

Name of decision maker:	Councillor Margaret Griffiths
Portfolio:	Housing
Date of Portfolio Holder Decision:	29 May 2007

Title of Decision: The appointment of a Home Energy Conservation Officer.

Decision made and reasons: To agree to the appointment of a Home Energy Conservation Officer to deal with issues relating to the conservation of energy in both the private sector and in council owned homes. Around 30% of all energy used is used within the home. Home energy conservation is an important issue in relation to Fuel Poverty, Decent Homes, the Housing Health and Safety Rating System and Climate Change. A Home Energy Conservation Officer will help to resolve these issues and reduce the energy used in the Borough, which will in turn help with the Council's commitment to the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change and meet other obligations.

Reports considered:
Officer's Report attached.

Officers/Councillors/Ward Councillors/Stakeholders Consulted:
Chief Executive, Director of Communities, Customers and Housing, Director of Environment and Regeneration, Head of Public Protection, Head of Housing and Community Services, Senior Manager - Housing Maintenance, Management Accountant - Housing.

Monitoring Officer/Chief Financial Officer Comments:
No comments to add from either officer.

Risk Implications: The Council is under a duty to reduce home energy use under the Home Energy Conservation Act. It is also has a corporate/social responsibility to reduce the causes of climate change and fuel poverty. In addition it has an obligation to lead and take action on these issues following the signing of the Nottingham Declaration. Failure to address these issues and those set out in the report could result in the failure to meet targets, adverse publicity and criticism from external assessments.

Options Considered and reasons for rejection:
The proposal identifies an improvement in service to allow many corporate responsibilities to be taken forwards. If the proposal is not accepted these improvements will not be possible.

Portfolio Holders Signature:

Date:

Details of any interests declared and any dispensations given by the Standards Committee:

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Date Decision Record Sheet received from portfolio holder: 29 May 2007

Date Decision Published: 29 May 2007 Decision No: PH/034/07

Date of Expiry of Call-In Period: 5 June 2007

Date any Call-In received or decision implemented:

Home Energy Conservation Officer

REPORT FOR PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR HOUSING

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To give an overview of the work related to home energy conservation and to identify an improvement in service delivery, through the appointment of a dedicated Home Energy Conservation Officer, to take this area of work forwards.

IMPLICATIONS

Key Corporate Objectives

Reducing domestic energy use and helping implement the use of renewable energy sources helps in Creating a Cleaner and Healthier Environment. Improving insulation and reducing energy costs helps reduce fuel poverty and the risk of cold related illness, which help in Improving Social Care and Health. Much of the installation work regarding energy efficiency and renewable energy will be carried out by local trades people, so helping to Ensure Easy Access To Local Employment. Domestic renewable energy is still an emerging field and it is likely that new companies will be formed to tackle this market. Energy efficient homes are more affordable to live in and so improving the quality of homes in the Borough, helping with the theme of Meeting Housing Need.

Financial

There will be no increase in expenditure resulting from the appointment of a Home Energy Conservation Officer. Funding for the post will be met from within existing budgets. The existing funding will need to be converted into employee related budgets, such as salaries, vehicle use, etc.

RECOMMENDATION

That a post be created to allow the appointment of a Home Energy Conservation Officer to work on energy conservation issues in both public sector and private sector housing.

BACKGROUND

1. Home energy conservation has been seen as an important issue by the Council for many years, even before global warming and climate change became everyday issues. The Environmental Health Division has been involved with giving assistance, including grants and other advice, to householders on this subject for over 25 years. The basic drivers for this were the effect on the environment of wasted energy and the potential health effects on the occupants of poorly insulated homes. The Housing Department has also been proactive in its approach to energy conservation in the Council's own housing stock, with a programme of installing energy efficiency measures going back over many years. As a result of more recent awareness, energy conservation issues have

subsequently moved up the local, national and international agenda. It is estimated that around 30% of all the energy used in the country is used in the domestic sector.

2. In 1995 the Home Energy Conservation Act was introduced, coming in to effect in 1996. This classified each Local Housing Authority within England as an Energy Conservation Authority. The Act placed a responsibility on every Energy Conservation Authority to report to the government on the energy used in homes in its area and then report annually on the work that has been undertaken and the improvements made in home energy efficiency within its area. The goal was to try to improve the energy efficiency of homes by 30% over a 10 to 15 year period. The Act covered both the private and the public sector.
3. Due to the time constraints set by the Act and the lack of the specialist knowledge needed to produce the detailed energy consumption calculations along with the relevant carbon dioxide emissions calculations needed, etc. a consultant was employed to take on this area of work. In the main these consultants have continued with this work over the years. Much of this work, particularly in the earlier years, was jointly procured between Environmental Health and Housing Maintenance.
4. Working with the consultants has been a useful exercise, making use of their specialist knowledge and skills. However, the majority of the opportunities offered through this partnership have now been explored and utilised and it is felt that a new approach now would open up new opportunities for improvements in energy efficiency in homes within the Borough in a more cost-effective way.
5. In more recent times increased awareness has lead to the publication of a number of documents and Acts of Parliament that increase the emphasis on energy efficiency and the reduction in carbon emissions. These include the Sustainable Energy Act 2003, the Energy Act 2004, The Climate Change and Sustainable Energy Act 2006, The Government's Fuel Poverty Strategy, The Energy White Paper, the Stern Review and the Energy Review 2006. Most recently the draft Climate Change Bill has been announced. Each of these places, or potentially places, more responsibilities on local authorities to take action to tackle the issues around energy consumption and climate change. In addition, thermal comfort and the effects of excess cold are matters that need to be considered in determining the Decent Homes Standard and also in the Housing Health and Safety Rating System. The SAP Rating of council homes is also a reported BVPI.
6. Joint work with other councils across Hertfordshire, through the Herts Environmental Forum – Energy Group, has resulted in a number of useful home energy efficiency projects. A dedicated Home Energy Conservation Officer would be able to take these forwards to better effect at a local level. The Home Energy Officers Network (HEON) for the Eastern Region has also initiated a number of projects to help improve home energy efficiency. These include a Data Analysis Tool, which can be used to identify areas of specific interest based on a wide range of selection criteria, such as pensioner households, households receiving benefit, households with disabled occupants, households without central heating,

