

	<p style="text-align: center;">CHIEF OFFICER IN CONSULTATION WITH COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN DELEGATED POWERS REPORT 12 August 2019</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Title</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Releasing £0.499m of top-up funding from the Government</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Report of</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Deputy Chief Executive</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Wards</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">All</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Status</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Public</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Enclosures</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Officer Contact Details</p>	<p>Ian Helcke Head of Housing Options, Barnet Homes Ltd Ian.Helcke@barnethomes.org 0208 359 4869 Faisal Butt Commissioning Lead, Housing Faisal.Butt@Barnet.gov.uk 020 8359 6263</p>

Summary

Sustained lobbying by Barnet Homes' Housing Options Service to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) resulted in the Ministry agreeing to provide £0.533m to Barnet Homes' Housing Options Service, to support the following three key areas of homelessness work:

- a) Prioritising prevention activity;
- b) Carrying out homelessness activities in line with the principles of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017; and
- c) Reducing or eliminating the use of emergency B&B, particularly for periods over 6 weeks.

This report sets out how the additional funding can be used to reduce homelessness and seeks to allocate the funding to Barnet Homes for this purpose.

Decisions

- 1. That the Council releases £0.499m of the funding provided by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to Barnet Homes' Housing Options Service.**

1 WHY THIS REPORT IS NEEDED

- 1.1 Sustained lobbying by Barnet Homes to the Government has resulted in the MHCLG agreeing to provide £0.533m to support the following three key areas of homelessness work:
- a) Prioritising prevention activity;
 - b) Carrying out homelessness activities in line with the principles of the Homelessness Reduction Act; and
 - c) Reducing or eliminating the use of emergency B&B, particularly for periods over 6 weeks.

Below, section 1.5 shows why these three areas require funding for additional resourcing.

- 1.2 This report sets out how Barnet Homes propose to use the additional funding to deliver the interventions and outcomes approved with the MHCLG. The MHCLG will require Barnet Homes to develop an action plan with the advisers in the MHCLG's Housing Advice and Support Team (HAST) and report on outcomes achieved through this funding.
- 1.3 As specified below in section 1.5, the £0.499m will pay for salaries over 12 months for 2 visiting officers and over 24 months for 7 trainees.
- 1.4 The proposed interventions will be delivered over 12 months from the date of mobilisation. These interventions are projected to produce 265 additional prevention outcomes over 2 years – which bring financial benefits due to reduced placements into temporary accommodation (TA).
- 1.5 Why the funding is required**

1.5.1 **Increased casework resource – more prevention activity**

Frontline officers' ability to achieve preventions and complete casework effectively has been negatively impacted by the increased administrative burden of the Homelessness Reduction Act. The new Act requires more detailed assessments, additional notifications and greater decision-making. The longer assessment periods with the 56-day prevention and then 56-day relief duty results in cases being held open for longer. It also should be noted that Housing Needs Officers (HNOs) are completing assessments and banding decisions under the LBB Housing Allocations Scheme.

Barnet Homes has already put resources in place to help meet this administrative burden, with the Triage and Customer Ready Teams. There has also been investment in new software to deliver on the Act, and new IT modules are now being rolled out to help with assessing applications under the Housing Allocations Scheme. Despite these interventions, we have seen caseloads continue to rise amongst HNOs.

To get resources to where they are needed – i.e. in completing casework - it is recommended that another tranche of trainees is recruited to backfill the September trainees in the Triage function. By reducing average caseloads, we expect officers would have more time for prevention activities. In 2018/19, the number of preventions for 17 officers was 425 with an average per officer of 25. By reducing current caseloads by a quarter, we would expect prevention outcomes per officer to increase by a fifth. With 23 casework officers, this would represent 30 preventions per officer, or 690 per year which represents an additional 265 preventions.

To manage the triage functions of the contact centre and face-to-face appointments, 7 trainees are required to cover rotas in the team.

1.5.2 **Visiting Officers – supporting casework and prevention**

The Homelessness Service receives a high volume of applications relating to the suitability of existing accommodation on medical grounds, and evictions from parents and relatives. In 2018/19, the service received 236 and 798 respectively. To properly assess these types

of cases and verify genuine applications, home visits need to be completed. Employing visiting officers to provide a coordinated approach to working across the borough will assist in reducing applications which do not meet the thresholds of unsuitability, and in deterring applications where homelessness has been contrived.

Two visiting officers are required given the volume of applicants needing a home visit, the comprehensive assessment and photographs to be recorded, the size of the borough and the ability to complete visits in an emergency.

1.6 **Total Costs**

The total costs of these interventions are £499,000 and would require the funding to be spread over 3 financial years, to pay for the salaries over 12-24 months. There is also an additional cost of paying landlord incentives which need to be factored in when determining any savings, which means that financial benefits are not achieved in 2019/20.

2 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 This funding will bring additional resources to Homelessness services, where the impact of the Homeless Reduction Act is bringing increasingly unmanageable caseloads.
- 2.2 The funding will enable the Council to better manage cases, and to drive improved performance on compliance with the Homelessness Reduction Act, as well as seeing increased levels of homeless prevention outcomes and TA reduction.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND NOT RECOMMENDED

- 3.1 The alternative option entails the council not using the money which the MHCLG has provided for the purpose of delivering additional homelessness outcomes. This option would prevent Barnet Homes from delivering these additional outcomes, and entails the following risks:
 - Continued unmanageable caseloads leading to higher sickness and staff turnover in a market where it is not possible to recruit experienced staff
 - Housing applicants spending longer in temporary accommodation impacting on General Fund (GF) homelessness budget pressure

- Increased likelihood of legal challenge and Ombudsman complaints due to poor compliance with the Homelessness Reduction Act and delays in handling applications within reasonable timeframes as set out in the Code of Guidance
- The risk that the MHCLG would not provide further additional funding for tackling homelessness in future.

