

REPORT TO:	Finance and Management Committee	AGENDA ITEM: 19
DATE OF MEETING:	21st June 2007	CATEGORY: Delegated
REPORT FROM:	Head of Housing	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	Victoria Taylor-Stokes	DOC:
SUBJECT:	2 year fixed term post for the Mystery Shopping exercise	REF:
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	None	TERMS OF REFERENCE: HCSO1, FMO5

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 To approve the appointment of a fixed term post of Mystery Shopping Co-ordinator at **no** costs to the Council.

2. Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To agree that SDDC Housing Services facilitate and operate the Mystery Shopping co-ordinator post, which has been allocated finance through GOEM (Government Office East Midlands) to fund this post on a 2 year, fixed term contract.
- 2.2 As this matter relates to a personnel issue the Finance and Management Committee needs to make the decision although as a matter of policy the Housing and Community Services Committee considered it at their meeting on 14th June 2007. A verbal update on that Committee's recommendation will be given at the meeting.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Derbyshire Tenants' Network (DTN) was formed in 2003. It brings together tenants from Housing Associations, ALMOs (Arms length management organisations) and Local Authorities across Derbyshire to discuss common issues, share good practice and initiate joint projects. It is supported by officers from landlords across the county and the DTN works closely with the Derbyshire Tenant Participation Workers Group (DTPWG) and the East Midlands Tenant Participation Forum.
- 3.2 One of the aims of the Derbyshire Tenants' Network is to contribute to improving housing service delivery and raising standards both within individual housing organisations and across the county. To this end, its members are keen to explore ways in which they can directly contribute to monitoring services and commenting on the quality of those services.

- 3.3 In March 2006 officers from the DTPWG put forward a proposal to the DTN to form a Mystery Shopping Group, where trained tenants from the landlords in the group would telephone and sample or 'shop' the service across all the landlords. This would ensure that the shops are conducted in a consistent and objective manner and would also allow for a true comparison of service delivery across Derbyshire.
- 3.4 Initially six landlord members of the group became members of the DTN Mystery Shopping Group. These were Amber Valley Housing Ltd; Bolsover District Council; Chesterfield Borough Council; Derwent Living; South Derbyshire District Council and Three Valleys Housing Ltd. Rykneld Homes, the ALMO for North East Derbyshire District Council, have subsequently also become members of the group.
- 3.5 Membership of the group entitles the landlord to a complete Mystery Shop and the opportunity to have six tenants trained in Mystery Shopping and Presentation Skills sample their service. The trained tenants, working with the landlord, are involved in setting all aspects of the shop, including setting the scenarios, conducting the shop, writing the report and presenting its findings to the landlord. Six shops have so far been conducted and the Group have now begun their 2007 programme.
- 3.6 Alongside its full membership, the Group also offers its services to non members, including conducting a full shop and the training of tenants. The group have also formed a partnership with Pennington Consulting to conduct the Mystery Shopping element of the Mock Inspection services they provide.
- 3.7 In March 2007 the Group put forward a grant application to the Regional Housing Board, to fund a position of a Facilitator for the Group in relation to mystery shopping. This position will be initially for a part time, two year fixed contract. The funding, of £30,000 to cover a two year post, has been approved and is now awaiting transfer to a Local Authority landlord.
- 3.8 A major part of the facilitator's role will be to promote and expand the Mystery Shopping Group, with an aim to create a viable, self sustained social enterprise, allowing the facilitator's post to continue.

4. Financial Implications

	2007/8 £'000	2008/9 £'000
Gross costs	+25%	+25%
1 part time co-ordinator scale 4	11448.53	11876.35
Work space/ongoing costs	3000	1000
Funded by GOEM	15,000	15,000
AT NO COST	+551.47	+2123.65

- 4.1 There are no financial implications for South Derbyshire District Council in taking on this post.

5. Corporate Implications

- 5.1 The post will be employee of the District Council but on a fixed term temporary contract. The salary for the post is covered in the grant alongwith an amount for on-costs (to cover office costs and officer support from other functions within the Council)

6. Community Implications

- 6.1 The post will aid the improvement in service delivery of social landlords across Derbyshire.