

AGENDA ITEM 6

QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

1. Councillor White to ask the Leader of the Council:
Progress on Reducing Consultant Spend

Please can the Leader of the Council tell me the job titles of the top 10 highest-paid interim managers or consultants currently working for the Council, how much each currently earns per day, how many days per week each currently works and how long each has been working for the Council?

REPLY by Councillor Lovelock (Leader of the Council).

The purpose of an interim management appointment is to provide short-term cover for key funded vacant posts.

It is important to understand that the cost of most interims is largely covered by the budget which is available for a permanent post holder's salary, but which is not being used due to the vacancy. It is also the case that interim appointees do not receive holiday or sickness pay and the Council does not pay National Insurance or Pension costs as it would for a permanent employee.

Sometimes it is also necessary to use an interim for a fixed period to do a specific piece of work, but for which there will not be an ongoing role, so it would not be right to make a permanent appointment.

As Cllr White should be aware, over the past year substantial progress has been made in permanent appointments to the very senior posts. The new Chief Executive took up post in June 2017 and the permanent Director of Adult Care and Health Services also joined the Council in the summer of 2017.

More recently there have been successful permanent appointments to Director of Resources, the Head of Finance, the Head of Human Resources, the Head of Procurement and Contracts and the Head of Education, all of who will join the Council over the next few weeks.

Interviews are also scheduled in February for the permanent Head of Adult Social Care.

The exact structure for Children's Services will be determined as the development of the wholly owned Council company progresses.

The list of current interim managers as requested is shown below:

Job Title	Daily bill rate	Days p/w	Tenure
Strategic Lead Education	£964	4	8 months
Finance Director	£850	5	9 months
Safeguarding Consultant	£800	5	6 months

Mosaic Systems Owner	£754	5	10 months
Chief Technical Accountant	£748	5	7 months
Directorate Accountant	£691	5	3 months
Safeguarding Consultant	£676	5	9 months
Directorate Accountant	£644	5	1 year 1 month
Head of Adult Social Care	£630	5	3 months
Service Manager Children's Services	£602	5	9 months

2. Councillor Dennis to ask the Lead Councillor for Housing:

Reducing Cost of Bed and Breakfast Accommodation

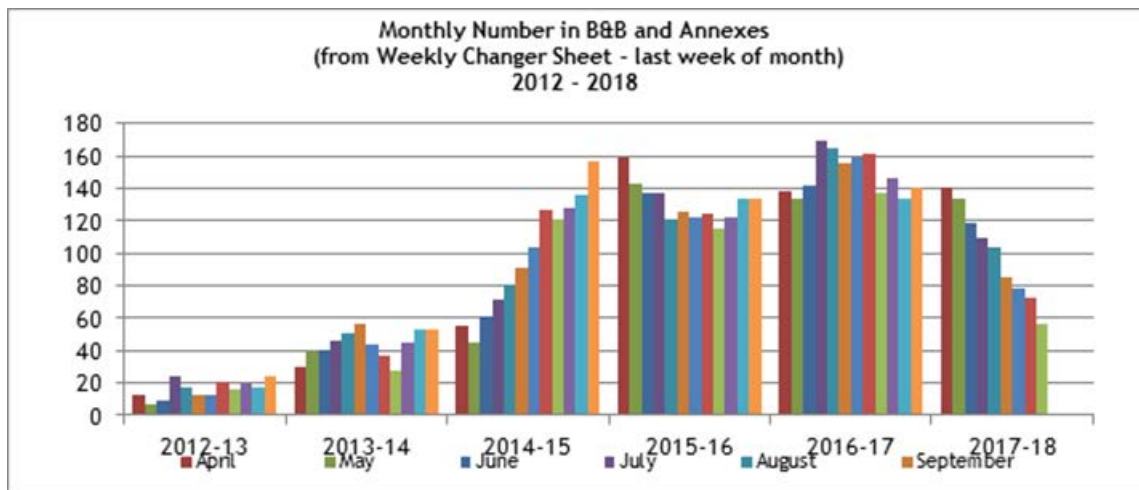
Can the Lead Councillor for Housing tell me how the Council has been tackling the difficult situation regarding reducing the cost of bed and breakfast, and assisting homeless families after being in bed and breakfast. Also how will the development at Lowfield Road further help the difficulty of families in bed and breakfast ?

