

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by Executive Director of Housing, Environmental and Economic Development

Housing, Environment and Economic Development Committee: 5 March 2008

Subject: Empty Homes Action Plan - Proposed New Posts

1. Purpose

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to provide Members with information on the proposed new posts of Project Officer and Data Analyst referred to in the Empty Homes Action Plan.

2. Background

- 2.1** A report was submitted to Committee on 9 January 2008 presenting the results of the recent external evaluation of the Council's performance in the management of empty homes and proposing an action plan to address the findings of the report.
- 2.2** The Committee agreed that the proposed two new posts of Project Officer and Data Analyst referred to in the report be agreed in principle, with a view to a further report being submitted to the Committee on the role, reporting structure, option appraisal and remit of these posts.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1** The report on the Evaluation of Performance in the Management of Empty Homes highlighted a deficiency in the analytical capacity to monitor and evaluate void management performance. In particular, the report recommended that staffing issues which are currently restricting the development of an adequate performance monitoring framework be addressed. The action plan formulated to address the recommendations of the report identified several areas which would benefit from more in depth data reporting and analysis.

3.1.1 There are 3 options available to the Council.

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| Option 1 | Continue to produce and monitor statistical information as at present. |
| Option 2 | Utilise existing resources to develop an adequate performance monitoring framework and analytical capacity. |
| Option 3 | Recruit a Data Analyst with job profile as attached at Appendix 1. |

- 3.1.2** Option 1 would mean that the deficiency in the analytical capacity to monitor and evaluate void management performance would continue as identified within the report.
- 3.1.3** Option 2 would allow the development of a performance monitoring framework and improved analytical capacity, subject to the appropriate skills being available within the existing resources.
- 3.1.4** There would be no additional costs in terms of staffing costs, however the resource would require to be diverted from other activities which could suffer as a result of under resourcing having an indirect financial implication in terms of void turnaround times and subsequent increased void loss.
- 3.1.5** Option 3 would allow the development of a performance monitoring framework and improved analytical capacity at no detriment to other aspects of service provision. The expertise of an experienced Data Analyst would result in improved management information in terms of the operation and greater capacity to inform future housing strategy.
- 3.1.6** The estimated cost of this option is £34,000 at 08/09 salary levels which includes employer on-costs. This post would be subject to job evaluation.
- 3.1.7** In consideration of the options outlined above, option 3 is the option included within the action plan.
- 3.2** The report on the Evaluation of Performance in the Management of Empty Homes also recommended that a comprehensive review of allocations policy and procedures be undertaken and that the possibility of converting the existing property shop approach into a fully fledged Choice Based Lettings system be examined.
- 3.2.1** There are 3 options available to the Council.
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| Option 1 | Continue with our current allocations policy and procedures. |
| Option 2 | Utilise existing resources to review of our allocations policy and procedures and examine the possibility of converting the existing property shop approach into a fully fledged Choice Based Lettings system. |
| Option 3 | Recruit a Project Officer for a period of 1 year with job profile as attached at Appendix 2. |
- 3.2.2** Option 1 would mean that the recommendations contained within the report would not be met.
- 3.2.3** Option 2 would allow a review of the allocations policy and procedures and the examination of the possibility of converting the existing property shop approach into a fully fledged Choice Based Lettings system.

- 3.2.4** The work involved will require in depth knowledge of housing law in relation to housing allocations and best practice, experience of carrying out research, experience of production of reports and an understanding of related housing issues. There would be no additional costs in terms of staffing costs, however the resource would require to be diverted from other activities which could suffer as a result of under resourcing having an indirect financial implication in terms of void turnaround times and subsequent increased void loss.
- 3.2.5** Option 3 would allow a comprehensive review of our allocations policy and procedures and the examination of the possibility of converting the existing property shop approach into a fully fledged Choice Based Lettings system. The expertise of an experienced Project Officer would bring greater capacity for intensive research to inform the future of our housing allocations which takes account of strategic objectives and our statutory obligations whilst ensuring that it meets the needs of West Dunbartonshire. There would be no detriment to current service provision
- 3.2.6** The estimated cost of this option is £38,000 at 08/09 salary levels which includes employer on-costs. This post will be subject to job evaluation and will initially be a temporary appointment for 1 year, subject to review thereafter.
- 3.2.7** In consideration of the options outlined above, option 3 is the option included within the action plan.
- 3.3** At the outset these posts will require to carry out background work in relation to current policy and processes. It is therefore, envisaged that in terms of structure, these posts will form part of the Housing Strategy Team, but will work closely with Housing Operations to ensure a cohesive response to these issues.

4. Personnel Issues

- 4.1** These posts will require to be subject to job evaluation.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1** There are no direct staffing costs associated with options 1 and 2 for each of the posts. However, there is likely to be an indirect financial implication in terms of void turnaround times and subsequent increased void loss.
- 5.2** The additional costs associated with the introduction of the posts as detailed at option 3 for each post at the current pay level amounts to £34,000 and £38,000 respectively including employer oncosts.
- 5.3** Provision has been made for these posts within the HRA draft estimates for 2008/09.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1** The most significant risk is that the Evaluation of Performance on the Management of Empty Homes forms part of the Remedial Plan agreed with Communities Scotland and if the Council does not implement the Remedial Plan satisfactorily, Scottish Ministers may appoint a manager to exercise housing and related functions.
- 6.2** There is a risk that by failing to implement necessary improvement actions void performance deteriorates and rental income is lost.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1** The Evaluation of Performance on the Management of Empty Homes makes recommendations for further improvements in performance and the associated action plan addresses these recommendations. At the meeting of the Housing, Environment and Economic Development Committee held on 9 January 2008, the Committee agreed that the proposed two new posts of Project Officer and Data Analyst referred to in the report be agreed in principle, with a view to a further report being submitted to the Committee on the role, reporting structure, option appraisal and remit of these posts. The details requested are provided within this report and the associated appendices.

8. Recommendation

8.1 It is recommended that Members:

- (a) agree that the most effective means of creating capacity to address the issues in the Empty Homes Action Plan at no detriment to existing services is to augment existing resources in the areas of Data Analysis and Policy Development.**
- (b) agree the role, reporting structure and remit of these posts; and**
- (c) agree to the recruitment of these posts.**

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Date: 20 February 2008

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Appendices:

Appendix 1 Job Profile - Data Analyst

Appendix 2 Job Profile - Project Officer

Background Papers:

Housing, Environment and Economic Development Committee 9 January 2008; Evaluation of Performance on the Management of Empty Homes

Housing, Environment and Economic Development Committee 9 January 2008; Evaluation of Performance on the Management of Empty Homes Action Plan

Wards Affected:

All