

Chichester District Council

CABINET

7 July 2015

Review of the Internal Lettings Agency (Homefinder)

1. Contacts

Report Author:

Rob Dunmall, Housing Operations Manager,

Tel: 01243 785166 Ext. 2334 E-mail: rdunmall@chichester.gov.uk

Cabinet Member:

Susan Taylor, Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning,

Tel: 01243 514034 E-Mail: sttaylor@chichester.gov.uk

2. Recommendation

2.1. That the internal lettings agency (Homefinder) be continued.

3. Background

3.1. On 1 November 2011 Cabinet approved the setting up of an internal lettings agency called Homefinder, subject to review after 18 months, and that commuted sums money not exceeding £105,000 over 3 years be used for that purpose.

3.2. Homefinder was reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 5 September 2013 and Cabinet on 8 October 2013 and it was resolved that the internal lettings agency be continued subject to a further review after it had been running for 3 years and that the unspent £105,000 commuted sums money be transferred to fund the rural enabling officer post on a fixed term contract for up to 3 years.

3.3. Homefinder was set up to assist the Council in dealing with the anticipated rise in homelessness arising from the impacts of the welfare reforms and to allow us to discharge the main housing duty owed to homeless applicants by the offer of suitable accommodation in the private rented sector

4. Outcomes to be achieved

4.1. An explanation of the Homefinder internal lettings agency scheme and a review of its performance are set out in the appendix to this report.

4.2. In total Homefinder placed 177 households in the private rented sector in the 3 years from 1 April 2012, a sector that is becoming increasingly more difficult to access by low income households. For comparison we placed 111 households in the private rented sector in the previous 3 years.

- 4.3. The team is currently managing 38 private rented sector dwellings under the Homefinder Gold scheme and achieved an income of £22,068 in 2014/15
- 4.4. Tenancy sustainment is an important aspect of Homefinder. We assist landlords and tenants to maintain tenancies that are at risk of failing and would otherwise lead to the tenant becoming homeless. From 1 April 2012 Homefinder has successfully sustained 40 tenancies.
- 4.5. The unit cost of preventing homelessness via Homefinder in the first 3 years of operation was £850, which is far lower than the cost of up to £3,150 for placing a homeless household in bed and breakfast accommodation for a period of 10 weeks. Research by Herriot-Watt University in 2007 indicated that the cost of helping someone who is already homeless amounts to £5,300 per case per year.

5. Proposal

- 5.1. It is proposed that Homefinder should be continued because it provides value for money by preventing homeless at a reasonable cost and has a positive impact on the households who are assisted by it preventing them being made homeless.
- 5.2. That Cabinet note the conclusions at page 6 of the appendix.

6. Alternatives that have been considered

- 6.1. There is no realistic economic alternative to Homefinder. A number of alternatives were considered in the original report to Cabinet on 1 November 2011 and none of them were considered to be viable. No new alternatives have emerged since that time.

7. Resource and legal implications

- 7.1. Homefinder is budgeted for in the current financial year at a net cost of £77,200.
- 7.2. Without Homefinder there would be a need to place a higher number of homeless households in temporary accommodation or bed and breakfast which would have a significant adverse impact upon the housing budget.
- 7.3. Ceasing Homefinder may lead to households with children or a pregnant household member remaining in bed and breakfast for longer than the 6 week period permitted by legislation.

8. Consultation

- 8.1. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a draft copy of this report at its meeting on 2 July 2015 and the Chairman will report orally on its recommendations.

9. Community impact and corporate risks

- 9.1. Homefinder has a positive impact upon vulnerable households that are threatened with homelessness. Without the scheme there would be an increase in homelessness, which may result in an increase in rough sleeping or placements into temporary accommodation including bed and breakfast.

10. Other Implications

	Yes	No
Crime & Disorder:		X
Climate Change:		X
Human Rights and Equality Impact:		X
Safeguarding: Homefinder can have a positive impact upon our ability to safeguard children and vulnerable adults because the Homefinder Officer visits a Homefinder Gold tenant in their home at least twice during each 6 month assured shorthold tenancy period. Any safeguarding concerns are reported to the Children's Access Point or Adult Services Access Point.	X	

11. Appendix

- 11.1. Review of the Internal Lettings Agency (Homefinder)

.

12. Background Papers

- 12.1. Cabinet Report dated 1 November 2011 – Improved Access to the Private Rented Sector in the Chichester District.