

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C/130/2005-6.
Date of meeting: 10 April 2006.



Portfolio: Housing.

Subject: Homelessness Prevention.

Officer contact for further information: Roger Wilson (01992 – 56 4419).

Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992 – 56 4470).

Recommendation:

That, funded by ODPM grant and DDF and CSB funding agreed as part of the Council's budget, the appointment of a full time senior Homelessness Prevention Officer, from April 2006 on a temporary contract of 2 years, be agreed,

Report:

1. The Council currently has 2 full time homelessness prevention officers on temporary contracts. Their work is funded as follows:

Government Grant for Homelessness Prevention	£40,000
General Fund Continuing Services Budget (CSB)	£10,000
Total	£50,000

2. In addition, from 1 April 2005, a 1 x 18 hour per week establishment post was transferred from the homelessness team to the homelessness prevention team.
3. In the year 1 January 2005 to 31 December 2005, the total number of cases being dealt with through homelessness prevention was 506.
4. This table demonstrates the success of the homelessness prevention work undertaken between 1 January 2005 and 31 December 2005. Where intervention was not successful and resulted in a full homelessness application, figures are shown as a sub-set, in bold, in brackets. For example, in the third quarter, 126 cases were dealt with in total, of which only 8 went on to make full homeless applications:

Reason for Action	Case numbers Jan to Mar 05	Case numbers April to June 05	Case numbers June to Sept 05	Case numbers Oct to Dec 05
NTQ privately rented accommodation	16 (1)	17 (1)	25 (2)	27
Family/friends no longer willing to accommodate	38 (3)	34 (8)	23	32 (2)
Domestic violence/harassment/relationship breakdown	24	37 (5)	37 (6)	31

RSL/Council tenancy at risk	10	13	16	8
Repossession/affordability	10	15 (2)	15	11 (1)
Other	11	8 (1)	10	5 (1)
Total	109 (4)	124 (17)	126 (8)	114 (4)

5. At present homelessness prevention is focused on families with children and expectant mothers, but there is a pressing need to extend it to other priority need groups, particularly 16 and 17 year olds, an age group in which homelessness is on the increase in the District.
6. The Government is promoting homelessness prevention work and has set each local housing authority a target to reduce the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation by 31st March 2010. This authority's target is 90 households. At 31 December 2005 the Council had 208 households in temporary accommodation.
7. A number of measures are in hand to enable the Government's target to be met but homelessness prevention is key. The ODPM has awarded EFDC an additional £20,000 per annum over the next 2 years for homelessness prevention (making a total of £60,000 per annum). The Council has an annual amount of £10,000 CSB funding for homelessness prevention. An additional £9,000 for 2006/07 has been included in the DDF. These sums enable a senior homelessness prevention officer to be appointed on a temporary contract, to lead the existing team of 2.5 FTE staff. As well as extending the service to more problematic priority need groups, such as ex-offenders and people with poor mental health, the appointment of a team leader will enable the work to be driven forward, with new initiatives, for example, linked to the Council's Empty Properties Strategy, being thoroughly explored and implemented.

Statement in support of recommended action:

8. The statistics demonstrate that homelessness prevention work is highly effective, as well as being invaluable to those who use the service in avoiding the stress of homelessness. The Cabinet has previously agreed DDF to supplement surplus ODPM funding, to enable an additional officer to be appointed.
9. The existing team members are supervised by the Assistant Housing Needs Manager (Homelessness) but, with increasing workloads, there is a need for closer management, prioritisation of workloads and performance monitoring. There is also a need for new initiatives to be identified and implemented.

Options for action:

10. To not approve the appointment of an additional full time homelessness prevention officer as outlined above, or appoint for a different number of hours or period.

Consultation undertaken:

11. No external consultation undertaken.

Resource implications:

Budget provision: There is sufficient budgetary provision (£20,000 from ODPM Homelessness Prevention Grant and DDF of £9,000) at Grade 7 (1 grade higher than existing homelessness prevention officers). This grading has been confirmed through the job evaluation process.

Personnel: Temporary full time officer for 2 years.

Land: N/A.

Community Plan/BVPP reference: BV 213.

Relevant statutory powers: The Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Act

2002.

Background papers: None.

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications: N/A.

Key Decision reference (if required): Will advise when key decisions have ref nos.