

# CABINET

## Establishment of an Additional Estate Steward – Council Housing Services

11 DECEMBER 2007

### Report of Corporate Director (Community Services)

PURPOSE OF REPORT			
The report proposes the establishment of an additional Estate Steward within the Repair and Maintenance Section of Council Housing Services. This will help ensure that the Service meets its targets for the average time taken to relet dwellings.			
Key Decision	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Non-Key Decision	Referral from Cabinet Member
Date Included in Forward Plan	05 November 2007		
This report is public			

#### RECOMMENDATIONS OF COUNCILLOR GILBERT AND COUNCILLOR KERR.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That Cabinet approves the proposed arrangements for funding an additional Estate Steward Post SCP 6 within Council Housing Services, and that the Revenue Budget be updated accordingly.

#### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The current establishment for Council Housing Services includes the provision of an Estates Steward Team within the Repairs and Maintenance Section. The Team comprises one Senior Supervisor (SCP 22), two Working Supervisors (SCP 18) and six Estate Stewards (SCP 6)
- 1.2 The primary role of the Estate Stewards is to ensure that vacant properties meet the Council's "Lettable Standard" in terms of cleanliness and standard of redecoration and that gardens are in a reasonable state of maintenance. Their secondary role is to undertake some general estate caretaking/cleaning. This largely involves targeted cleaning of "grot spots" as identified by Housing Management Staff.
- 1.3 Unfortunately, many vacant properties are returned to the Council in a poor condition, and the Estate Steward Team is finding it increasingly difficult to meet the demands

of the Service and ensure that all properties meet the Lettable Standard before being relet. This has resulted in delays in letting property, and a deterioration in one of the Council's Key Performance Indicators (the Average Time Taken to Relet Properties). At its worse, that figure was 42.8 days (June 2006), however, by increasing Estate Steward resources through weekend working, that figure was reduced to 35 days. Whilst this represents a significant improvement, it is still some way short of the "top quartile" performance of 29 days.

## **2.0 Proposal Details**

- 2.1 Whilst the use of regular weekend working has proved to be effective as a means of reducing void periods, it is an expensive option. For the first three months of 2007/2008, overtime for Estate Stewards amounted to £5,412. At current levels, that would equate to an annual cost of £21, 648.
- 2.2 It is clear that workloads for the Estate Steward Team are not going to reduce and, in order to ensure the Council meets its corporate targets, additional resources will be continually needed to deliver the lettable standard for vacant Council properties.
- 2.3 The annual cost of recruiting an additional Estate Steward at Spinal Column Point 6 (SCP 6) would be £14,532, inclusive of on costs. Not only would this be more cost effective than the existing weekend working arrangements, it would also mean that existing members of staff would not need to work a seven day week in order to meet Council targets.

## **3.0 Details of Consultation**

- 3.1 No formal consultation has taken place as the existing overtime is non contractual and the Terms and Conditions of individual members of staff are not affected by the proposals. An informal meeting was held on the 8<sup>th</sup> August 2007 with the Estate Stewards Team to outline the proposal.

## **4.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)**

- 4.1 **Option 1 - To appoint an additional Estate Steward**  
To appoint an additional Estate Steward. This is the most cost effective means of maintaining improvements in the average time taken to relet dwellings.
- 4.2 **Option 2 - Continue with the existing arrangements and utilise regular overtime to meet performance targets**  
Continue with the existing arrangements and utilise regular overtime to meet performance targets. This would be slightly more expensive than Option 1, but it does provide flexibility and can be discontinued at anytime. However, the existing practice of working seven days a week is not satisfactory.
- 4.3 **Option 3 - Retain the existing establishment and discontinue overtime**  
This option would result in staffing costs but there would be a loss in rental income if properties remain empty for longer periods. There would also be a deterioration in a Key Performance Indicator.
- 4.4 For the reasons outlined within the report, Option 1 is the preferred option.

## 5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 The provision of an extra Estate Steward post will enable the better programming of work and should help to ensure the delivery of reduced relet time.

### RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK

Ensuring vacant properties are prepared to the "Lettable Standard" helps ensure that the Council is supporting sustainable communities.

### CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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

The provision of an effective Estate Steward Service helps to ensure that empty properties are relet to a high standard and that any minor environmental problems on estates are tackled quickly and effectively

### FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

To maintain an average relet time of 35 days, the Estate Stewards are currently working overtime at weekends. The cost of continuing operations under this arrangement, is estimated at around £21,600 p.a.

The full year costs of appointing an additional Estate Steward would be in the region of £14,500 in 2007/2008, £15,000 in 2008/2009, and £15,400 in 2009/10 (inclusive of oncosts).

Therefore, under the proposal outlined in option 1, there is a potential benefit of around £7,000 p.a. to the HRA.

The cost of the proposal will be directly met from the existing overtime budget of £10,300 and from the increased rental income resulting from the reduced re-let time per dwelling, from 42.8 days to 35 days. The additional income anticipated is £17,000 p.a. Whilst there is some risk attached to this (linked to sustaining the improvements in re-let times), the funding of the proposal is felt easily manageable, given the amounts involved.

### SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The proposal represents better value for money in managing re-lets.

### LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Legal Services have been consulted and have no observations to make.

### MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

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

### BACKGROUND PAPERS

Nil.

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