



Report to: Communities Committee, 4th February 2019

Report of: Corporate Director - Homes and Communities

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

1. Recommendation

- 1.1 That Committee approve a 6 month extension (until September 30th 2019) to the existing Worcestershire Single Person and Childless Couples Homeless Prevention Support Service Contract at a cost of £85,472 to the Council; and**
- 1.2 That Committee recommends to Policy & Resources Committee for the 6 month extension of the contract outlined at para 1.1, to be funded from the Affordable Housing Bid Fund.**

2. Background

- 2.1 The Single Person and Childless Couples Homeless Prevention Support Service is a Countywide Service which Worcester City Council commissioned in partnership with each of the Local Housing Authorities (LHA) across the Worcestershire, and commenced in April 2016 for a period of 3 years.
- 2.2 It has to date been wholly funded by Worcestershire County Council via a Public Health Ring Fenced Grant allocation paid to and administered by Worcester City Council as Lead Authority for the contractual purposes. It has recently been confirmed (December 2018) however that such funding will be reduced from £300,000 to £100,000 per annum for a 2 year period so procurement of a new contract will require funding contributions from LHA's across Worcestershire.
- 2.3 It is important to recognise that although the Council act as Lead Authority for contractual purposes the area of work in and around preventing homelessness and tackling rough sleeping is collaboratively delivered by several agencies (public, support providers and charitable) across Worcestershire and is a shared responsibility represented by forums such as the Worcestershire Strategic Housing Partnership and the local homelessness forums.
- 2.4 The existing contract consists of the following elements which the report will expand on in slightly more detail below –
- The HoPES Service
 - Worcestershire No Second Night Out Protocol (NSNO)
 - Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)

- 2.5 The HoPES service aims to prevent entrenched homelessness and provides support to new rough sleepers who have been placed in NSNO accommodation to find an alternative and more appropriate housing solution.
- 2.6 The 'NSNO' Protocol established an agreed approach to ensuring new rough sleepers did not spend more than a single night on the streets by providing emergency accommodation. In addition rough sleepers from another area or country can be reconnected back to their local community, unless there is a good reason why they cannot return.
- 2.7 Local Authorities across Worcestershire aim to ensure that vulnerable people are protected during periods of severe cold weather by providing a safe and warm place of shelter. SWEP is activated if it is predicted to be zero degrees Celsius or below on any one night within Worcestershire. The primary aim of SWEP emergency provision is to prevent the loss of life or risk of serious harm as a result of cold weather.
- 2.8 This report seeks approval for a 6 month extension of the current contract so that a draft specification can be developed and tendered through full and proper collaboration with key partners and with full knowledge of budget availability across LHA's in Worcestershire.
- 2.9 The proposed extension would enable a comprehensive consultation process to be carried out with agencies across the county regarding both the needs of a new service but more importantly the outcomes we desire.
- 2.10 Such an extension would also enable a proper and comprehensive mobilisation and transition to be undertaken so there is continuity in support for some of our most vulnerable individuals.
- 2.11 Requirements for a future service will be informed from agencies experience of the current contract being delivered, findings from the independent review into the current HoPES service and a better understanding of both the level and type of demand that has been generated as a result of The Homelessness Reduction Act 2016.
- 2.12 Any new service will be commissioned in partnership with LHA's across Worcestershire utilising this knowledge. It will also be essential for any draft service specification to be widely circulated across partner agencies for consensus prior to a formal tendering process being undertaken
- 2.13 This piece of work will be led by the Head of Housing and Communities from Wychavon and Malvern Hills District Council and will be supported by the jointly funded Worcestershire Strategic Housing Partnership Officer and the Worcester City Single Homeless Pathways Officer.
- 2.14 £15,000 of the original allocation of £300,000 was also used to fund an access to private rented sector scheme delivered locally by each of the housing teams and which provides a supply of private rented property solutions for single and childless couples threatened with becoming homeless. Within Worcester this allocation of funding, matched by £15,000 of the Council's own money has been provided to the Citizens Advice Bureau / Worcester Housing & Benefits Advice Centre to deliver such a service via its Smart Let Scheme.

2.15 A funding bid of £30,000 has been made to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to cover this gap in funding for a 12 month period initially and although this submission has been received positively there is a risk to the ongoing provision of this service if funding is not received.

3 **Preferred Option**

3.1 To extend the existing contract for a period of 6 months until the 30th September 2019 enabling the council and its partner agencies to properly develop, consult and procure a new contract which is effective and compliments other and existing services across Worcestershire and in particular Worcester City.

4 **Alternative Options Considered**

4.1 To extend the contract for 3 months – This timeframe is deemed to be insufficient to allow for proper and meaningful consultation and to carry out a full tendering exercise which will allow for an efficient and effective transition and handover period.

5 **Implications**

5.1 Financial and Budgetary Implications

The full cost of a 6 month contract extension stands at £120,000 with the financial contribution of Worcester City Council proportioned to £85,472. Funding contributions across all financially contributing LHA's are included in the table below with the Council's contribution highlighted in blue.

	BDC	MHDC	RBC	WCC	WDC	WFDC	Total
Total Cases (Demand) 01/04/2016 – 31/03/2018	18	77	14	933	119	149	1310
% of total cases	1.38%	5.88%	1.06%	71.23%	9.08%	11.37%	100%
6 month Contribution	1648.86	7053.44	1282.44	85,471.64	10,900.76	13648.86	120,000

Subject to approval the Council's contribution would be funded from the existing Affordable Housing NHB Earmarked Reserve. This reserve balance currently stands at £820k of which £300k has been committed for use.

If the bid for funding from the MHCLG is not successful to cover the £30,000 this will result in a budget pressure and the reduction of a service providing housing solutions to single and childless couples.

5.2 Legal and Governance Implications

Subject to approval, extension of the existing contract and procurement of a new contract will be undertaken in line with council policy and procurement rules with support from the council's legal and procurement officers.

5.3 Risk Implications

Not having a sufficient period of time in which to develop and procure a new contract would risk impacting some of the City's most vulnerable individuals who are presently rough sleeping but also those households who are at risk of becoming homeless. To mitigate such risk this report seeks a 6 month extension period.

5.4 Corporate/Policy Implications

The service supports the delivery of the Worcestershire Homelessness Strategy and the legislative requirements of the HRA.

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, Environmental and Economic Implications

The extension of this contract will provide the existing provider and any future provider with a period of time to ensure that there is a successful transition period that does not adversely impact on service users circumstances.

Ward(s): **All Wards**
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Background Papers: **None**