

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Personnel and Management Services Committee - 10 November 2003

REPORT ON: Housing Department - Homeless Services Unit - Establishment of Posts

REPORT BY: Assistant Chief Executive (Management)

REPORT NO: 699-2003

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval to establish 3 temporary posts in the Housing Department's Homeless Services Unit, to assist with delivery of expanded legislative duties to homeless persons as contained in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee approves the establishment of the following temporary posts in the Homeless Services Unit until 31 March 2006:-

- 2.1 1 post of Temporary Homeless Persons Officer, graded AP2 (£15,582 - £16,866);
- 2.2 1 post of Temporary Housing Officer, graded AP2 (£15,582 - £16,866);
- 2.3 1 post of Temporary Homelessness Advice and Development Officer, graded AP4 (£19,632 - £21,732).

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 Total employment costs would be £125,388. All staff costs for years 2004-05 and 2005-06 will be met from the specific homelessness grant awarded by the Scottish Executive. There are no financial implications for the Housing Revenue Account or General Fund. Continuation funding for these posts beyond 2006 will be achieved through savings in current revenue expenditure and will be subject to further Committee approval at that time.

4 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The proposed reflects a number of key Dundee 21 Themes; including access to good food, water, shelter and fuel at a reasonable cost; health is protected; access to the skills, knowledge and information needed to enable everyone to play a full part in society.

5 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Implementation of the new homelessness duties fulfils the Council's commitment to assist those in need by ensuring that needs are assessed and a range of accommodation is available for local people.

6 BACKGROUND

- 6.1 Prior to October 2002, Local Authorities' obligations to homeless persons were governed by the provisions of Part 2 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, related legislation and the Code of Guidance Scotland. Many advocates had argued that the provisions of the 1987 Act were too limited and that greater emphasis had to be given to improving the legal rights of homeless persons and to addressing the underlying causes of homelessness in Scotland.
- 6.2 As part of a wide ranging social justice and social inclusion agenda the Scottish Parliament set up the Homelessness Task Force in August 1999. The remit of the Task Force was to undertake a fundamental review of policy and practice which impacts on homeless people in Scotland and to make recommendations for the expansion of rights and services for homeless people. The first report of the Task Force, published in early 2000 made recommendations which formed the basis of Part 1 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. The second and final report makes further and more wide ranging recommendations for change and has culminated in the Homelessness, etc., (Scotland) Act 2003.
- 6.3 The additional obligations contained in the 2001 Act came into force in October 2002 and have placed considerable strain on the City Council's Homeless Service, both in terms of physical resources required to meet demand for accommodation and staffing resources required to deal with increased demand from persons presenting and requiring a service. At this time, the 2003 Act has received Royal Assent but has not been enacted. The 2003 Act goes much further in strengthening the rights of homeless people and when enacted will present real challenges to the City Council in meeting its statutory obligations.
- 6.4 The introduction of the aforementioned legislation, allied to an ongoing change in the nature and extent of homelessness, has led to a need to review the operation of the Homeless Services Unit and to increase staffing resources to meet the challenges presented, thereby ensuring that the City Council is fully compliant with its legal obligations. The need to review staffing levels in the HSU is supported by a recent pilot inspection carried out by Communities Scotland, which recommended an increase in staffing levels in order to address a number of weaknesses in service delivery.

7 INCREASED LEGISLATIVE DUTIES

- 7.1 The 2001 Act came into force on 1 October 2002 and has introduced a number of new duties for Local Authorities and registered social landlords on homelessness and the allocation of housing. They include:-
- A duty on Local Authorities to carry out an assessment of homelessness and to prepare and submit strategies for preventing and alleviating homelessness in their area.

- A duty on Local Authorities to ensure that advice on homelessness and the prevention of homelessness is available free of charge to anyone who wants it.
- A duty to provide temporary accommodation and advice and assistance to any person believed to be homeless regardless of whether or not they have a priority need or are intentionally homeless.
- A duty to provide permanent accommodation to any person found to be in priority need and not intentionally homeless.
- Homeless people will also have a right to have any decision made by the Local Authority in respect of their homelessness assessment reviewed by a senior officer in the Local Authority.
- New regulations will set out the occupancy rights of people living in hostel accommodation (*including Local Authority run hostels*).

7.2 The 2003 Act builds on the 2001 Act by introducing further new rights for homeless persons and by imposing additional statutory obligations on Local Authorities. The main changes will be:-

- An immediate change to the law to extend the categories of priority need under which homeless persons will qualify for permanent accommodation.
- Phased abolition of priority need over a 10 year period.
- Changes to the intentionality rules which will result in an obligation to provide ongoing temporary accommodation, support, advice and assistance to all homeless persons regardless of whether they have been assessed as intentionally homeless.
- Suspension of the local connection rule resulting in the receiving Local Authority being required to discharge all homelessness duties to the applicant regardless of previous residence qualifications.

7.3 Operationally, the duties to provide temporary accommodation and enhanced advice and assistance to non-priority applicants have had the largest impact on the HSU ability to deliver the service required.

7.4 Demand for temporary accommodation has reached unprecedented levels. Many single applicants, both priority and non-priority, present with a range of issues which make them difficult if not impossible to place. Issues include challenging behaviour, substance dependency, alcohol dependency, mental illness, sex offending history, debt to other providers and exclusion from other provider's premises. Prior to the introduction of the 2001 Act the majority of single persons presenting would have been given basic advice on accessing accommodation. Now, however, attempts have to be made to secure accommodation. The time required to carry out initial investigations, identify options and negotiate with providers means that homeless officers may spend an entire afternoon dealing with one individual. This time pressure inevitably leads to a serious backlog in assessing cases, moving people through the system and freeing up temporary accommodation.

