

Report of the Portfolio Holder for Housing

HOUSING FURNITURE SCHEME

1. Purpose of Report

To outline a proposal to implement furnished tenancies for Council tenants.

2. Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to RESOLVE that the proposal and a one-off budget of £5,000 for external legal advice be approved in 2022/23, to be funded from Housing Revenue Account (HRA) working balances.

3. Detail

The housing department are aware that a number of tenants are living without essential furniture items. The Council has many successful partnerships with charity organisations that help, but the demand can't always be met and there is usually still a cost to the tenant. Also, appliances are rarely available.

Research completed by End Furniture Poverty found the following impact on an average family annual bill:

- Living without a cooker adds £2,100 to food bill
- Living without a fridge/freezer, adds £1,365 to food bill
- Living without a washing machine adds £1,000 washing expenses
- Living with faulty or inefficient white goods adds over £100 to energy bills

End Furniture Poverty have also found other impacts of furniture poverty:

- Mental health – people may feel a stigma as they are unable to afford basic items, they are also unlikely to invite people into their home
- Physical health – people may be unable to sleep well, or cook a health meal
- Financial – people can get into unmanageable debt to acquire items

An action was included in the Housing Business Plan to address this. Initial research suggested that furniture packs could be provided by an external company, and that the cost would be housing benefit and universal credit eligible. However, when more detailed work was completed it was clear that not all aspects of the service could be covered by benefits, and therefore the scheme would not meet the needs of our tenants.

It is proposed that to achieve the aim set out in the Housing Business Plan the Council should look to offer furnished tenancies. This option would not be simple or quick to implement and would require external legal advice. Only 2% of all social housing tenancies are let as furnished, but there are some landlords that have offered successful schemes for many years.

If the proposal is approved further work would be completed and a report would be presented to Cabinet, outlining the details and any risks, for final approval before any furnished tenancies commence. An Equalities Impact Assessment will also be completed at this time.

The budget for legal advice is calculated based on previous legal advice received in regards to the Council's Secure tenancy agreements.

4. Financial Implications

The comments from the Head of Finance Services were as follows:

The anticipated cost of the external legal advice required is £5,000. This is considered to be a one-off revenue cost in 2022/23 and will be funded from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) working balances.

5. Legal Implications

The comments from the Monitoring Officer / Head of Legal Services were as follows:

There are no direct complications that arise from this report

6. Human Resources Implications

The comments from the Human Resources Manager were as follows:

Not applicable

7. Union Comments

The Union comments were as follows.

Not applicable

8. Data Protection Compliance Implications

Not applicable

9. Equality Impact Assessment

Not applicable

10. Background Papers

Nil.