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Community & Children's Services Committee INFORMATION ONLY REPORTS - NOVEMBER

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28.	YORK WAY ESTATE: PROVISION OF SOCIAL HOUSING	

Ian Thomas CBE
Town Clerk and Chief Executive



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Committees:	Dated:
Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Sub-Committee –	
For Information	04/10/2023
	04/10/2023
Department of Community and Children's Services – For	
Information	01/11/2023
Subject: City of London's Women Project Access Criteria	Public
Subject: Only of London's Women's Toject Access Official	1 ubiio
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate	1,2,3,4,10
Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	1,2,0,4,10
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or	N
capital spending?	
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the	N/A
Chamberlain's Department?	
Report of: Judith Finlay, Director of Community and	For Information
Children's Services	
Report author: Fleur Holley-Moore, Rough Sleeping	
Services Manager	
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Summary

This report aims to provide supplementary information on the access criteria of the City of London's Women Project and how it ensures that the City of London is meeting its obligations under the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) and the Equality Act (2010). The City of London's Women Project was launched in April 2023, marking the City of London's first dedicated accommodation service for single women who are experiencing homelessness and fleeing domestic abuse. This report outlines the access criteria and the measures in place to minimise risk as far as reasonably possible for women accommodated within the project.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

• Note the report.

Main Report

Background

- The report City of London's Women Project Update was brought to the Department of Community and Children's Services Committee and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Sub-Committee in July 2023.
- 2. The paper provided a background on the City of London's Women Project and why it was required to meet City of London's (CoL's) legal obligations under

- the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) and moral responsibilities towards women who are homeless and fleeing domestic abuse.
- 3. The paper also explained how the project supports CoL's Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2019-2023,¹ that outlines its priorities for dealing with violence against women and girls through services across the Square Mile.
- 4. Members requested that a supplementary paper be provided to offer additional information on the access criteria of the project and how the safety of the women placed there is ensured, while also ensuring that the CoL is meeting its statutory responsibilities under the Housing Act (1996), the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) and the Equality Act (2010). Members also requested additional information on demand for the project, and outcomes to date.

Domestic Abuse Act (2021)

- 5. The Domestic Abuse Act (2021) changed homelessness legislation to include those fleeing domestic abuse as automatically in priority need for assistance under the Housing Act (1996).
- 6. This means that, if the local authority is satisfied that an applicant is eligible for assistance and is homeless because of domestic abuse, the local authority must offer safe temporary accommodation for the duration of their application without needing to meet other qualifying factors.
- 7. The Act created a new requirement that temporary accommodation for those fleeing domestic abuse must be safe, and CoL saw this as an opportunity to move away from its reliance on mixed-sex accommodation provision and develop a new approach for this group.
- 8. In response, the City of London's Women Project was established as a women-only temporary accommodation initiative to better address the needs of women fleeing domestic abuse and fulfil legal duties under the Domestic Abuse Act (2021).

Demand Data

The City of London experienced an increase in homelessness approaches from households fleeing domestic abuse after the enactment of the Domestic Abuse Act (2021).

¹ City of London Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2019-2023

Table 1 - Number of approaches from households fleeing domestic abuse

Year	Number of approaches	Percentage increase
		vs previous year
2018/19	5	N/A
2019/20	3	-40%
2020/21	26	77%
2021/22	31	19%
2022/23	53	71%

- 10. Overall, from 2018/19 to 2022/23, the CoL saw a 960% increase in approaches due to domestic abuse.
- 11. Figures for England demonstrate a 53% increase in a homeless duty acceptance due to domestic abuse from 2018/19 to 2021/22 (please note annual figures for 2022/23 are not yet published).
- 12. In the year 2022/23, a total of 49 women slept rough in the Square Mile for one or more nights. While data from the Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) under-reports those rough sleeping due to fleeing domestic abuse, data from a nationwide homeless charity suggests that domestic abuse contributes to a third of cases involving women who sleep rough.²
- 13. This increase can be partially attributed to the national lockdown in response to COVID-19. During this period "police recorded crime data show an increase in offences flagged as domestic abuse-relation", "an increase in demand for domestic abuse victim services" and "London's Metropolitan police services received an increased number of calls-for service for domestic incidents". This, too, would have resulted in an increase in the number of households approaching CoL and local authorities across England because of fleeing domestic abuse.

