



Finance Sub-Committee

Minutes of a meeting held on Monday 13 November 2017 at 12 Noon, East Northamptonshire House, Thrapston

Present: Councillors: Steven North (Chairman)
Roger Glithero JP
Glenvil Greenwood-Smith
David Jenney
Richard Lewis

Officers: David Oliver (Chief Executive)
Carol Conway (Housing Strategy and Delivery Manager)
Michelle Drewery (Finance Manager)

1.0 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor David Brackenbury

2.0 MINUTES

2.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Finance Sub-Committee held on 11 September 2017 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

3.0 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 No interests were declared.

4.0 QUESTIONS UNDER PROCEDURE RULE 10.3

4.1 There were no questions submitted under Procedure Rule 10.3.

5.0 HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION FUND

5.1 The Housing Strategy and Delivery Manager presented a report proposing the establishment of a Homelessness Prevention Fund to prevent and alleviate homelessness in the district.

5.2 At its meeting on 26th June 2017, the Sub-Committee had considered homelessness prevention funding and the Homelessness Reduction Act and had made a number of recommendations to the Policy and Resources Committee. This included that the establishment of a fund, to be used to prevent and alleviate homelessness, would be referred to the Housing Policy Working Group which had recently considered the proposal.

5.3 It was noted that it would be necessary to purchase new IT software to enable the Housing Services Team to meet more onerous Government homelessness reporting and

monitoring procedures requirements. The cost would be approximately £10,000 per annum and it was considered that the Additional Burdens Funding should be reserved at this stage to meet this cost. It was noted that this funding was separate from the cost previously agreed by Policy and Resources Committee for the one-off software changes required to implement the changes to the Council's Housing Allocation Policy.

- 5.4 Additional staffing might be required in the future and it was considered unlikely that there would be any further additional funding from the Government to meet the costs involved with increasing staff resources.
- 5.5 It was proposed that the remainder of the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant of approximately £31,000 be set aside to provide a discretionary Homelessness Prevention Fund and a draft policy was submitted for consideration.

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO THE POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE:

That

- i) a Homelessness Prevention Fund be established from 1 January 2018 be used on a discretionary basis to prevent and alleviate homelessness.
- ii) the expenditure incurred be funded from the remaining ring-fenced Flexible Homelessness Support Grant.
- iii) the draft policy and procedure document at Appendix 1 be approved.
- iv) the efficacy and value for money of the fund be reviewed after 6 months and evaluated after 12 months.
- v) the Additional Burdens Funding allocated to the district be reserved at this stage for on-going IT software costs.

(Reason: To ensure the fair and transparent allocation of the available funding and ensure appropriate funding of statutory duties)

6.0 2018-19 LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE SETTLEMENT - DCLG TECHNICAL CONSULTATION

- 6.1 The Finance Manager presented a report informing the Sub-Committee of the response provided to the Department of Communities and Local Government's consultation paper on the 2018-19 Local Government Finance Settlement.
- 6.2 In the 2015 Autumn Statement, the Chancellor of the Exchequer had announced an overall Spending Review package which aimed to address in particular the pressures experienced by councils which provided adult social care. The 2016-17 settlement offered local authorities a four year deal, giving greater certainty over their funding, which had been accepted by 97% of local authorities, including this Council. The proposed 2018-19 settlement funding was allocated in accordance with the agreed methodology which had been announced by the Secretary of State at that time. The consultation paper described the Government's intended approach for the third year of the multi-year settlement
- 6.3 The Chief Executive and Executive Director, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and/or the Deputy Leader and the Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the relevant

Committee as appropriate, had been given delegated authority to respond to government consultations where the time frame was too short to permit consideration by an appropriate Committee. The response had been approved in accordance with this delegation and submitted by the deadline of 26 October 2017 and was submitted to the Sub-Committee for information.

RESOLVED: That the report and the responses to DCLG's '2018-19 Local Government Finance Settlement Technical Consultation' be noted.

(Reason: To raise awareness of current proposals on 2018-19 Local Government Finance Settlement and the potential implications for the Council).

