

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 17th April 2025

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director Adult Services

PORTFOLIO: Health & Wellbeing Board

SUBJECT: Homelessness Grant Funding Allocation

WARD(S) Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The report is to inform and update Executive Board of the Councils annual Homelessness funding grant award and allocated spend for 2025/26 to tackle and prevent homelessness.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Board

- 1) note and consider the contents of this Report and**
- 2) approve the recommendations for expenditure against the grants, as described in Appendices 1 and 3**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Context

The Government confirmed the allocation of a key element of the overall investment: funding through the Homelessness Prevention Grant, which is available to local authorities in 2025/26 to support and deliver services to prevent and tackle homelessness.

- 3.2 Halton allocated homelessness grant funding award for 2025/26 is £547,706, which is an uplift of approximately £200.000, due to the prevention work achieved during 2024/25.

- 3.3 The funding grant allocation will be ring-fenced to ensure the Local Authority has the resources to take action to prevent homelessness and utilise the funding to continue to implement the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

3.4 Purpose of the Funding Grant

The purpose of the Homelessness Prevention Grant is to give local authorities control and flexibility in managing homelessness pressures and supporting those who are at risk of homelessness, and to deliver the following priorities:

- To fully enforce the Homelessness Reduction Act and contribute to ending rough sleeping by increasing activity to prevent single homelessness.
- Reduce family temporary accommodation numbers through maximising family homelessness prevention,
- Eliminate the use of unsuitable bed and breakfast accommodation for families for longer than the statutory six-week limit.

3.5 This funding will be provided upfront in April 2025 and can be used flexibly as part of the councils' resourcing to contribute to the costs of statutory duties, including implementing the Homelessness Reduction Act, domestic abuse and supporting with the costs of temporary accommodation.

3.6 **Funding Allocation**

The Homelessness Prevention Grant will be allocated to improve and deliver statutory services and develop new initiatives to prevent homelessness. A proportion of the grant will be allocated for staffing within the Housing Solutions Team, to manage the daily administration pressures and increase prevention activity to reduce homelessness within the Borough. The Prevention grant funding allocation is outlined within Appendix 1.

3.7 Prevention

Within the grant allocation funding, there is an identified amount of £70,000. It is proposed that the funding will provide financial incentives to prevent homelessness and offer vulnerable clients financial assistance, to support and prevent homelessness and sustain tenancies.

3.8 These services have proven successful during the latter years and assisted clients to remain within their homes or have the necessary assistance to move into alternative suitable housing accommodation.

3.9 Private Rented Sector

One of the biggest barriers for clients accessing private rented accommodation is the need for guarantors. The LA reviewed the Bond Guarantee Scheme in 2023 and now offers a guarantor service for clients, for a period up to 6 - 12 months. The service enables vulnerable client groups to access properties in the private rented sector, enabling officers to remove barriers and encourage landlords to work directly with the Local Authority. The scheme will also link in with the Bond Guarantee Scheme to offer longer term support and reassurance to landlords.

3.10 Debt Advice Caseworker (CAH)

The present economic crisis has affected many households, who struggle with issues of debt and affordability. Currently the Citizens Advice Halton (CAH) have a designated advice officer who works

across both services to offer a more efficient and robust service to clients. The officer works directly with the designated Housing Solutions Officer who specialises in repossession orders within the social and private rented sector and the Mortgage Rescue Scheme.

