

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT FOR DELEGATED DECISION

By

County Councillor Graham Brown

Portfolio Holder for Commissioning and Procurement

Date 8th January 2015

REPORT AUTHOR: Interim Head of Housing

SUBJECT: Funding for Shelter Cymru

REPORT FOR: Decision

1. Summary

- 1.1. This report asks the Portfolio Holder to agree to the continued funding of Shelter Cymru's housing advice service in Powys, via a contribution from the Housing Revenue Account, for the financial year 2015-16.

2. Proposal

Background - Shelter Cymru Housing Advice Service

- 2.1. Section 180 of the Housing Act 1996 empowers the Secretary of State (replaced by the Welsh Ministers following devolution) and local authorities to provide funding to voluntary organisations who play a role in addressing homelessness.
- 2.2. Shelter Cymru provide housing advice services across the 22 local authority areas of Wales, funded in part by Welsh Government and local authority's under the provisions of S.180. This arrangement has been in place for some time.
- 2.3. Attached is a copy of the most recent quarterly monitoring statistic provided to us by Shelter Cymru (covering the period April to June 2014). This shows that the service provided by Shelter Cymru receives a high level of demand at present.
- 2.4. With the introduction of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 during 2015-16 the Council will rely more on the Shelter Cymru housing advice service to enable us to achieve a greater rate of success in respect of homelessness prevention. The service has two elements which are of value to the Council. First it is a service which is independent of the Council providing a first point of contact for citizens who may not be aware of the Council's statutory duties and plays a key role in providing citizens with good quality housing advice to enable them to address their own housing difficulties. Second, Shelter Cymru have access to specialist legal staff who will act on behalf of citizens of Powys and we as a local authority will refer cases to Shelter for them to undertake more specialist work, to ensure that the applicant doesn't become homeless.

- 2.5. Therefore it is suggested that the funding provided to Shelter Cymru to provide its housing advice service in Powys, is an essential element of the toolkit used by the Council to address homelessness in the County.
- 2.6. The funding provided by the Council (£34,000 in 2014-15) was previously met by a contribution from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and the Council Fund. In 2012-13 the mix of funding was £15,000 (HRA), £19,000 (Council Fund). However the previous Head of Service agreed that the funding would come entirely from the HRA, securing a saving of £19,000 to the Council Fund and this decision took effect from 2013-14. I am not aware that this decision received political approval.

Proposed funding arrangements for the Shelter Cymru housing advice service in Powys

- 2.6 The purpose of this report is to agree funding arrangements for Shelter Cymru moving forward and to obtain the consent of the Portfolio Holder for the funding to be charged entirely to the HRA.
- 2.7 Whilst it would be correct to consider the prevention of homelessness and the provision of housing advice to be a matter most appropriately funded from the Council Fund, as it is a statutory responsibility of the local authority rather than a housing landlord activity. However, the Council Fund would not be able to fund such a contribution without a significant impact on the delivery of other housing services funded by the Council Fund, for example private sector housing, homelessness, housing strategy & supporting people. This is despite the Council's contribution to Shelter Cymru being limited to £34,000.
- 2.8 If agreement is provided to the funding of Shelter Cymru housing advice from the HRA for 2015-16, Officers will work with housing association partners to ensure that agreement is reached with all social landlords that own homes in Powys, for each to make a contribution to the costs of the Shelter Cymru housing advice service, based on the number of homes they manage in Powys.

3. One Powys Plan

- 3.1. This initiative will help us to deliver Stronger Safer and Economically Viable Communities by helping the housing service to achieve a higher rate of homelessness prevention, assisting the Council deliver its statutory obligations.

4. Options Considered/Available

- 4.1. There are two options available to the Local Authority. We either fund Shelter Cymru's housing advice service or we don't.
- 4.2. By providing financial support for Shelter Cymru to fund the housing advice service in Powys means that we are bolstering the Welsh Government investment in the service and supporting a service which works alongside our staff to, where possible, prevent homelessness. In the light of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 the role performed by Shelter Cymru's housing advice service will become increasingly important.

- 4.3 By not providing financial support for Shelter Cymru to fund the housing advice service, it is likely that we would receive a reduced level of service from Shelter Cymru which will impact on the Council's ability to increase the proportion of homelessness presentations that we are able to prevent from becoming homeless, but we will also mean that the citizens of Powys will have reduced access to the housing advice service.

5. Preferred Choice and Reasons

- 5.1. It is recommended that the Council support the funding of Shelter Cymru's housing advice service via funding of £34,000 from the HRA for 2015-16. The reasons for this recommendation are set out in paragraphs 4.2 and 4.3 above.

6. Sustainability and Environmental Issues/Equalities/Crime and Disorder,/Welsh Language/Other Policies etc

- 6.1. The funding of Shelter Cymru's housing advice service by the Council will have a positive impact on the ability of households in Powys to access independent housing advice and will assist the Council increase the proportion of households it and its partners assist whose possible homelessness is prevented from occurring.

7. Children and Young People's Impact Statement - Safeguarding and Wellbeing

- 7.1. An increase in the effectiveness of the Council and its partners in preventing homelessness will mean that fewer children experience of becoming homeless..

8. Local Member(s)

- 8.1. This matter has equal effect across the Council.

9. Other Front Line Services

- 9.1. This matter will not have an effect on other frontline Services.

10. Support Services (Legal, Finance, HR, ICT, BPU)

- 10.1. Legal: The recommendation can be supported from a legal point of view.

