

# Report

5

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| Report to:       | <b>Housing and Technical Resources Committee</b>   |
| Date of Meeting: | <b>17 June 2009</b>  |
| Report by:       | <b>Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources)<br/>Executive Director (Corporate Resources)</b> |

|          |   |
|----------|---|
| Subject: | <b>Allocation of the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) Fund and Fairer Scotland Fund</b> |
|----------|---|

## 1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ◆ update Committee on proposals to utilise funding allocated to Housing and Technical Resources from the Department of Works and Pensions (D.W.P.) and Enterprise Resources as part of the Fairer Scotland Fund initiative.
- ◆ request authorisation to increase the establishment by 1 Money Adviser and 16 Clerical Assistants.

## 2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Committee is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that the proposals outlined in section 4 for the use of the additional funds for Housing and Technical Resources be approved.
- (2) that an establishment increase of 17 posts be approved within Support/Area Services for a period of 1 year. The posts consisting of:
  - ◆ 1 Money Adviser (Grade 2, level 3, scp 38-48) and,
  - ◆ 16 Clerical Assistants (Grade 1, level 1-3, scp 1-25)

## 3. Background

- 3.1. As a result of the current national economic problems The D.W.P. has provided additional funds to all Councils specifically to assist in coping with additional enquiries in relation to Benefits entitlement and in many cases changes to current entitlement.
- 3.2. Whilst the Council has not yet seen a significant rise in the value or number of Benefit claims being awarded the volume of enquiries including claims being assessed but being unsuccessful has risen considerably. This has resulted in a marked increase in the workload of Benefits staff and is expected to increase further over the next 12 months. This increased workload is having an adverse impact on the time taken to process new claims and changes to the circumstances of current claims. This was further highlighted during the past year where the year end performance in both areas fell compared to previous years.

- 3.3. The economic situation is also leading to increases in the number of residents seeking assistance from the Money Matters Advice Service and, through discussions with our colleagues in Enterprise Resources, funds have been made available to provide additional assistance in this important area via the Fairer Scotland Fund.

#### **4. Proposals for use of the monies**

##### **4.1. Assisting in dealing with benefits enquiries and processing claims**

- 4.1.1. As members will be aware the economic situation has led to increases in the number of people losing their jobs which in turn has led to an increase in the number of residents seeking information on Benefit entitlements.
- 4.1.2. The D.W.P. has recognised that Councils will experience increased workloads for processing new claims, changes to individuals' financial circumstances on their current claims but also general enquiries from residents wishing to establish whether or not they will be entitled to Benefits.
- 4.1.3. The current situation within Housing and Technical Resources reflects this national trend with the volume of enquiries via the phone, in person to our Q and A's and via the Internet all increasing.
- 4.1.4. This has resulted in the performance of the Resource for the time taken to process claims increasing to 13 days from a target of 12 days and the time taken to process changes of circumstances increasing to 7 days from a target of 6 days. This is the first time in many years that these two important performance indicators have not been achieved.
- 4.1.5. Staff are also having to deal with substantial increases in claims from residents who believe they may be entitled to Benefit but are unsuccessful when the claim is submitted.
- 4.1.6. This increase in general correspondence and contact from the public is resulting in skilled Benefits Officers having their time diverted to additional administrative tasks at the expense of duties commensurate with their skills.
- 4.1.7. It is therefore proposed that the Resource recruits 15 Clerical Assistants to be located within the Housing Area offices and the Benefit Support Section at Brandon Gate to provide assistance to the offices in dealing with the increased enquires and associated increases in administration (Appendix 1). Twelve Clerical Assistants will report to the Team Leader (B & R) similar to the Benefits and Revenue Assistants (BARAs) and 3 Clerical Assistants will report to the Principal Officer (Accounts Management) in the Revenues Management Team, Central Revenues, Brandongate.

##### **4.2. Assisting residents wishing to return to work**

- 4.2.1. In April 2008 Housing and Technical Resources received approval for the use of funds allocated from the Fairer Scotland Fund to employ staff to assist residents who wish to return to work with financial advice.

- 4.2.2. Whilst this assistance has been very successful the decline in the economic situation since then has resulted in an increase in the number of residents approaching the Council for guidance.
- 4.2.3. This assistance has seen staff work closely with individuals outlining what impact returning to work would have on their benefits and what financial help they may be entitled to in relation to other benefits with a view to encouraging them back to work.
- 4.2.4. It is therefore proposed that for a period of 1 year the Resource recruits 1 Money Adviser and 1 Clerical Assistant (Appendix 1) with the objective of assisting Area offices cope with additional enquiries, interviews and associated general increases in administration. The Money Adviser will report to the Benefits Project Team Co-ordinator and the Clerical Assistant will report to the Welfare Rights Co-ordinator.

## **5. Employee Implications**

- 5.1. It is proposed that the following posts be approved for a period of 1 year.

- ◆ 1 Money Adviser (Grade 2, Level 3 (£19,453 - £22,556)), and
- ◆ 16 Clerical Assistants Grade (Grade 1, Level 1-3 (£11,187 - £16,004))

These posts have been evaluated under the Council's competence initiative and job evaluation scheme.

## **6. Financial Implications**

- 6.1. It is anticipated that the total funding required to provide the additional services will be £293,000. The Department of Works and Pensions have provided £258,000 and Enterprise Resources have allocated a further £35,000 from the Fairer Scotland Fund. The expenditure will comprise of staffing costs £289,724, detailed below, and office and travel expenses of £3,276.

| Post Title          | Grade & Level      | SCP Range | Hourly Rate | Annual Pay | Gross Cost | No. of Posts | Total employee costs | Sub Total |
|---------------------|--------------------|-----------|-------------|------------|------------|--------------|----------------------|-----------|
| Money Adviser       | Grade 2, Level 3   | 38 - 48   | £11.63      | £21,224    | £25,787    | 1            | £25,787              | £26,079   |
| Clerical Assistants | Grade 1, Level 1-3 | 1 – 28    | £7.44       | £13,577    | £16,496    | 16           | £263,937             | £266,921  |
|                     |                    |           |             |            | Totals     | 17           | £289,724             | £293,000  |

## **7. Other Implications**

- 7.1. None

## **8. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements**

- 8.1. This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy and therefore no impact assessment is required.
- 8.2. Regular consultation has been on-going and will continue to be undertaken with Enterprise Resources over the proposed initiative and the anticipated outcomes.

8.3. Consultation has taken place with Corporate Personnel.

**Jim Hayton**  
**Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources)**

**Robert McIlwain**  
**Executive Director (Corporate Resources)**

26 May 2009

**Link(s) to Council Objectives and Values**

- ◆ Tackling Disadvantage and Deprivation
- ◆ Improving the Lives of Vulnerable Children, Young People and Adults

**Previous References**

None

**List of Background Papers**

- ◆ Housing and Technical Resources Committee 8 April 2008

**Contact for Further Information**

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:-

Patrick Murphy, Head of Support Services

Ext: 4065 (Tel: 01698 454065)

E-mail: [patrick.j.murphy@southlanarkshire.gov.uk](mailto:patrick.j.murphy@southlanarkshire.gov.uk)