7.0 PAYMENT SURCHARGES

- 7.1 The Finance Manager reported that the Sub-Committee, at its meeting on 11 September 2017, had considered changes arising from The Payment Services Regulations 2017. This legislation meant that from 13th January 2018 the Council would not be able to apply card surcharging to consumers where payments were made by credit card. A surcharge of 1.8% was currently charged on all credit card payments. The Council did not levy any charges on debit cards and did not use PayPal as a payment method, which were also covered by the change in legislation.
- 7.2 The surcharges had been reviewed and a summary of the main service areas, the amount of income against each area and the estimated percentage and cost of surcharges that would have been allocated to each area for the financial year 2016/17 was submitted.
- 7.3 It was proposed that in future these costs should be allocated to each relevant service through support service recharges. This would enable some of those costs to be taken into account when reviewing the cost of providing the service and the relevant fees and charges could then be increased to allow full recovery of service costs where possible at their point of use.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and card charges be allocated through support service recharges as set out in paragraph 3.3 of the report.

(Reason: In accordance with new legislation no longer allowing surcharges to be applied to card payments and ensuring that cost of service can be fully recovered where possible at the point of use).

Chairman



Homelessness Prevention Fund

One-Off Payment Scheme and Procedure 2017

Index of Contents

1. Scope of Procedure
2. Aims and Objectives of the One-Off Payment Scheme
3. Examples of One-Off Payments
4. Eligibility
5. One-Off Payment Scheme Procedure
6. Recording and Monitoring Arrangements
7. Complaints and Appeals

1. Scope of Procedure

Homes Direct, acting under contract for East Northamptonshire Council (the Local Authority who has the duty towards homelessness), has a number of homeless prevention tools available to them for use in assisting people who are homeless or who are threatened with homelessness (where they may become homeless within the next three months) and in particular there is a fund for one off payments that can be used innovatively to prevent homelessness.

This procedure explains how the One-Off payments scheme works and how it can be accessed. When dealing with homelessness prevention, the 'Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities' and the 'Homelessness Prevention - a guide to good practice' or any more recent guidance documents should be consulted at all times.

2. Aims and Objectives of the One-Off Payment Scheme

The aim of the One-Off Payment Scheme is to assist households who are homeless/or threatened with homelessness by making relatively small one-off payments that will allow them to maintain their current accommodation, or access new accommodation, and therefore reduce the need to place people in temporary accommodation and other social costs that arise through homelessness.

The One-Off Payments Scheme is not intended to provide payments to applicants where it is felt that they have not taken sufficient responsibility to maintain their accommodation e.g. wilful non-payment of rent. This would not encourage personal responsibility and could encourage dependency on the Council. Whilst in some instances such refusals may result in the use of temporary accommodation, it should be acknowledged that the Council has a moral duty to utilise public funding in a manner that does not condone or reward deliberate behaviour on behalf of an applicant that places them at risk of losing their accommodation. However, decisions will be made on a case by case basis.

3. Examples of One-Off Payments

The scheme could be used for the following;

- Rent or mortgage arrears payments to Registered Providers (RPs), private landlords or building societies where extenuating reasons for the arrears can be given e.g. illness, loss of employment, or a short term prison sentence or, in some circumstances, marital breakdown. However, such payments will only be made where (subject to current rent or mortgage payments being maintained) there is an undertaking by the landlord or building society not to evict the applicant(s) for the arrears and to allow the applicant(s) to remain in the property for at least 6 months. Rent and mortgage arrears payments will normally be paid monthly to ensure the recipient is also contributing to the arrears and maintaining current payments
- Payment of rent in advance to secure accommodation from Registered Providers or in the private sector
- Where the applicant has the funds to pay rent in advance or is eligible for the council's Rent in Advance Scheme, payments to RPs or private landlords for deposits in order to secure accommodation. Such payments will only be made if ENC is registered as the agency that paid the deposit on the deposit protection documents and if/when the tenancy ends the funding will be recouped by the council
- Payments to landlords to delay the eviction of private tenants whilst alternative accommodation is secured to prevent the need for temporary accommodation
- Travel costs e.g. to take up available accommodation elsewhere
- Any other payment that the Housing Services Officer and Housing Options Team Leader jointly believe will enable homelessness to be prevented for a minimum period of 6 months.

