



CABINET
Tuesday, 03 October 2023

Subject	Building Capacity within the Private Sector Housing and Housing Needs Services
Cabinet Member	Councillor David Beavan Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member with responsibility for Housing
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Is the report Open or Exempt?	Open
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Category of Exempt Information and reason why it is NOT in the public interest to disclose the exempt information.	Not applicable
Wards Affected:	None

Purpose and high-level overview

Purpose of Report:

To seek the approval for recruitment to three key new posts within the Private Sector Housing (PSH) (2) and Housing Needs (1) teams to enable the efficient delivery of key services to continue.

Options:

1. Members approve the increased budget and enable the recruitment to the three proposed posts.
2. Members approve a smaller increased budget and recruitment to some of the three proposed posts and acknowledge that this will impact on service delivery.
3. Members decline to increase the budget or recruit to the new proposed posts and acknowledge that this will impact on service delivery.

Recommendation/s:

That an increased budget within the General Fund be approved to enable the permanent recruitment of staff for the new roles of:

1. Business Support Administrator – Private Sector Housing
2. Licensing Officer- Private Sector Housing
3. Housing Enabling Officer- Housing Needs

Corporate Impact Assessment

Governance:

The Council is the Strategic Housing Authority for East Suffolk. As part of this strategic leadership and place shaping activity, local authorities address the housing needs of all residents across all housing tenures. The local authority strategic housing role can support effective place shaping and ensure delivery of sustainable communities.

The Housing Enabling Officer role includes:

- Assessing and planning for the current and future housing needs of the local population across all tenures,
- Making the best use of the existing housing stock,
- Planning and facilitating new supply,
- Planning and commissioning housing support services, which link homes and support services,
- Working in partnership to secure effective housing and neighbourhood management on an on-going basis.

ESC policies and strategies that directly apply to the proposal:

[We are East Suffolk Strategic Plan 2020-24](#) [East Suffolk Housing Strategy 2017-23](#)

Working together to enable our communities through effective licensing regime and through the development of strong and effective housing enabling role.

[Housing Enabling Strategy 2020-2025](#)

The proposed Housing Enabling Officer role is critical to support the delivery of:

Developing new sustainable homes in the district to deliver the housing needed, including new affordable housing to be delivered by both Registered Providers (RPs) and the Council itself. The Housing Strategy identifies certain priorities relevant to this Housing Enabling Strategy.

These are:

- Increasing the supply of new housing to meet a range of needs, with a more proactive role for the Council supporting the development of affordable homes.
- Working in partnership – supporting successful communities, regeneration and economic development.
- Delivering on ambitions to ensure development across the district is increasingly sustainable, including through minimising carbon emissions, and ensuring that development is undertaken in a way which protects and enhances the environment.

[Private Sector Housing Strategy 2019-2023](#)

This strategy is due for renewal this year. The updated strategy will align with the Council's new themes and priorities. Whilst these are being developed, there is an ongoing need to meet our statutory housing obligations which have increased, along with awareness about issues such as energy efficiency and climate change, damp and mould and fire safety.

A strategic service review has been completed which looks at successes and obstacles to achieving the ambitions set out in that document. The outcomes of that review have led to the identification of new posts detailed in this report.

Environmental:

The work carried out by the Housing team has a focus on environmentally aware solutions for solving housing issues in line with the Council's commitment to reduce carbon emissions to net zero by 2030.

Equalities and Diversity:

ESC has declared Deprivation and Disadvantage as a 10th 'characteristic' for the purpose of assuring Equality in our District. Many of the housing initiatives supported by these roles seek to assist those on low incomes who are suffering from poverty.

Financial:

The Landlord Service within the Housing Department is primarily funded through the Housing Revenue Account.

Private Sector Housing (PSH) and Housing Needs (HN) are funded from the General Fund.

These teams receive significant income from external sources, much of which is via a competitive bidding processes. Receiving this funding allows the teams to deliver enhanced support for residents, above and beyond the basic statutory services.

The PSH team also lead on a significant number of Countywide Suffolk services including Warm Homes Healthy People, Stepping Home, Safe Suffolk Renters and Centres for Warmth.

The tables below show how this income is apportioned based on figures from 2022/2023.

