

**RELEASE OF FUNDS FOR HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION OFFICER
(Report by the Head of Housing Services)**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To request the release of funds to appoint to the Homelessness Prevention Officer post.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The funding, on a permanent basis, for a Homelessness Prevention Officer post was approved by Council in 2003/4 as part of the Council's MTP process.
- 2.2 Cabinet approved the release of funds (March 2004) to appoint on a two year contract, to the end of March 2006.
- 2.3 The post holder has now left the Council's employment. The post has been a success with the role needed into the future.

3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The table below shows the continuing high rates of homelessness within the district and the number of households where the Council has a duty to help with permanent rehousing. The prevention of homelessness has always been the main focus of local authority housing advice teams although the effectiveness of this is limited where insufficient early warning of potential homelessness is given and/or other realistic housing options are not available. The table also shows the number of prevention cases that have assisted since 2004/05 and that this area of work is increasing. The majority of these are through assisting households into private sector tenancies via the help of the Rent Deposit scheme although it may also include resolving issues that allow a person to remain in their current home and so avoid homelessness.

Numbers of Households Applying/Accepted as Homelessness and the number of households where homelessness was prevented including those helped into private tenancies through the Rent Deposit scheme

	01/02	02/03	03/04	04/05	05/06 (first half year)
Total Applied	304	367	293	361	195
Of which Accepted	192	251	233	254	139
Cases where homelessness prevented *	-	-	-	65	51
Of which helped through Rent Deposit scheme	20	25	32	50	35

* Not recorded prior to 04/05

- 3.2 The post holder:
- ◆ Introduced the Home Choice Scheme, a service that helps homeless households find and access private sector tenancies. At the same time helped landlords resolve issues that may otherwise lead to them not offering a tenancy to a homeless household. This has led to an increase in the number of Rent Deposit loans.
 - ◆ Extended this service to offer advice and help to landlords who may be considering evicting their tenant in an attempt to resolve any issues. Landlords ending tenancies in the private sector is the second largest cause of homelessness in the district.
 - ◆ Increased links with the Anti Social Behaviour problem solving groups in an attempt to resolve issues that may lead to homelessness.
 - ◆ Increased the proactive approach to Court advocacy as a means of preventing homelessness as a result of rent arrears and introduced early warning systems with housing association partners that flag potential homelessness cases so that action can be taken.

4. IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Prevention has taken a much higher profile over the last 2 years and prevention measures are flagged as good practice and a way of slowing, and in some areas even reducing, the rate of homelessness.
- 4.2 New Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) have been introduced this financial year to monitor Councils' success at preventing homelessness and in particular repeat homelessness.
- 4.3 The prevention of homelessness leads to a reduction in the number of households having to be placed in temporary accommodation. The government has set all Councils the target of reducing the use of temporary accommodation by 50% by 2010. The prevention measures we have implemented and need to develop further will help us achieve this target.
- 4.4 Failure to successfully implement and resource prevention measures are likely to result in:
- i) the loss of potential for limiting the growth, or reducing the rate, of homelessness within the district;
 - ii) increasing demands on temporary accommodation from homeless households together with increasing costs;
 - iii) greater demand on the limited social rented stock within the district as a result of lost opportunities to help household resolve their housing needs through other options; and
 - iv) poor outcomes in the new BVPIs covering this service area.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The Homelessness Prevention Officer introduced initiatives and made positive links with other agencies as well as taken on individual casework, providing a range of prevention measures. Although this has not yet seen a reduction in the number of households becoming homelessness it has stemmed the flow and prevented homelessness

increasing at a sharper rate. This in turn leads to fewer households being placed in temporary accommodation and fewer households requiring social rented housing than would otherwise have been the case.

- 5.2 This post contributes directly to the Council's priority of providing homes that meets local needs via the intensive casework that it undertakes. The success of this is monitored through the Council's performance against new BVPIs introduced this year and the government target of reducing the use of temporary accommodation.
- 5.3 Council has previously approved the funding of this post on a permanent basis but Cabinet initially released the funding for 2 years only.

6. RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 The Cabinet is recommended to approve the release of future years' funds so that the Homelessness Prevention Officer post can be appointed on a permanent basis.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

ODPM P1E Homelessness Returns
Achieving Positive Outcomes on Homelessness, ODPM, April 2003

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