

**TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE**

**26 June 2007**

**Report of the Director of Health and Housing**

**Part 1- Public**

**Matters for Recommendation to Council**

**1 THE HOUSING STRATEGY AND ENABLING ROLE**

**Summary**

**This report seeks to enhance the Council's housing strategy staffing to meet an increasing workload. There are currently two part time (24 hours per week) positions but only one is on the permanent staffing establishment. The proposal is to make the vacant part time position not on the establishment into a full time and permanent post on the establishment. To reflect the increasing and varied workload it is also proposed to rename both positions as Housing Strategy and Enabling Officer.**

**1.1 Background**

1.1.1 As part of planning for the returning in-house of the homeless investigation service and housing register, I propose strengthening the housing strategy and new initiatives (enabling) aspects of the housing service. Unfortunately, as explained in my report to the last meeting of the Strategic Housing Advisory Board (SHAB), return of these functions is not envisaged until later in this financial year. I propose therefore to bring forward the changes to increase the housing strategy and enabling resource to assist both in reducing homelessness and increasing the supply of affordable housing in the meantime. Work is also required on the next iteration of the Council's Housing Strategy (2008-11).

1.1.2 The Council's housing strategy and enabling role has seen a significant increase in workload, in particular around the provision of new affordable housing negotiated through the planning system and because of national changes associated with the prevention of homelessness. Consequently a report was presented to the May 2007 meeting of the SHAB seeking Cabinet endorsement to strengthen the housing strategy and enabling service. Members of the SHAB supported the recommendation in the report, which was also subject to the General Purposes Committee supporting the staffing implications arising therefrom.

1.1.3 In summary, the housing strategy and enabling role covers the following key areas of service delivery:

- developing housing strategies;
- securing new affordable housing provision;
- research and policy development;
- performance monitoring and review; and
- partnership working and new initiatives.

1.1.4 A copy of the Job description for the post is attached as **[Annex 1]**.

## **1.2 Proposals**

1.2.1 There are currently two part time housing strategy and enabling posts (2 x 24hrs per week) within the Housing Service both on Senior Officer (SO) Grade but only one of which is on the permanent establishment. The other, supernumerary post, was a temporary position originally created to support the undertaking of the Housing Services Best Value Review and the wide range of initiatives within the resultant action plan. The position has been filled since September 2000.

1.2.2 Government grant has been secured annually towards the costs incurred in developing new initiatives and increasing the supply of affordable housing to reduce the incidence of homelessness. Part of the funding has been used to offset the costs of this post. The award for 2007/08 is £40,000 is built into base budget. The post was maintained on a temporary contract renewed annually, linked to the funding regime. The contract was subsequently made permanent during 2006/07 consistent with the Council's obligations under employment legislation.

1.2.3 It is proposed to strengthen the strategy and enabling resource base within the service to accommodate the growing workload from these activities. At present, the two part time posts share this work backed up with support from the Chief Housing Officer. The post on the permanent establishment is occupied. The other post is currently vacant due to the recent retirement of the incumbent. This vacant post is funded for 2007/08 but the cost is not projected forward currently in the medium term financial strategy. It is proposed to make the vacant post full time (i.e. an increase of 13 hours per week) and permanent on the establishment.

1.2.4 The full year top of scale cost of this post when full time is £41,176. The actual cost of the additional 13 hours per week at top of scale is £10,484 plus on costs at 38 per cent, i.e. in total £14,468 per annum. A few years ago a reserve was established into which Government grant has been paid in the past and which continues to meet part of the cost of this and another supernumerary post in the Housing Service. This reserve is finite and the Director of Finance advises that

the longer term impact on the Medium Term Financial Strategy of making this post both permanent and full time is the value of the contribution from the reserve once depleted (£11,000), plus the cost of the additional hours making a total of £25,468 per annum.

- 1.2.5 Return in-house of the homeless investigation and housing register services will require a new staffing structure to deliver those services. The intention being to fund the costs involved from savings in the contract payment to Russet Homes (£168,800 per annum) and future savings in bed and breakfast expenditure. The costs of increasing the housing strategy and enabling resource will be factored into the funding arrangements for the new structure.
- 1.2.6 To better reflect the increased duties and responsibilities of the position, it is also proposed to rename both posts as Housing Strategy and Enabling Officer. This change more accurately reflects the emphasis on partnership working and strategy/initiative development included within the position.

### **1.3 Legal Implications**

- 1.3.1 The housing strategy is a statutory requirement under Section 7 of the Local Government Act 2003.

### **1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

- 1.4.1 The cost of increasing staffing resources will be an additional £10,484 plus on-costs at 38 per cent, making a total of £14,468 per annum at top of scale. The full impact of the post being made permanent on the establishment is £25,468 per annum, including on-costs at 38 per cent, as explained above.

### **1.5 Risk Assessment**

- 1.5.1 Failure to explore ways of increasing the supply of affordable housing could leave the Council unable to meet its legal obligations towards the homeless and other households in need.
- 1.5.2 Without developing a range of rehousing initiatives, the Council's ability to prevent homelessness would be set back.

### **1.6 Recommendations**

- 1.6.1 It is **RECOMMENDED** that the post of Housing Strategy and Enabling Officer **BE ESTABLISHED** on a permanent and full time basis on Senior Officer Grade with effect from 1 August 2007.

Background papers: Nil

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