- 3.11 The CAH officer has proven to be a positive addition within the Housing Solutions Team and achieved high levels of savings and debt consolidation within 2024/25. See Appendix 2
- 3.12 The joined-up approach enables both services to reach vulnerable clients, offering an accelerated approach to tackle both housing and debt related issues. 2024/25 also brought changes to insolvency legislation, increasing debt limits for Debt Relief Orders to £50,000 and removing the fee for this option. Through the Housing Solutions support, the CAB have seen an increased uptake of Debt Relief Orders for lower levels of indebtedness as a way to reduce the threat of enforcement action and allow clients to remain within their homes.
- 3.13 **Housing Solutions Activity**
The Local Authority has seen an increase in the level of clients approaching the Housing Solutions Team for support and assistance, due to many landlords issuing Section 21 no fault notices to gain possession of their properties. See Appendix 2a.
- 3.14 Within the Housing Solutions Team there is a designated officer who is actively involved in the court process. The officer works directly with lenders to reach an agreement that will allow the clients to remain within their home. The Mortgage Rescue Scheme and possession process has been identified as a priority and funding allocated to assist homeowners and tenants.
- 3.15 There is a robust process in place with the registered social landlords that notifies the housing solutions adviser at early stage of pending action. The process has proven successful with the officer achieving positive outcomes to reduce evictions and negotiations to enable the client to remain within their home. Level of activity during April 2023– February 2026 (See Appendix 2b).
- 3.16 **Rough Sleeper Initiative Funding Grant**
The Rough Sleeping Initiative Funding (RSI) will continue to run up to 31ST March 2026. The annual funding award of £139,706, plus the RSI support funding of £17,250 is ring fenced. The funding will enable the LA to retain existing services, to ensure the funds are dedicated to achieving the shared ambition of ending rough sleeping. See Appendix 1a.
- 3.17 This funding is described as being made available for local authorities to support people who are street homeless. The Local Authority funding award will enable the continuation of the identified support service delivered by Whitechapel across Halton. which has

proven successful and been highlighted as best practice. The outreach support services will work with all rough sleepers to assist them off the streets and access to short- and long-term sustainable accommodation.

3.18 The grant allocation will continue to fund the emergency crash pad accommodation provision, which is situated within Halton Lodge and managed by Changing Lives. The service provision offers 6 emergency units for rough sleepers to access and move off the streets and work with agencies to make positive lifestyle choices.

3.19 **Winter Pressures Funding**

Halton received a welcomed uplift to the winter pressures grant funding of £474.000 for 2025/26, which is ring fenced and needs to be spent or at least committed by 31st March 2025. The funding allocation, if agreeable, will be committed and allocated by the target deadline. See Appendix 1b.

3.20 The additional officers will form part of the Housing Solutions Team to address the increased work across the repossessions and discontinuation notices. Due to the increase in referrals and court attendance, it is deemed necessary to recruit another officer to manage the caseload.

3.21 Also, due the Renters Reform Bill due to be implemented in April 2025, this will add additional pressure upon the team to conduct property checks, work directly with landlords and address any property issues. The post will complement the work across Environmental Health, who are responsible for the enforcement action.

3.22 The sit up service initially provided three sit up spaced for client for up to 3 days. Due to recent issues, the provision will be increased from three to six self-contained units. The units will undergo full refurb to provide the required facilities for rough sleepers for up to five days.

3.23 There are discussions underway with private landlords who want to engage with the Local Authority and allow use of the accommodation available. Yale Housing Association have approached the Local Authority as they have a number of one and two bed apartments within Halton and will offer 12 month assured shorthold tenancies for vulnerable homelessness clients.

3.24 The accommodation rents are set at 10% above the local housing allowance, therefore, the Local Authority would cover the shortfall rent for up to 12 months. The leasing scheme would offer secure tenure to clients with additional financial support to pursue employment within the 12-month period.

3.25 Affordability remains an issue for many clients, who cannot afford the rent in advance. Unfortunately, Discretionary housing payment does not cover rent in advance for social landlords, which can prove difficult for clients to fund and in many cases forcing them into debt. The funding would remove further barriers and allow clients to move on quicker without the concern of the one week rent in advance. This initiative would also speed up the move on process and free up temporary accommodation provision.

3.26 **External Funding Grants**

The Local Authority has been successful in securing a number of grant funding to improve support and service delivery across Homelessness Services.

Funding Grant	Initiative	Total Award
Combined Authority Trailblazer Grant	1 x Early Intervention Officers	£39.000
Combined Authority AFEO – Ex Offenders	1 x Offender Co-ordinator Post	£60.000

3.27 The trailblazer funding is part of the Housing First Programme that funds one early intervention officers one officer for 2025/26. The officer is prevention focused offering early intervention measures to reduce and prevent homelessness.

3.28 The AFEO funding introduced a new co-ordinator post in 2021/22 to work across offender services and improve service delivery. The post has achieved successful outcomes, resulting in a vast improvement in communication, partnership working and a consistent approach across Local Authority services. Subsequently, no offender has been released back to Halton without a full pathway plan and accommodation route. The service has been deemed good practice, and the remaining Liverpool City Region Local Authorities have recently introduced the same approach. See Case Study Appendix 3

3.29 **Homelessness Priorities 2023/24**

MHCLG expect the funding allocation to be specifically used to maximise upstream homelessness prevention for low-income clients to secure and retain suitable accommodation. The funding priorities for 2025/26 will be allocated to meet the needs of all clients as detailed below.

