

Reorganisation – Private Sector Housing team

REPORT TO THE EXECUTIVE



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PORTFOLIO	Housing and Leisure
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PURPOSE

1. The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the reorganisation of the private sector housing team including the development of additional projects to support resident's wellbeing.

RECOMMENDATION

2. That the Executive approve the reorganisation of the private sector housing team including a net increase of two full time posts as detailed in (Appendix 1).
3. That the Executive approve the costs associated with operating an Integrated Health and Wellbeing Team, funded from the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) allocation of the Better Care Fund.
4. That the Executive delegate authority to the Head of Housing and Development Control, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Leisure, to amend the Housing Renewal Policy 2012.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

5. On the 23rd August 2019 the Lancashire Advancing Integration Board approved the use of DFG funds to support Home Improvement Agencies (HIA) in local authority districts (Appendix 2). Using a proportion of the 2019/20 DFG allocation will facilitate the delivery of the Integrated Health and Wellbeing Team which will continue to deliver projects and HIA services to help keep people safe and well in their own homes.
6. To increase the number of proactive inspections in the selective licensing areas to improve housing conditions. To increase the number of empty properties brought back into use each year and to continue to offer the most vulnerable residents of Burnley services that support their wellbeing when Lancashire County Council (LCC) cease funding the HIAs in March 2020.
7. To support the Council's objective of making the borough a dementia friendly community.

8. The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 requires local authorities to have a policy which sets out the projects and services in relation to private sector housing renewal and focusses specifically on the provision of financial assistance and other forms of assistance that the council is able to offer to improve the standards of housing and the quality of life for qualifying residents. The Council's current policy is the Housing Renewal Policy 2012 which requires amending to reflect the services of the proposed Integrated Health and Wellbeing Team.
9. Not funding any HIA work is rejected as this option detracts from the Council's priority of creating flourishing, healthy and confident communities. Funding an existing HIA to continue the work (which is currently undertaken by St. Vincent's) was considered, however the creation of the in house Integrated Health and Wellbeing Service is more cost effective and enables the Council to control and shape a comprehensive service for vulnerable occupiers, delivering a range of grants and initiatives in an integrated way that will improve the health, safety and welfare of Burnley's residents.
10. The integration of grants, HIA services and additional services such as the dementia dwelling grants will ensure a customer centred approach, to understand their needs in one visit. Improving the accessibility as well as the safety of the home will help to reduce ill health caused by excess cold, dampness or trips and falls which in turn will reduce the need for hospital admission or assist with hospital discharge.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

11. The private sector housing team deliver a range of services including, selective licensing, the licensing of houses in multiple occupation, the enforcement of housing conditions, landlord accreditation, projects to ensure empty homes are brought back into use, grants that deliver emergency repairs, adaptations for disabled people and energy efficiency measures. All these services help to improve residents' health and wellbeing.
12. Through the proposed reorganisation the following aims will be met:

Aim 1 - Increase proactive housing enforcement work in the selective licensing areas.

13. Proactive property condition inspections within the selective licensing areas are currently undertaken by the existing Housing Enforcement Team, with additional input coming through time limited Government rogue landlord projects. As a result of the recent rogue landlord projects we know that the worst housing conditions are uncovered through proactive property inspections. As the number of selective licensing areas has increased across Burnley, we are seeing a greater volume of complaints from tenants regarding poor housing conditions. While the projects help tackle poor property condition in the private rented sector it puts additional pressure on staff resources to undertake reactive property inspections and enforcement action. This in turn significantly reduces the time enforcement staff can dedicate to proactive property inspections.
14. It is proposed that a vacant Technical Officer post (grade 8), which works across the Council's private rented sector programme, is deleted and an Enforcement Officer post created. This post would be dedicated to the enforcement of housing conditions within the

selective licensing areas. It is anticipated that through the Job Evaluation process this post would be set at grade 9.

15. In addition, it is proposed to delete a generic Team Support Officer post (grade 5) that works across the housing service and create an Enforcement Case Worker (anticipated to be grade 5 subject to job evaluation). This post will focus on supporting and organising enforcement work to maximise efficient processes and prioritise serious cases.
16. This reorganisation will concentrate enforcement activity on the poorest property conditions. This activity, when combined with the action of the selective licensing team on property management will allow us to tackle the worst landlords, increase our focus on enforcement action and facilitate the use of Banning Orders to exclude poor landlords from operating.

Aim 2 - To increase the number of empty properties brought back into use through Council intervention.