4 POST-DECISION IMPLEMENTATION

- 4.1 Once the funded is released, Barnet Homes will put the measures in place and recruit for the additional roles as soon as possible. Prompt recruitment should result in outcomes being achieved in a shorter timeframe.

5 IMPLICATIONS OF DECISION

5.1 Corporate Priorities and Performance

- 5.1.1 The Council's Corporate Plan 2019 to 2024 is based on three main outcomes, one of which is "our residents live happy, healthy, independent lives with the most vulnerable protected." By enabling the recruitment of additional frontline resources, Barnet Homes will prevent more residents from becoming homeless, and will process housing applications in a shorter timeframe – to give residents greater time to obtain favourable outcomes to their housing issues.

5.1.2 Resources (Finance & Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)

- 5.1.3 In March 2019, the Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) awarded the council additional top up grant funding totalling £0.533m for Homelessness Prevention £224k and Flexible Homelessness Support £309k. This was achieved through successful lobbying by Barnet Homes following the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act. The grant conditions do not specify a timeframe for spending the grant, however it does specify what the grant can be spent on.

Table 1 below shows how the funding will be applied

Table 1 – Summary of additional costs

	2019/20 (£'000s)	2020/21 (£'000s)	2021/22 (£'000s)	Total (£'000s)
7 additional trainees increasing homelessness prevention	101.5	212	110.5	424
2 Visiting officers	37.5	37.5	.	75
Total	139	249.5	110.5	499

5.1.4 The funding will enable an additional 265 homeless preventions over 4 years from 2019/20 to 2022/23 which will help reduce spend on temporary accommodation. Applying the funding as outlined above will result in a General Fund homelessness budget pressure of £3.6m by 2022/23, compared to a do-nothing approach which could result in a budget pressure of £5.0m. The funding is estimated to reduce the cost to the Council by £1.4m over 4 years.

5.1.5 The financial benefits to the General Fund Homelessness budget expected to be delivered through the proposed allocation of funding is outlined in table 2 below and is approved by the Council's section 151 officer.

Table 2 – General Fund Homelessness budget impact

	2019/20 (£'000s)	2020/21 (£'000s)	2021/22 (£'000s)	2022/23 (£'000s)	Total (£'000s)
Budget	6,399	5,530	3,890	2,230	18,049
Current projected net expenditure	7,273	6,639	5,224	3,956	23,092
Current projected budget pressure (P3)	874	1,109	1,334	1,726	5,043
Cost of interventions¹					
Cost of interventions ¹	323	547	111	0	981
Reduction in TA costs	(178)	(542)	(625)	(590)	(1,934)
Application of Grant	(139)	(249)	(111)	0	(499)
Revised Net expenditure	7,058	6,395	4,599	3,366	21,418

¹ Includes the cost of assisting households access the private rented sector and staff costs

Revised budget pressure	880	865	709	1,136	3,590
Cost/(Saving)	6	(244)	(625)	(590)	(1,453)

5.1.6 The MHCLG have yet to announce the New Burdens Funding settlement for 2020/21 and beyond and the Council will continue to lobby for the funding allocation to include these additional interventions

5.2 Social Value

5.2.1 Preventing homelessness and moving people out of Temporary Accommodation into longer-term accommodation enable households to live more settled, stable lives.

5.3 Legal and Constitutional References

5.3.1 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 has introduced two main additional duties on local housing authorities – the duty to prevent homelessness and the duty to relieve homelessness.

5.3.2 Article 10.4 of the Council’s Constitution states:

10.4 Decision making by Chief Officers jointly with Theme Committee Chairmen
Chief Officers in consultation with Theme Committee Chairmen (Policy & Resources; Children, Education, Libraries & Safeguarding; Adults & Safeguarding; Environment; Assets, Regeneration & Growth; Housing; Community Leadership) have delegated authority to make decisions which are not key decisions and which have a value between £181,302 and £500,000. A written report will be prepared for every decision.

5.4 Risk Management

5.4.1 In addition to the risks outlined in section 3.1 above, without additional funding, the Councils Homelessness Service risks losing more staff. Since the Homelessness Reduction Act was introduced in April 2018, 19 officers have left roles delivering the frontline casework service. There will also be an impact on the Service’s ability to be compliant with the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act.

5.5 Equalities and Diversity

5.5.1 The Equality Act 2010 outlines the provisions of the Public Sector Equality Duty which requires Public Bodies **to have due regard** to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it; and
- foster good relations between people from who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

5.5.2 The relevant protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

5.5.3 No Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) was completed because this did not represent a policy change.

5.6 Corporate Parenting

5.6.1 None

5.7 Consultation and Engagement

5.71 The proposals underpinning this funding allocation have been agreed with HAST at the Ministry.

5.8 Insight

5.8.1 None

6 BACKGROUND PAPERS

6.1 None

Chairman: Cllr Gabriel Rozenberg, Chairman of Housing Committee
Has been consulted



Signed

Date 15.8.19

Chief Officer: Anisa Darr, Director of Finance
Decision maker having taken into account the views of the Chairman



Signed

Date 8.8.19