Access Criteria

14. The access criteria for the City of London's Women Project has been developed based on the Housing Act (1996), Equality Act (2010), Domestic Abuse Act (2021) and best practice research.

- 15. The project is for women, (including those who identify as a woman), with a connection to CoL who are homeless, require safe accommodation and for whom domestic abuse is an aggravating factor in their homelessness.
- 16. The project, and access criteria, have been established in light of potential proposals to reform the Gender Recognition Act (2004)

² New research reveals women experiencing homelessness are often hidden from help - St Mungo's (mungos.org)

³ <u>Domestic abuse during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)</u>

- 17. Clients must be 18 years old or older.
- 18. They must be single, or it must be that their children or partner do not reside with them.
- 19. They must be eligible for homelessness assistance and have access to public funds.
- 20. They must have low- or medium-level support needs and be able to sustain temporary accommodation with floating support.
- 21. They must not have a violent criminal conviction, caution or warning.
- 22. They must either have a history of rough sleeping recoded in the Square Mile on CHAIN or have sought homeless assistance from the CoL under Part VII of the Housing Act (1996).
- 23. The Equality Act (2010) stipulates that the exclusion of an individual because of a protected characteristic, for example, because they have started or completed gender reassignment, can only be in circumstances when it can be demonstrated that such exclusion constitutes a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.
- 24. Under this clause, a single-sex service such as the City of London's Women Project can only exclude men from accessing the service. Additionally, as there is insufficient demand, CoL are not required to provide a parallel service for men.
- 25. Therefore, apart from the exceptions mentioned above, exclusion from the service is determined by assessing the potential risk that a placement into the project might pose to others within the service, or the risk that existing residents might pose to the new individual, rather than an arbitrary exclusion of a protected characteristic.
- 26. This access criteria is in line with the 15 umbrella bodies and local domestic and sexual violence support services across Britain that were interviewed for Stonewall's resource Supporting trans women in domestic and sexual violence services; Interviews with professionals in the sector. Among other findings, it found that "no participants said they have used the Equality Act exemption to deny support to a trans survivor. Some participants said that the exemption should be kept as a safeguard, while others were concerned about other services using the exemption to turn away trans survivors when they should be providing support" and "participants take a personalised, client-centred approach to supporting trans women, as they do for all survivors".4

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⁴ Stonewall, Supporting trans women in domestic and sexual violence services. stonewall_and_nfpsynergy_report.pdf

Keeping Women Safe in the City of London's Women Project

- 27. The Project is for all women who meet the access criteria and do not pose a threat to the existing residents, thereby prioritising safety for both newcomers and those already part of the programme.
- 28. To minimise risk as much as possible for the women placed in the project, a range of safety measures have been implemented, both concerning the project itself and the assessment and sign-up process. This includes a client centred risk assessment procedure.
- 29. Through its research⁵, Stonewall observed that "while respondents were aware that gender recognition reform could allow violent men to pose as women to access their service...there was a clear consensus that services' thorough risk assessment procedures would safeguard against (harm)".
- 30. The project does not have direct access; referrals must undergo a thorough assessment by a CoL Advice and Homeless Officer or by a City Outreach Worker before being presented to a panel for acceptance.
- 31. The panel convenes as needed and includes CoL employees as well as representatives from commissioned services, ensuring a comprehensive assessment of the referral.
- 32. A referral will be declined by the panel if the individual fails to meet the access criteria and/or if they present a risk to others within the service, or if existing residents may pose a risk to them.
- 33. A comprehensive sign-up process is in place, including CoL's Temporary Accommodation Agreement and a Behaviour Contract. This ensures that accepted referrals understand their responsibilities during their time in the project, and that it is a safe, inclusive space. In the event of a breach of the Temporary Accommodation Agreement or Behaviour Contract, the woman's bedspace in the project may be brought to an end.
- 34. A female Mobile Intervention and Support Worker attends the project regularly to provide support for the women and to ensure adherence to the Temporary Accommodation Agreement and the Behaviour Contract.
- 35. The temporary accommodation provider of the City of London's Women Project has also installed CCTV that can be accessed and shared when necessary.
- 36. If a woman, or someone identifying as female, is deemed unsuitable for the project at panel or after placement, alternative suitable temporary accommodation will be arranged. This may include a placement in CoL Supported Accommodation Pathway, self-contained Temporary Accommodation, or a more specialised options, such as a refuge.

