

CABINET MEETING – 31 JANUARY 2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY SHEET – PART I

Title of Report:

Grant Funding to support the Homeless Drop-in Service

Author(s):

Report of the Executive Director of Health, Housing and Communities

Purpose of Report:

To seek approval to award Oasis Aquila Housing trading as Oasis Community Housing funding to provide a continued and extended Homeless Drop-in service in the City.

Description of Decision:

Cabinet is requested to approve the award a grant for 2024-2025 to Oasis Aquila Housing trading as Oasis Community Housing for the continued and extended Homeless Drop-in Service to a maximum of £113,758.

Is the decision consistent with the Budget/Policy Framework? Yes

If not, Council approval is required to change the Budget/Policy Framework

Suggested reason(s) for Decision:

The provision of a Homeless Drop-in service by the voluntary sector within the city has been identified as a valuable service in response to those homeless and sleeping rough.

The Homelessness Health Needs Assessment identified the Homeless Drop-In as a key point of service access and support for those homeless and was highlighted to support their well-being.

The Homeless Drop-In service is a key function and service activity in response to the homelessness issues in the city and the provision of the Homeless Drop-in supports the wider Homelessness Reduction and Sleeping Rough Strategy and its approved Action Plan. Oasis Aquila Housing have advised that following a reduction in donations that they would no longer be able to continue to support and deliver the service.

This grant funding will ensure a continued and extended Homeless Drop-in service up until 31st March 2025(up to 5pm) which is critical in ensuring appropriate access and support services for homelessness.

As the grant is over £50,000 Cabinet approval is required under the Council's constitution.

Alternative options to be considered and recommended to be rejected.

The option of Oasis Community Housing reducing its opening hours and days opening were considered to align with available secured funding through its charitable donation activity, however due to the growing demands on homelessness services this reduction in service was discounted and the provision of grant funding was seen as the most appropriate way forward to meet the service needs in the city.

Impacts analysed;

Equality **Privacy** **Sustainability** **Crime and Disorder**

Is the Decision consistent with the Council's Co-Operative Values? Yes

Is this a "Key Decision" as defined in the Constitution? Yes

Is it included in the 28 day Notice of Decisions? Yes

GRANT FUNDING TO SUPPORT THE HOMELESS DROP IN SERVICE**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF HEALTH, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES****1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To seek approval to award Oasis Aquila Housing trading as Oasis Community Housing funding to provide a continued and extended Homeless Drop-in service in the City.

2.0 DESCRIPTION OF DECISION (RECOMMENDATIONS)

- 2.1 Cabinet is requested to approve the award of a grant for 2024-2025 to Oasis Community Housing for the continued and extended Homeless Drop-in Service to a maximum of £113,758.

3.0 SUNDERLAND DROP IN – OASIS COMMUNITY HOUSING “BASIS”

- 3.1 Oasis Community Housing’s Basis Sunderland Homeless Drop-in centre currently operates from Park Road Church, near to Sunderland city centre. The Drop-In provides support to people facing homelessness.
- 3.2 Oasis Aquila Housing (“OAH”) is a registered Charity (no. 1107554) and exists to reignite hope and a future for everyone facing homelessness. OAH helps around 1,300 people annually across the UK by providing housing and support and, more fundamentally, a place where those excluded feel they belong and supports an estimated 300 people in Sunderland.
- 3.3 Basis crisis centres are a cornerstone of the services delivered by OAH. In Sunderland the Basis Homeless Drop-in Centre is free to access and open every weekday helping people facing homelessness by providing relief to their pressing material and physical needs. This includes things such as:
- access to a shower and laundry facilities which are vital for maintaining personal hygiene and a sense of dignity.
 - Free food and refreshments including tea/coffee, cereal, toast, fruit, and biscuits.
 - A shoe and clothes bank so people stay warm and presentable.
 - Access to phones and IT to overcome the digital exclusion that is such a barrier for those struggling to escape homelessness.
- 3.4 Through the small two-person team supported by dedicated volunteers, when people are accessing the Drop-in service, they engage with service users in providing information, advice and advocacy support. They listen to service users so people can share their stories, then OAH offer personalised support at a pace that fits their circumstances so that people can begin their journey out of homelessness.

3.5 The OAH team provide the following practical support:

- assisting with completing applications for housing and other services
- helping people access Universal Credit
- providing a mobile phone
- assistance with applying for benefits or finding proof of identity to access services.
- Basis can be used as a care of address for those sleeping rough.
- A safe place where people can store their belongings.

