

Meeting:	Cabinet member health and adult wellbeing
Decision date:	Friday, 22nd January 2021
Title of report:	Capital grant for homelessness hub
Report by:	Head of community commissioning and resources

Classification

Open

Decision type

Non-key

Wards affected

Whitecross, Greyfriars

Purpose

To approve a capital grant to Citizen Housing for improvement works to enable the launch of a homelessness hub in Hereford, with an associated nominations agreement.

The proposal forms part of Project Brave, an initiative developed during the Covid19 response and now evolving to make homelessness in Herefordshire rare, infrequent, non-recurring and short-lived.

It is proposed to make a grant of capital to Citizen Housing to enable redecoration and refreshment of the accommodation located west of the City Centre. The grant for works to create a homelessness hub will be funded entirely from a capital grant awarded for the purpose to the council by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)

The hub will launch during April 2021 and provide drop-in advice and support, eight units of emergency accommodation and four self contained flats for transition of homeless people towards independent living. Support and advice will be provided by the council's Housing Solutions service and Vennture, with housing management through Citizen Housing. There will be a nominations and operational agreement between the three organisations to support smooth and effective accommodation and support of homeless people at the hub.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- (a) **Capital funding of £104k on improving and equipping premises in Hereford as a homelessness hub, incorporating a grant to Citizen Housing be approved and**
- (b) **The director for Adults and Communities be authorised to approve a nominations and operational agreement with Citizen Housing and Vennture for the provision of accommodation and support at the homelessness hub.**

Alternative options

1. Establish a homelessness hub without any capital spending. This option is not recommended as the spending is necessary to ensure that the premises is appropriate for use as the hub. MHCLG awarded Herefordshire Council a capital grant of £104k expressly for the purpose of establishing a homelessness hub.
2. Spending the capital funds available on a different premises in order to establish a homelessness hub. This option is not recommended as more than one site has already been considered for the hub. The premises offers extensive accommodation, appropriately configured for a hub and requiring only minor works.

Key considerations

3. The council seeks to establish a homelessness hub, providing drop in advice and support, along with eight rooms with shared facilities and four self contained flats as emergency and transitional accommodation for homeless people. This will make a substantial contribution to ensuring effective pathways for vulnerable homeless people to living independently in long term homes. It will operate on the principle of “No second night out”, a national policy approach to homelessness which seeks to intervene immediately and decisively in rough sleeping. An effective homelessness hub will help reduce rough sleeping, sofa-surfing and other forms of rough sleeping, as part of Project Brave.
4. Project Brave emerged in March 2020 as part of Herefordshire’s response to the Covid19 emergency, focusing on “tier three” need, among people vulnerable, but not necessarily eligible for care services and who are at heightened risk during the emergency. There was a particular focus on homeless people, prompted in part by the Government’s requirement that all homeless people at risk were accommodated from March 2020. The council, working with partners including Vennture, has successfully accommodated up to 85 homeless people at any time in a variety of settings, provided support and worked with them to understand their needs and agree pathway plans with them. Vennture is a local voluntary organisation which works extensively particularly in Hereford city, including providing street based support for rough sleepers and others. The initiative has also found homes for almost 50 people and helped a number into employment.
5. Project Brave has evolved rapidly into an ambitious but serious plan to prevent and reduce homelessness in Herefordshire so that it becomes rare, infrequent, non-recurring and short lived. It combines working to understand, support and plan pathways for

homeless people and design and deliver a pipeline of up to 120 long term homes for them. The council has attracted very significant grant aid, both revenue and capital from MHCLG to implement the initiative.