- 7.5 Similarly, all non-priority applicants who have been accommodated have a right to be provided with enhanced advice and assistance to enable them to identify and access accommodation options. Scottish Executive guidance states that advice should be delivered to Homepoint standards. Separate advice interviews have to be set up for all non-priority applicants in temporary accommodation. This is time consuming and places additional demands on Homeless Officers, again leading to backlogs in case assessments. Currently, the section is not delivering advice to the required standard and there is a need to improve advice services through the recruitment of a dedicated advice worker.

8 STAFFING LEVELS

- 8.1 In addition to the requirements of new legislation and the findings of the Communities Scotland inspection, the need to increase staffing levels in the Homeless Services Unit is further evidenced by the increased demand from homeless persons presenting and requiring services. The undernoted table details increased demand over the previous 3 years.

Year	No of presentations	All applicants requiring temporary accommodation	Single applicants requiring temporary accommodation
2000-2001	860	470	208
2001-2002	929	465	225
2002-2003	960	486	267
2003-2004	1,146 (<i>projected</i>)	654 (<i>projected</i>)	348 (<i>projected</i>)

- 8.2 As can be seen from the above table, demand has risen significantly. This year it is projected that presentations will rise by 33% over 2000-01. Persons requiring temporary accommodation comprise, on average, 53% of all applicants and show a 39% increase over the previous 3 years. Most significant is the rise in single persons who require temporary accommodation. It is projected that 348 single persons will have to be placed during 2003-04. This represents an increase of 67% over 2000-01.
- 8.3 As noted above, the increased level of presentations and demand for temporary accommodation has severely affected the ability of officers to deliver the service. The increase in demand from single persons with attendant support issues, has led to Homeless Officers having to spend more time with individuals who present and consequently being unable to spend the time required to carry out case assessments to the standards expected by Communities Scotland. Currently individual officer's case loads are running at a monthly average of 60. Cases are becoming increasingly complex, temporary accommodation options are becoming more difficult to identify and this has led to people spending longer periods of time in temporary accommodation, a backlog in case assessments and a lack of turnover of temporary accommodation.

- 8.4 The overall increase in applications and in particular the increase in presentations from single persons has led to a need to spend far more time in dispensing housing advice. The requirements of the 2001 Act allied to increased efforts to comply with best practice on preventative services, has meant that Homeless Officers are spending a far greater proportion of their time in advice interviews. This has contributed to the delay in completing assessments and adds to the difficulties in moving cases through the system.
- 8.5 The increase in the number of people who require temporary accommodation has led to an expansion of dispersed furnished accommodation and a far greater reliance on the use of Bed and Breakfast. Currently this service operates 106 units of temporary accommodation. A further 20 placements in B&B are required to meet demand. The administration of the temporary accommodation service is carried out by the Supported Accommodation Team within the Homeless Services Unit and involves the setting up, repairs, redecoration and refurbishing of properties. In addition all rent control, ordering and financial controls are carried out by the SAT. Due to expansion of properties, the increase in numbers accommodated and problems with Housing Benefit, the team is spending an increasing amount of time on benefit administration and rent control in order to maximise rental income. The requirement to maximise income has become a priority and is vital for funding of homeless services, but has led to difficulties in carrying out the property management aspects of the service.
- 8.6 One Temporary Homeless Persons Officer, graded AP2, is proposed to bring the assessment team up to 4 Homeless Persons Officers. This would bring case loads within manageable levels and would enable officers to spend the time required with clients. Four officers would also enable assessments to be carried out more thoroughly thereby addressing Communities Scotland concerns and would assist greatly in moving people through the system more timeously.
- 8.7 One Temporary Housing Officer, graded AP2, within the Supported Accommodation Team would be responsible for the administration of all rent control functions relating to temporary accommodation including ensuring Housing Benefit claims are processed and thereby maximising rental income. In addition to these duties the officer would have a contracts role in setting up and administering B&B, carriers and furniture contracts along with the administration of the Council's storage of goods responsibilities. The additional post would free up the existing Housing Officer and Team Leader to concentrate on the management, maintenance and refurbishment of temporary accommodation thereby greatly improving turnaround times for temporary accommodation.
- 8.8 A dedicated Temporary Advice and Development Officer, graded AP4, is needed to ensure that the Council meets its increased obligations to provide enhanced advice and information. The worker would carry out advice interviews, produce an advice strategy, review and expand advice leaflets and other advice sources, establish referral arrangements with specialist advice agencies and ensure that accreditation to Type 1 Homepoint standard is achieved. In addition, the worker would also have a role in reviewing and updating internal policies, identifying areas of service improvement, developing new service initiatives and developing procedures for staff use.
- 8.9 All three posts will be created for a temporary period of two years.

- 8.10 This report and proposals for staffing levels are set in the context of available information on the present and likely future effects of current and new legislation and its impact on service delivery. It is likely that as the full effects of the 2003 Act become known and services are developed to meet these requirements, a further review of staffing levels will be required.

9 **CONSULTATION**

- 9.1 The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Support Services), Director of Housing, Depute Chief Executive (Finance) and the trade unions have been consulted on this report.

10 **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 10.1 No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information), were relied on to any material extent in preparing this report.

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3 November 2003