	Housing Needs		Private Sector Housing	
	£	%	£	%
General Fund	£1,085,400	30.50%	£609,100	10.50%
Income	£417,000	12%	£207,800	3.50%
In Year Grant Funding	£2,029,200	57%	£4,160,100*	73%
Reserves	£10,400	0.50%	£733,900	13%
Total Expenditure Budget	£3,542,000	100%	£5,710,900	100%

*includes £2.7M DFG funding which can only be used for this purpose

	Total GF Housing Budget	Total Funded by 'Taxpayer'	% Funded by 'Taxpayer'
GF Housing Services Total	£9,252,900	£1,694,500	18%

The additional financial costs of the three proposed posts are set out below:

Job Title	Band	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Business Support Admin	Band 3 SCP 8 (inc. oncosts)	£34,059	£35,375	£36,740	£38,158
Housing Licencing Officer	Band 5 SCP 18 (inc. oncosts)	£39,868	£42,166	£43,806	£45,510
Housing Enabling Officer	Band 5/6 SCP 18 (inc. oncosts)	£39,868	£42,166	£43,806	£45,510
	Total	£113,795	£119,707	£124,352	£129,178
Grand Total over Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)					£487,032

Any growth to the budget must be considered over the MTFS. The total growth over this period is £487,032. As per the financial procedure rules, Cabinet can approve additional budget during the year up to £750,000.

Of the £750,000 approval limit for Cabinet during 2023-24, £604,000 is available. Therefore, the financial growth to budget requiring Cabinet approval in this report is within the remaining threshold available.

Human Resources:

New roles will be created within existing teams.

Recruitment and the 'onboarding' stage takes approximately 8 months for each new recruit, with HR input throughout that timeframe.

ICT:

The new employees will require standard ICT equipment.

Legal:

No significant implications have been identified as the issuing of licences is a largely administrative process managed within the private sector housing team using standard processes and forms already agreed with the legal team. Prosecutions, which would require legal support, are rare and not anticipated to be significantly greater as a result of the development of this specialist role.

Risk:

Risk	Mitigation
<p>If the roles within Private Sector Housing (PSH) are not created, there is a significant risk that the workload on the PSH team will become unmanageable leading to unacceptable pressure on staff, staff leaving and challenges recruiting particularly to Environmental Health Practitioner posts which are very difficult to recruit to in the current market but vital to deliver full and comprehensive support to residents living in poor housing conditions.</p>	<p>Recruit to the additional posts created, which will ensure sufficient capacity to meet our statutory responsibilities and reduce the pressure on officers.</p>
<p>Failure to work with Registered Providers and Community Groups to bring forward new homes, could result in less Affordable Homes being delivered. ESC Enabling Strategy 2020-2025 sets out our ambitions to deliver affordable housing both by the Council and Register Providers (RPs) in the district. The strategy identifies certain priorities with a more proactive role for the Council supporting the development of affordable homes, partnership working and ensuring that development is undertaken in a way which protects and enhances the environment. The enabling role will link several teams within the Council (Housing Needs, Planning, Asset Management, Communities and Economic Development and Regeneration) as well as closely work with RPs and community groups to explore housing needs and future development opportunities. Community led housing provides a route for</p>	<p>Recruit to the newly created Housing Enabling Officer role, which will support the delivery of much needed Affordable Homes in East Suffolk.</p>

delivery of affordable homes to meet the needs of the community and this role will be key in ensuring we actively engage.	
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External Consultees:	None
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Strategic Plan Priorities

Select the priorities of the Strategic Plan which are supported by this proposal: <i>(Select only one primary and as many secondary as appropriate)</i>		Primary priority	Secondary priorities
T01	Growing our Economy		
P01	Build the right environment for East Suffolk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
P02	Attract and stimulate inward investment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P03	Maximise and grow the unique selling points of East Suffolk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P04	Business partnerships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P05	Support and deliver infrastructure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
T02	Enabling our Communities		
P06	Community Partnerships	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P07	Taking positive action on what matters most	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
P08	Maximising health, well-being and safety in our District	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
P09	Community Pride	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
T03	Maintaining Financial Sustainability		
P10	Organisational design and streamlining services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P11	Making best use of and investing in our assets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P12	Being commercially astute	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P13	Optimising our financial investments and grant opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P14	Review service delivery with partners	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
T04	Delivering Digital Transformation		
P15	Digital by default	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P16	Lean and efficient streamlined services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
P17	Effective use of data	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
P18	Skills and training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P19	District-wide digital infrastructure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
T05	Caring for our Environment		
P20	Lead by example	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P21	Minimise waste, reuse materials, increase recycling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P22	Renewable energy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P23	Protection, education and influence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
XXX	Governance		
XXX	How ESC governs itself as an authority	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How does this proposal support the priorities selected?

