

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL

CABINET

19 APRIL 2007

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO LEADER - SOCIAL INCLUSION AND HOUSING

SPEND TO SAVE INITIATIVES 2007-08

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To consider the adoption of "spend to save" initiatives for the housing services funded through the Housing Revenue Account.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the following "spend to save" initiatives are adopted for 2007-08:-
- (a) That £1,000 is allocated to Staffordshire County Council as a contribution to the training flat, to provide "life skills" training to young people from the Cannock Chase area.
 - (b) That £2,000 is allocated to develop a family mediation scheme through an external organisation to assist in resolving cases where family members cause nuisance on Council estates.
 - (c) That £6,000 is allocated for debt counselling through an external organisation in respect of households with rent arrears who have multiple debt problems.
 - (d) That £1,000 is allocated to support referrals from Council tenants who have suffered domestic violence or hate crimes to the "safe as houses" scheme.
 - (e) That £2,000 is allocated to support the work of the Community Development Officer and the Community Partnership Team in relation to the involvement of schools and young people based in community projects on Council estates.

3. Key Issues

- 3.1 The Council has adopted a "spend to save" approach with regard to the prevention of homelessness which has had considerable success.
- 3.2 It is now considered that such an approach could be extended to other areas of the Council's housing service which are funded through the Housing Revenue Account.
- 3.3 It is therefore suggested that a total £12,000 is spent on a number of "spend to save" initiatives during 2007-08 as detailed in the recommendations set out in section two. Further information regarding the proposed initiatives is set out in section two of the "supporting report".

- 3.4 The adoption of a “spend to save” approach is recognised by the Department for Communities and Local Government as an area of good practice.

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Section 1

1. Background

- 1.1 Cabinet on 31 March 2005 adopted a "spend to save" policy in relation to the Council's homelessness service and agreed a number of policy initiatives to help prevent homelessness and therefore reduce the need to use expensive temporary accommodation.
- 1.2 The adoption of this policy together with other actions taken by the Housing Options Team reduced the number of homeless acceptances from 345 in 2004-05 to 208 in 2005-06 and to 43 for the 2006-07 "half year". Furthermore, the length of time families have spent in bed and breakfast accommodation has not exceeded four weeks during 2006-07, an improvement on previous years.
- 1.3 It is now considered that a "spend to save" approach could be extended to other areas of the Council's housing service which are funded through the Housing Revenue Account.
- 1.4 The adoption of a "spend to save" approach is recognised by the Department for Communities and Local Government as an area of good practice.

Section 2

2. Details of Matters to be Considered

- 2.1 The Council was instrumental (through a grant of £2,000 and partnership working) to provide a training flat for young people leaving care. These people may not have the necessary skills to maintain a tenancy successfully and once housed initially may make disproportionate demands on the services provided by the Housing Division.
- 2.2 The provision of a training flat gives them the opportunity to obtain independent living skills. The young people have a Support Worker who shows them how to budget, cook, understand the values of being a good tenant and the responsibilities involved in maintaining a tenancy. Continued support for this scheme could well help towards ensuring a sustainable tenancy.
- 2.3 The training flat has been provided by HomeZone Housing Association in the Lichfield area and referrals include young people from the Cannock Chase area. Day to day management of the flat is the responsibility of Staffordshire County Council and HomeZone, whilst the Council is represented on the steering group.
- 2.4 It is proposed that a grant of £1,000 be awarded to Staffordshire County Council to assist in maintaining the training flat.
- 2.5 A family mediation scheme to assist families to resolve conflicts and prevent homelessness is currently supported by the Council. It is, however, considered that this could be further developed to take referrals made by the Tenancy Services Section in cases where family members are causing nuisance on estates. It is considered that such action could help resolve some problems, without the need to resort to costly and time consuming Court action and it is therefore proposed that £2,000 is allocated for family mediation.
- 2.6 Rent arrears have been reduced from £478,795 in December 2006 to £396,280 in February 2007. However, during this time over £20,000 has been charged against rent accounts in respect of Court costs as part of the Council's recovery action.

- 2.7 A number of tenants have multiple debt problems and in order to provide additional assistance to such households, it is suggested specialist debt counselling and income maximisation advice could reduce the number of cases which require Court action. It is therefore proposed that £6,000 is allocated for debt counselling.
- 2.8 The Council currently operates a Safe as Houses Scheme. The scheme has been developed in partnership with other support agencies and has been recognised as an area of good practice by the Government Office for the West Midlands. The scheme undertakes work on properties where the occupants have been the victims of domestic violence or hate crimes and enables them to remain safely in their homes. It therefore also provides a "safety net" for Council tenants who are the victims of hate crimes, such as racial harassment. It is proposed that £1,000 is allocated to support referrals from Council tenants.
- 2.9 The Council supports tenant participation through:-
- (a) Grant funding to tenants and residents groups and the Chase Tenants and Residents Federation.
 - (b) The provision of a Community Development Officer, as part of the housing service.
- 2.10 The Community Development Officer has been working with other agencies and the Community Partnership Team to bring residents together and involve the young children in events on the estates. In order to promote community cohesion, particularly on estates undergoing redevelopment work, the Community Development Officer would like to involve the young people through the school in projects on the estate. This would help give young people on the estate a stake in the area they live and work towards reducing anti-social behaviour. It is therefore proposed that £2,000 is allocated to enable work to be carried out involving young people through the schools or on estates in community based projects.

Section 3

3. Contributions to CHASE

- 3.1 The proposed "spend to save" initiatives would contribute to both the Social Inclusion and Housing and Environmental objectives of CHASE.

Section 4

4. Section 17 Implications

- 4.1 A number of the initiatives would help combat anti-social behaviour on the Council's estates which would have positive implications for crime prevention.

Section 5

5. Human Rights Act Implications

- 5.1 There are no identified implications in respect of the Human Rights Act arising from this report.

Section 6

6. Data Protection Act Implications

- 6.1 There are no identified implications in respect of the Data Protection Act arising from this report.

Section 7

7. Risk Management Implications

- 7.1 If risk assessment has been undertaken in respect of the initiatives detailed in the report and it is considered that the risks associated with the implementation of these initiatives are low.

Section 8

8. Legal Implications

- 8.1 Generally, the legal implications are set out throughout this report.

Section 9

9. Financial Implications

- 9.1 A provision of £12,000 exists within the agreed Housing Revenue Account Budget for 2007-08 for "spend to save" initiatives.

Section 10

10. Human Resource Implications

- 10.1 There are no human resource implications associated with this report.

Section 11

11. Conclusions

- 11.1 The recommendations are set out in section two of the report.

Background Papers

Annexes