⁵ Stonewall, Supporting trans women in domestic and sexual violence services. stonewall_and_nfpsynergy_report.pdf

Outcomes to Date

- 37. To date, we have had seven placements in the City of London's Women Project.
- 38. Six of these placements have been made by the Statutory Homeless Team and one by the Rough Sleeping Team.
- 39. Four women have moved on from the project: one was reconnected to their home area; two moved into CoL social housing stock; and one moved on to a privately rented flat.
- 40. We currently have two women on the waitlist.

Options

41. There are no additional options arising from this report.

Proposals

42. There are no proposals arising from this report.

Key Data

43. There is no key data arising from this report.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

- 44. Financial implications N/A
- 45. Resource implications N/A
- 46. Legal implications N/A
- 47. Risk implications N/A
- 48. Equalities implications Under the Equality Act (2010) providers cannot discriminate against someone based on a protected characteristic. However, there are exceptions where access for certain groups can be modified or limited when it represents a "proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim". Under this exception, men are excluded from accessing the CoL's Women's Hub, as it is a safe space for women fleeing domestic. A full Equality Analysis has been completed.
- 49. Climate implications N/A
- 50. Security implications N/A

Conclusion

- 51. The City of London's Women Project is for all women who meet the access criteria and who do not present a risk to the current residents, ensuring safety for newcomers and those already within the service.
- 52. Legislative changes under the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) accentuated the need for the project, alongside the increase in demand from approaches to CoL from women fleeing domestic abuse and the ongoing need from women sleeping rough in the Square Mile.
- 53. The access criteria, which was developed with careful consideration, ensures that the project caters to the needs of single women fleeing domestic abuse, and has a robust assessment mechanism to ensure a safe environment.
- 54. The project's compliance with the Equality Act (2010) demonstrates its dedication to maintaining an inclusive and protective space, and the safety measures in place for the project play a pivotal role in ensuring the women's safety while at the project.

Appendices

None

Background Papers

• City of London's Women Project Update, July 2023

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Committee:	Dated: 1 November 2023	
Community and Children's Services		
Subject: Cost of Living Response Update	Public	
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	2, 3, 4	
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N	
If so, how much?	£	
What is the source of Funding?	N/A	
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the	N/A	
Chamberlain's Department?		
Report of: Judith Finlay, Executive Director of	y, Executive Director of For Information	
Community and Children's Services.		
Report author: Hannah Dobbin, Strategy and Projects		
Officer, Department for Community and Children's		
Services.		

Summary

This report updates the Committee on the City of London Corporation's (City Corporation) response to the cost-of-living crisis and Winter 2022-23, and plans for Winter 2023-24.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

Note the report.

Main Report

Background

- 1. In September 2022, Members were provided with an update report on how the City Corporation is responding to the cost-of-living pressures faced by residents.
- 2. The report set out actions under a number of priorities: communications to promote support provision; targeting financial assistance; winter warmth; tackling food poverty; increasing income from employment; and wellbeing.
- 3. These actions seek to mitigate the pressures some households face supplementing government support and utilising government funding provided to help struggling households.
- 4. This paper provides Members with an update on how the City Corporation continues to respond to the cost-of-living pressures on residents.

5. The delivery and co-ordination of action is led by a Cost-of-Living Steering Group consisting of departmental and partner organisation representatives.