Neighbourhood Plans, Community led planning and good data from Housing Needs assessment is critical to ensuring housing is built in the right place to the right specification and to meet needs. (P01, P06, P07 P17).

Ensuring there are sufficient homes for our residents and these homes are safe, secure and suitable is a key priority that sits within the priority for maximising well-being and health. Business support is a key element of this work to ensure efficient use of resources. (P08) Providing effective and efficient licensing service meets the need for lean efficient services (P16)

Background and Justification for Recommendation

1 Background facts

1.1 This report proposes additional resources in two key service areas, and these will be explained separately.

Firstly, the Private Sector Housing (PSH) team has expanded significantly since 2019. It has grown from a team of 15 staff providing services across 2 areas, to a team of 51 staff providing services across 5 areas, largely due to opportunities taken by the Team to lead on Suffolk-wide initiatives impacting health and well-being, poverty, and housing standards. The synergies between these different projects, means they work best co-located and hosted by one Local Authority.

The success of these schemes is recognised, which has enabled East Suffolk to lead on the Pathfinder, Safe Suffolk Renters programme. This is an incredibly opportunity and testament to the great reputation the PSH have developed since 2019.

All of the Countywide programmes are externally funded including an element of recharges for administration but whilst the finances are in place, they haven't warranted employing additional people, so this growth and enhanced service profile has resulted in additional pressure on the core team.

1.2 The PSH team has a high workload and this has not shown any sign of diminishing despite implementing a self- help system on the website and a triage system. Since the start of FY 2020 there have been a total of 3473 service requests and 485 grant enquiries (non-disabled adaptations) shared between 6 professional staff. The majority of these are about housing standards and renovation grants both of which can be complex and prolonged to resolve.

Financial Year	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24 1/4/23 to 18 /9/23
No. of service requests	971	935	1161	406

		No of grant enquiries (not DFG or Warm Homes related)	158	141	135	50	
	<p>A review of staffing has resulted in a number of changes including the proposal to add these 2 posts to the establishment. Costs of streamlining other areas of the team have been funded from income generated from Civil Penalties, charges for enforcement action, HMO licence fees and other miscellaneous income generated by the team and held in reserves.</p>						
1.3	<p>The Housing Enabling Officer role has been created to support, assist, and facilitate the delivery of Affordable Housing with Registered Providers, Neighbourhood Plans and other community-led planning initiatives in East Suffolk Council in order to enable growth in line with policy. The postholder will also supervise the commissioning of a comprehensive Housing Needs Survey and assess the results of the Survey to inform a new Housing Strategy for the district.</p>						

2 Current position

2.1	<p>In June 2023 a temporary role was created for a business support assistant funded from reserves, as it was required urgently to support the professional team.</p> <p>This was not an additional resource, but retention of an apprentice who had completed their qualification. This report requests the additional budget to make this post permanent.</p> <p>The team will struggle to maintain a satisfactory service to the public if this post is lost from the establishment. It is critical in triaging and providing self-help support to reduce the pressure on the professional staff.</p>
2.2	<p>The PSH team have faced significant challenges to absorb the additional requirements of legislative changes (Houses in Multiple Occupation licensing changes, Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards, Electrical Safety standards) and there are more changes proposed with revisions to the Decent Homes Standard and the Housing, Health and Safety Rating system. These changes will need to be evaluated once they can be quantified.</p>
2.3	<p>There is a national shortage of qualified Environmental Health Professionals (EHP) such that of the 6-field staff employed in the team there is only 1 qualified and 1 nearly qualified EHP. The team have far-reaching responsibilities for all aspects of private sector housing and the Technical Officers who work alongside the EHPs, are not as qualified or experienced to deal with the more complex work.</p> <p>It therefore becomes efficient to utilise specialist skills for some areas of the work and train one person to deliver this including the responsibility for licensing caravan sites and camping sites and HMO licensing revisits.</p> <p>These are both significant work areas (20/21 43 HMO cases and 22/23 65 and an average of 50 caravan site cases per annum – new and existing) requiring specialist knowledge but not necessarily specialist Environmental Health Practitioner skills.</p>