PRIORITY	REASON	PURPOSE
Priority 1	PRS Tenancy Sustainment	Rent arrears. Minor repairs, safety certificates Create new tenancy agreement.
Priority 2	PRS New Tenancies	Rent in advance. Deposits

Priority 3	Guarantor	LA act as guarantor for 6 months
Priority 4	MRS Properties	Assist homeowners with mortgage arrears
Priority 5	Exceptional Circumstances, e.g. Hoarders	Hoarding - Fund clean-up process to support vulnerable clients and save tenancies. Clear arrears

- 3.30 Funding to be used to deliver early intervention measures, be client focused, and LA must demonstrate negotiations with landlords to increase tenancy sustainment.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no policy implications arising from this report.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The increased demand in homelessness presentations has placed additional pressure upon the team. The funding grant will provide additional staffing to deliver homelessness services and reduce/prevent homelessness. The Local Authority failure to comply with legal requirements would lead to court action, proving costly to the Local Authority.
- 5.2 The funding grant will complement the ongoing delivery of services for homelessness clients, with additional financial assistance to promote lifestyle change and sustainability.
- 5.3 In compliance with MHCLG funding instructions, the Winter Pressures grant must be spent or committed by 31st March 2025 or will be recovered by DHLUC. An emergency decision was taken to Executive Board to approve the allocated spend, to reassure MHCLG that the funding had been fully committed.

5.4 Corporate Savings.

A number of staffing posts have been moved from Base budget to grant funding, which will contribute towards the Council savings. Details

2 X Housing Officer Posts	£ 87,500
1 x Landlord Accreditation Officer	£ 48,707
B&B Allocated Budget	£ 6,500
Total Savings	£142,207

- 5.5 The funding will allow the Local Authority to improve service delivery and extend prevention incentives to encourage the private rented sector to work with the Homelessness Team

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S

6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

The funding allocation is to provide vulnerable people threatened with homelessness to secure alternative suitable accommodation and promote sustainability. The grant funding supports vulnerable clients to remain within their homes by offering financial incentives to support them to resolve homelessness issues and improve health and wellbeing.

Key elements of the services for rough sleepers include the outreach team, to support entrenched rough sleepers to engage with services, move off the streets and address housing and health needs.

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

The Funding grant enables the Local Authority to support vulnerable homelessness clients to secure accommodation to promote sustainability within communities.

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

The services and support provided by the Housing Solutions Team apply to young people, families, and care leavers, as well as to individuals who find themselves homeless. These can be some of the most vulnerable groups in our communities, and many rely on accessing suitable social housing to meet their needs.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

The Housing Solutions Team support vulnerable clients to resolve homelessness, tackling inequality and ensuring the relevant support is made available to meet the needs of vulnerable and complex clients.

Further financial support to ensure all homelessness clients can access all housing options and services to reduce and prevent homelessness.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

There are no direct implications arising from this report.

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

There are no direct implications arising from this report.

7.0 Risk Analysis

7.1

On an individual basis, the provision of help and support from the housing and homelessness service is addressing the needs of some of the most vulnerable people in our area.

- 7.2 Failure to spend or commit the funding will result in MHCLG recouping the funding and reduce the prevention activity options across the Homelessness service.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 8.1 There are no equality implications arising from the contents of this report.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no implications arising from the contents of this report.

10.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

‘None under the meaning of the Act.’

Appendix 1 **HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION GRANT**

Funding	Service Delivery	Purpose
£87.500	2 x Housing Solutions Adviser	HST Officers to manage the homelessness administration and prevention activity.
£32.000	Triage/Move on Officer	Triage Officer to manage homeless presentations and temporary accommodation placements.
£100.000	Temporary Accommodation	The Base budget costs are £6,500. The additional funding will cover the annual costs of hotel/B&B accommodation
£36.000	Debt Consolidation Officer	Staffing resource delivered by CAB, work alongside Housing Solutions Adviser to assist vulnerable clients facing repossession.
£70.000	Prevention Fund	Offer financial funding to prevent homelessness. E.g., rent arrears, safety certificates, deposits etc.
£12.000	No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) – Families	Assist migrant Families who have NRPF, whilst applying for immigration status.
£40.000	PRS Guarantor Scheme Bond Guarantee Scheme	The LA will act as guarantor for homelessness clients to enable them to access private rented accommodation.
£40.000	PRS Landlord Incentive Scheme.	PRS Incentive scheme, to encourage the private rented sector to engage with LA, Offering up to 3 months' rent in advance, cover rent shortfall for clients to access private rented accommodation.
£40,000	Mainstay / Jigsaw	Homelessness data reporting IT system (Jigsaw)