6. Many social and economic factors can increase homelessness and despite the work undertaken by the council and latterly, its voluntary sector partners, a small but significant number of local people are homeless. The official annual count of rough sleepers in November 2019 identified 29, although numbers fluctuate from week to week and are counted informally on a regular basis. A year later in November, the count was 15 and the cohort of homeless people vulnerable during the winter is estimated to be 20. The reduction from 2019 is attributable in part to the detailed work through Project Brave in identifying and addressing needs of the cohort. In total, approximately 120 people are identified to be homeless and in need of sustainable homes.
7. The proposed homelessness hub will help implement the Homelessness Prevention Strategy for Herefordshire and the council's strategic work in managing emergencies, including flooding and Covid19. It will also help ensure that the government's priorities through the rough sleeping initiative and the Next Steps programme are delivered effectively. Whilst encompassing "no second night out", the hub will also contribute directly to wider pathways for homeless people, and so indirectly promote the "Housing First" principle adopted by Project Brave.
8. The property is a three storey building with an extension, situated to the rear to the west of Hereford City centre with proximity to local facilities. It is owned by Citizen Housing, a large regional registered housing provider with significant stock in Hereford. Other buildings have been considered including a property owned by the council, but these were not suitable in relation to one or more of the following;
 - Their location in relation to transport links and the city centre night time economy.
 - The scale and cost of improvement or conversion works required
 - The number and configuration of accommodation units available on site.

The landlord will undertake a procurement process in accordance with appropriate regulations to commission the works required.

9. The building was extended and improved some years ago with capital grant from the council. It has eight bedrooms with shared facilities over two floors in the main building and four self contained flats in the rear extension. There are extensive common areas on the ground floor which are currently utilised in full.
10. The premises has operated for a number of years as accommodation for vulnerable people, as part of a service commissioned by the council. The service is now being de-commissioned as the market for young people's accommodation and support is being redeveloped. Up to 12 current occupants will need to move-on to other housing, some with continuing support. Commissioners are working with referring services and the provider to ensure that all occupants are able to move-on appropriately from the building by 31 January 2021. It is proposed that Citizen Housing will continue to operate the building as a homelessness hub, with housing management.
11. The accommodation at the hub will be used as emergency accommodation for homeless people at immediate risk of rough sleeping, with the self contained flats providing initial transition opportunities, including through taster or trial periods with support. Support for

vulnerable individuals will be provided by the council's rough sleeping outreach team, augmented by the work of Vennture, through a council contract funded by MHCLG. This support will be personalised to individuals' needs and focused on pathways to independent living. It will be delivered at the hub but also following an outreach approach, within Hereford but also potentially in market towns. As well as supporting people living at the premises, the teams will offer drop in advice, information and triage to vulnerable homeless people.

12. To ensure the effective delivery of the hub and best use of the accommodation, there will be a three way operating agreement between Citizen Housing, Vennture and the council. This will deal with how people living on-site are contacted and supported and the use of space and provision of advice to homeless people. It will serve to promote transparency, good outcomes for homeless people and minimise tensions between different organisations and different roles. The agreement will be combined with a nomination agreement which governs who will be referred to the hub by which service. It will also set expectations of the housing provider and seek to prevent or manage any extended voids or vacancies. The combined agreement will be for a period of three years with robust options for review and termination, within the term.
13. The accommodation is currently in broadly satisfactory condition for its proposed purpose, albeit rather tired. The capital grant offered to Citizen Housing will enable some refreshment works including redecoration and checking and improving of bathroom fittings and flooring materials, as required. Over time as landlord, Citizen Housing will be required to keep the premises in satisfactory condition. The costs of the works are estimated to be up to £90k. The re-furnishing of the accommodation will be undertaken by the council, utilising various charitable and other sources. The grant to Citizen Housing will be administered using standard capital grant processes and the project is overseen by the Capital Board for Adults and Communities Directorate.
14. Key elements of the proposed timetable are as follows;

January 2021	All current occupants successfully moved-on Operating and nomination agreement drafted and circulated.
February 2021	Current foyer service closes Works on the premises commence
March 2021	Works on the premises conclude. Nomination and operating agreement finalised
April 2021	Opening of new hub is launched
May 2021	New homelessness hub is operational and fully occupied

