

## **Policy Group – 18 July 2018**

### **Purbeck Citizens Advice – Homelessness Reduction Caseworker**

#### **1. Purpose of report**

To seek approval to fund a Homelessness Reduction Caseworker working in Purbeck Citizens Advice (PCA) on a two year fixed term contract.

#### **2. Key issues**

- 2.1 Since the transfer of the Council's housing stock in 2004 the Council has worked in partnership with PCA to prevent homelessness by funding a Housing Specialist Advisor one day a week. The role provides advice and support to households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness that approach PCA in the first instance. The support provided by the role reduces the number of households who approach the Housing Needs Team.
- 2.2 When Council agreed in April 2018 to fund an additional Housing Needs Officer working in the Housing Needs Team, the report referred to discussions taking place with PCA about how they may be able to assist the Council to fulfil its new duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (Min 23 18/19 refers).
- 2.3 PCA's proposal is based on two part time caseworkers providing a 0.5 FT Homelessness Reduction Caseworker role to supplement the work carried out by the Housing Specialist Adviser. The caseworkers will provide a dedicated housing, welfare benefits and income maximisation service to residents who approach PCA directly for assistance with their housing as well as those referred by the Council's Housing Needs Team for more specialist help. The cost of post is £16,766 (including on-costs) per annum.
- 2.4 The PCA caseworker role will focus on supporting people who are threatened with homelessness or who are homeless. Caseworkers will ensure people are aware of their rights and where necessary assist them to address their housing issues. The support they will provide will include:
  - ensuring income from all sources is maximised by checking benefit entitlement, applying for benefits, dealing with benefit problems, looking at personal budgets and identifying ways of saving money and/or spending less on essential services;
  - assisting households to apply for discretionary payments, charitable grants and accessing Emergency Local Assistance; and
  - identifying when a household may need to be referred to other projects for support (internal and external) such as debt, employment advice or energy efficiency measures.
- 2.5 The service would only be available to Purbeck residents.

2.6 It is anticipated the proposed role will continue to complement the work of the Housing Needs Team, providing assistance to households who would not approach the Council for advice, as well as those the Housing Needs Team refer for more specialist advice.

### 3. Recommendation

A report be submitted to Council to approve the provision of funding for a 0.5 FT Homelessness Reduction Caseworker working 18.5 hours a week for Purbeck Citizens Advice on a two year fixed term contract at a cost of £16,766 (including on-costs) per annum.

### 4. Policy issues

#### 4.1 How will this affect the environment, social issues and the local economy?

There are no implications for the environment or the economy associated with this report.

The role will help the Housing Needs Team meet the increased workload the new legislation will involve and assist the Council to meet its corporate objective of “being an efficient and effective council”.

#### 4.2 Implications

##### 4.2.1 Resources

The cost of an additional 0.5 FT Homelessness Reduction Caseworker working 18.5 hours a week is £16,766 (including on-costs) per annum:

Based on scale 24, full time before on costs	£21,962	£12,006
Management cost 0.08FTE (3hrs)		£2,900
Travel (estimate based on 20 miles a week at 35p per mile x 48 weeks)		£336
Contribution to overhead costs 10%		£1,524
<b>Total</b>		<b>£16,766</b>

The funding the Council currently provides PCA through its Service Level Agreement funds PCA’s core service. Any other funded projects which PCA deliver need to contribute towards the additional management costs and overheads associated with the projects. In return specialist projects benefit from the added value of the holistic service PCA provides.

The table below shows there is sufficient money available to fund the new post:

<b>Grant income</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>Total</b>
New Burdens – Homelessness Reduction Act	£10,530	£11,763	£22,293
Flexible Homelessness Grant	£66,473	£74,777	£141,250
	<b>£77,003</b>	<b>£86,540</b>	<b>£163,543</b>

<b>Planned expenditure</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>Total</b>
IT costs new homelessness module	£3,577	£0	£3,577
Housing Needs Officer (2 year fixed term contract)	£23,150	£23,150	£46,300
PCA funding (additional housing caseworker)	£16,766	£16,766	£33,532
Housing benefit costs	£6,500	£6,500	£13,000
	<b>£49,993</b>	<b>£46,416</b>	<b>£96,409</b>
<b>Balance of funding available</b>			<b>£67,134</b>

The Flexible Homelessness Support Grant is paid by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). It replaced the Temporary Accommodation Management Fee (TAMF) the Department of Work and Pensions paid to Councils. The funding is designed to support the Homelessness Reduction Act by providing additional funding to local authorities to enable them fund a range of homeless services to prevent homelessness. The grant is ring-fenced and can only be used to prevent or deal with homelessness.

#### 4.2.2 Equalities

There are no equalities implications associated with this report.

#### 4.2.3 Shaping Dorset Council implications

At the meeting of the Shadow Executive Committee on 18 June 2018 a recommendation from the Interim Section 151 Officer regarding the Protocol on Spending and Commitments was agreed. The report noted that “At present the existing councils are free to continue to run their affairs and make financial decisions without taking into account the impact upon the new unitary. The protocol requires any items that could have a financial impact upon the new unitary to be initially assessed by the interim Section 151 Officer and, if it has a significant financial impact, seek approval by the Shadow Executive. De minimis levels of £100,000 for each District and Borough and £500,000 for Dorset County Council are proposed in order to avoid the process becoming unmanageable.”

As the amount of funding requested is below the de minimis level, consultation with the Shadow Executive Committee will not be required.

### 5. Further information

- 5.1 As previously reported to Council the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 places new duties on local authorities to prevent and relieve homelessness in their areas. It also requires housing authorities to provide homelessness services to all those affected irrespective of whether they are in priority need or ‘intentionally homeless’.
- 5.2 There is likely, therefore, to be a significant increase in the number of households seeking help. The requirements of the legislation in terms of the preparation and review of personal

housing plans and on-going casework until housing needs are met will also increase the time spent on each case.

- 5.3 Over the last three years the number of clients assisted by the PCA Specialist Housing Advisor has increased by 17.5%.The complexity of the cases has also increased.
- 5.4 The Homelessness Reduction Caseworker role will build on the work and skills developed through The Lloyds Foundation Project. This is a PCA project which works in partnership with the Council's Housing Needs Team. The project provides specialist housing and financial capability support to homeless households referred to PCA by the Housing Needs Team. The funding awarded in 2017 for a three year period addresses tenancy sustainability and aims to avoid repeat homelessness. Demand for the service and the amount of work involved with each household has meant the service has frequently been oversubscribed.

Background papers:

- Homelessness caseworker support proposal to Purbeck District Council – Purbeck Citizens Advice

For further information contact:

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