		Accommodation and support referral IT system across LCR
£40.000	Mortgage Rescue	Financial assistance to homeowners
£40.000	GIFT Initiative	Furniture package for homelessness clients when undertaking new tenancy.
£10.000	Staff Training	Additional training for staff

Appendix 1a - Rough Sleeper Initiative Funding Grant

Funding	Delivery	Purpose
£25.000	Changing Lives Sit up service	Provide spaces for rough sleepers for up to 5 nights and cover the rent shortfall.
£114,700	Whitechapel 1 x Intensive Support Officer 1 x Move On Officer 1 0.5 Deputy Manager	Outreach support provision for rough sleepers.
£17,250	Outreach Support Officer	Provide intensive outreach support to rough sleepers placed at Lacey Street / Market Street accommodation.

Appendix 1b - Winter Pressures Grant Funding

Funding	Delivery	Purpose
43,579	Immigration Officer	Post presently covered by agency. Recruit new post to cover the increased caseload and offer outreach advice within the IA hotel.
48,707	LAO Officer	To comply with the Renters Rights Bill, which will come into force April 2025
48,707	Repossessions Officer	Senior Officer to manage Repossessions across all sectors and attend court etc.
35.000	Early Engagement & Employment Officer	Continued outreach support for RS to support back into work/training
75.000	Rough Sleeper Crash Pads	Increase and refurb rough sleeper short term crisis accommodation
50.000	Social Rent Support	Provide one week rent in advance for clients securing social housing.
110.000	Private Leasing Scheme	Secure tenancies within the private rented sector.
£40.000	Legal Challenges	Cover future legal costs.
£15,000	RS Prevention Fund	Financial assistance for rough sleepers and ex-offenders, offering 3/6 months' rent in advance, deposits etc. Support to prevent hoarding.

Appendix 2 - CAB Cost Savings

Actions	Achievements
Clients Helped	280
Social Landlord debts written off	£562,704
Homeowner saved homes – written off debts	£627,947
Total Debts written off	£1,302.322 Average of £4,651.15 per client
Former Tenancy arrears written off	£23,620

Appendix 2a - Repossession Referrals

Year	Home Ownership	Private Rented Sector	Registered Social Landlord
April 2024 / Feb 2025	84	380	561
2023 / 24	52	384	499
2022 / 23	42	336	271

Appendix 2b - Repossession Notice Activity

Registered Social Landlord Activity	Total
Referrals	561
Evictions prevented via Crisis Interventions	98
Evictions prevented via Relief Stage	279
Property Relinquished / Tenant Deceased/ withdrew applications.	1 31
Total Eviction Loss	32
Court attendance – Suspended Orders	98
Prevention Funding Applications	45 - £24,211
Discretionary Housing Applications	63 - £66,457

Home Ownership Activity

Owner Occupier Activity	Total
Referrals	84
Total evictions prevented	59
Court attendance – Suspended Orders	12
Total eviction loss / None Engagement	12
Sold Property and rehoused via PPP	1

Appendix 3 – Case Studies

Case Study – RSL:

The RSL referred DB to HST on 31/07/2024 as part of the pre-action protocol as DB was in breach of their court order and at risk of eviction action.

On 31/07/2024, contact was made with the client and an assessment was booked.

On 02/08/2024, I met with DB, and I completed a homeless application. Having concluded a full housing assessment, it was established that the client lived at the property with their 2 dependants. DB worked part time and claimed Universal Credit. Changes in wages each month had affected her UC entitlement and so client had mismanaged her budgeting and missed/paid short payments of rent. As client was subject to a suspended possession order, any breach of this agreement can result in an eviction notice.

