

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

**CORPORATE SERVICES
CABINET MEMBER**

HOUSING REGISTER

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To confirm the arrangements for administering the housing register until the introduction of choice based lettings in October 2010.
- 1.2 To recommend the creation of a temporary fixed term post of nominations officer help administer the housing register and provide additional capacity to the Housing Advice Team to meet service demand.

2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The council has legal rights to make nominations to registered social landlords in order to secure accommodation for people in housing need.
- 2.2 In order to exercise those legal rights the council is required to maintain a housing register of households in need of accommodation and a policy setting out on what basis people will be offered social housing.
- 2.3 When the council transferred its housing stock to North Lincolnshire Homes in 2007 agreement was reached that North Lincolnshire Homes would maintain the housing register on behalf of the council until the end of March 2009.
- 2.4 This two-year commitment for North Lincolnshire Homes to maintain the council's housing register and make nominations from the register to other registered social landlords has now expired.
- 2.5 North Lincolnshire Homes have indicated their willingness to continue to operate the housing register on behalf of the council but have asked for assistance in making nominations to other housing associations. This is due to the matching of households on the housing register and properties available for letting having to be done manually as software system inherited from the council is not capable of storing the required data.
- 2.6 North Lincolnshire Homes have indicated that this work takes approximately 18.5 hours a week.
- 2.7 The Housing Advice Team has experience an increase of 12% in the number of people seeking assistance over the last 12 months. Recent government backed initiatives to prevent homelessness due to mortgage and landlord

repossession have further increased the team's workload. So far the Housing Advice Team has been very successful in preventing homelessness but in order to meet the additional demands placed on the team it is proposed to provide an additional 18.5 hours of advice worker time on a fixed term basis until October 2010.

- 2.8 Putting the two requirements for additional staff resource together will allow one full time temporary post to be created.
- 2.9 The introduction of the sub-regional choice based lettings scheme in October 2010 will be based on a web-based software system that will process lettings for all registered social landlords in North Lincolnshire. This will do away with the need for a separate nominations system and the need for the proposed temporary post.

3 OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 Option 1

3.1.1 To provide a full time temporary post until October 2010.

3.2 Option 2

3.2.1 To provide a half time post solely to deliver the nominations service.

3.3 Option 3

3.3.1 Not to provide any additional staff resource.

4 ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

4.1 Option 1

4.1.1 This will allow the council to exercise its rights to secure housing for people in housing need much more effectively than has been the case so far. Integration of the nominations role and providing additional capacity for the Housing Advice Team will produce a more effective joined up service. This is the preferred option.

4.2 Option 2

4.2.1 This will leave the Housing Advice Team unable to respond to the additional repossession prevention measures requested by the government but will provide better access to social housing for those who are already in housing need.

4.3 Option 3

4.3.1 The council's performance in exercising its nomination rights to other registered landlords has been identified by the Audit Commission as an area of weakness that should be addressed. North Lincolnshire Homes are entitled to either seek payment from the council for operating the housing register or to cease providing the service if the council does not provide the staff resource requested. For these reasons option 3 is not viable.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

- 5.1 The need to fund the continuing operation of the housing register after the end of the two-year agreement with North Lincolnshire Homes was identified during the budget setting process for the current financial year. A contingency of £30,000 was identified for this purpose.
- 5.2 The cost of the proposed temporary nominations officer based on a grade 6 full time post is £25,625 per annum including on-costs. This amount could be found within the budget contingency already identified for operating the housing register.
- 5.3 A more effective nominations service may help reduce the time that homeless households have to spend in commercial bed and breakfast accommodation. This may provide a cost saving.
- 5.4 The job description has been formally evaluated at grade 6.
- 5.5 The council and North Lincolnshire Homes have secondment agreements in place to allow certain staff access to IT systems for housing benefits and homelessness prevention purposes. The proposed post would operate under similar secondment arrangements.
- 5.6 The proposed post will operate part time from North Lincolnshire Homes headquarters and part time with the Housing Advice Team at 55-57 Oswald Road.

6 OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 - CRIME AND DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER)

- 6.1 Making effective use of nomination rights is essential to enable the council to meet its statutory duties to secure accommodation for households in priority housing need.
- 6.2 Provision of adequate staff resources to enable effective nominations to be made from the housing register will help ensure that vulnerable households are allocated the housing that they need. These proposals will enable nominations to be made more quickly and more appropriately.

7 OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION

- 7.1 The proposed temporary post arises as the result of ongoing discussions with North Lincolnshire Homes regarding the operation of the housing register.
- 7.2 The unions have been consulted and raised no concerns.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 That the creation a full time temporary post of nominations officer within the Housing Advice Team until October 2010 be approved.

SERVICE DIRECTOR
NEIGHBOURHOOD AND ENVIRONMENT

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

Cabinet Report 'Choice Based Lettings' October 2008
Audit Commission – Report on Strategic Housing Services February 2009.