Update

Household Support Fund

- 6. In October 2021, Government made funding available to local authorities via the Household Support Fund (HSF). The expectation was that it should primarily be used to support households in the most need particularly those including children and pensioners who would otherwise struggle with energy bills, food and water bills.
- 7. The City Corporation has taken the view that individuals do not have to be in receipt of a means-tested benefit to get help from the HSF. Support can be accessed through City Advice as well as teams in the Department for Community and Children's Services (DCCS).
- 8. The HSF is administered by the City Corporation's Benefits Team in the Chamberlain's Department. This enables it to be targeted in line with data and intelligence held by that team. The benefits team works in partnership with teams in the DCCS to proactively identify those most in need.
- 9. Help is provided in the following ways: giving food vouchers to organisations such as City Advice and Age UK City of London to distribute; directly paying utility bills for those who are struggling; and providing essential items to help people reduce their fuel costs such as curtains. There is an online application form embedded in the Emergency Support Scheme to help people access food and fuel vouchers.
- 10. The City Corporation received £63,000 for the period 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022 as part of the second round of funding (HSF2). Reporting for this period shows that 53 households with children, 184 households with pensioners and 141 'other' households were awarded support through HSF2.
- 11. The third round of HSF (HSF3) made £63,000 available for the period October 2022 to March 2023. The fourth round (HSF4) is allocated for the whole 2023/24 financial year and anticipated spend is £126,161.

Emergency support scheme

- 12. The 'emergency support scheme' (ESS) aims to support and assist those experiencing a crisis or an emergency, including families and individuals under exceptional pressure.
- 13. Those supported must be 16 years old or over and live in the City of London, or have recently been housed by the City Corporation on one of our estates. They must also be in receipt of certain benefits, such as Universal Credit, Housing Benefit, Pension Credits or Jobseekers Allowance.
- 14. The budget for ESS is £25,000 per financial year including admin costs as well as the awards. The majority of spend is on household goods, e.g. furniture and white

goods, and often supports people who are moving into a property from temporary accommodation. Support also includes high street vouchers, food vouchers and fuel payments for those on pre-paid meters.

Council Tax Reduction Scheme

- 15. The City Corporation continues to award Council Tax Reduction Support (CTRS) up to 100% of a claimants Council Tax liability. Entitlement to council tax reduction is means tested and worked out according to personal circumstances, household income and capital and other factors.
- 16. In September 2023, there were 93 pensioner households, and 140 working age households in receipt of this benefit in the Square Mile.

Discretionary Housing Payments

17. The government has made this funding available to support households in receipt of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit housing costs who have a shortfall in their rent and need additional financial support to make up this shortfall. Such shortfalls can be because of benefit caps, Local Housing Allowance restrictions or other pressures.

School clothing grant

- 18. The City Corporation reviewed its School Clothing Grant Policy in January 2023 following authorisation by the Community and Children's Services Committee. In a bid to reach a wider group of families, the policy was changed from providing assistance to those transitioning into reception or year 7 to families with children in any year group within a maintained setting. The amount of grant available to parents was raised from £150 to £160 per secondary pupil and from £50 to £60 per primary pupil. This is a contribution toward the total cost of a school uniform and will not necessarily cover the whole cost.
- 19. Over the course of the 2022/23 academic year, the numbers applying for a school clothing grant tripled from 9 to 28. 17 children benefitted from the grant compared to eight during the 2021/22 academic year, which is over a 100% increase.
- 20. So far, in preparation for the current 2023/24 academic year, the City Corporation has received 21 school clothing grant applications, 16 of which have been successful. It is anticipated that this figure will rise following further promotion of the revised policy.

Holiday Activity and Food programme

21. The Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme is a government initiative that aims to provide healthy food and enriching activities during the school holidays, primarily to children and young people aged 5 to 16 who are eligible for benefits related free school meals. It is funded by the Department for Education.

- 22.47 individual children and young people were engaged during the four days of the HAF programme. 34 of these were primary aged and eligible for free school meals, and 11 were secondary aged and eligible for free school meals. The remaining two children were primary aged. The popularity of the sessions was beyond expectations. All the children enjoyed access to activities and lunch. The programme received positive feedback from parents and service users alike.
- 23. The current HAF contract with Society Links runs from 1 March 2023 to 31 December 2023 (plus two one-year optional extensions).

