

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

27 November 2007

Report of the Director of Health and Housing

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Council

1 **PROPOSED STAFFING CHANGES TO THE HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING REGISTER SERVICES**

Summary

This report sets out the proposed new staffing resources needed to deliver in-house housing register and homelessness assessment services currently provided under contract by Russet Homes. It is proposed to increase the current staffing level by an additional seven full time posts to reflect the new responsibilities placed on the Council in delivering these services. Two existing staff will be eligible to fill some of these posts.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 This report concerns the contract with Russet Homes to provide housing register and homelessness services. The reasons why the contract should be allowed to expire by mutual agreement on 1 April 2008, were reported to the October 2007 meeting of the Strategic Housing Advisory Board (SHAB) along with the reasons why the service areas should return to direct management by the Council's Housing Service. The Board made the following recommendations which at the time of writing were due to be endorsed by Cabinet on 19 November 2007.

1.1.2 Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to:

1.1.3 **ENDORSE** the proposed arrangements for providing housing register, homelessness and housing advice services when the service returns in-house by 31 March 2008;

1.1.4 **ENDORSE** the proposed resourcing of the service as explained in this report but subject to the endorsement by General Purposes Committee of the changes to the staffing establishment;

1.1.5 **SUPPORT** the proposed means by which it is planned to offset future growth in expenditure created by these staffing proposals;

1.1.6 **CONSIDER** the additional short-term expenditure arising from the interim IT solution during the forthcoming budget cycle;

- 1.1.7 **NOTE** the need to review and update the Council's Allocation Scheme; and
- 1.1.8 **SEEK** further reports on the implementation of these service arrangements and in particular, the monitoring and review of nominations and allocations to housing.
- 1.1.9 This report seeks to advance the second recommendation relating to staffing. However, Members are reminded that other costs associated with the restructure, principally Information Technology, are also being addressed through the current budget planning cycle.

1.2 Current Staffing Levels

- 1.2.1 The housing needs team within the Environmental Health and Housing Service is currently made up of the following staff:

Post	Grade	Hours	Post Number
Housing Needs and Strategy Manager	M8	37.00	DV0701
Strategy and Enabling Officer (Part Time)	SO	24.00	DV0705
Strategy and Enabling Officer	SO	37.00	DV0715
Housing Officer (permanent contract but not reflected on the permanent staffing establishment)	Sc 5 / 6	37.00	DV0716
Housing Adviser	Sc 4 / 5	37.00	DV0710
Housing Assistant	Sc 1 / 2	37.00	DV0707

- 1.2.2 In addition there is a further post of Housing Adviser not on the establishment which is currently filled by an officer on secondment from Russet Homes.

1.3 Proposed Staffing Levels

- 1.3.1 In order to deliver the service in-house a number of new posts are required to ensure that all the additional duties are covered. Changes to the housing strategy and enabling role have already been endorsed by this Committee at your meeting on 26 June 2007. These changes have been factored in to the cost of the existing structure which amounts to £14,468 at top of scale including on costs at 38 per cent.
- 1.3.2 The proposal is to increase the current staffing within the housing needs team by the addition of five full time posts to reflect the new responsibilities and workload associated with delivering these services in-house. However, it is likely that two of these posts will be filled by officers already working in the team - the housing adviser currently on secondment from Russet Homes (subject to TUPE - the Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment Regulations), and the housing officer who is employed on a permanent contract but is not included on the permanent staffing establishment. All staff affected by the new structure will have the opportunity to fill one or other of the new posts created.

