

Homelessness Prevention and Assistance Policy

Report of: Councillor Ian Pritchard, Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Environmental Protection



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Key: YES
Decision?

CABINET

1. Executive Summary

The Council operates a number of homelessness prevention schemes, to enable homeless households to either remain in their current accommodation or to access suitable alternative accommodation. Several of these schemes require amendments to ensure that they remain effective.

In addition recent Government guidelines recommend that Council's should develop schemes to protect rough sleepers from death or serious harm during severe weather.

The Homelessness Prevention and Assistance Policy 2011, which is detailed at **APPENDIX A**, incorporates these revised prevention schemes together with the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol into one policy within a set of overarching principles. Members are requested to approve the policy.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To approve the Homelessness Prevention Assistance Policy 2011.
- 2.2 To delegate authority to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Environmental Protection to revise the schemes as and when appropriate, to ensure that they remain effective and meet identified needs.

3. Statement of Reasons

- 3.1 Each year, the District Council receives a grant from Central Government, to use in the prevention of homelessness. Over the years, the Council has used this funding to develop several homelessness prevention schemes, to enable clients to either remain in their current accommodation or to access suitable alternative accommodation.
- 3.2 **Homelessness Prevention Fund**

The Fund is used to prevent homelessness in the form of loans or small grants, in a variety of ways. Although the majority of the loans have been for rent deposits or rent in advance, the Fund has also been used to assist with court costs, transport costs, home repairs. The scheme has assisted 57 households at a cost of £27,000. Proposed changes include the introduction of a minimum age of 18 due to the assistance being in the form of a loan and the widening the eligibility to include all those threatened with homelessness rather than be restricted to within 28 days, to enable assistance to be given earlier. In addition, the maximum assistance has been increased to £2,000 to ensure that the scheme remains effective.
- 3.3 **Repossessions Prevention Fund**

This fund has the specific aim of preventing homelessness by assisting households who are threatened with eviction or repossession because of rent or mortgage arrears. The fund is used to pay off part or all of the arrears via a loan to the applicant. The fund has prevented the homelessness of five households at a cost of around

£7,500. This fund has been separated out from the Homelessness Prevention Fund in the proposals to make it easier to monitor expenditure as it funded by a specific Government grant.

To date just under £4500 has been repaid in total in relation to these 2 schemes.

3.4 Rent Guarantee Scheme

The Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme was set up in 2009 to assist in the securing of private rented accommodation by guaranteeing the deposit to the landlord instead of actually paying it, with the understanding that the Council would pay the landlord if it was successfully demonstrated that the he or she had suffered financially because of the actions of the tenant. We would then seek to recover the equivalent sum from the tenant. We have assisted 18 households through the scheme to the value of approximately £11,500 and accepted two claims from landlords at a cost of £1,000.

The proposed scheme now includes rent in advance and has been renamed the Rent Guarantee Scheme and in addition the maximum period of guarantee has been extended to 2 years to enable tenants more time to save up for the deposit.

3.5 Sanctuary Scheme

The scheme assists those who have suffered from domestic abuse to remain in their own homes by arranging for additional security measures to be installed. Measures can range from additional door or window locks and security lights to replacement doors. The Council contracts and pays for all measures installed. To date, we have assisted 23 households at a cost of almost £24,000. Apart from the introduction of a maximum grant there are no changes to this policy

3.6 In July 2011, the Government set-out its vision to end rough sleeping through the *No Second Night Out* nationwide report and in September produced a set of guidelines. This advised Local Authorities of the actions they should take to prevent rough sleepers from dying during severe weather. The proposed Severe Weather Emergency Protocol ensures that rough sleepers in Lichfield District will be offered accommodation if the night time temperature is predicted to fall below zero degrees Celsius for three consecutive nights, regardless of their eligibility under the homelessness legislation.

3.7 The Severe Weather Emergency Protocol is required as not all rough sleepers will be eligible for assistance under the Council's existing statutory duty to provide temporary accommodation for homeless households.

3.8 Rough sleeping is not significant problem in Lichfield District and in the annual return to Government made in the autumn of each year the number of rough sleepers identified has never been more than 2. The Police have advised that over a year there are up to 20 different individuals, who are mainly transient people, remaining in the District for only a few days at a time.

3.9 Incorporating all the schemes into one policy will assist in the monitoring of the effectiveness of the schemes in relation to the prevention and relief of homelessness and the reduction in the use of temporary accommodation.

Community Benefits

The prevention of homelessness can help in the sustainability of communities by enabling households to remain in close proximity to their support networks, including family and friends and services.

Views of Overview and Scrutiny

None sought

Alternative Options

The alternative options are:

- To continue to implement the existing prevention schemes without the introduction of a Homelessness Prevention Assistance Policy.

- Not to introduce a Severe Weather Emergency Protocol

Financial Implications

- The cost of all the homelessness prevention schemes will be met from existing service budgets.
- Expenditure will continue to be monitored

Strategic Plan Implications

One of the nine priorities contained within The Strategic Plan 2008/12 is *Help people access a home that's right for them and to live independently*. Contained within the priority are the following actions:

- Protection of homeless people and families by improving the services we deliver.
- With partners, help to prevent people from becoming homeless.

The Homelessness Prevention Assistance Policy will assist in the implementation of these actions.

Sustainability Issues

The policy will assist in maintaining people in their homes.

4. Risk Management

	Risk Description	Likelihood / Impact	Status	Countermeasure
A	Reduction or loss of central Government grant after 2015-16	Medium / high	Financial	Look to fund from existing budgets. Tighten eligibility criteria
B	Excess demand on the schemes	Low/High	Financial	Close monitoring of expenditure Amend eligibility criteria
C	Lack of demand for the schemes	Low/High		Amend eligibility criteria