

# Decision under Delegated Powers

## Officer Making the Decision

Katie Moore – Head of Strategic Housing

## Recommendation

The creation of a Private Sector Access Grant fund of £13,000 per financial year.

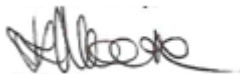
## Reason

To support Housing Options service to successfully prevent, relieve and reduce homelessness by assisting household who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to access private rental accommodation.

## Authority for Decision

Under the Constitution Heads of Service have general delegated authority for all operational management matters for those functions and service areas for which they have responsibility. This proposal falls within that delegation.

## Decision and Date



Katie Moore  
Head of Strategic Housing  
19<sup>th</sup> September 2023

## Background

The main aim of Housing Options service is to prevent, relieve and reduce homelessness within Charnwood, through the provision of advice and assistance to housing and homeless applicants.

The Housing Options Team is expecting to see increases in presentations from households who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless and who do not have sufficient funds available to enable them to access private rented accommodation. This includes homeless households who are eligible for homelessness assistance under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended), but do not qualify for the council's housing register because they do not meet the qualification criteria.

The council currently has a Discretionary Housing Payments scheme that can be used to assist homeless applicants who are in receipt of housing benefit or universal credit housing element to access private rental accommodation. Under this scheme cash rent in advance payments and cash deposit payments can be provided.

The council currently has a Tenant Finder scheme that can be used to assist homeless applicants who do not qualify for discretionary housing payments to access private rental accommodation. Under this scheme cash rent in advance payments (to the value of up to 1 month's rent) in the form of a loan repayable by applicants and written bond agreements (equivalent to the value of up to 1 month's rent) to landlords in lieu of cash deposits can be provided.

The Housing Options Team are increasingly finding that the current Tenant Finder scheme is not effective as homeless applicants are unable to afford loan repayments and private sector landlords are unwilling to accept written bond agreements.

This recommendation is for the existing Tenant Finder scheme to be replaced with a Private Sector Access Grant fund. The new fund can be used to offer grants (rather than loans or written bonds) for rent in advance and deposit payments to assist applicants to secure private sector tenancies. If the tenancies come to an end, the tenants would be able to re-use the deposits to secure alternative private rental accommodation.

Grants will only be awarded where all of the following apply:

- A homeless application has been made to Charnwood Borough Council and the prevention / relief / main duty is owed by Charnwood Borough Council
- The homeless applicant is eligible for private rental accommodation (i.e. has a legal right to rent)
- The landlord / letting agent has agreed to grant an assured shorthold tenancy (or license for a room in a house of multiple occupation) for a period of at least 6 months
- The council is satisfied that the accommodation is likely to be suitable and affordable for the household for a period of at least 6 months
- The council is satisfied that the accommodation is likely to be available for the household for a period of at least 6 months

- A grant has not been awarded to the applicant (or any member of their household) within the previous 12 months.

Grants will not normally exceed the following amounts:

- Deposit payments equivalent to up to 5 weeks rent
- Advance rent payments equivalent to up to 5 weeks rent.

Grant awards will be paid direct to landlords (not to applicants).

All grant awards will need to be authorised in advance by the Housing Needs Manager (or by the Private Sector Housing Manager, Housing Strategy Manager or Head of Strategic Housing in the absence of the Housing Needs Manager).

## **Human Resources**

N/A.

## **Finances**

There is currently an annual budget allocation of £13,000 per year for payments under the existing Tenant Finder scheme. This budget will be converted for use for payments under the new Private Sector Access Grant fund.

## **Risk Management**

| Risk Identified  | Likelihood | Impact | Risk Management Actions Planned   |
|--|------------|--------|---|
| This grant fund is not available and the Housing Options Team are less likely to be able to prevent / relieve / reduce homelessness. This could result in increased caseloads, temporary accommodation placements and associated spend, legal challenges and associated spend. | Medium     | Medium | Offer over-time to existing staff within the Housing Options Team to manage workloads resulting from increases in homelessness and increase the budget for emergency accommodation. |

## **Key Decision**

No.

## **Background Papers**

N/A.