Community impact

15. Herefordshire's County Plan addresses three priorities of economy, community and environment through the themes of sustainability, wellbeing and connectivity. By providing accommodation and support to rough sleepers and homeless people, this proposal will promote the wellbeing of vulnerable people. It will also contribute to building communities by helping people to be able to live independently in their own homes. There are wider benefits to the economy through helping to prevent street homelessness in Hereford and market towns, as part of the wider initiative, Project Brave.
16. The strategic integrated needs assessment, Understanding Herefordshire sets out the estimated numbers of homeless people and the smaller number of people at highest risk, through rough sleeping. Project Brave, commencing with the Everyone In arrangements in response to Covid-19 has enabled a great increase in understanding of the numbers and needs of homeless people locally, including rough sleepers. The homelessness hub will also help the development of a pipeline of new sustainable homes for people who are currently homeless, as part of wider development of sustainable and connected housing in the county.
17. The proposed homelessness hub is not aimed directly at supporting care experienced young people as part of the council's corporate parenting responsibilities. By redeveloping the market for support and accommodation, the council is working to ensure that young people do not become homeless. However, some young people have been accommodated and supported through Project Brave, including some with care experience in other council areas. The hub will be able to support vulnerable young people at risk of homelessness and enable them to find appropriate accommodation and support.

Environmental Impact

18. There will not be significant environmental implications from this proposal. However, by helping to reduce street homelessness in Hereford and market towns it will contribute to improving the urban environment for people, businesses and the night-time economy. This is being promoted through Team Hereford, Team Leominster and other initiatives.

The homelessness hub will help reduce pollution through use of vehicles in Hereford city by providing a flexible working environment for teams supporting homelessness on a hot-desking basis, consistent with better ways of working. Workers will be encouraged to walk or use the Beryl Bike scheme travel between the hub and other key locations and offices in Hereford.

Equality duty

19. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;

- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
20. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying ‘due regard’ in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. The proposed homelessness hub will positively improve the situation of people sharing some protected characteristics by enabling them to be in safe accommodation with support and on a pathway to independent living in sustainable housing. This beneficial impact will be experienced by disabled people including those with mental health needs and also by men who are traditionally disproportionately represented amongst those rough sleeping. The proposal may also provide benefit in relation to other protected characteristics, including age.
21. No detrimental impact for any group with a protected characteristic is anticipated from this decision, as it will lead to an increase in facilities and an improved service for a vulnerable group of local people.

Resource implications

22. The proposal has no significant resource implications for the council. It involves only capital spending and this is met in full by a capital grant awarded to the council by MHCLG for the purpose. There is no revenue spending directly related to this decision.
23. A grant of £104k has been received by the council from MHCLG’s Rough Sleeping Initiative, in order to establish a homelessness hub in Hereford. This grant has now been added to the council’s capital programme by the s151 officer under delegated powers. It forms part of a line in the capital programme, “Homelessness Hub and Property Investment.
24. The twelve units of accommodation will be provided by Citizen Housing, which will seek to meet its costs of the building and housing management through claims for housing benefit by occupants. Support to occupants will be provided by the council’s Housing Solutions service and Vennture, a contracted provider of the council. The revenue costs of this support are met through separate budgets, funded by other grants from MHCLG and subject to separate governance.
25. The table below sets out the capital income and expenditure related to this decision

Revenue or Capital cost of project (indicate R or C)	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Future Years	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Capital grant to Citizen Housing		90			
Furnishing		9			

Contingency		5			
TOTAL		104			

Funding streams (indicate whether base budget / external / grant / capital borrowing)	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Future Years	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
MHCLG Capital Grant		104			
TOTAL		104			

Legal implications

26. Local Authorities have a duty to secure that accommodation is available to homeless applicants where it is satisfied, following enquiries, that they are eligible for assistance, priority need and not intentionally homeless (“the full housing duty” s193 Housing Act 1996). A Local Authority is subject to the full housing duty until it ceases by any of the provisions of section 193 of the Housing Act 1996.
27. Under section 192 of the Housing Act 1996, A local authority has a power to secure that accommodation is available for those applicants who would otherwise be entitled to the “full housing duty” save for that they do not have a priority need.
28. Under s1 Localism Act 2010 the council has a general power of competence which means the council can do anything that an individual can do which would include the ability to make a grant to Citizen Housing for the works to the proposed homelessness hub.