3.6 OAH engages with a range of partners in the delivery of its services, with many operating out of Basis directly, these include local community groups and churches, the Council Housing Options Team, Wear Recovery, Shelter and the Probation Service.

4.0 BASIS SUNDERLAND DROP IN – SERVICE FUNDING AND GRANT AWARD

4.1 OAH relies on charitable donations to run and operate the Basis Homeless Drop-in Service in Sunderland. This has over many years attracted sufficient donations to ensure that the service operates weekdays through the morning and up to around 2pm in the afternoon.

4.2 Unfortunately in recent times Charitable donations have slowed and the level of donations secured would mean that the Basis Homeless Drop In would need to consider reducing hours and possibly closing on some days in line with available secured funding.

4.3 The Council's Homelessness Reduction and Sleeping Rough Strategy, the Homelessness Action Plan and the associated Homeless Health Needs Assessment has highlighted the importance and value the Homeless Drop In Service plays in supporting people that are homeless and supports their wider health and well-being

4.4 It costs £139,695 annually to run Basis. In 2023/24 there was a gap to operate the service in its current arrangements and OAH needed £23,710 to remain operational until the end of the financial year. Due to the positive impact and benefits this service offers the Council were keen to support the ongoing delivery of the service by OAH.

4.5 Following discussions an opportunity was available to improve the access and service offer and extend the service opening times to 5pm, as well as increase the times the Council's Housing Options Team operates from the Basis Homeless Drop In.

4.6 To facilitate this enhanced service offer there was an additional cost for an administration staff member. The funding gap for 2023/24 increased to £49,204 from the original £23,710. A grant of £49,204 has been provided to OAH by the Executive Director of Health, Housing and Communities under

delegated powers in 2023/24 using available funding the Public Health grant to support the delivery of health and well-being outcomes for those people that are homeless.

4.7 For 2024/25 the grant funding required to provide continuation of services at the Homeless Drop-in is £113,758. Funding for the ongoing support for this service would be met from funding available within the Council's Public Health grant.

4.8 Due to the positive impact on homeless people through the use of the Drop In on health and wellbeing and the benefits identified within the Health Needs Assessment aligned with the Homelessness Reduction and Sleeping Rough Strategy it is proposed to award grant funding for 2024/25 to OAH for the ongoing delivery of the Basis Homeless Drop-in Service.

5.0 Reasons for the Decision

5.1 The provision of a Homeless Drop-In service by the voluntary sector within the city has been identified as a valuable service in response to those homeless and sleeping rough.

5.2 The Homelessness Health Needs Assessment identified the Homeless Drop In as a key point of service access and support for those homeless and was highlighted to support their well-being.

5.3 The Homeless Drop-In service is a key function and service activity in response to the homelessness issues in the city and the provision of the Homeless Drop-In supports the wider Homelessness Reduction and Sleeping Rough Strategy and its approved Action Plan. Oasis Aquila Housing have advised that following a reduction in donations that they would no longer be able to continue to support and deliver the service.

5.4 This grant funding will ensure a continued and extended Homeless Drop-in service up until 31st March 2025 (up to 5pm) which is critical in ensuring appropriate access and support services for homelessness.

5.5 As the grant is over £50,000 Cabinet approval is required under the Council's constitution.

6.0. Alternative Options

6.1 The option of Oasis Aquila Housing reducing its opening hours and days opening were considered to align with available secured funding through its charitable donation activity, however due to the growing demands on homelessness services this reduction in service was discounted and the provision of grant funding was seen as the most appropriate way forward to meet the service needs in the city.

7.0 Other Relevant Considerations / Consultations

- 7.1 **Co-operative Values:** Sunderland City Council is a co-operative Council and will act ethically in all its actions whilst adhering to and actively promoting its co-operative values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. These values will underpin our decision making and actions.
- 7.2 **Financial Implications:** The financial implications are outlined in the main body of the report with the proposed grant to be funded from the Council's Public Health grant.
- 7.3 **Legal Implications:** In accordance with Part 4, Section 7 of the Council's Financial Procedure Rules (FPR16 Payment of Grants and Benefits) approval of Cabinet must be sought before Chief Officers provide assistance to any third party by way of loan, grant or guarantee of over £50,000 to any one body in any one financial year.

The Council has considered the applicability of the provisions of the Subsidy Control Act 2022 ("the SCA") in respect of the financial assistance envisaged by this report. As Oasis Aquila Housing is not engaged in economic activity in providing the homeless drop-in service in Sunderland and the grant is to be ringfenced for these non-economic activities they are not acting as an economic enterprise for the purpose of this grant which will therefore not fall as a subsidy pursuant to the SCA.