

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO HEALTH & HOUSING COMMITTEE

Information

meeting date: 8th JUNE 2023
title: UPDATE ON THE ACCOMMODATION FOR EX-OFFENDERS SCHEME
submitted by: DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING
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1 PURPOSE

1.1 Update members on the Accommodation of Ex -Offenders scheme operating across East Lancashire.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities

- Community Objectives – To meet the housing needs of all sections of the Community.
- Corporate Priorities - N/A
- Other Considerations – Work in partnership with probation, police and community safety in the borough.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 On 9 April 2021, MHCLG (now the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) launched the Accommodation for Ex -Offender's (AFO) funding scheme to support ex-offenders into their own Private Rented Sector (PRS) tenancies. The scheme aims to build a pathway from prison into the private rented sector increasing ex-offenders access and sustainment of PRS tenancies. The scheme is supported by the Ministry of Justice. Members were informed of the Accommodation for Ex-Offenders scheme in 2021.

Initial (Pilot) Scheme

2.3 Pendle Council, acted as the lead partner and submitted a successful bid on behalf of the East Lancashire authorities - Burnley, Blackburn with Darwen, Hyndburn, Rossendale, Pendle and Ribble Valley. Pendle entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with MHCLG for the delivery of the scheme and a subsequent Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Calico, the appointed support provider who would administer the scheme on behalf of the East Lancs Authorities. The total grant award was £198,000.

2.4 Whilst Pendle BC as lead authority liaised with MHCLG in terms of the overall scheme, individual Councils managed their specific part of the scheme in relation to the allocated number of cases in their area.

2.5 The scheme which was submitted to MHCLG, and allowed for 75 households to be helped via this scheme, broken down as follows:-

- 10 cases per Council with an additional 15 'demand-led' cases available. Decisions on allocation of the 'demand-led' cases was agreed by the district Councils.

- Each Council received £10,000 for their allocated 10 cases split into £5,000 from 1st September 2021 and £5,000 from 1st December 2021.
- 2.4 The scheme has proved to be very valuable with the highest uptake of the scheme being in the post Covid period of 2021 (as some prison releases had been delayed during the pandemic).
- 2.4 The scheme had two key elements, one being the support provided through the contract which Pendle awarded to Calico Support Service. The second was the grant for support and setup to individual ex-offenders. The grant was for up to £1000 per individual which could be used for cash bonds and deposits or to provide essential start up packs such as white goods, bedding etc.

New Funding Round

- 2.8 In October 2022 the Department of Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) announced the opportunity to bid for a further round to allow the continuation of the initial scheme beyond March 2023. A bid was submitted by Burnley Borough Council on behalf of the East Lancashire Authorities excluding Blackburn with Darwen who decided to submit their own bid. In December 2022 DLUHC announced the successful bids. The total award for the East Lancashire Authorities was £232,808 split between
- 2023/24 - £116,404
 - 2024/25 - £116,404
- 2.9 The target number of service users is 80 over the total period and Burnley have entered into a service level agreement with the same support provider Calico to administer the scheme.
- 2.10 As noted above the scheme provides an additional resource to RVBC whereby the Housing team make a referral to Calico under the scheme as soon as a 'duty to refer,' or any homeless case is received from Probation. Rehousing ex-offenders remains a very difficult task and therefore the additional support is very valuable. Often securing private rented accommodation is the only option for ex-offenders and therefore accessing 'setup funding' for individual ex-offenders has been useful in securing accommodation without which these individuals may have been at risk of homelessness.
- 2.11 Whilst prison release figures for Ribble Valley are low in comparison to neighbouring boroughs, on average between 8-10 per year, securing suitable housing for a single person provides many challenges in the borough. Often bedsits or hostel accommodation out of the borough are the only options available.

3 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 3.1 As the Report is for information no implications arise for Resources, Technical, Environmental, Legal, Political, Reputation and Equality & Diversity.
- 3.2 The scheme is fully funded through a government grant award from DLHLC. It should be noted that without the Grant award, the release of housing ex-offenders from prison and requiring accommodation would have put a strain on housing staff and financial resources. Calico assists ex-offenders to look for accommodation, including searching online, completing housing application forms, and working with the private landlords willing to accept ex-offenders.

4 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

4.1 Note the contents of the report and the assistance the scheme can provide.

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