17. In 2018/19, the Empty Homes Officer post was created increasing the minimum number of empty properties brought back into use through Council intervention from 40 to 80 (87 was achieved in 2018/19); the number of compulsory purchase orders was increased from 10 to 20.
18. Under the current structure the Empty Homes Project Officer undertakes all the enforcement work and the Empty Homes Officer undertakes the pre-enforcement work.
19. It is proposed that the Empty Homes Officer's job description is amended to include enforcement work. Due to this increase in responsibility it is anticipated that through Job Evaluation the pay grade would rise from grade 8 to 9. This would enable a wider programme of enforcement work to be undertaken.
20. In addition, it is proposed to delete a generic Team Support Officer post (grade 5) and create an Empty Homes Case Worker (anticipated to be grade 5 subject to job evaluation). The case worker would undertake all the administration work and lower level investigations. This post will be capitalised, which allows for a previously approved revenue saving to be achieved.
21. This reorganisation would reduce the amount of time the Empty Homes Officer spends on administration work allowing them to focus on more empty properties and enforcement work. It is expected that this could increase the number of empty properties brought back into use through Council intervention from 80 to a minimum of 120 per year.

Aim 3 – To develop an Integrated Health and Wellbeing Team

22. For around 20 years Lancashire County Council (LCC) have funded HIA work across Lancashire to deliver several projects, all of which aim to assist people (usually over 60 or disabled) to remain living well in their own home. These projects include a handy person service carrying out small jobs around the house, minor adaptations and daily living aids to assist independent living and general advice for customers on safe and healthy homes. All these services compliment the work of the Council's Housing Grants Team.

23. LCC are to cease funding HIAs from April 2020 and have asked district council's whether they could use a proportion of the Disabled Facilities Grants allocation to continue to deliver these services.
24. There is currently a mixture of HIA models across Lancashire. Lancaster, Chorley and Fylde with Wyre run 'in house' HIA services. Preston use Preston Care and Repair an external agency and St Vincent's operate across Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale.
25. For St Vincent's to continue to operate a HIA in Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale they are requesting £49,448 per year from each of the three Local Authorities (£148,344.99 in total, excluding handy person fees). St. Vincent's proposed staffing structure means that officers would be working 39 hours in Burnley per week with the request to utilise Council buildings and facilities.
26. An alternative to St Vincent's proposal is that the Housing Grants Team is reorganised and expanded to create an Integrated Health and Wellbeing Team delivering a range of grants and HIA services. The proposal would merge the existing grants team, consisting of 2 Technical Officers and 1 Administration Officer, with additional officers to create the Integrated Health and Wellbeing Team. The additional officers would be new posts and include a full time Well Being Team Manager and a full time Well Being Officer (total 72.30 per week). The team would deliver disabled facilities grants, emergency works grants, dwelling dementia grants, energy efficiency grants, landlord accreditation, support for those who are hoarding, a handy person service and potentially, subject to negotiations with LCC, minor adaptations. This would ensure that current and additional services are integrated and delivered to the residents of Burnley once LCC withdraw the funding for HIAs.
27. LCCs decision to withdraw funding from the HIAs, and if adopted, the Council's proposal to utilise Better Care Funding to run an Integrated Health and Wellbeing Service is likely to result in St. Vincent's no longer operating as a HIA.
28. The Integrated Health and Wellbeing Team will give the Council control over a comprehensive service for vulnerable occupiers, delivering a range of initiatives concurrently that improve their health, safety and welfare of Burnley's residents.
29. The development of the dwelling dementia grants supports the Council's objective of making the borough a dementia friendly community.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND BUDGET PROVISION

30. As set out in paragraph 13 of this report the deletion of the vacant Technical Officer Post and the creation of an Enforcement Officer Post will require additional funding of £1,099. It is proposed that this increased cost is met from the additional income received through civil penalty notices served for housing contraventions.
31. As set out in paragraphs 19 and 20 of this report the Empty Homes Officer re-grade will require additional funding of £1,099. This increased cost will be met from the empty homes capital programme. The Empty Homes Case Worker cost of £26,211, will be capitalised and funded from the empty homes capital programme. This will create a revenue saving of £26,211 that meets an agreed savings target for 2020/21.

32. The additional costs associated with creating the Integrated Health and Wellbeing Team will be met from the anticipated underspend from the 2019/20 DFG allocation as detailed in the 2019/20 Capital Monitoring Programme. The additional annual costs are £39,395 for the new post of Well Being Team Manager, £32,647 for the new post of Well Being Officer and £50,000 for the dwelling dementia grants.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

33. Amendments will be required to the Housing Renewal Policy 2012.

DETAILS OF CONSULTATION

34. None

BACKGROUND PAPERS

35. None

FURTHER INFORMATION

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