

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

6 NOVEMBER 2007

EXECUTIVE

20 NOVEMBER 2007

TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION MANAGER POST (CE06216)

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek Members' approval to make the post of Temporary Accommodation Manager (CE06216) within the Housing Services Unit permanent.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE POST

- 2.1 The Council manages a number of properties that are used as temporary accommodation for homeless households. Currently there are 115 private sector leased properties, 24 bed-spaces funded by Supporting People in serviced temporary accommodation, 26 within Exeter City Council's own stock and 31 units at Shauls Court making a total of 196 units.
- 2.2 Many of the clients in temporary accommodation have complex support needs and require intensive housing management in order to ensure they maintain their temporary accommodation and can move successfully on to permanent accommodation. Temporary accommodation is complex to manage, particularly with regard to repairs and maintenance issues. Unlike the Council's own stock, each property is unique and, depending on the lease arrangements with the landlords, some repairs are the responsibility of the landlord whereas others are the Council's responsibility.
- 2.3 Until August of 2005, a team of two Temporary Accommodation Officers (CE06199 and CE06208) and a Rent Arrears Officer (CE06179) managed these properties. However, it was identified in August 2005 that this staffing structure was insufficient to manage the properties effectively, and support the homeless households accommodated within them.
- 2.4 Following the completion of Shaul's Court, a building containing 31 units leased from the landlord to house homeless households, and an Internal Audit report on the management of temporary accommodation, a review was undertaken of the roles and responsibilities of staff in the temporary accommodation service. It was agreed that there was not enough management capacity within the service to ensure the recommendations of the audit report were implemented effectively. There was also a need to ensure that the services provided to both the client and landlords met their needs and was of a higher quality. It was therefore decided in August 2005 to create the post of Temporary Accommodation Manager. The aims of this post were to:
- Ensure value for money for the Council in the management of temporary accommodation in particular regarding repairs and maintenance, void control and hand back of properties

- Ensure that the supply of temporary accommodation met the needs of the clients with regard to house type, size and location
- Develop policies and procedures for the service, including the new unit at Shauls Court, and ensure staff were operating in accordance with them
- Develop a multi-agency approach to managing homeless households in temporary accommodation in order to ensure clients were given appropriate support to enable them to sustain their properties and successful move into permanent accommodation
- Monitor performance of the service overall and liaise with external contractors regarding issues of performance, contract management and compliance with supporting people arrangements
- Provide management support and guidance for staff

2.5 The post was initially appointed on a temporary basis under delegated powers because it was funded from the annual government homelessness grant. The successful applicant was appointed on 12 September 2005 on a temporary contract for a period of one year ending on 8 September 2006. Following a review of the effectiveness of this post, and the continued Government funding it was agreed under delegated powers to extend the contract for a further 12 months until 8 September 2007. At that time the post was further extended to allow for this report to be submitted for consideration.

3. CURRENT PROGRESS

3.1 The post has increased the management capacity within the team, as intended, enabling the service to manage temporary accommodation more effectively and efficiently. Since the post was created the following work has been completed or is on-going:

- A continuous audit of all households in temporary accommodation, including regular individual visits to all clients, in order to ensure the property is being maintained and their support needs are being met. Where appropriate referrals have been made to floating support providers.
- A review of the repairs and maintenance arrangements for our private sector leased properties. The existing repairs and maintenance contract is currently being reviewed and will be re-tendering in the near future. This will be followed by a contract implementation timetable and close monitoring of the new arrangements thereafter.
- Opening of Shauls Court in December 2005 and the continued intensive and effective management of the scheme.
- Development of policies and procedures for the temporary accommodation service, including the production of a customer information leaflets, temporary accommodation handbook and arrears procedures.
- More effective management of anti-social behaviour issues resulting in a number of tenants being evicted from their accommodation

- 3.2 Since this post has been established there has been a reduction in the time temporary accommodation remains empty before being reoccupied (from an average of almost 20 days in August 2005 to an average of 10 days in the first quarter of 2007/08), greater control over expenditure on repairs and maintenance of properties, improved relations with external contractors and landlords and improved tenancy management and sustainment for the homeless households accommodated in temporary accommodation.
- 3.3 In addition to supervising the staff in the temporary accommodation team, the Temporary Accommodation Manager's post is responsible for delivery of the Council's temporary accommodation reduction plan and will be responsible for overseeing the management of the Council's first local authority hostel at Glencoe (subject to committee approval). This will be a significant piece of work requiring new procedures to be introduced and a robust management regime installed.
- 3.4 The work undertaken by the postholder has resulted in significant efficiency savings to the Council. For example, the reduction in average void times highlighted in paragraph 3.2 above has saved an average of £21000 per annum (based on current average void rates). There has also been a reduction in the average value of handing back a private sector leased property to its owner through better negotiation and understanding of the lease. Arrears levels for current and former tenant placed in temporary accommodation has fallen by over £48,000.

4. PROPOSAL

- 4.1 Whilst the amount of temporary accommodation is set to decrease over the next three years to meet the government targets, this will result in more private sector leased properties being handed back to landlords. This process will need to be effectively managed in order to minimise the Council's expenditure under the terms of the leases for each property.
- 4.2 At the same time the Council is seeking to expand its Extra-let service as an alternative to private sector leasing. This service is effectively an arms-length management agency that specialises in managing private sector properties where the landlord agrees to the Council having exclusive use of their accommodation for clients who are potentially homeless. Clients housed through the service are not classed as living in temporary accommodation and therefore help the Council meet its temporary accommodation reduction targets. The Extra-lets service has grown rapidly over the past 12 months and is currently managed by just one Housing Enabling Officer. However, as the number of properties in management increases, the temporary accommodation team will undertake the day-to-day management responsibilities for these properties to ensure tenancy agreements are adhered to and clients are effectively supported. The scheme will also have a positive impact on the numbers of households accepted as homeless and help to prevent expenditure within the emergency accommodation budget.
- 4.3 It is also essential that the temporary accommodation team continue to have a strong and effective management structure to support them in the intensive work they undertake. Strong management of private sector properties is also essential to maintain the trust of the landlords we work with.

4.2 Given the continuing need for a properly managed and effective service in this area it is proposed that the post of Temporary Accommodation Manager be made permanent from 8 September 2007.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The salary of this post is set at Grade 8 (£23,175 to £26,928 pay award pending). The post has been funded from within the government's homelessness revenue grant budget, which is set annually. However, the cost of this post can be contained within existing general fund homelessness budgets because of efficiency savings that have now been achieved by the work of the temporary accommodation team. This will allow the government homelessness grant to be used for other important initiatives to help prevent homelessness in Exeter. For example support for Exeter Homelessness Action Group's Smart-Move and Nightstop services and greater use of debt outreach workers.

6. RECOMMENDED

- (1) That Executive approves that the post of Temporary Accommodation Manager (CE06216) is made permanent from the 8 September 2007.

HEAD OF HOUSING SERVICES

S:LP/Committee/1107SCC10
18.10.07

COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:

None