



Report to: Communities Committee, 8th June 2022

Report of: Corporate Director, Operations, Homes & Communities

Subject: EXTENSION OF THE SINGLE PERSON AND CHILDLESS COUPLES HOMELESS PREVENTION SUPPORT SERVICE (HOPES)

1. Recommendation

That the Committee:

- 1.1 Approve a six-month extension of the Worcestershire Single Person and Childless Couples Homeless Prevention Support Service Contract, to cover the period 30th September 2022 to 30th April 2023);**
- 1.2 Note that the Councils financial contribution towards the contract extension period of £51,605 will be funded from the Flexible Housing Grant Reserve; and**
- 1.3 Note that a future report will be presented to this Committee following a review of the existing contract and outlining options for future service provision.**

2. Background

- 2.1 The Single Person and Childless Couples Homeless Prevention Support Service is a countywide service commissioned in partnership with all Worcestershire Local Housing Authorities (LHA) and Worcestershire County Council. Worcester City Council acts as Lead Authority for contractual purposes.
- 2.2 The contract was originally commissioned with Caring for Communities and People (CCP) in early 2016 for a period of three and a half years. It was recommissioned with CCP in 2019 for a further three years and this contract is due to end on 30 September 2022. The Homeless Prevention Support Services contract comprises two service elements which are described below.

Crisis prevention

- 2.3 The first element is a support service which helps single people and childless couples at risk of homelessness avoid their situation turning into a homelessness crisis. The service provides a range of assistance which can help them to stay in their homes, or find alternative accommodation, before they lose their home. This reduces the number of people who may ultimately end up rough sleeping. This early support reduces the need for long term interventions and the increase in associated costs. It also prevents people from needing to approach Worcester City Council's Housing Options Team as homeless and provides a floating support service for individuals who are sofa surfing or in temporary accommodation.

- 2.4 The total number of people supported by the homeless prevention support service during 2021/22 was 78, of which 60 were from Worcester City. This support included help to reduce debt and maximise income support to access healthcare services and help to reduce offending behaviour. An additional 160 individuals were supported Countywide of which 97 were from Worcester for tenancy-ready floating support.

Emergency accommodation

- 2.5 The second element of the service is activating and operating the emergency accommodation for people sleeping rough during periods of severe weather. Ensuring that people are offered safe and warm accommodation when the weather is predicted to be zero degrees Celsius or below on any one night within Worcestershire. This emergency provision is open to all rough sleepers regardless of local connection or recourse to public funds and support is given to reconnect people who do not have a local connection.
- 2.6 The primary aim of this accommodation is to prevent loss of life or risk of serious harm during severe weather. In addition, the emergency accommodation also provides increased opportunities to engage with more entrenched rough sleepers who may be more likely to accept support particularly during the winter months.
- 2.7 During the winter of 2021/22 the emergency accommodation was opened 30 times and was accessed by 45 individuals, of which 35 people had a connection to Worcester. The number of times the accommodation was accessed by an individual ranged between 1 night and 9 nights.

3. Preferred Option

- 3.1 To extend the existing contract for a period of 6 months to allow time to carry out a comprehensive consultation and market testing exercise. This will enable the councils to procure a contract with a specification which is effective and complements our existing services.
- 3.2 The proposed extension will also allow for a comprehensive mobilisation and transition so there is continuity in support for some of our most vulnerable individuals and any new provider will have time to implement the new service.
- 3.3 If the interim extension period is agreed, we will have fully reworked KPIs and specification. This will ensure that the implementation of necessary contract changes are not delayed by the 6 month extension. It will also allow us to pilot the revised KPIs and specification ahead of the new contract being tendered.

4. Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 The option of not recommissioning the contract was considered and is not recommended. The potential impact of not providing these services would be an increase in homelessness including rough sleeping and an increase in demand for council services. This would create pressure on Housing Options team resources including the financial burden incurred through the increased use of temporary accommodation.

- 4.2 The option of not extending the contract also was appraised by all Councils. It was agreed that continuing with the current recommissioning date of 30 September would not allow time for proper and meaningful consultation which would inform the new contract.
- 4.3 With an extended timeline the contract could also be informed by the new Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy which is due to be completed by Autumn 2022 and the outcome of the recently submitted Rough Sleeper Initiative 2022 - 2025 bid. It would also allow for an efficient and effective transition/handover period.

5. **Implications**

5.1 Financial and Budgetary Implications

A six-month contract extension will cost £150,750, with a financial contribution from Worcester City Council of £51,605. Funding contributions are shown in the table below.

Local Authority	6 months funding
Worcester City Council	£51,605
Wyre Forest District Council	£16,462
Wychavon District Council	£14,858.50
Malvern Hills District Council	£12,614.50
Bromsgrove District Council	£ 2,712
Redditch Borough Council	£ 2,498
Worcestershire County Council	£50,000
TOTAL FUNDING	£150,750

The Flexible Housing Grant Reserve has a balance at 31 March 2022 of £1.049m. There are projected releases in 2022/23 and subsequent years totalling £648,932, leaving an uncommitted balance of £400,981.

5.2 Legal and Governance Implications

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2018 placed a duty on local authorities to intervene at an earlier stage to prevent homelessness and to take reasonable steps to help those who become homeless to secure accommodation. The Act introduced a change to the point at which a person is classed as being threatened with homelessness from 28 days before a person is likely to become homeless to 56 days. It requires local housing authorities to provide new homelessness services to all people in their area and also expands the categories of people who they have to help to find accommodation and give advice to.

The proposed contract extension line with council policy and procurement rules and has the support from the council's legal and procurement officers.

5.3 Risk Implications

There is a risk that the contract will not be reprocurd satisfactorily under the existing timetable. The request for a six months' extension is designed to help mitigate this for the reasons set out in the report.

5.4 Corporate/Policy Implications

None identified in this report.

5.5 Equality Implications

None identified in this report.

5.6 Human Resources Implications

None identified in this report.

5.7 Health and Safety Implications

None identified in this report.

5.8 Social, Economic and Environmental implications

There are both social and economic implications arising from this report. Social implications relate to the fact that this service is supporting people to remain in their own home or provide them with emergency accommodation to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping and the negative social impacts that can have.

Economically, preventing people or households becoming homelessness has a positive impact across the public sector and commissioned support services as these services are required less, enabling them to focus on those people who have passed this point and are in crisis.

Ward(s): **All Wards**

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Background Papers: **None**