- 1.3.3 It was reported to SHAB in October 2007 that in considering the case for establishing a new in-house staffing structure, benchmarking with all 'good' or 'excellent' rated large scale voluntary transfer (LSVT) local authorities in the south east was undertaken. It was found that the proposed structure is below the average staffing levels of all south east LSVT councils making up the cohort. However, careful consideration has been given to the suggested posts in light of what is considered to be a minimum level of staffing necessary to improve service delivery and in light of the budgetary pressures facing the Council.
- 1.3.4 An overview of the current and proposed structure is provided at **[Annex 1]**.
- 1.3.5 It is intended to fund the additional staffing costs involved from savings in the contract payment to Russet Homes (£171,000 per annum). It is also anticipated that the shortfall in funding will be off set at least in part by future savings in bed and breakfast expenditure as the homelessness prevention service becomes embedded. This of course cannot be guaranteed but will be monitored over time. A contribution of £40K grant per annum is also currently received from central government to support homeless prevention. A summary is provided for Members' information at **[Annex 2]**.
- 1.3.6 The cost of the existing structure in 2007/08 is supported by a contribution of £11,000 from the Housing Earmarked Reserve, which is finite. When this contribution ends the long term additional cost of the new establishment will be £4,225 per annum based on top of scales. In addition the cost of the TUPE transfer of one member of staff will incur additional costs of £5,870 per annum making a total cost of £10,095. This represents a slightly reduced net cost to the figure of £12,295 reported to SHAB in October 2007. The difference is due to the full and final impact of the RPI on the 2007/08 contract sum with Russet which increases the contract cost from £168,800 to £171,000.
- 1.3.7 Informal discussions have been held with those staff affected by the restructuring proposals. Formal consultation will now be carried out to ensure the effective return of the service and to address any staff concerns arising from the proposals. The trade union has been consulted about the new structure and supports it. The post of Senior Housing Options Officer will be filled first allowing applications from existing staff. Other posts will then be filled with the intention of ensuring all existing staff can be slotted into the new structure.

1.4 Revised staffing proposals

Post	Grade	Hours	Post Number
Housing Needs and Strategy Manager	M8	37.00	DV0701
*Senior Housing Options Officer	SO	37.00	DV0718
*Housing Options Officer	Sc 4 / 6	37.00	DV0710
*Housing Options Officer	Sc 4 / 6	37.00	DV0714
*Housing Options Officer	Sc 4 / 6	37.00	DV0717
*Accommodation Officer	Sc 4 / 6	37.00	DV0719
*Housing Register Assistant	Sc 1 / 2	37.00	DV0720
*Housing Register Assistant	Sc 1 / 2	37.00	DV0721
Housing Assistant	Sc 1 / 2	37.00	DV0707
Strategy and Enabling Officer (Part Time)	SO	24.00	DV0705
Strategy and Enabling Officer	SO	37.00	DV0715

(* indicates new position)

1.4.1 Job descriptions for each of the new positions are provided at **[Annex 3]**

1.5 Legal Implications

1.5.1 The Council has a legal duty to determine housing need in the borough, and to produce an allocations scheme which explains how affordable housing is allocated to those in housing need. The housing register is the means of holding a list of those seeking rehousing and for recording their priority under the allocations scheme.

1.5.2 The Council is required to provide an advice and information service about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness to anyone in the borough, free of charge. The Council is also under a legal obligation to make enquiries into the circumstances of people who approach as homeless or threatened with homelessness, and to determine whether a duty to accommodate exists.

1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.6.1 The resourcing of the return in-house of the service is judged to be appropriate to ensuring that the needs of residents are properly served. The structure compares favourably with those of other similar authorities and we are satisfied that the arrangements constitute value-for-money and a cost effective solution.

1.6.2 The contract sum payable to Russet Homes will provide the bulk of the means for paying for the new structure. However, there is a potential shortfall in the longer term. In the short-term that shortfall can continue to be offset by a contribution from a housing 'earmarked' reserve intended to fund measures to reduce homelessness. Once that reserve is depleted and including the additional costs

of a TUPE transfer, the shortfall is £10,095 per annum when costed at top of the grades of posts **[Annex 2]**.

- 1.6.3 The actual salary costs of the new structure will be less in the short-term than stated in this report because most, if not all, posts will be filled at salaries below the maximum. The costings also assume no increase in staffing on costs which are currently 38%.
- 1.6.4 The further costs associated with this new service area are IT related. The forthcoming review of the Capital Plan will consider a bid for additional capital expenditure to meet the costs of acquiring new software to support operation of the housing register, homelessness and housing advice services.

1.7 Risk Assessment

- 1.7.1 Failure to properly assess housing need and homelessness would leave the Council open to legal challenge.

1.8 Recommendations

It is **RECOMMENDED** that:

- 1.8.1 the proposed staffing structure for the housing needs team be **ENDORSED**.
- 1.8.2 the job descriptions for the new positions as set out at **[Annex 3]** be **ENDORSED**.
- 1.8.3 the financial implications arising from the restructure are **ENDORSED** and factored in to the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Background papers:

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Nil

John Batty
Director of Health and Housing