



EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION

REPORT OF:	Executive Member for Finance and Governance
LEAD OFFICERS:	Director of Finance
DATE:	Thursday, 13 October 2022

PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:	Finance and Governance
WARD/S AFFECTED:	(All Wards);
KEY DECISION:	Y

SUBJECT: Supported Housing Improvement Programme

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In July 2022, the Government announced a new programme of work and available funding to support councils with improving Supported Accommodation.

The Council was invited along with 3 other Local Authorities to bid for the new funding prior to the national roll out of the programme. Our successful bid has secured £946,000 for the new programme over the periods October 2022 – March 2023, April 2023 – March 2024, and April 2024 – March 2025.

This report seeks approval of the commencement of the activities outlined below that will be undertaken during the two and half year programme.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board:

- 2.1 Agrees to the commencement of work and allocation of resources to deliver the programme, including establishing the necessary budgets as part of the Council's General Fund Revenue Budget;
- 2.2 Give delegated authority to the Director of Finance, in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and Governance, to approve the procurement strategy and subsequently award a contract to a partner organisation to assist with the delivery of the programme outcomes.
- 2.3 Give delegated authority to the Director of Finance, in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and Governance, to approve the procurement strategy and subsequently award a contract to an appropriately qualified organisation to undertake a Strategic Review of Supported Accommodation within the borough.
- 2.4 Agrees to the monitoring of the programme through an annual progress report.

3. BACKGROUND

Blackburn with Darwen has historically had high numbers of short term Supported Accommodation within the borough. In September 2020, the council was invited by the Department of Communities and Local Government to submit a bid for a pilot scheme to examine the property standards, support quality for residents and value for money to the tax payer for this sector of housing. The information and data collated during the pilot has been invaluable to the now Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, who following the allocation of further funding asked Blackburn with Darwen to consider submitting a further longer-term bid for the period October 2022 – March 2025.

The newly funded programme will build on the work of the earlier pilot and seek to improve the property conditions and support delivered to residents by the establishment of a Core Team who will seek to proactively engage with residents and enforce standards through increased scrutiny and enforcement activity.

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

The first pilot in September 2020 provided valuable information and intelligence on all providers of Supported Accommodation in the borough. This new programme of work will seek to focus exclusively on the short-term provision in the Borough via large Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) models.

The funding will provide for the establishment of a Core Team within the Benefit Service of the Council. This Team will coordinate joint activities with colleagues in Housing Needs and Housing Standards Teams, and oversee the case management of vulnerable residents by a voluntary sector partner.

Our activities and programme of work outlined in our successful bid include the following:

4.1 Undertaking regular inspections of Supported Accommodation properties

This activity will see the scheduled inspection of the nine properties outlined in our bid. This will be undertaken jointly by Housing Standards, Housing Needs, the Benefits service, our voluntary sector partner, and the Fire Service. Any required enforcement action will be co-ordinated across all parties.

4.2 Monitoring of the standards of support and outcomes for residents

The team will proactively obtain feedback on the standard and depth of support offered to residents. This feedback will be obtained in face to face settings, following which, we will work with providers to improve standards, however, where appropriate, action will be taken.

4.3 Improving engagement with residents and raising claimant expectations

One of the biggest challenges to improving the standard of Supported Accommodation in the borough is obtaining sufficient feedback and information from residents regards standards. We will therefore be engaging with hundreds of residents to better understand the reality facing those individuals. We have seen many residents move into this type of short term accommodation who then become long term residents. It is hoped that once we have established a rapport with residents in this type of accommodation we will be better placed to identify issues and raise expectations.

4.4 Audit of Supported Accommodation providers

The culmination of our programme of work will allow for the regular audit of Supported Accommodation providers. The additional information collated will allow objective analysis of individual providers and the opportunity to make an assessment. Where failures are identified, warning notices will be issued, however, should poor standards continue, it will be in our power to suspend the payment of claims and potentially withdraw the supported status of a provider.

4.5 Introduction of Case Management Officers

The earlier pilot in 2020 identified a number of residents in short term accommodation who with additional support could move out of the Supported accommodation into main stream accommodation. The newly created case management roles will work with residents to support them with the challenges of relocating into new accommodation, in addition, there will be continued ongoing support for a period of 3-9 months following the move. These roles will be undertaken by a suitably qualified and appropriate voluntary organisation that will be appointed from a procurement exercise in October/November 2022.

4.6 A comprehensive Strategic review of Supported Accommodation

To ensure that we have an accurate and complete understanding of the borough's current and future Supported Accommodation needs, a comprehensive strategic review will be undertaken. To assist with this review, consultancy support will be sought from a suitably qualified organisation.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There are no policy implications arising directly from this report.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Council has received confirmation of the funding allocation of £946,000. This funding will ensure the financial costs of the programme are fully met by the Department of Levelling up, Housing and Communities.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Procurements will be undertaken in line with the Council's Contract Procurement Procedure Rules and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. Contracts will be in a form approved by legal officers in the Contracts and Procurement team.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The funding from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities will be used to backfill all Blackburn with Darwen resources allocated to this programme of work, and the cost of procuring a voluntary sector partner and consultancy support.

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.

Option 1 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. *(insert EIA link here)*

Option 3 In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. *(insert EIA attachment)*

10. CONSULTATIONS

There are no consultation requirements from this report.

11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded in the Summary of Decisions published on the day following the meeting.

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CONTACT OFFICER:	Andy Ormerod
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BACKGROUND PAPER:	
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