

CABINET

Request for the City Council to give agreement for an application to be made to the DCLG to fund a project to tackle problematic houses in multiple occupation

Urgent Business Decision

Report of Chief Officer (Health & Housing)

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To obtain the agreement of Cabinet for the City Council to make an application for funding from money made available by the DCLG to help local authorities tackle problems with rogue landlords in their area. Funding to pay for the employment of a Housing Enforcement Officer for up to and not exceeding a two year period to target the top twenty problematic houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) with enforcement, and to co-ordinate multi-agency intervention.

Key Decision	X	Non-Key Decision		Referral from Cabinet Member	
Date Included in Forthcoming Key Decision Notice				11.9.13	
This report is public.					

RECOMMENDATIONS OF CHIEF OFFICER (HEALTH & HOUSING)

- (1) That the Chief Executive under urgent business agrees to Lancaster City Council submitting an application to the DCLG Rogue Landlords funding, subject to there being no additional cost implications for the city council.
- (2) That the General Fund Revenue Budget is updated accordingly, split across relevant financial years, in the event that the application is successful.
- (3) That consultation is undertaken with a view to waiving call in, in accordance with Overview & Scrutiny Procedure Rule 17, to enable the decision to be implemented immediately.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Housing Minister recently announced that £3 million is being made available to help Local Authorities tackle acute and complex problems with rogue landlords in their area.
- 1.2 Although an announcement was made by government about this funding in July, the Council didn't receive the details until 12th August. The Housing Standards Manager had an initial look at the application criteria and felt that the fund was more aimed at authorities in the south of England to deal with the "beds in sheds" landlords. However, on further reflection after returning from annual leave in the first week of September, she thought we could put a good business case for a project similar to one carried out in the west end a few years ago. The deadline for applying for this funding is 20 September 2013, hence the need for an urgent business report.

2.0 Proposal Details

- 2.1 The West End of Morecambe has the highest level of private rented properties in the district at approximately 29%, which compares to a district average of 13% and a national average of 9%. Many of the large properties are being rented out as cheap, low standard accommodation with the associated problems of disrepair and poor management. With the introduction of welfare reform there is the market potential for an increase in low-cost shared accommodation. Although Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) can help to address the housing needs of single people, large concentrations of poorly managed HMOs in a small area can impact on the character of a residential area.

Between 2007 and 2009, a successful project operated in the West End. It was a collaboration between partner agencies, lead by a Housing Enforcement Officer to target the most problematic HMOs through intensive multi-agency intervention. The aim was to confront problems of disrepair, poor management, anti-social behaviour and secure improvements. Success of the project was measured by visible improvements to the accommodation and a reduction in crime and police/fire service call outs associated with the properties targeted.

The proposal is to make an application for funding to employ a Housing Enforcement Officer for up to and not exceeding a two year period to use this experience and lead a similar project to intensively target the top twenty problem HMOs.

3.0 Details of Consultation

- 3.1 No formal consultation has been carried out.

4.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)

4.1 Option 1 - agree to the application for funding. The objectives of the project fit with the Housing Strategy and will be co-ordinated with homelessness, empty homes, anti-social behaviour and regeneration activity.

4.2 Option 2 - not to agree to the application for funding. The project would not go ahead without funding.

5.0 Officer Preferred Option (and comments)

5.1 Option 1 is the preferred option as this presents a unique opportunity in the current financial climate to obtain external funding for targeted work directly meeting the council's priority of improving the quality of private rented sector housing in the district.

RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK

Work to improve the quality and availability of housing, and improvements in the private rented sector are priorities in the Corporate Plan 2013 - 2014.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

The provision of good quality, mixed housing encourages more sustainable communities. Often it is the most vulnerable living in the worst HMO properties and thus this project aims to improve the health and well being of this most vulnerable group.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Legal have been consulted and have no comments to make.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The total bid to the DCLG will be in the region of £72,100 to fund a new Housing Enforcement Officer at Grade 4 on a fixed term contract for up to and not exceeding a two year period plus associated running costs for this post, such as car mileage, subsistence, equipment and tools, etc.

It should be noted that for any contract lasting two years or more the council would become liable for redundancy at the end of the contract. It is not possible to predict the level of redundancy payment under these circumstances due to entitlement being driven by total Local Government Service, rather than employment with the council. In order to reduce the associated financial risks for the council therefore, the fixed term appointment will be for a period of less than two years.

Subject to the bid being successful, the General Fund Revenue Budget will need to be updated in order to reflect the additional expenditure and grant funding and could

span up to three financial years subject to when the fixed term post is appointed from.

OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Human Resources:

Any appointment made as part of the proposal will be compliant with all current employment legislation. It is noted that the proposal is for a fixed term post of up to 2 years. Should any postholder acquire 2 or more years continuous service, then they will on terminating of employment be entitled to a redundancy payment.

Information Services:

No implications have been identified.

Property:

No implications have been identified.

Open Spaces:

No implications have been identified.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no comments.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Letter from Mark Prisk MP, Minister for Housing.

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