DCLG was £34,000 shared between CBC and ENC. Initially it was decided that the consultant would be on the project for a period of 12 months and the remaining money would be used for small scale grants to help bring properties back into use. After running the project for a few months it became clear that the remaining money was not enough to be significantly useful and instead a joint decision was taken to extend the consultant for a further 12 months using up the remainder of the government grant money. After this time the project will not continue unless another funding stream is identified.
- 2.5 The project has spent £8,840 (£4,420 each) of the grant money on a consultant from April to November, which has seen a return of 44 empty properties back into use in ENC. Based on these returns the cost per property is slightly over £100 to the project. Returning these 44 empty properties back into use earns the Council New Homes Bonus funding, which is equivalent of the council tax received for the band of property for 6 years. Based on a Band A property with a council tax of nearly £1,000, which is the lowest value, the project's achievements so far would see a total NHB income of £264,000.
- 2.6 The allocation of £4,000 of the Homelessness Grant during 2011/12 to this project would enable the project to continue until the end of March 2012.
- 2.7 In addition, the carry forward of a further £6,000 to 2012/13 would enable the project to continue for a further year from the end of March 2012. This would result in total expenditure from the 2011/12 Homelessness Grant of £10,000 on this project.
- 2.8 Empty properties are an ongoing challenge, with new properties becoming empty on a regular basis and empty properties falling into the definition of 'long term empty' each month. Extending this project beyond the initial 2 year funding period will enable it to develop and become more proactive - and enable the consultant to gain good working relationships with external companies and registered providers to offer a suite of options for owners.
- 2.9 The project will help us to respond to homelessness in the District more effectively by increasing the supply of rented accommodation; and thereby 'freeing up' affordable housing for homeless and vulnerable people.
- 2.10 There are currently over 1,000 households on the Council's Housing Register (waiting

list); but only approximately 350 social rented properties become available each year. It is vital therefore that we can protect this scarce resource for those most in need.

3.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

3.1 There are no equality and diversity implications..

4.0 Legal Implications

4.1 There are no legal implications associated with the recommendation below.

5.0 Risk Management

5.1 There are no risks associated with the recommendation below.

6.0 Financial Implications

6.1 There are sufficient funds available in the Homelessness Budget for 2011/12. An indication of the overall financial benefits of the project is set out in 2.5 above.

7.0 Corporate Outcomes

7.1 Allocation of the Homelessness Grant 2011/12 contributes to the following corporate outcomes:

- A Good Quality of Life – Healthy
- Good Value for Money
- Effective Partnership Working

8.0 Resource Requirements

8.1 There are no additional resource requirements associated with the recommendation below.

9.0 Recommendation

9.1 The Committee is recommended to

Approve the release of £4,000 during 2011/12, and the carry forward of £6,000 to 2012/13, from the Homelessness Grant 2011/12; for the Empty Homes Project.

(Reason: to deliver the Empty Homes Project, and enable officers to administer the Homelessness Grant 2011/12.)

Legal	Power:	Homelessness Act 2002			
	Other considerations:	Housing Act 1996			
Background Papers:					
Person Originating Report: Cat Hartley , Housing Strategy Manager chartley@east-northamptonshire.gov.uk 01832742078					
Date: 12 December 2011					
CFO		MO		CX	

(Committee Report Normal Rev. 22)