

Decision Pathway – Report



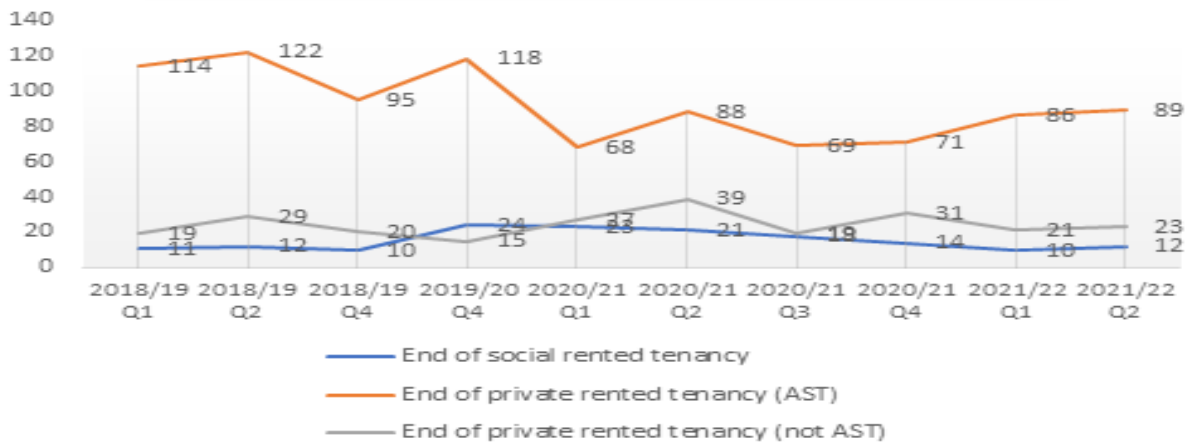
PURPOSE: Key decision

MEETING: Cabinet

DATE: 18 January 2022

TITLE	Homelessness Prevention Grant – Winter 2021 COVID-19 rent arrears financial support		
Ward(s)	City wide		
Author: Paul Sylvester	Job title: Head of Housing Options		
Cabinet lead: Cllr Tom Renhard, Cabinet Member Housing Delivery and Homes	Executive Director lead: Stephen Peacock, Executive Director Growth and Regeneration		
Proposal origin: BCC Staff			
Decision maker: Cabinet Member Decision forum: Cabinet			
Purpose of Report: To seek approval to accept the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC's) Homelessness Prevention Grant (Winter 2021 COVID-19 rent arrears financial support) and to distribute in accordance with the principles set out in the report and in compliance with the grant conditions to avoid eviction or secure a new home for private rented tenants at risk of homelessness.			
Evidence Base:.			
Bristol context			
<p>Whilst we were disappointed to see the removal of the eviction ban and that the Local Housing Allowance will be frozen again in 22/23, we are pleased to see that the government have responded to lobbying from local authorities and homelessness organisations to support people in the private rented sector who have suffered financially due to the pandemic.</p> <p>Over 30% of households in Bristol live in the private rented sector (PRS). Bristol's PRS is in high demand and rents in the South West have risen by 9% in the last 12 months. The challenges of affordability mean that for many households in the PRS who have lost employment, or had their income reduced, this can quickly lead to rent arrears and put their tenancy at risk.</p> <p>This one-off payment of £610k will enable Bristol City Council to support between 150 and 250 low-income private renters with COVID-19 related rent arrears to avoid eviction or find a new home.</p> <p>The graph below shows the number of households in the PRS who have approached BCC for support and where they are threatened with homelessness within 56 days. It shows the number of private tenants with Assured Shorthold Tenancies and other agreements; as well as the number of social housing tenants who are threatened with homelessness.</p> <p>Whilst we did see a reduction in private rented possession proceedings and evictions in 20/21, the numbers have started to increase, linked to the removal of the eviction ban and other protections, for example longer notices.</p>			

Reasons for Homelessness (for cases where first duty was accepted during quarter only)



Since Q2 21/22, we have seen a significant increase in the number of PRS tenants contacting the Housing Options Service due to concerns about homelessness. There are over 200 PRS tenants who need support now to prevent homelessness.

Grant conditions

The Department for Levelling Up, Communities and Homes (DLUCH) has confirmed that Bristol will receive an allocation of £610,000 in grant for 21/22 to be spent by 31.3.22

The grant is made specifically to prevent homelessness from the PRS and to enable households to move into affordable/sustainable PRS tenancies.

The grant may not be used to pay for Temporary Accommodation (TA) costs. However effective prevention will mean that affected households do not present as homeless and will not need TA.

Who and how will we help?

The target group for prevention of homelessness for the PRS is any low-income household at risk of homelessness – mainly those in rent arrears.