	<p>The existing team will then be able to concentrate on Housing Standards and key Public Health works, according to their knowledge set and will be more efficient in dealing with the most urgent cases – pushing for better, faster outcomes for the most significant hazards found.</p>
2.4	<p>In January 2023, the Head of Housing carried out a strategic review of the Housing Service that resulted in the creation of 6 Strategic Leads. These replaced existing management roles and resulted in the deletion of the Housing Strategy and Enabling Manager Role, which was a senior role without a team of people to manage.</p>
2.5	<p>The proposed Housing Enabling role will ensure better community engagement to deliver appropriate and suitable housing growth and develop a better understanding of Housing Needs across our area.</p> <p>This role will focus on strengthening relationships with stakeholders, partners and communities and improve service outcomes alongside evidence based used for determining the appropriate forms of affordable housing.</p> <p>The workload currently being absorbed by the Housing Needs and Housing Investment teams has added significant pressure. Officers are currently supporting the work required as part of the planning process and community lead housing.</p> <p>This has proven difficult to manage given the detail and expertise required to ensure the right information is provided and that we are having meaningful conversations with key partners, developers and Town Councils, something that cannot be absorbed unless other areas of the service area affected.</p> <p>This role will offer support to several service areas within the organisation focusing on potential development opportunities, engaging in public consultations and work alongside partners such as Community Action Suffolk to deliver more affordable homes across the district.</p>

3 How to address current situation

3.1	<p>The review considered three years' worth of data - service requests and grant enquiries- into the PSH team. It looked at who had been allocated the work and if that represented best use of resources. It considered the end-to-end processes involved in various types of service request, looked at what could be triaged and where a self-help element could be introduced.</p> <p>The aim was to reduce the number of low-level complaints being actioned by skilled and experienced professionals, when the solutions are primarily the offering of advice.</p> <p>The conclusion was that there were a number of process steps, involving less complex tasks, which could be carried out by a fulltime business support administrator.</p>
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	<p>This role provides a comprehensive triaging system and works with customers using scales of severity to assess categories of complaint such as rubbish, hoarding and damp and mould to determine most appropriate next steps.</p> <p>The role also registers service requests, sources background supporting documents relevant to the enquiry (e.g. Energy Performance Certificates, Land registry documents, Tenants Deposit data, etc), deals with payment vouchers and invoices and other general administrative support. Officers are then provided with a comprehensive information and are free to deal with the most serious cases, using their skills appropriately.</p>
3.2	<p>In addition to the business support role, the appointment of a licensing officer to cover all camping and caravan sites and support the HMO licensing regime, across East Suffolk, would also ease the pressure on the professional field staff in PSH, allowing them to concentrate their skills and experience on the core service.</p> <p>The licensing officer would provide a more efficient and effective service for owners, operators and users of sites through having specialist knowledge to support them.</p>
3.3	<p>An alternative would be to recruit two additional EHPs which would be extremely challenging in the current market and significantly more costly.</p> <p>Recent adverts for replacement staff on the team received no applications from EHPs and the roles have been filled with inexperienced staff who have great potential but need long term mentoring and training.</p>
3.4	<p>The appointment of a Housing Enabling Officer will allow for the key tasks to inform and support the work of both the Housing Development Team and Housing Needs team to be completed effectively. It will also work closely with the planning service, to support the delivery of Affordable Homes, through Registered Providers.</p>

4 Reason/s for recommendation	
4.1	To relieve the growing pressure on the Private Sector Housing Team particularly the professional staff, to ensure effective delivery of statutory services and meet residents and business owner's needs.
4.2	To work collaboratively with developers, Registered Providers and planning colleagues to support the development of more affordable homes in East Suffolk.
4.3	To alleviate resource pressure from Housing Investment, Housing Needs and Planning Teams who are currently coordinating replies to Housing Enabling queries. This work is in addition to their regular workload and whilst cover has been provided this is not sustainable in the long term and specific posts are required.

Appendices

Appendices:
None.

Background reference papers:
None.