etc. This Tool is ideal for a dedicated officer to use for targeting specific energy efficiency campaigns to areas where they are most likely to be effective, etc.

7. There are many opportunities for partnership working in this area, both with the voluntary sector and with installation companies, manufacturers, energy supply companies, external agencies and other internal departments. A dedicated local officer could build these partnerships to take this area of work forwards.
8. Although it does not have any direct control over the private sector housing stock, the Council still has a responsibility to improve housing conditions in the area. Under The Communities and Local Government Public Service Agreement (PSA) 7, part of this responsibility is to reduce the number of homes that fail to meet the Decent Homes Standard, particularly those occupied by vulnerable households. The latest figures available from the English House Condition Survey (2005) shows a national average of 19.8 % of homes in the private sector failed to meet the Decent Homes Thermal Comfort Standard, which is the most common reason for a home to fail the Decent Home Standard. This standard sets a minimum requirement of a combination of heating and insulation measures. A housing stock modeling exercise carried out by the BRE in 2005 estimated that 24% of the private sector housing in Dacorum failed to meet the Decent Homes Thermal Comfort Standard. This equates to be around 11,000 homes. The Council is also under an obligation to ensure that all of its own housing meets the Decent Homes Standard by 2010. A dedicated home energy conservation officer would be able to use the data that is available to help improve the energy efficiency of these homes, as a priority.
9. The use of renewable energy sources is a way of reducing carbon emissions and helping to provide secure energy supplies for the future. Systems are now becoming available that can be installed within the residential market. A dedicated home energy conservation officer would be able to promote such systems and develop schemes to encourage their installation at a local level. Projects could be developed in both the public and private sector, leveraging in external funding where available, to utilise these technologies. In addition, capital projects for our own housing stock could include the use of renewable energy technologies. An in-house expert would be able to help select and procure suitable technologies for use in such projects. This would include planned and reactive maintenance, as well as major refurbishment projects within the council stock.
10. Fuel Poverty, which is a national priority, tends to mostly affect vulnerable households, particularly those on a low income. Fuel poverty is generally defined as where a household has to spend more than 10% of its income on fuel to maintain an adequate standard of warmth in the home. The prevalence of fuel poverty is affected by three factors, the income of the household, the price of fuel and the amount of energy that needs to be used to maintain an adequate level of warmth. The less energy a household needs to use, the less likely they are to be in fuel poverty. Local work by a dedicated officer will increase the take-up of insulation and other energy efficiency measures, which will in turn reduce the levels of fuel poverty in the Borough. Fuel poverty affects both the private and the

public sector. The Government's aim is to eliminate fuel poverty in vulnerable households by 2010 and to eliminate it in all households by 2016.

11. An important factor in promoting energy efficiency is education. A dedicated officer could arrange suitable training for those in direct contact with householders (public and private) such as Contact Centre staff, Health Visitors, Housing Officers, etc. in order that as many people as possible, in both the public and private sector, can be given advice and referred on for assistance where appropriate. In addition the person could take responsibility for the Housing Energy Strategy and represent the Housing Department on energy conservation issues both within the Council and more widely at County and Eastern Region level.
12. In the past two years the budget allocated for this area of work in the private sector has not been fully spent. This is partly because the partnership work has become less effective over recent years, and also in order that some monies can be carried forward to enable a large scale, detailed housing survey to be carried out in the private sector. This survey will include detailed information regarding energy efficiency of homes within the Borough, as well as general housing conditions information. The results will allow further targeting of specific projects or the promotion of specific measures to take place in the areas where it is likely to have the greatest effect. A survey is currently being undertaken to assess the effects of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System on council houses in the Borough. This again will help target future action, along with other house condition survey information collected over recent years with the aim of improving the energy efficiency of the Council's own housing stock.

Financial Implications

1. The work currently undertaken relating to home energy conservation in the private sector is funded through the Housing General Fund, with an annual budget of £23,000. In addition, resources are provided through HRA for energy conservation work through Housing Maintenance. It is anticipated that an additional £20,000 could be specifically identified to cover the costs of this post. These existing budget allocations would need to be converted into employee related budgets, such as salaries, vehicle use, etc. in order to accommodate this new post.
2. The cost of employing an officer with the necessary interpersonal skills, technical knowledge and marketing/presentational skills, to fulfil this role successfully, is anticipated to be in the region of £30,000 to £35,000, including on-costs.
3. In addition, the work involves a large amount of promotional work, as a result a budget for promotional activities of around £5,000 would also be required to allow the work to be carried out effectively.