A prevention duty was owed to the DB as she was threatened with homelessness within 56 days. Prevention options were discussed with DB. DB was referred to CAB to get support with debts and budgeting to ensure that rent payments were prioritised. The client had her hours amended at work to ensure that they were regular, so that her UC claim could become a regular and reliant amount.

Upon negotiations, the RSL confirmed the breach of the order that was subject to eviction action was £916.33 and if this was cleared as a lump sum, then they would not pursue the eviction notice.

An income and expenditure was completed with the DB to establish affordability ongoing for a payment proposal. DB was advised on what payment proposal could be offered based on their excess income and when to start making payments. The CAB confirmed the ongoing payment plan of Current Rent + £50pcm towards the arrears was reasonable.

HST were able to secure funding to clear the breach. £350 was secured from Vicars Relief and £566.13 was secured from Prevention Funding.

As the breach was cleared, the RSL agreed to accept ongoing payment property and not pursue the eviction notice and so the client was able to remain in her home.

The case was closed as homelessness prevented.

Case Study – Mortgage:

The lender referred MU to HST on 14/05/2024 as part of the pre-action protocol as they were seeking possession of the mortgage property at a hearing on 28/06/2024. HST attempted to contact MU and a possession warning card was left at the property in a sealed envelope.

On 03/06/2024, MU responded to the card and an assessment was booked.

On 06/06/2024, I met with MU and I completed a homeless application. Having concluded a full housing assessment, it was established that the client lived at the property with his wife and their 2 non-dependants. MU worked part time as he has been engaging with mental health services following a recent suicide attempt. MU's wife had been made redundant and was actively seeking new employment, however her income was the household's main source of income. MU had accrued arrears on the mortgage due to being unable to maintain the contracted monthly instalment. These arrears resulted in the possession action from the lender.

A prevention duty was owed to the MU as he was threatened with homelessness within 56 days. Prevention options were discussed with MU. As MU's wife had the prospect of new employment, I advised we could support at court to ask for an adjournment that would allow further time for MU's wife to secure the employment, and be in a position to offer a payment plan towards the mortgage and arrears as per the terms of Norgan.

On 28/06/2024, I attended St Helens Court and the Lender was continuing to pursue with their request for a possession order. I represented MU in the hearing and was successful in obtaining an Adjournment for 56 days. MU was made aware a new hearing would be listed after 56 days; however, he had been afforded the opportunity for his wife to start her new employment.

During the adjourned period, employment commenced and an income and expenditure was completed with the MU to establish affordability ongoing for a payment proposal. MU was advised on what payment proposal could be offered based on their excess income and when to start making payments. MU was also referred to CAB for ongoing support with debts and budgeting to ensure that mortgage payments remain their priority.

On 20/09/2024, I attended the St Helens Court and the lender was continuing to pursue with their request for a possession order. I represented MU and was successful in obtaining a Suspended Possession Order which allows MU to remain in their home and prevented repossession action.

The case was closed as homelessness prevented.

Case Study

On the 08/05/2024, KM was released from custody after serving 18 months of a 32-month sentence for Stalking involving Serious Alarm/Distress. Due to risk factors, the decision was made to refer KM to an approved premises for a period of 12 weeks post-release from custody due to his high-risk nature.

A duty to refer was received by Halton Borough Council on 17/05/2024 as there was a concern that KM would be homeless when the 12-week period ceased.

On the 03/06/2024, I attended Bunbury House approved premises and completed a homeless application. A prevention duty was owed to the client as he was threatened with homelessness within 56 days and a number of options for preventing homelessness were discussed, such as social rented housing, accessing the private rented sector and supported housing. Further advice and signposting were progressed, so client was aware and could access support in relation to income (benefit entitlement) and health, as client had significant physical and mental health concerns.

Over the next two weeks, KM was supported to register for social housing, provide all proofs to progress access to AFEO funding (funding for offenders to access private rent) and referrals made to supported housing providers. At all times, updates were shared with probation so that any housing options were considered in relation to managing the risk of KM in the community.

KM identified a private rented property in Warrington. Affordability checked completed and property determined affordable. Probation confirmed property suitable in relation to risk. Landlord of property contacted and agreed the HBC would assist with the upfront costs from AFEO funding to secure the property. Client signed tenancy agreement and progressed into property. Case close as homelessness prevented.