Finance: The Finance Business Partner confirms that the prevention of homelessness and the provision of housing advice is a statutory responsibility of the local authority, rather than a housing landlord activity, however the Council Fund would not be able to fund the proposed allocation of £34k without a significant impact on the delivery of other housing services funded from baseline, so the proposal is to fund from Housing Revenue Account.

There will be an opportunity for Officers to work with housing association partners to ensure that agreement is reached with all social landlords that own homes in Powys, for each to make a contribution to the costs of the Shelter Cymru housing advice service, based on the number of homes they manage in Powys.

11. Local Service Board/Partnerships/Stakeholders etc

11.1 This is a specific housing matter

12. Communications

12.1 The Housing Service will communicate its on-going commitment to fund Shelter Cymru through the Tenant Liaison Forum, the Open House Newsletter and via the website.

13 Statutory Officers

13.1 The solicitor to the Council (Monitoring Officer) has commented as follows: "I have nothing to add to the report."

13.2 The Strategic Director Resources (Section 151 Officer) notes the comments made by finance.

14 Members' Interests

14.1 The Monitoring Officer is not aware of any specific interests that may arise in relation to this report. If the Portfolio Holder has an interest he should declare it, complete the relevant notification form and refer the matter to the cabinet for decision.

Recommendation:	Reason for Recommendation:
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. That confirmation of funding to the value of £34,000 is provided to Shelter Cymru for the financial year 2015-16, and that the funding is provided from the Housing Revenue Account.2. That Officers commence discussions with housing associations about the joint funding of the Shelter Cymru housing advice service in Powys for 2016-17 onwards.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. That the decision to fund Shelter Cymru is one which needs to be taken by the portfolio holder, to ensure that it has legitimacy.2. That funding is shared proportionately between all social landlords who operate in Powys.

Relevant Policy (ies):			
Within Policy:	Y / N	Within Budget:	Y / N

Relevant Local Member(s):	All members
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Person(s) To Implement Decision:	Interim Head of Housing
Date By When Decision To Be Implemented:	15th January 2015

Contact Officer Name:	Tel:	Fax:	Email:
Simon Inkson	01597 826631		simon.inkson@powys.gov.uk


Total number clients: 60 (April – June 2014)

Household type	Number
Adult household	3
Couple & children	8
Couple	7
Single parent male	1
Single parent female	6
Single male	15
Single female	17
Unknown	3
Total	60

Homelessness status	
Imminently homeless	11
Medium Term Risk	13
Not homeless	17
Roofless: potential roughsleeper	4
R'less/str h'less: 3-6mths	1
Statutory homeless	13
Unknown	1
Total	60

Priority need	Number
Children	7
Domestic violence	0
Ex-prisoner	1
Not applicable	24
Not known	4
Not priority	7
Pregnant	0
Vulnerable	17
Total	60

Employment status	Number
Full time (over 30 hours)	0
Not applicable	11
Part time (under 30 hours)	3
Retired	5
Self employed	1
Sick/ill	22
Unemployed	12
Total	60

Local Connection	Number
3 years	1
6 months	27
Family	3
Not applicable	27
Other LA connection	2
Total	0

LA decision	Number
Accepts responsibility	1
Application not allowed	1
Making enquiries	3
No connection	0
No responsibility accepted	2
Not applicable	9
Not involved yet	21
Not priority	3
Total	60

Tenure	Number
Assured shorthold / short assured	11
Friend	1
HA: assured s'hold/short assured	10
HA: assured	7
HA: secure	1
LA secure	10
Not known`	1
Parents	3
Other	2
Owner occupier	6
Refuge	1
Relatives	5
Street homeless	1
Total	60

Total Number Problems Dealt With in Quarter: 180

Problems include	
ASB alleged perpetrator	1
Dampness/disrepair	2
Deposits	8
Homelessness	33
Housing Benefit and CTB	37
Landlord possession action	9
Landlord/ tenant	8
Medical/health	1
Mortgage arrears and possession	7
Other	4
Other benefits	6
Other financial	8
Rent arrears	18
Rents/ rent levels	1
Relationship breakdown	4
Tenancy ending	4
Unsuitable accommodation	1
Wants transfer	2

Closed Cases : 43

Known Outcomes	Casetrack
Permanently re-housed	2
Temporarily re-housed	1
Kept in own home	11
Homelessness delayed	1
Conditions in existing home improved	1
Affordability improved	12

Client Details

Gender	
Male	28
Female	32
Total	60

Ethnicity	
White British	4
White Irish	50
White other	6
Total	60
Disability	
Longstanding illness or health condition	15
Mental health condition	9
Not considered disabled	32
Not known/ not recorded	4

Total	60

Age Bands	
0-16	1
17-24	6
25- 34	11
35-49	21
50-64	16
65+	5
Total	60

Feedback:

7 feedback forms have been received during the quarter. 6 people reported that they were 'Very Satisfied' with the service. The remaining respondent did not fully complete the form but did record positive feedback to the other questions.

Comments made on the forms include "Very happy with free advice & help given, poorer families need someone to help in times of need", "Precise information, helped all along the process at different stages" and "The lady I was talking to was a great help. She put my mind at rest and I am very grateful for that."

The Service and staff:

There have been no changes to the service during this quarter. The trial to deliver a fortnightly service in Ystradgynlais is continuing and has been well received.

Kim Waller

Regional Services Manager North