

BOROUGH OF KETTERING

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Report Originator	John Conway – Head of Housing	<i>Fwd Plan Ref No:</i> A17/060	
Wards Affected	All	18 th April 2018	
Title	HOUSING OPTIONS - SPEND TO SAVE POLICY		

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Mark Rowley

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To seek Executive Committee approval of the revised Spend to Save policy, which will help Housing Options Advisors when delivering the Council's new prevention and relief duties being introduced by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

2. INFORMATION

- 2.1 The Spend to Save Policy has been in operation for a number of years. It was designed to support the homelessness prevention work of Housing Options Advisors by enabling them to prevent homelessness through the providing of funds to cover the initial costs (deposit and rent in advance) of renting a property in the private sector.
- 2.2 Elsewhere on this agenda, a report on the proposed changes to the Keyways Housing Allocations Scheme highlights the significant increase in homelessness applications since August 2015. The number of homelessness applications from local residents has almost trebled over the three years since 2014/15.
- 2.3 Linked to the rise in homelessness is a substantial rise in the use of costly and often unsuitable temporary accommodation. The number of homeless households currently accommodated in temporary accommodation is more than five times higher than three years ago:

Year	No. homeless households in TA at year end
March 2015	24
March 2016	46
March 2017	84
February 2018*	122

Table 1: No. homeless households in Temporary Accommodation (TA) at year end

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- 2.4 It is against a backdrop of rising statutory homeless and temporary accommodation numbers nationally that the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 was implemented on 3 April.
- 2.5 The previous homelessness legislation provided a safety net for vulnerable households, but it required local housing authorities to intervene only at crisis point. Households without a 'priority need' but who may still have had complex needs often did not receive the support they might have needed to secure accommodation.
- 2.6 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 will transform the way that local authorities help homeless households including many of the people who were not entitled to help under the previous system. Councils now have a formal duty to take reasonable steps to prevent people becoming homeless. As a result, the need for in-depth casework will increase substantially and the Housing Options Team will need to offer detailed face-to-face interviews with a far greater number of households than was previously the case. This will require ready access to a comprehensive range of preventative tools.

3. CONSULTATION AND CUSTOMER IMPACT

- 3.1 A consultation process has been undertaken with frontline staff dealing with homelessness and feedback from this process has informed the revisions to the Spend to Save Policy.
- 3.2 An Equalities Impact Assessment will be completed prior to the formal adoption of the revised scheme.

4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 As the private rented sector has become more unaffordable to many local residents, the current Spend to Save policy has become less useful in supporting the homelessness prevention agenda of the Housing Options team.
- 4.2 Revisions to the Spend to Save policy are therefore proposed. This will help to ensure that the policy is of greater assistance to Housing Options Advisors in their day-to-day work and reduce the need to use temporary accommodation. The revised Spend to Save policy document attached to this report. However, the main changes are summarised as follows:
- **General** – Widening of the language used within the policy from preventing homelessness to preventing or relieving homelessness. This will ensure that the Spend to Save policy accords with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
 - **Policy Aims** – Four policy aims have been inserted into the Spend to Save Policy to broaden the ways in which Housing Options Advisors can use Spend to Save resources and in so doing meet the obligations placed upon the Council by the new Act. The aims are:

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1. Encourage Housing Options Advisors to use the grant to fund innovative ways to prevent or relieve homelessness for their applicants
 2. Prevent the need to use temporary accommodation for eligible households
 3. Secure suitable accommodation for applicants which has a reasonable prospect of being available for the applicant's occupation for at least 6 months
 4. Secure accommodation that is safe for occupation and free from hazards
- **Eligibility Criteria** – These have been altered to reflect the new duties placed on the Council by the Homelessness Reduction Act.
 - **Sustainability Assessments** – Clarification on the factors to take into account when deciding if a Spend to Save grant is a sustainable option for the applicant. For example, the rent liability must be affordable to the applicant going forward.
 - **Approval of Spend to Save grant** – Clear approval limits have been set within the Spend to Save Policy to ensure that higher Spend to Save grants are approved by a senior manager. An evidence checklist for Housing Options Advisors to complete has also been created to ensure that all grant awards can be shown to meet the criteria outlined within this policy.
 - **Terms and Conditions Applicable** – The following terms and conditions have been inserted into the Spend to Save policy to attempt to guard against any misuse of the policy:
 - All decisions to award grants will be made subject to funds being available.
 - The grant is payable at the discretion of the Council and will only be awarded where there are tangible benefits for both the applicant and the Council.
 - Where a Spend to Save grant is being utilised to pay an applicant's rent arrears, grants will only be awarded after repayment agreements between the applicant and landlord have been explored.
 - Where an applicant has previously been awarded a Spend to Save grant for the same issue, a grant will not normally be awarded.

5. FINANCIAL RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

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5.1 The Spend to Save Grant is funded through the H050 Homelessness budget. It is only allocated when there is a clear cost benefit to the Council of doing so. (E.g. where a saving on the use of Temporary Accommodation will be made by issuing the grant.) Therefore, the revised Spend to Save Policy should result in further savings, therefore resulting in a positive financial impact on the Homelessness budget.

6. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 None at this stage.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 None at this stage.

8. RECOMMENDATION

8.1 It is recommended that the Executive Committee agrees to adopt the revised Spend to Save Policy attached to this report with immediate effect.

Background Papers:

Title

Date

Contact Officer

Previous Minutes/Reports:

Ref:

Date: