

Meeting: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY /
EXECUTIVE

Agenda Item:

3

Portfolio Area: Resources

Date: 16 March 2015 / 30 March 2015

NEW HOMES BONUS – 2015/16 SCHEME ALLOCATIONS

KEY DECISION

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1 PURPOSE

- 1.1** To approve a range of schemes and initiatives to be funded from the 2015/16 New Homes Bonus allocation.
- 1.2** As the allocation of the New Homes Bonus forms part of the Council's Budget and Policy framework it is necessary for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider these proposals in the March cycle of meetings so that this report can be submitted for recommendation to the Executive meeting on 30 March 2015, thereby allowing the projects to commence from early April 2015.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1** That an allocation of £760,400 from the 2015/16 New Homes Bonus allocation be approved for the implementation and delivery of the following schemes :
- (a)** Town Centre Improvements (Initiative 1) - £164,910;
 - (b)** No More Project – 6 month extension (initiative 2) - £40,000;
 - (c)** Domestic abuse Co-ordinator and panel (Initiative 3) - £117,500 per annum for two years;
 - (d)** Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator (Initiative 4) - £38,840 per annum for two years;
 - (e)** The Women's Cycling Tour (Initiative 5) - £20,000;

- (f) Clean and Green projects (initiative 6) - £170,000;
- (g) Supporting Private and Housing Association Renters (initiative 7) - £52,810;

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1** The New Homes Bonus scheme is designed to be a financial incentive for Council's to deliver housing growth and as such replaced the Housing and Planning Development Grant. It is also intended to make the link between growth and new finance more visible.
- 3.2** New Homes Bonus commenced in April 2011, and matches the additional Council Tax raised for new homes and properties brought back into use, with an additional amount of £350 for each affordable home, for the following six years. In two tier areas the New Homes Bonus is split 80/20 between the District and County Councils.
- 3.3** Until 2014/15, this was new money made available by the Government; subsequently the money comes from the Formula Grant as a permanent feature of local government funding. This means that councils that treat the scheme as an incentive to build and return empty properties to use will benefit and those that do not will lose money after 2015.
- 3.4** New Homes Bonus is an un-ringfenced grant. However as any year's award is only given for six years, the Chief Finance Officer has recommended that only £200,000 be built into the General Fund base budget, and a policy has been established to transfer the grant into a reserve for future political direction. In addition an annual contribution of £250,000 per annum was also approved last year to contribute towards a Single Revenue Capital Reserve.
- 3.5** We are now in the fifth year of the New Homes Bonus scheme. The grants awarded to Stevenage BC are as follows:

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Year 1	£84,562	£84,562	£84,562	£84,562	£84,562	£84,562	
Year 2		£495,367	£495,367	£495,367	£495,367	£495,367	£495,367
Year 3			£222,712	£222,712	£222,712	£222,712	£222,712
Year 4				£218,424	£218,424	£218,424	£218,424
Year 5					£240,228	£240,228	£240,228
One off allocation			£19,048	£7,725			
Total	£84,562	£579,929	£821,689	£1,028,790	£1,261.293	TBD	TBD

3.6 Based on the allocations for the first five years, the total payment due to the Council up to 2017/18 will be £3,776,263 million.

3.7 In addition, there will be further allocations for future years based on annual new homes growth. The allocation for 2016/17 will be based on the net change in stock (as per Council Tax records) for the year to October 2015.

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

4.1 A number of New Homes Bonus proposals were announced as part of the Leader's Budget Speech at Council on 25 February 2015.

4.2 The following schemes for the 2015/16 New Homes Bonus have therefore been identified for implementation:

Initiative 1 : Town Centre Improvements	
Lead Portfolio Holder : Environment and Regeneration	
Allocation : £164,910	Delivery Lead : Head of Planning, Regeneration and Transport
Timescales : 1. Design & Planning - <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Preparation of draft design – By end of March 2015 2. Construction Planning - <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Preparation of construction plan and commissioning work to contractors – mid April 2015 3. Implementation phase – <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Repainting of Railings (joyride platform, bus station, ramp to leisure centre) – April• Repair Work to existing street furniture – April/May 2015• Installation of new street furniture (subject to selection and delivery) – May/June 2015	
Priorities Supported : Regenerate the Town Centre and neighbourhoods Improve the economy and encourage financial resilience Deliver value for money Put residents first	

- 4.3** This scheme will deliver an improved environment in the town centre and signals that SBC is committed to delivering a higher quality built environment in the town centre. The scheme offers an opportunity for SBC to physically display the commitment to the town centre as the number one priority and support the ‘Stevenage First’ approach.
- 4.4** Following a comprehensive audit and review of street furniture in the town centre it is clear that there has been an inconsistent approach to the type and location of street furniture. This creates a public realm which appears confused and unmanaged. This project delivers a complete overhaul of town centre street furniture.
- 4.5** The rationalisation, repair and de-cluttering scheme has been identified as a project and is an important part of the ‘Stevenage First’ programme to regenerate the town centre by:
- creating momentum and being part of the programme to deliver wider regeneration of the town centre;
 - signalling to all users of the town centre that SBC is focussed on creating a better quality town centre environment and is actively managing the space;
 - continuing the engagement and conversations with key stakeholders about the potential for investment in the town centre;
 - promoting visitor numbers and footfall by creating an improved public realm in the town centre; and,
 - using this scheme as a starting point to review the public realm strategy and a wider review into the way the town centre is managed;

In addition to the above, to complement these works a complete jet-wash of the town centre paving will also be undertaken.

Initiative 2 : No More Project – 6 month extension	
Lead Portfolio Holder : Safer Communities, Older People and Health	
Allocation : £40,000	Delivery Lead : Head of Housing Management
Timescales :	
This project is already established, the funding requested will enable it to continue from April – September 2015 by which like the outcome of the lottery bid will be known.	
Priorities supported :	
Help people feel safe Put residents first	

- 4.6** The 'No More' project (NMP) was introduced because of an escalating problem with street drinkers in Stevenage town centre. After profiling the most persistent protagonists, it was evident they were all prolific offenders, many with persistent ASB cases against them, culminating in homelessness or threat of eviction. All had alcohol and drug addictions which had not been addressed satisfactorily through criminal justice interventions, community sentences or being managed in the community by health and housing. Many had varying degrees of addiction, and most had some form of learning disability or mental health problem. It is clear from the work we have carried out that this group of people benefit from intensive support, to reduce their offending and improve their quality of life, and the quality of life for those living and working around them. The first position appointed to within the No More project was a No More Alcohol post. Due to its success the project was extended to include a No More Drugs worker in June 2014.
- 4.7** The No More project deals proactively with those suffering from drug and alcohol abuse and their families. The project works closely with internal and external partners such as the police, Thriving Families, our Family Intervention worker, Spectrum and CAB.
- 4.8** The project takes clients 'back to basics' guiding them in important life skills. A dedicated key worker is allocated to each individual. The meetings encourage clients to express and explore thoughts and behaviours in a safe environment. Through 1-2-1 support some of the areas that have been worked on, aside from their substance misuse, include self-esteem, anger management, exploring emotions, behaviour management, finance and budgeting forecasting, education or employment and health issues.
- 4.9** Through tailored support plans, 1-2-1 meetings and 'team around the client' meetings the project aims to:
- prevent homelessness and provide sustainable routes back to settled housing
 - decrease offending
 - improve health and wellbeing
 - tackle alcohol and drug misuse and provide opportunities to make change
 - improve access to training and employment opportunities
 - improve family relationships
 - reduce the risk of poverty
 - reduce the risk of becoming a vulnerable victim of crime
 - increase social inclusion
 - reduce cost to partners that interact with the client
 - increase the effectiveness of multi-agency working.

Since 2011 the No More project has helped 56 people to deal with their long term issues.

- 4.10** A lottery bid for £300,000 over 5 years to fund 4 No More posts is currently being progressed. If successful, the lottery bid will ensure that the two posts currently delivering the project will be funded for a further 5 years. There would also be an additional 2 posts, one for No More Debt and another for No More Abuse to work with clients specifically around those suffering domestic abuse and those in debt.
- 4.11** If the lottery bid is successful, the £40,000 requested through the NHB bid if successful can be returned. Phase 2 of the lottery bid was submitted in January 2015. At the point of writing this bid the date of the outcome is unknown, however previous experience suggests it may be late March 2015.

Initiative 3 : Domestic abuse Co-ordinator and panel	
Lead Portfolio Holder : Safer Communities, Older People and Health	
Allocation : £117,500 per annum for two years	Delivery Lead : Head of Leisure, Environmental Health & Children's Services
Timescales : Quarter 1 - Conclude existing 2013/15 DV Action Plan and commence consultation for a new strategy and 2015/17 action plan Quarter 2/3 - Draft and consult 2015/17 Action Plan and commence delivery Quarter 4 - Review 2016/17 delivery plan	
Priorities Supported : Help people feel safe Put residents first	

- 4.12** The Purpose of the project is to provide funding to sustain the Domestic Abuse Coordinator post until September 2017 and the Stevenage Domestic Abuse Panel (SDAP) and the delivery of the NSPCC Domestic Abuse Recovering Together (DART) programme, until April 2017.
- 4.13** This proposal provides an extended 2 year pilot of two key projects. The Stevenage Domestic Abuse Panel will continue to support medium to high risk victims of abuse, whilst the NSPCC's DART programme will provide intervention for those children aged 7-11 who have been affected by domestic abuse. Whilst the project delivery continues, the role of the Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator will be focused on securing long term funding for the pilots, whilst delivering the remaining actions from the Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse Action Plan.
- 4.14** The funding will allow for further development of the Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse Action Plan, taking forward the actions yet to be delivered and providing further strategic work across Stevenage to reduce the prevalence of domestic abuse and increase services available to those affected by domestic abuse. Key areas from the action plan still to be delivered include female perpetrators of abuse and improving data sharing across the partnership, particularly with Health authorities.

- 4.15** The SDAP/DART project currently runs until April 2015, and has thus far had a positive impact on the lives of medium risk victims of domestic abuse who might otherwise have been overlooked as well as providing an essential service to support children.
- 4.16** The SDAP and DART projects will be sustained by providing the following resources:
- 1 Part Time SDAP Coordinator post
 - 1 Part Time DART practitioner post
 - £5,000 budget per annum for supporting victims of domestic abuse
 - £12,500 budget for the delivery of NSPCC DART

Initiative 4 : Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator	
Lead Portfolio Holder : Safer Communities, Older People and Health	
Allocation : £38,840 per annum for two years	Delivery Lead : Head of Business Strategy, Community and Customer Services
Timescales :	
<p>The post will be recruited to in quarter 1 of 2015/16 and will focus initially on understanding the issues and causes of ASB in the town, cultivating relationships with key delivery partners from the community safety partnership and across the voluntary sector; as well as looking at how partners can maximise the use of the Government's new ASB tools and powers to ensure an effective response to ASB. By the end of quarter 4 the ASB co-ordinator will have developed and begun implementing a programme of activities and initiatives in partnership to tackle ASB in a co-ordinated, co-operative and effective manner to improve outcomes in the hotspot areas.</p>	
Priorities Supported :	
<p>Help people feel safe Put residents first</p>	

- 4.17** Due to an increase in ASB month on month since April 2014 (+6.4% in Q1; +14.7% in Q2 and 34.4% in Q3) there is a renewed need for the recruitment of an Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) coordinator, to take a strategic overview of ASB issues, using data analysis to inform an intelligence led, proactive and preventative approach to problem solving. This will allow us to take a more strategic approach towards the management of ASB, delivering an ASB prevention / reduction strategy which complements the SoSafe three year strategy and annual action plan. The post will involve reporting to SoSafe on performance, nurturing links with partners to share information and best practice, and seeking external funding for projects.

4.18 ASB remains a high priority issue for Stevenage residents, as evidenced in the last town wide survey (2013) where tackling crime and ASB was selected as a main priority by 84% of residents. When ranking residents priorities in order of importance, tackling crime and ASB came top.

4.19 The proposal will employ an ASB coordinator on a two year fixed term contract to:

- Develop a strategic prevention / reduction partnership plan for SoSafe, in relation to ASB trends and current issues.
- Develop council policy in relation to ASB tools and powers afforded by the ASB, Crime and Policing Act 2014 – working across the council with Environmental Services, Licensing, Tenancy and enforcement officers; to ensure that the council is utilising all its available powers.
- Work with wider partners (charities, mental health etc.) to address the issues around ASB associated with homelessness, researching best practice and solutions.
- Work with the Shephall youth steering group to address youth related ASB, in particular at the Hyde.
- Undertake a review of current mobile CCTV arrangements and equipment.
- Undertake hot spot analysis and report to Operational Delivery Group / Responsible Authority Group on a regular basis.
- Reinstate regular ASB meetings with SBCs ASB team, police ASB officers and CCTV management, in order to coordinate action around current issues; managing deployment of mobile CCTV.
- Attend county forums and events in order to share best practice and information.
- Identify potential funding streams, and work with external partners to secure funding for projects / initiatives.
- Undertake public engagement and consultation to ascertain a picture of perceived ASB across the town.
- Undertake project work as and when required and support the role of the Senior Corporate Policy Officer (community safety & strategic partnerships).

Initiative 5 : The Women’s Cycling Tour	
Lead Portfolio Holder : Culture, Leisure and Sport	
Allocation : £20,000	Delivery Lead : Head of Leisure, Environmental Health & Children’s Services
Timescales :	
Quarter 1 - Deliver finish of the 2015 Women’s Tour and supporting community events.	
Priorities Supported :	
Put residents first Improve the economy and encourage financial resilience	

4.20 The Women’s Tour is the largest women’s cycling event in the world. The Council has been invited to host a stage finish on the High Street on 22 June 2015, we expect crowds of up to 20,000 to line the streets to see the world’s finest female competitors race to the finish line. On the 16 December the Executive approved a report detailing the likely benefits to Stevenage and the community plus the overall estimated cost to the Council of £88,000. Of the £20,000, requested £7,500 will be directly used to fund community events pre, during and post event, this will primarily be delivered using local clubs and organisations. The event requires significant planning, infrastructure and event management to be provided by the host authority.

4.21 Over half a million people watched the 2014 event on TV, and there were over 70,000 spectators on the streets in Hertfordshire. Like the Torch relay this event will provide a free national spectacle for local residents and will encourage increased participation in cycling in Stevenage.

Initiative 6 : Clean and Green projects	
Lead Portfolio Holder : Environment and Regeneration	
Allocation : £170,000	Delivery Lead : Head of Environmental Services
Timescales :	
<p>Clean Quarter 1 = 25% of bins purchased, installed. Quarter 2 = 50% of bins purchased, installed. Quarter 3 = 75% of bins purchased, installed. Quarter 4 = 100% of bins purchased, installed.</p> <p>Agreed funds will only allow some prioritised sites to have bins replaced with dual litter/dog bins.</p>	
<p>Green Quarter 1 = review of shrub/hedge survey and decide on which properties to consult. Quarter 2 = Consult residents on shrub/hedge rejuvenation proposals where they are affected. Quarter 3 = Review consultation, order plants/materials and start works. Quarter 4 = Continue works to rejuvenate shrub/hedge sites.</p>	
Priorities Supported :	
<p>Clean Deliver value for money Regenerate the town centre and neighbourhoods</p> <p>Green Put residents first Deliver value for money Regeneration the town centre and neighbourhoods</p>	

<p>Clean & Green Help people feel safe</p>
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4.22 Litter/Dog Bin Replacement Scheme – Following a review of litter bin provision, to replace bins throughout the town that no longer provides appropriate storage of litter prior to weekly emptying. This includes; Small lamp column yellow bins that suffer from filling with rain water, windy weather emptying and small capacity overflow; concrete uncovered bins that also fill with water in periods of heavy rain and windy weather emptying and finally red specific dog waste bins that have a small capacity not relevant to current dog owner behavioural usage. The new style replacement bins are dual purpose closed top litter & dog waste bins. They have a letterbox aperture deterring filling with domestic waste, the closed top protects from windy emptying and rain water filling.

4.23 Shrub Bed & Hedge area Rejuvenation - To renovate or remove approximately 30% of shrub beds throughout the town equating to 75,000m² (approximately 15 Football pitches size). Removal will be followed by grass seeding or other appropriate treatment. Retained beds will be planted with appropriate new shrub stock.

Initiative 7 : Supporting Private and Housing Association Renters	
Lead Portfolio Holder : Housing	
Allocation : £52,810	Delivery Lead : Head of Housing Management
Timescales :	
<p>Quarter 1 - the project will be scoped and the Job description agreed and evaluated and recruited to</p> <p>Quarter 2 - post holders to start the project</p> <p>Quarter 3 - target 100 Private Rented Sector (PRS) tenancies and determine support package</p> <p>Quarter 4 – target 200 PRS tenancies and determine support package</p> <p>Quarter 1 – target 300 PRS tenancies and determine support package</p> <p>End of Quarter 1 - complete project evaluation to determine number of tenancies successfully sustained.</p> <p>The bid suggested that a post holder would be in place 1 April 2015. This is not realistic and a carry forward will be requested to carry forward funding to the end of June 2016 to complete a full year of the project work.</p>	
Priorities Supported :	
<p>Improve the economy and encourage financial resilience</p> <p>Put residents first</p> <p>Deliver value for money</p>	

- 4.24** The government's welfare reforms have already restricted the levels of housing benefit private renters in Stevenage get. This has had four major impacts – (1) reduced supply of settled affordable PRS accommodation for households threatened with homeless, (2) increased problems of affordability, arrears and financial exclusion issues for existing PRS placements; (3) increased competition for the available affordable accommodation as private renters move out from the over-heated London rental market; and (4) landlords ending HB tenants' tenancies in the hope of getting working tenants who can pay more.
- 4.25** Over the years the Housing Advice Service has developed an effective approach to sustaining private and housing association tenancies. Benefit dependent advice seekers approach the council asking for help to sustain their tenancies. The Housing Advice Service runs thorough financial 'health checks', more recently ensuring these assessments are done with Universal Credit (UC) in mind.
- 4.26** A recent SBC survey of residents including PRS and Housing Association tenants has shown that more needs to be done to mitigate the effects of welfare reform.
- 4.27** The Council is about to embark on a project involving a programme to make direct personal contact with the 300 private tenants we have placed in the private rented sector, to ensure that they are ready for UC. This will not just be an information-giving exercise, but will include the offer of casework and support plans where necessary. We will be contacting our partners within the council and at the CAB, Credit Union and DWP prior to carrying out this exercise to ensure a holistic, joined up approach that takes account amongst other things:
- food and fuel poverty
 - financial savviness
 - general indebtedness
 - access to affordable credit
 - access to the labour market
 - digital access

5.1 Financial Implications

- 5.1.1** The final New Homes Bonus allocations for 2015/16 have now been announced. The total grant payments will be made monthly direct to councils with the first monthly payment will be made in April 2015.
- 5.1.2** As part of the budget setting process, Council approved a General Fund Revenue Account Contingency Sum in the Budget and Policy Framework for 2013/14 of £400,000 for expenditure determined by the Executive. This expenditure is funded from the New Homes Bonus reserve and the impact on the General Fund is neutral.

5.1.3 There are three previously approved budget policy commitments against the 2015/16 New Homes Bonus allocation as follows:

2015/16 New Homes Bonus Allocation	£1,261,293
Less : Contribution to 2015/16 General Fund Budget	(£200,000)
Less : Contribution to Capital Reserve	(£250,000)
Less : Contingency left in reserve for scheme over-runs	(£50,893)
Allocation Remaining to Support Schemes	£760,400

Two schemes (Initiatives 3 and 4) require funding in 2016/17, although the funding will be provided from the 2015/16 New Homes Bonus allocation.

5.1.4 The following schemes are recommended for approval within the Executive's contingency sum:

Initiative	Scheme	Per Annum	Years	Total
1	Town Centre Improvements	£164,910	1	£164,910
2	No More Project – 6 month extension	£40,000	1	£40,000
3	Domestic abuse Co-ordinator and panel	£117,500	2	£235,000
4	Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator	£38,840	2	77,680
5	The Women's Cycling Tour	£20,000	1	£20,000
6	Clean and Green projects	£170,000	1	£170,000
7	Supporting Private and Housing Association Renters	£52,810	1	£52,810
Total				£760,400

5.2 Legal Implications

5.2.1 The New Homes Bonus is paid through section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003 as a un-ringfenced grant. Local authorities and their communities will have the freedom to spend New Homes Bonus revenues according to local wishes.

5.3 Equalities and Diversity Implications

5.3.1 Stevenage Borough Council has committed itself to providing high quality services that are relevant to the needs and responsive to the views of all sections of the local community, irrespective of their race, gender, disability, culture, religion, age, sexual orientation or marital status. The General Equality Duty (Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) requires the council to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations in the exercise of its functions. These considerations

are the duty of decision makers. Initial Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) have been carried out on the recommended New Homes Bonus schemes and further full EqIAs will be carried out, where appropriate, if the schemes go ahead. It is anticipated that there will be a positive impact from the schemes and EqIAs will be used to ensure that all sections of the community can benefit from them.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- None

APPENDICES

- None