Winter packs

- 24.75 winter packs were distributed to people known to Adult Social Care (ASC) containing items and information to keep them warm during the cold weather and cost of living crisis. Packs included a thermal blanket, thermal socks and hat, hand warmers, hot water bottle (no longer included as standard as risk of scolding for some people) and a wall thermometer.
- 25. Libraries were given an additional 10 packs to distribute and the Housing team 25 packs. ASC also replaced fan heaters and other old, potentially dangerous heaters with more cost effective and safe oil-filled radiators for those known to have care and support needs.
- 26. The packs were revised for the hot weather over the summer as this can also present challenges to people with care and support needs. The cold weather packs will be revisited for Winter 2023-24.

Awareness raising

- 27. There has been extensive awareness raising through the Department of Community and Children's Services' communication channels and providers.
 - Fortnightly communications update on all cost-of-living support services.
 - Cost-of-Living Flyer promoting resources and support sent to all households in the City of London.
 - Flyer for 'Get Online Week' to include signposting to cost of living support.
 - 2 x press releases (Warm Spaces Funding, winter vaccinations and support with cost of living).
 - 4 x City Advice outreach events (2 x Golden Lane and 2 x Portsoken).
 - City Advice footer added to rent account letters to City tenants.
 - City Advice 'How to cope with the Cost of Living Crisis Part 1' information sheet in May 2023.
 - Wraparound letter going into City Matters (7 December) which is intended as a reminder of the activity and campaigns around winter safety.
 - Web page (<u>Getting help with the cost of living City of London</u>) created and promoted on front page of City website.
 - Libraries offer of computers and basic IT support added to resources and promoted.
 - Public access terminals to be provided in both community centres from January utilising funding from City and Hackney Health and Care Board (C&HHCB).

- Make Every Contact Count (MECC) training promoted to all front-line services and increased uptake of training by City Corporation staff.
- Green Doctor service promotion.
- Webinar training delivered by the Green Doctor service for City Corporation and commissioned service staff was provided in March 2023. The training included:
 - o What is Fuel Poverty?
 - The actual energy crisis.
 - o How the free energy consultations work.
 - Who could benefit from the service.
 - How to refer individual.

Tackling food poverty

- 28. The HSF has been deployed to provide direct help with food costs, and indirect support by providing support to other household costs such as utility bills. Further support has been provided through the HAF programme to deliver food and activity to children eligible from term time free school meals.
- 29. Family Action runs the Food Pantry based at Artizan Library in the City of London. The Pantry is grant funded and opened at the end of August 2023. It is currently only taking referrals from services such as City Connections, City Corporation social care and City of London libraries, but no-one would be turned away. Members pay £1 per family to join and then you can purchase a bag of food worth approximately £10-£15 for just £4. You must live or work within approximately 15 minutes of a club to become a member. The Pantry is open once a week and there are currently 30 members signed-up. 18 members attended the club run on 5 October 2023 which generated £198 worth of financial savings for members.
- 30. St Luke's Community Centre located just north of the City provides a range of food support services. It operates a food hub and has just launched a food cooperative, and a food pantry is also proposed. The food hub provides food support to residents living in St Luke's area of benefit which in the City of London includes the Golden Lane estate who are on a low income and in financial difficulty. There are currently no fees for the Food Hub, however, the proposed alternative Food Pantry model will be based on a weekly fee in order to meet anticipated greater needs. St Luke's accepts referral and individual referrals and supports those meeting its criteria.

Winter warmth

31. As part of its wider action plan, the City Corporation developed a 'Warm winter welcome' campaign. This provided a directory of warm spaces and events – such as libraires, community centres and activities in cultural and faith spaces in the Square Mile.