4. Eligibility

The scheme can assist single people or couples and families who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

Payments will normally be restricted to a maximum of £500 or one month's rent, although each case will be judged on its merits and this may be increased in exceptional circumstances. Payments will normally be limited to 1 per household.

The payment must result in the applicant being able to maintain current accommodation or access new accommodation for a minimum of 6 months.

Households must also have a local connection to East Northamptonshire, which could be any of the following;

- Lived in East Northamptonshire for 3 years out of the last 5 years; or
- Lived in East Northamptonshire for 6 months out of the last 12 months; or
- Have stable employment in East Northamptonshire or
- Have close relatives who have lived in East Northamptonshire for the last five years; or
- Are Armed Forces Personnel (as defined in the council's Housing Allocation Policy 2017), or are war widows or widowers of Armed Forces personnel (including civil partners)
- Have special circumstances that would make the household an exception to these rules.

Households may not be eligible if:

- they have savings which would enable them to make the payments themselves

- there are alternative means of funding available e.g. if Housing Benefit payments would reduce or pay arrears
- there is evidence to suggest that they would be unable to manage a tenancy successfully, even if support was provided e.g. they have been refused access to supported accommodation owing to their needs being too high
- it becomes evident that false information has been supplied
- the accommodation is considered too expensive for the household to afford, is unsustainable, in some way unsuitable, or is in a poor state of repair
- the payment will not result in the applicant being able to access or remain in accommodation for at least 6 months
- there is a likelihood that the applicant will require further assistance in the near future and will not be able to sustain their home in the long term
- it is felt that the applicant has been responsible for worsening their housing circumstances e.g. wilful non-payment of rent/service charges, anti-social behaviour, non-engagement with debt counselling services where these have been offered
- they have been evicted for Anti-Social Behaviour in the last 12 months
- they have convictions relating to arson.

Payments will not be made for

- Bed and Breakfast, or other temporary accommodation, as the Prevention Fund is intended to facilitate alternatives to this
- anything which could be seen to support potentially illegal action being taken by a landlord e.g. attempting to make unreasonable charges to a tenant
- the same reason as a previous application e.g. rent arrears which have previously been cleared or reduced and which the applicant has since failed to address.

5. One-Off Payment Scheme Procedure

When a household approaches Homes Direct for assistance, the Homelessness Prevention Officer will consider if the household's homelessness could be prevented by accessing a one-off payment and whether the use of the scheme is viable.

If the Homelessness Prevention Officer believes that a payment from the scheme is viable they will complete a form and pass it to the Senior Homelessness Prevention Officer (SHPO) for approval.

Two forms of identification must be seen and copied on file to include proof that the applicant does not have any available funds themselves, e.g. a recent bank statement and proof of identification.

Payments up to £50 can be authorised by the SHPO. Payments over £50 will be forwarded to the Housing Services Officer (or in their absence the Housing Strategy and Delivery Manager or Housing Enabling Officer) and the Housing Options Team Leader (or in their absence the Senior Homelessness Prevention Officer) for joint authorisation.

Homes Direct will make the payments and invoice ENC on a quarterly basis.

If a payment is granted to cover court costs or arrears to a landlord or building society then the Homelessness Prevention Officer must ensure the landlord signs a statement to the effect that they undertake not to evict the tenant for 6 months if a

payment is made, unless there are other grounds e.g. further arrears or Anti Social Behaviour.

6. Recording and Monitoring Arrangements

Details of payments made are to be recorded by Homes Direct, together with any repayments received from deposit protection schemes.

ENC will monitor the spend under the One-Off Payment Scheme against the budget.

ENC and Homes Direct will monitor the success of the One-Off Payment Scheme by

- checking at 6 and 12 months whether the applicant is still in the accommodation retained or obtained
- estimating annually the savings made in B&B and temporary accommodation costs.

7. Complaints and Appeals

Use of the fund is at the discretion of officers. There is no application procedure or appeals process.