REPLY by Councillor Ennis Lead Councillor for Housing.

Wherever possible the Council has aimed to avoid the use of Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation. An unfortunate consequence of the significantly rising level of homelessness demand, the limited supply of temporary accommodation and the lack of supply of affordable housing in Reading was an increased reliance on this form of emergency accommodation for homeless households in Reading.

The use of B&B peaked in 2016/17 with the maximum number of households placed at any one time being over 160 and 144 households in B&B at the start of this financial year. Increased use of B&B resulted in increased costs and last financial year the annual spend was £1.59m. However, since April 2017 there has been a targeted, consistent and steady reduction in the overall use of B&B. At the time of writing there were 48 households in B&B/nightly paid accommodation - 9 of these are in self-contained accommodation.

Throughout 2017/18 the reduction in use of B&B and expenditure has consistently exceeded targets and so projections have been reviewed accordingly throughout the course of the year. Ambitious targets were set and agreed in July over a period of the next three years to reduce B&B usage - £300k for 17/18 and £250k per annum for each of the subsequent two financial years - a total of £800k. Due to significant successes over the year in January 2018 members agreed a challenging but achievable additional savings target of a further £350k in 2018/19 and £100k in 20/21. This totals £1.25m savings - and more importantly perhaps, a reduction in the number of households and length of stay in B&B - improving outcomes for homeless families.



The Housing Service has been committed to reducing the use of B&B, especially its longer term use for vulnerable families. The significant achievements relating to the reduction in the use of B&B can confidently be attributed to a number of strands of activity underpinning a sustained and concerted effort to reduce homelessness in Reading, many of which have recently been identified by the DCLG as areas of best practice. These include the following activities:

- Implementing a range of prevention activity and financial support to help homeless households - using this financial resource flexibly and considering innovative solutions to meet needs.
- Setting up a dedicated team to work intensively with families on their housing options to find personalised move on solutions helping them to move from B&B as quickly as possible.
- Increasing the capacity of applicants to find their own accommodation through advice and coaching on how to approach landlords and agencies, and development of a 'tenants pack' and a workshop to support people to find accommodation.
- Introducing the use of the Private Rented Sector Offers (PRSO) to assist with moving families on from B&B, and to encourage increased take up of PRS offers to prevent homelessness.
- Ensuring close management of new placements, which are authorised by a manager and include a move on plan, with all placements reviewed at a weekly meeting.
- Effective planning and regular monitoring of supply and demand, including regular reforecasting and refocusing activity.
- Developing temporary accommodation options as alternatives to B&B, including 35 temporary accommodation units refurbished and brought back into use over 2 years, and options to maximise existing stock, empty homes and regeneration sites - 40 flats vacated as part of a regeneration brought back into use as pending redevelopment.
- Development of a more commercial Rent Guarantee Scheme (RGS) to secure more vetted and affordable private rented sector (PRS) housing - with circa 370 properties on the scheme currently.
- Incorporated Homes for Reading Ltd to purchase and responsibly let private rented housing with a proportion let at sub-market rent.
- Increasing the supply of, and access to, affordable permanent and temporary accommodation through the Council's new build housing programme - 28 units at Lowfield Rd are almost completed and a 57 home scheme at Conwy Close is being built out and will deliver the first new homes this autumn.

- Development of a dedicated Welfare Reform Team working with other agencies to support households affected by benefit reductions, including through employment support and the development of a strong working relationship with the DWP delivering advice at the Job Centre.

In terms of rehousing people, the 28 new modular construction homes at Lowfield Rd are expected to be available for occupation in February. This scheme is one of the first of its kind nationally and is providing affordable accommodation to households in significant need. This will further reduce the numbers of families in B&B.

It is worth noting that whilst the Housing Service is firmly committed to reducing the use of B&B there are many risks already identified in the housing market including the lack of supply of social housing; a static Local Housing Allowance (the amount of Housing Benefit payable); the further reduced benefit cap; and the introduction of universal credit. These will continue to place a strain on the availability of affordable housing. In addition 2018 sees the introduction of new challenges, including introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2018. The Housing Needs Service has been preparing for these changes and whilst the teams are aiming to be well placed to deal with the challenge, significant increases in homelessness casework are predicted.