

To: City Executive Board

Date: 1st April 2009

Item No:

Report of: Head of Service, Community Housing & Community Development

Title of Report: Enhanced Housing Options Project

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To outline the Enhanced Housing Options Project and seek approval to vary the 2009/10 Council budget to allow for the draw-down of CLG funds and the incurring of this sum as expenditure by the project

Key decision? Yes

Executive lead member: Councillor Ed Turner

Ward(s) affected: All

Report Approved by

Board Member: Councillor Ed Turner

Legal: Jeremy Thomas

Finance: Andy Collett

Executive Director for City Regeneration: Mel Barrett

Policy Framework: This report supports the Council's objectives relating to housing and social inclusion, and meets objectives within the Council's Homelessness Strategy 2008-13

Recommendation(s): Members are asked to consider this report and to make the following recommendations to full Council:

- (1) To approve a variation to the Council's 2009/10 budget, through the addition of £40,000 income (from CLG grant) and an expenditure budget of £40,000, in order to fund the Enhanced Housing Options Project
- (2) To note that another £40,000 income and expenditure should be provisionally provided for, in the 2010/11 budget, dependent on the CLG confirming grant funding in early 2010

Introduction & Background.

- 1 In April 2008, the Government launched a prospectus for an Enhanced Housing Options Programme. The report by John Hills, on the future of social housing, had previously highlighted the relationship between housing and employment problems, and there was growing interest in developing approaches to provide a more holistic housing service, with improved links to employment and training, to help tackle the root cause of housing need.
- 2 The programme initially invited expressions of interest from a small number of 'trailblazer' authorities, either through the 'extra' programme, for authorities currently undertaking such work and willing to mentor others, or through a programme for authorities interesting in developing such services. Oxford City Council made a bid submission for the latter.
- 3 In late November 2008, the Government announced the results of this programme. Although Oxford City were not successful in the full bid, we were awarded 'kick-start' funding to support this work. This grant is for £40,000 in 09/10, dependent on an action plan being approved by the CLG; and another £40,000 in 10/11, dependent on us meeting the 09/10 outcomes identified in the previous action plan.

Enhanced Options Project

- 4 The Implementation Plan for the project, including a detailed Action Plan, was submitted to the CLG for approval in early March 2009. This is attached at Appendix A.
- 5 At the time of writing this report, approval has not been formally given by the CLG, but this is expected during late March/ April. This report is prepared on the basis that such approval is forthcoming, in order to expedite the project from April 2009.
- 6 The implementation plan proposes that the CLG grant be used to directly employ a project co-ordinator within the Council, and for this officer to map and co-ordinate activities with a wider range of stakeholders.
- 7 The thrust of the project is to 'enhance' our housing options service by providing more holistic advice and assistance. In particular, by tackling possible underlining issues to a household's homelessness or housing need, and focusing on improving customers opportunities to enter into education, employment and training. This would be through improved service, and through improved referrals and sign-posting to other services, both for customers approaching us for assistance, and for households targeted by outreach work, including households in temporary accommodation, as well as the general public.

- 8 The Action Plan has been worked up in conjunction with other stakeholders that are supporting this initiative, including Job Centre Plus, social landlords, and the Oxfordshire Economic Partnership. As the project establishes, it is expected that a number of other linkages will be made between organisations traditionally operating in housing, and other organisations working in employment and training fields.
- 9 The project seems particularly relevant at the current time, due to the economic downturn, and will try to assist households pursue education, employment and training opportunities in this challenging environment. The impact this project can make, with limited resources, against a macro-economic climate such as this, is recognised however, and targets and deliverables for the project have been set accordingly.

Financial Implications

- 10 The project will be cost neutral in terms of the overall Council budget. It is proposed that any project expenditure is met from the £40,000 CLG grant allocation. Any additional expenditure will be from existing budget allocations.
- 11 Should CLG funding not be awarded, an appointment to the Project Co-ordinator post will not be made, and there will be no financial commitment on the Council.
- 12 This will be a two-year project, and it is assumed that expected outcomes will be met in 2009/10 and that the CLG confirm £40,000 funding in 2010/11. Provision in the 2010/11 budget should assume this grant is received. If it is not, then the project will be ended so that no expenditure is incurred in that year.
- 13 It is envisaged that the co-ordinator will be able to access other initiatives, resources and funding streams as part of the project, and that the enhanced options approach will be imbedded into mainstream services over the life of the project.

Legal Implications

- 14 As the funding is for two years, the appointment of the project co-ordinator should be made on a fixed term basis concurrent with the duration of the funding.

Equalities Impact

- 15 The project specifically seeks to improve the life chances for vulnerable households and some identified actions specifically seek to ensure good access to services for the BME community. These initiatives

- develop and build on actions identified in the BME Action Plan.
- 16 Service monitoring and the evaluation of any impact are to be developed as part of the initiation of the project.

Environmental Impact

- 17 There is no significant environmental impact as a result of this report.

Risk

- 18 This project presents minimal risk for the Council. Should the project not deliver on it's objectives, there is a possible reputational risk with our relationship with the CLG, although this will be mitigated through the use of good project management techniques and regular monitoring of project outcomes.
- 19 The risk of not securing the second year of funding, but incurring a staff cost for that year, can be mitigated by ensuring contractual arrangements can end the appointment after one year, should the project finish at that point.

Recommendations

- 20 Members are asked to consider this report and to make the following recommendations to full Council:
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Background papers:

None

Appendices:

Appendix A - Enhanced Options Project – Implementation Plan (version 4)