- 32. The City Corporation awarded grants to three agencies to provide support Winter 2022-23:
 - Age UK City of London was awarded £2,000 to provide warm spaces and a
 friendly welcome in the City's community spaces. 43 winter warm hub
 sessions were delivered between December 2022 and March 2023. 53 people
 benefited from the grant, 55% were aged 75 years old and over, 45% were
 65-74 years old and 85% were White. However, funds had to be redirected to
 wider community outreach activities due to lack of uptake.
 - Bankside Open Spaces Trust (BOST) was awarded £2,000 to provide a warm hub for residents on Wednesdays for 12 weeks January to March 2023. 44 people benefited from the grant; 53% of those were aged between 45 and 64 and 47% were mixed/multiple ethnic groups.
 - The Carers Centre was awarded £2,000 to provide a warm space for carers and those they care for in the City of London, providing social interaction, healthy refreshments and wellbeing activities.
- 33. There are currently no plans to re-issue the grants this Winter.
- 34. All three libraries in the City of London Barbican, Artizan Street and Shoe Lane signed-up as official warm welcome spaces. Activities across the libraries included:
 - Barbican 'Warm Wednesdays' with a free tea and coffee station, mindful
 colouring and games which ran for approximately four months. Green Doctors
 pop-up advice stand and 'Warm Library' events such as art group which
 averaged around 15 people per week and memory group which averaged
 around 10 per week.
 - Artizan Street tea and coffee with books and chat averaged three people per week and an Age UK Warm Up (tea, biscuits and board games) averaged around two people per week. Posters and leaflets promoting Green Doctors and City Advice targeted at cost of living issues.
 - Shoe Lane display of cost of living related books and leaflets, Green
 Doctors pop-up advice stand and tea, coffee and biscuits at every adult event.
 Dragon Café in the City workshops ran from January to May 2023 and were
 attended by 423 people, and talks and events held during the same period
 were attended by 174 people.
 - Junior library activities at all three libraries included colouring and toy sessions and Shoe Lane Library ran 'Warm Tuesdays' offering puzzles, Lego and Duplo to families and children.
- 35. Planning is underway for warm libraries activity this winter, it is thought that this will likely be similar to last winter but the formal plan has not yet been agreed.

Increased access to computers at libraries

36. City Corporation lending libraries offer free use of computers, Wi-Fi, scanning and low cost printing/photocopying to make sure everyone has equal access to the support that is available to them. Staff will also assist with creating email accounts and can provide assistance with form filling. Membership is not necessary.

Green Doctors

- 37. The City Corporation has commissioned Groundwork London to provide a Green Doctor (energy adviser) service to help people stay warmer and use less energy. Any City of London resident is eligible for the free service being funded by City and Hackney Health and Care Board.
- 38.12 visits to residents took place between January to, and including, September 2023. Savings to residents have predominantly been achieved by changes to behaviour and costs saved range from £22.33 to £500.07.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications

39. The poverty reduction action plan aligns to the commitments of the Corporate Plan, Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and Children and Young People Plan.

Corporate implications

40. This piece of work aligns with and will support the following outcomes of the Corporate Plan:

Contribute to a flourishing society

- 2. People enjoy good health and wellbeing
- 3. People have equal opportunities to enrich their lives and reach their full potential
- 4. Communities are cohesive and have the facilities they need

Financial implications

41. Current activity is being funded through resources made available from government and in principle funding form the City & Hackney Health and Care Board. Further initiatives may require additional funding to be identified but given the pressures on departmental and corporate finances cannot be guaranteed.

Resource implications

42. Officers from the Chamberlains Department and DCCS have absorbed this work within existing capacity. It may be that further growth in activity would require dedicated resource.

Legal implications

43. None

Risk implications

44. None

Equalities implications

45. Targeted action on reducing poverty in the City of London will work towards reducing health and wellbeing, and income inequality across the square mile. Poverty disproportionately impacts of those with protected characteristics.

Climate implications

46. None

Security implications

47. None

Conclusion

48. The City Corporation has taken action to support the residents impacted by the cost-of-living crisis. A multi-agency steering group was set up in Autumn 2022 to oversee the implementation of an action plan and maximise the impact that can be delivered through the services offered and funding available. The steering group will reconvene on 30 October to assess current activity and concerns or new demand going into this Winter. This will inform decision making around activity for Winter 2023-24.

Hannah Dobbin

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Agenda Item 27

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.











Agenda Item 28

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.