Risk management

29. The risks of not proceeding with the proposal involve not being able to establish a homelessness hub in Hereford, so foregoing the use of 12 units of emergency and transitional accommodation and a location for support and advice to vulnerable homelessness people. This would delay or prevent the opportunity to further reduce homelessness in Herefordshire. In addition by not utilising the capital grant provided by MHCLG for the purpose of establishing a homelessness hub, the council would risk reputational harm and potentially reduced potential for attracting future grant aid in preventing homelessness.
30. The following risks and opportunities arise from the proposed decision;

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
<p>The launch of the hub could be delayed by the time taken to complete the refreshment works required to the building.</p>	<p>The works required are modest and straight forward. The Housing provider has established processes for procuring and managing works to its buildings. A period of approximately eight weeks is available for the works to be undertaken. There is some risk of delay arising from covid 19 affecting the ways works are carried out. However, the nature of works is likely to allow them to be carried out by a small team able to observe social distancing and covid secure practice.</p>
<p>The works to the hub and therefore its launch could be delayed by the moving on of current residents in the building.</p>	<p>The current foyer service for young people operating from the building is scheduled to close on 31 January 2021, following its decommissioning by the council. A project to ensure timely and appropriate move-on is being co-ordinated by commissioners and including the provider, and the council's housing solutions and 16 Plus services.</p>
<p>The cost of works could exceed the grant income available.</p>	<p>The works will be agreed with the landlord subject to a ceiling cost and a contingency budget is included above the ceiling.</p>
<p>Over a period, demand amongst vulnerable homeless people may reduce to an extent sufficient to lead to the hub over supplying accommodation.</p>	<p>The current levels of demand are well understood by operational teams and are sufficient to be managed in part through the premises on The nomination and operating agreement will provide for regular reviews of need and demand and can be terminated with notice. The accommodation is susceptible to alternative uses if required over time and is in the ownership of a registered housing provider.</p>
<p>There is the potential for tension and complexity in having three different organisations operating in the building.</p>	<p>The operating and nominations agreement is intended to manage the relationships and prevent tensions and complexity, whilst ensuring the best outcomes for vulnerable homeless people.</p>

The proposal provides an opportunity to prevent rough sleeping and manage homelessness in a more decisive way and support people on pathways to sustainable homes. This further reflects priorities in the County Plan, including that relating to community.

31. The risks will be managed at service level through the Prevention and Support service and All Age Commissioning.

Consultees

32. During the evolution of Project Brave as part of the Covid19 emergency, council and Vennture teams have engaged extensively with rough sleepers and other homeless people to understand their needs and aspirations. This work has informed plans for a homelessness hub and the choice of location.
33. The ward members for Whitecross and Greyfriars wards have been consulted.
34. There has been consultation with Vennture, the Diocese of Hereford, Citizen Housing and other local voluntary and community organisations directly involved in project brave, along with local police. This engagement has indicated support for the development of a homelessness hub in Hereford.
35. Members were consulted about the development of the wider homelessness initiative, Project Brave including this proposal for a homelessness hub. Members expressed support for the proposal and made suggestions about the implementation of Project Brave. These including recognising the contribution pets can make to the wellbeing of vulnerable and other people and the need to address possible barriers to housing relating to pets. This has been addressed in the development of the nomination and operating agreement for the proposed homelessness hub.

Appendices

Background papers

None identified

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.