

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

Date of Meeting: Executive 14th November 2017, Full Council 19th December 2017

Report of: Director Bindu Arjoon

Title: ADDITIONAL FIXED TERM STAFF TO SUPPORT NEW FIRE SAFETY MANAGEMENT POLICY

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Council

1. What is the report about?

- 1.1 This report sets out the business case for increasing the staffing provision (for up to 18 months on a fixed term basis) to ensure that the approved Fire Safety Management Policy is introduced and implemented effectively.

2. Recommendations:

- 2.1 That Executive recommends that Council approves that:

2 x new posts are added to the council's establishment to include the additional posts of an Implementation Officer (Liaison) and an Implementation Officer (Installations) on a maximum 18 month fixed term basis.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

- 3.1 The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 introduced the requirement for fire risk assessments (FRA) to be carried out by responsible persons and to act on the significant findings.
- 3.2 The original Fire Safety policy was introduced in 2009 and then subsequently reviewed against the findings of the FRAs. This indicated several gaps in the policy which will be addressed by the new Fire Safety Management policy.
- 3.3 One of the main areas of concern was how communal areas in blocks of flats (also known as escape routes) are managed. The old policy was insufficiently robust to deal with the tendency to store combustible and obstructive items in escape routes, leading to a risk to residents in safely exiting the building in the event of a fire.
- 3.4 There are clear legal requirements to maintain escape routes as clear areas which are not for resident use beyond transit to and from the building. Our own FRAs show that the current policy is not effective in managing the areas.
- 3.5 Members were presented with two strategies, as laid out in LGA Guidance 'Fire Safety in Purpose Built Blocks of Flats', either **Zero-Tolerance (known as Clear and Safe)** or a **Managed** policy.

- 3.6 As with any policy, there are pros, cons and risks. However, the recommendation to Members was that a Clear and Safe policy would be unambiguous and provide the lowest possible risk to residents and rescuers by restricting the opportunity for residents to use escape routes for the storage of obstructive and combustible materials.
- 3.7 In agreeing to adopt a Clear and Safe policy, Members gave a very clear indication that they wanted the implementation of the policy to be phased on a rolling programme of consultation and education, together with the identification of additional storage solutions for residents, where appropriate.
- 3.8 This proactive and intensive approach to the implementation of the policy cannot currently be met by the existing establishment within housing without detracting from their current priorities in key areas of service delivery.

4. What are the resource implications including non- financial resources.

- 4.1 The requested additional resources would be to establish an Implementation Officer (Liaison) and an Implementation Officer (Installations) on a maximum 18 month fixed term basis. These posts would be job evaluated but we anticipate that indicative grades would be in the region of a grade 5 and grade 7 respectively. The estimated increased staff costs per year would be as follows:

Grade 5

£19,008
£ 4,713 On costs
£23,721

Grade 7

£24,174
£ 5,995 On costs
£30,167

- 4.2 The **Implementation Officer (Liaison)** will be responsible for consulting with tenants to:
- Explain and promote the changes following the implementation of the new Fire Safety Management policy
 - Establish their potential needs in terms of additional storage
 - Identify additional and appropriate storage solutions where practicable
 - Support the tenant to move to suitable alternative accommodation if their needs cannot be reasonably met

The **Implementation Officer (Installations)** will be responsible for:

- Identifying storage opportunities and potential solutions
- Identifying suitable locations for mobility scooter storage and charging points

- Considering fire safety risks caused by storage and mobility scooter charging
- Reviewing of waste and recycling storage and access (fire safety)
- Providing a detailed specification of the works required
- Identifying and procuring suitable storage facilities, including associated work and installation contractors
- Managing contractors and post-inspecting works
- Approving invoices

4.3 There are no increased hardware costs associated with this proposal.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

5.1 If approved, the budget will be added to the HRA and managed within the HRA's medium term financial plan.

6. What are the legal aspects?

6.1 None identified

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

7.1 This report raises no issues for the Monitoring Officer.

8. Report details:

8.1 The business case and background for the establishment of these posts is set out in the original report submitted to Scrutiny Committee People, Executive and Council **(Appendix A)**.

8.2 It is essential that the introduction of the new Fire Safety Management policy is implemented effectively to ensure that the Council is compliant with fire safety regulations as laid out in legislation.

8.3 Details of the current and revised structure, together with the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) are set out in **Appendix B & C respectively**.

8.4 This request for additional staff provision will not impact any other employees within Housing and will offer them additional support in the initial implementation of the Fire Safety Management Policy by educating residents on the importance of maintaining a Clear and Safe policy. They will also identify and provide additional storage solutions to keep escape routes free of obstacles. Following the implementation phase, Housing Officers will maintain an ongoing regular programme of monitoring escape routes within blocks of flats to ensure that they remain clear.

8.5 A copy of the job descriptions and personal specifications are set out in **Appendix D**.

9. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

- 9.1 The content of this report is consistent with the following corporate objective of providing high quality, value for money services.

10. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

- 10.1 There are no risks involved in making this decision. It is a greater risk that we do not provide adequate resources to effectively implement the approved Fire Safety Management policy.

There is comprehensive and complex fire legislation to observe and penalties can be severe in the event of non-compliance, both for the Council (corporate manslaughter, unlimited fines and public sanctions) and the duty-holders (fines and/or custodial sentences) as well as significant negligence liabilities should harm occur.

11. What is the impact of the decision on equality and diversity; health and wellbeing; safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults, community safety and the environment?

- 11.1 We believe that this decision will have a positive impact in this aspect. It will allow us to effectively identify the needs of our residents, by a process of consultation and education, and provide, where possible, additional storage solutions to enable escape routes to be kept clear and ensure the continuing safety of residents living in communal blocks. Clear escape routes also make it safer and easier for fire fighters to operate and conduct evacuations. Where additional storage solutions are not practicable, residents will be supported in other ways, such as securing suitable alternative accommodation to meet their housing need.

12. Are there any other options?

- 12.1 One potential option for the implementation of this new system to be absorbed within the current establishment is considered earlier in this report. However, this would detract from officers being able to deliver on their primary roles and would potentially impact on the delivery of key services such as tenancy inspections and tackling Anti-Social Behaviour.

Director Bindu Arjoon

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)
Background papers used in compiling this report:-

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