

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

20 August 2015

Report by Director of Environment

WELFARE REFORM HOUSING ADVICE POST

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To seek Cabinet approval to use resources from the Welfare Reform contingency provision to extend funding of a temporary staff member until September 2016 to provide housing advice in order to mitigate the impact of welfare reform.

RECOMMENDATION

2. It is recommended that the Cabinet approves the proposal to use resources from the Welfare Reform contingency provision to extend the funding of a temporary staff member for a further year until September 2016 to provide housing advice in order to mitigate the impact of welfare reform and in particular to prevent homelessness.

BACKGROUND

3. The Cabinet will recall that in January 2014 approval was granted to employ a temporary staff member to help mitigate the impact of welfare reform and prevent homelessness.

4. This overall provision has to date been used for a variety of purposes. A report approved by the Cabinet on 4 September 2014 provided for a continuation of the Welfare Reform contingency into 2015/16 to be used for a variety of measures.

REPORT

5. Many households within East Renfrewshire find themselves experiencing hardship as a result of the legislative changes in relation to housing benefit whereby households who are under occupying their properties may experience a reduction in housing benefit entitlement.

6. The UK Government have now confirmed that the roll out of Universal Credit in East Renfrewshire will take place from February 2016. Universal credit is expected to add additional hardship to many households in East Renfrewshire.

7. Consequently it is felt that extending the contract of the temporary staff member (entitled "Welfare Reform Officer") is required to undertake three key functions:

- the delivery of housing options and improve the range of advice and information
- review existing practices in order to identify households in hardship early and mitigate the impact where possible
- review existing practices to prevent homelessness as a result of rent arrears

8. Therefore it is proposed that the post be extended on a temporary basis until September 2016.

FINANCE AND EFFICIENCY

9. The post of Welfare Reform Officer is Grade 8. The cost (including on-costs) for a full 12 months to September 2016 would be around £30,500. The Head of Accountancy has confirmed that the resources required for the continuation of the post can be met from the Welfare Reform contingency sum. It is expected that the extension of the post will continue to assist the alleviation of hardship for households in East Renfrewshire including the prevention of homelessness.

CONSULTATION AND PARTNERSHIP WORKING

10. In devising this proposal, consultation has taken place with appropriate Council services including Finance and Human Resources.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSAL

11. There are no implications in relation to IT, legal, property, equalities or sustainability.

CONCLUSIONS

12. Due to the likelihood of financial hardship to East Renfrewshire Council residents as a result of legislative changes in relation housing benefit it is felt necessary to create this post in order to provide additional advice and additional options. In addition action is required to reduce arrears and prevent homelessness.

RECOMMENDATION

13. It is recommended that the Cabinet approves the proposal to use resources from the Welfare Reform contingency provision to extend the funding of a temporary staff member until September 2016 to provide housing advice in order to mitigate the impact of welfare reform and in particular to prevent homelessness.

Director of Environment

Further details can be obtained from Phil Daws, Head of Environment (Housing and Property Services), 0141 577 3186.

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KEY WORDS

Welfare reform, Housing advice, homelessness, universal credit