The target groups for access to the PRS are supported housing, hostel and TA residents. Each move on from such accommodation to the PRS can free up high-demand bedspaces, reduce rough sleeping numbers and reduce the council’s use of TA.

Anticipated expenditure will be split as follows: 70% prevention; 30% access to sustainable PRS tenancies. This can be flexed depending on casework and take up of the fund’s use.

The majority of spend will be on paying arrears (preventions); and enabling access to the PRS (deposits, rent in advance, landlord incentive payments, removals and essential household goods).

We will prioritise:

- 1) preventing homelessness for households which we would otherwise have to accommodate in TA if evicted (preventions) i.e. families with dependent children; and
- 2) moving households into sustainable PRS tenancies who are:
 - Accommodated in TA
 - Accommodated in supported housing and hostel accommodation. Resultant vacancies can be filled by households currently accommodated in TA.
 - Currently staying with family members or friends in the short term, who would require TA if not provided with a housing option.
 - Living in unaffordable PRS accommodation who can move to sustainable PRS homes.

Robust financial controls and audit

This funding will only be used when all other options to prevent homelessness have been explored.

A referral will be completed, and decisions made by Team Leaders and Managers with Head of Service oversight

A payment will be made to a Landlord to rescue a tenancy on condition that:

- Landlord will issue the tenant with a new 12-month Assured Shorthold Tenancy
- Referrer confirmation that the tenancy is affordable and sustainable
- Confirmation that the property is in good condition
- The landlord is a 'fit and proper person'. Checks are made with the Private Housing Service

Accurate and comprehensive records will be kept including - All referrals, payment requests and associated documents

There will be regular reporting to the Cabinet member for Housing Delivery and Homes on outcomes.

Cabinet Member / Officer Recommendations:

That Cabinet:

1. Authorises the Executive Director of Growth and Regeneration in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing Delivery and Homes to accept the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' (DLUHC) Homelessness Prevention Grant and thereafter distribute in accordance with the principles set out in the report and in compliance with the grant conditions.

Corporate Strategy alignment:

This proposal aligns directly with the Corporate Strategy priority to reduce and prevent homelessness and reduce the number of households in Temporary Accommodation

City Benefits:

Stable housing is intrinsically tied to how well people can focus on other needs or difficulties in their lives and participate within their communities. This proposal will have a positive impact on both the households who are supported and the communities they live in.

Consultation Details:

None

Background Documents: None

Revenue Cost	£610,641	Source of Revenue Funding	DLUCH grant funding
Capital Cost	£0	Source of Capital Funding	
One off cost <input type="checkbox"/>	Ongoing cost <input type="checkbox"/>	Saving Proposal <input type="checkbox"/>	Income generation proposal <input type="checkbox"/>

Required information to be completed by Financial/Legal/ICT/ HR partners:**1. Finance Advice:**

This is one-off payment that will enable Bristol City Council to support between 150 and 250 low-income private renters with COVID-19 related rent arrears to avoid eviction or find a new home.

Please note that grant cannot be used to pay for Temporary Accommodation (TA) costs. However, funding will help to prevent affected household to be presented as homelessness and averting added pressure on TA budget.

The allocation is for 21/22, any unspent grant is expected to be returned although request for a carry forward will be made if required.

Finance Business Partner: Aisha Bapu 10th January 2022

2. Legal Advice: The proposal to accept the DLUHC’s Homelessness Prevention Grant raises no particular legal issues other than the need to ensure compliance with the grant terms, in particular regarding its use to assist tenants in the private rented sector etc.		
Legal Team Leader: Eric Andrews, Team Leader, Legal Services; 24 December 2021		
3. Implications on IT: I can see no implications on IT in regard to this activity		
IT Team Leader: Gavin Arbuckle, Head of Service Improvement and Performance 4 January 2022		
4. HR Advice: There are no anticipated HR implications		
HR Partner: Celia Williams, HR Business Partner, 29 December 2021		
EDM Sign-off	Stephen Peacock, Executive Director Growth and Regeneration	1 December 2021
Cabinet Member sign-off	Cllr Tom Renhard, Cabinet Member Housing Delivery and Homes	6 December 2021
For Key Decisions - Mayor’s Office sign-off	Mayor’s Office	20 December 2021

Appendix A – Further essential background / detail on the proposal	NO
Appendix B – Details of consultation carried out - internal and external	NO
Appendix C – Summary of any engagement with scrutiny	NO
Appendix D – Risk assessment	YES
Appendix E – Equalities screening / impact assessment of proposal	YES
Appendix F – Eco-impact screening/ impact assessment of proposal	YES
Appendix G – Financial Advice	NO
Appendix H – Legal Advice	NO
Appendix I – Exempt Information	No
Appendix J – HR advice	NO
Appendix K – ICT	NO
Appendix L – Procurement	NO