

## Overview of Responses and Recommendations

Budget Proposals 16/17: Housing Related Outreach Support Service		June Graves - Head of CCH&S	19 January 2016 Version 2 (Exec)
<b>Proposal:</b>	To withdraw the funding for the housing related outreach support service provided by Two Saints		
<b>Total budget 15/16:</b>	£184,000	<b>Recommended officer saving 16/17:</b>	£184,000 (100%)
<b>Initial proposed saving 16/17:</b>	£184,000 (100%)	<b>Final recommendation to Executive 16/17:</b>	To proceed with this savings proposal, without any modifications.
<b>Nos of responses:</b>	<p>55 responses were received in total – 36 of these were from people who are using the service. These came from either completing the feedback for on line, individuals working with a support worker to complete in hard copy or as part of a session with council officers facilitated by the provider. Many of the responses were quite lengthy and detailed in their response.</p> <p>Organisations that provided feedback include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Two Saints</li> <li>○ Southern Housing group</li> <li>○ WBC Adult Social Care – social worker feedback</li> <li>○ WBC – Housing service staff</li> <li>○ Salvation Army</li> <li>○ Loose ends</li> <li>○ UNISON</li> <li>○ Tilehurst Parish Council</li> <li>○ Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust</li> <li>○ Pangbourne Parish Council</li> </ul>		
<b>Key issues raised:</b>	<p>Overall there was significant concern that the withdrawal of the funding/service will have significant impact on some of the most vulnerable in our society and that in the long run will create demand and budget pressures elsewhere in the system.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respondents in many instances highlighted the role the service has in assisting people to make and attend health appointments, provide support for court appearances, apply for benefits and do their correspondence particularly in relation to managing any debt. Capacity and cost issues they believed would inevitably occurred within statutory services and agencies picking up support needs as without this service people will go into crisis - most particularly housing, ASC, CMHT, DAT services, Children and Family Services may see a rise in demand.</li> <li>• A significant number of respondents identified that the service has a role in preventing homelessness by maintaining tenancies, thereby avoiding evictions and reducing the numbers of rough sleepers and single homeless.</li> <li>• The financial benefits of the service were highlighted noting that 66% of those in receipt of the service who were at risk of eviction were able to stay in their homes. The average cost of taking a homelessness application in WBC is in the region</li> </ul>		

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	<p>of £1500 with the cost of temporary accommodation at an average of £300 per week.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research was provided by one respondent on the significant savings that comes from prevention and early intervention. Specifically the cost saving from avoiding evictions for families where it has not been possible to find temporary accommodation and fostering arrangements are needed, these are shown in the 2014 National Audit Office report as in the region of £30k per annum.</li> <li>WBC Housing Team would be unable to offer this kind of intensive service and therefore the number of evictions and homelessness applications will increase.</li> <li>Some respondents were clear that the Council should not rely on the CVS and Churches <i>'As a voluntary organisation we need Housing Support to work with us and to whom we can refer our clients for help.'</i></li> <li>There would be a negative impact on people's lives as they are unable to cope with managing their tenancies and issues of social isolation escalate, family breakdown may occur and mental health/physical issues will be exacerbated. At least two respondents indicated that this service has 'saved lives'.</li> <li>The service provides support to the travelling community and there was concern that the 'active voice' it provides in managing their licences would be lost.</li> <li>Numerous responses reinforced that they did not want the service to end. <i>'This service helps you to contact other services which are available to you.'</i> <i>'This is a really important service, please do not take this away'</i></li> </ul>		
<b>Equality issues:</b>	<p>There was a general view that the withdrawal of the funding would have a direct impact on homeless people, people with MH issues, the travelling community, people living in poverty and people with learning difficulties or literacy problems. However no specific equality issues were raised.</p>		
<b>Suggestions for reducing the impact on service users:</b>	<b>Suggestion</b>	<b>Council response</b>	
	<p>Many respondents felt they could not identify other methods for delivery the same or similar support in a way that would alleviate the impact as it does not exist and therefore would leave a significant gap. However some said that the CAB may be able to assist in some circumstances, but</p>	<p>CAB offers a telephone response or a booked appointment at their offices. Whilst this can be complementary to the outreach service, it is at a much lower level of support and not particularly accessible for the most vulnerable who often require considerable work up front to gain their trust and confidence.</p>	

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	it was also recognised that cuts are proposed to their funding as well.		
	<p>A number of responses suggested development of online information, however many of the people supported do not have IT access.</p> <p><i>'It is a great concern that many people will slip through this net and not be captured. In regard to housing related support there are very minimal other services to signpost to so I am not sure to where we could, other than CAB, which again is appointment only, and not as flexible or creative to engaging a very chaotic person/family.'</i></p>	The council is looking to develop on line information about homelessness services as part of its digital transformation approach to service delivery. This will meet the needs of relatively small number of those who currently access the support service, as many do not have access to IT or have an appropriate set of skills to use the information that would be provided.	
	<b>Suggestion</b>	<b>Council response</b>	
	Bring the service back into the Council, to sit within the Housing Options Team which could reduce costs by roughly half. This service would provide intensive support to those at risk of homelessness.	This could be an option however many of the client cohort for this service are dealing with the housing team on other matters which may lead to conflicts of interest. People tend to respond better to support provided by an external provider in dealing with complex and sensitive issues where the council may be seen by someone as part of their overall difficulty.	
<b>Alternative options for applying the saving in this area:</b>	<p>The current provider has made two proposals for alternative options:</p> <p>A. West Berkshire reduces funding by £105,950, to deliver a service which would provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• drop-ins at agreed locations</li> <li>• a rapid intervention service</li> </ul>	Both options could result in a significant reduction in the funding whilst retaining the core elements of the support service for the most vulnerable. It would seem sensible to explore this option with the provider to establish in more detail what a remodelled service could deliver.	

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	<p>offering six support sessions for those in most crisis.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employing 1.5 staff members</li> </ul> <p>B. West Berkshire reduces funding by £122,600 which would see services being provided to the most vulnerable via drop in support only, and employing 1 full time member of staff.</p>		
<b>Suggestions for how others may help contribute:</b>	Some respondents were clear that the Council should not rely on the CVS and Churches ' <i>As a voluntary organisation we need Housing Support to work with us and to whom we can refer our clients for help</i> '. It was suggested that Registered Providers who are currently referring to the service as their own tenancy support services are unable to work with people once eviction proceedings commence, should be approached to fund the service.		
<b>Officer conclusion as a result of the responses:</b>	This exercise has highlighted the value of the service for prevention and early intervention for homelessness. It is clear that the work is valued and there are little or no alternative sources of support available to step in should the service end. A strong financial argument has been made by a number of respondents on the basis of the much higher costs associated with taking homelessness applications and then dealing with impact of this in children and their families.		
<b>Officer recommendation as a result of responses:</b>	<p>Apart from an offer from the provider to deliver a more targeted service for a lower level of funding, which it is not possible to identify at this point, feedback has not uncovered any further issues which would prevent the council from proceeding with this proposal.</p> <p>Whilst it is understood a decision to withdraw funding will have an impact on the users of the service, given the level of financial savings the Council is required to make to achieve a balanced budget position and maintain core statutory services, the recommendation is to proceed with the proposal as described with no changes.</p>		

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