

Decision under Delegated Powers

Officer Requesting Decision

Katie Moore – Housing Needs Manager

Officer Making the Decision

Alison Simmons - Head of Strategic & Private Sector Housing

Recommendation

To approve the extension of the increase in hours of the Housing Officer post (H150) and recruitment of two full time officers at scale 6 on 18 month fixed term contracts for up to 37 hours per week with effect from the start date of the successful applicants. These officers will report to the Senior Housing Options Officer.

To approve the use of the Council's Homelessness Reduction Act New Burdens funding allocation for 2017/18 and 2018/19 for the costs associated with this extension.

Reason

The Council's Housing Options Service has seen a recent increase in caseloads and temporary accommodation use. The Homelessness Reduction Act is due to be implemented in April 2018. The Act places new duties on Local Authorities in relation to the prevention and relief of homelessness that are expected to lead to a significant initial increase in workloads within the Housing Options team.

Authority for Decision

Section 8.2, of the Constitution gives delegated authority to Heads of Service, following consultation with the Council's Human Resources team and subject to the decision complying with the Council's existing policies, to make temporary appointments to be held against existing permanent posts or within the overall budget [item 2 (vii) on page 8-3] and subject to the Officer Employment Procedure Rules and to any right of appeal which may be applicable, to undertake staff management, disciplinary and capability matters including dismissal within their Directorate or Service Area [item 2(x) on page 8-3].

Decision and Date



Alison Simmons
Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing
22/12/17

Background

The Housing Options Team currently consists of six permanent full time equivalent Housing Officers and one permanent full time equivalent Senior Housing Options Officer.

The Homelessness Reduction Act will bring changes to the definition of homelessness (currently those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness within 28 days are eligible to make a homeless application and the threshold is being increased to 56 days) and a substantial number of new statutory duties such as duties to prevent and relieve homelessness for all groups (regardless of priority need status). The number of homelessness applications received and the amount of casework relating to each individual application are expected to increase significantly.

Major changes to the Housing Options Team's operational processes are being made in advance of the implementation of the new Act in order to ensure the service is adequately prepared.

The creation of two 12 month fixed-term Housing Officers for the period 1st October 2017 to 30th September 2018 was approved in July 2017 (see DD055).

Attempts have been made to recruit two additional Housing Officers on 12 month fixed-term contracts, but no suitable candidates applied for these roles. Two agency staff members have therefore been in post since October 2017. It is hoped that a longer contract period of 18 months may attract more candidates.

The addition of two fixed-term Housing Officers within the Housing Options Team ensures sufficient resilience and front-line resources to manage the increasing workloads associated with preparing for the implementation of the Act and will ensure that the service is able to meet the increased demand following the introduction of the Act.

Comments from HR

HR Adviser: Anna Cairns (20/12/17)

If there are other employees who would be in a position to increase their hours, all employees should be given the opportunity. Otherwise, this is in line with the relevant policy. A variation eform will need to be completed.

Financial Implications

The new Flexible Homelessness Support Grant has been being provided to replace the previous Temporary Accommodation Management Fund. The new grant for Charnwood has been confirmed as £84,000 in 2017/18 and £89,000 in 2018/19. It is estimated that Charnwood will spend no more than £12,000 on temporary accommodation management costs that were covered under the old fund in each year. The new grant can only be spent on work to prevent or tackle homelessness, but this can include staffing costs.

Charnwood Borough Council has been allocated New Burdens funding from the DCLG for the increased work that is required in relation to the new Homelessness Reduction Act. The grant allocations are £28,789 for 2017/18, £26,371 for 2018/19 and £34,006 for 2019/20. This funding can be used for staffing costs.

The costs for two full time officers at the top of scale 6 with essential car user allowance and other on costs for 12 months would be up to £73,600. The Flexible Homelessness Support Grant allocation for 2017/18 was sufficient to cover the costs of these 2 posts for the initial 12 month period from 1st October 2017 to 30th September 2018. The new burdens funding allocation for 2017/18 (£28,789) and 2018/19 (£26,371) is sufficient to cover the cost of an extension for a further 9 months from 1st October 2018 to 30th June 2019.

Risk Management

| Risk Identified | Likelihood | Impact | Risk Management Actions Planned |
|--|------------|--------|--|
| This DD is not agreed and there is insufficient cover within the Housing Options Service to deal with the increase in workloads relating to changes to procedures in the lead up to the act and increased demand following the implementation of the act. This could result in increased temporary accommodation spend, complaints and legal challenges. | Medium | Medium | The Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and New Burdens Funding can be used to cover increased temporary accommodation costs. |
| It is not possible to recruit to these posts on fixed term contracts. | Low | Medium | Attempt to recruit agency staff via Matrix (this may have higher cost implications but there is likely to be sufficient budget to cover this for the 18 month period). |

Key Decision:

No.

Background Papers:

DD055.

