

Report to: Cabinet



Date of Meeting 3 March 2021

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Housing Options team staffing requirement

Report summary:

To address a staffing requirement within the Housing Options team

Recommendation:

That Cabinet note the requested change to the current staffing arrangement and recommend to Council to agree the upgrading of a part time post to a full time post and the additional budget required for this.

Reason for recommendation:

To ensure the Housing Options team are better equipped to tackle the level of pressure on the homelessness service

Officer: Andrew Mitchell, Housing Solutions Manager

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergencies
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Culture, Tourism, Leisure and Sport
- Democracy and Transparency
- Economy and Assets
- Finance
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities

Financial implications:

Financial details are contained in the report.

Legal implications:

This is properly a matter for Council to determine. There are no other legal implications requiring comment.

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk;

The risk of not making the recommended change to the current staffing arrangement includes higher numbers of homeless cases and a resulting increase in the temporary accommodation budget.

Links to background information [Cabinet 28 October 2020 item 239](#)

Link to [Council Plan](#):

Priorities (check which apply)

- Outstanding Place and Environment
 - Outstanding Homes and Communities
 - Outstanding Economic Growth, Productivity, and Prosperity
 - Outstanding Council and Council Services
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Report in full

1. Current levels of homelessness in the district

- 1.1 As of 4 February 2021 there are 281 open homeless cases and 48 households in temporary accommodation. Housing Officers within the Options team are holding high numbers of cases each, in a period before a significant second wave of homelessness is expected when landlords are no longer restricted from evicting tenants in the private sector, consistently the major reason for homeless approaches year on year to EDDC. Also to be factored in are the economic situations created by the pandemic including people losing jobs and income being reduced creating barriers to the affordability of rent and mortgage payments, ultimately contributing towards evictions and loss of homes. The effects will inevitably continue in the short and medium term and lead towards rises in homeless levels in the future, as we feel the wider effects of the economic impact of covid restrictions on business and employers

2. Funding for staffing

- 2.1 Since the Homelessness Reduction Act became effective from April 2018 only one and a half additional posts have been added to the Housing Options team using funding from the general account. A case was made for additional staffing resources in November 2019 following an analysis of the staffing structure where recommendations for additional staffing were made. This resulted in a fixed term Housing Officer post being agreed and the post became operational from March 2019, on a fixed term basis for 12 months. It was agreed at the Cabinet meeting on 28 October 2020 that the post would be made permanent, alongside a request for a vacant part time post to be made up from 21 hours a week to 37 hours a week, effectively an additional half post.
- 2.2 It has been confirmed that the allocation of funding from the MHCLG has increased for 2021-22. The Homelessness Prevention Grant of £261,375 replaces the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant (£111,394) and Homelessness Reduction Grant (£70,206) awarded in 2020-21. Funding provided by the MHCLG since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2018 has been used to fund two other Housing Officer posts.
- 2.3 Three posts exist due to further MHCLG funding through Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) Funding. This funding has been available annually for the past two years through a bidding system and is specifically aimed at assisting rough sleepers. For 2020-21 a total of £230,000 has been awarded to EDDC through a joint bid with Mid Devon District Council. The funding is allocated as follows:

- £100k for 3 Rough Sleeper Navigator posts (one full time for each LA and one shared, all fixed term)
- £75k for 2 Private Sector Liaison Officer posts (one for each LA, fixed term)
- £20k prevention pot (£10k to each LA)
- £35k Housing First support (contract with BCHA) – providing floating support for 6 former rough sleepers accommodated in our own stock (3 for each LA)

2.4 Bidding for 2021-22 funding through the RSI scheme is underway at this time, with the closing date for bids set as 26 February 2021 and results expected to be confirmed in April.

2.5 Overall, the most effective action we can take to tackle homelessness and in turn reduce the temporary accommodation budget, is to ensure that sufficient resources are in place to successfully prevent and relieve homelessness, with the expectation that interaction and preventative measures provide positive outcomes for applicants and dispel the need for temporary accommodation. The staff resources available to the Housing Options team are constantly under review in order to meet increasing demand and ensure we are set up to successfully reduce homelessness.

3. Staffing recommendation

3.1 A vacancy has occurred within the Housing Options team due to the resignation of a part-time Housing Officer who was working 18.5 hours a week.

3.2 This vacancy has created an opportunity to further review the structure of the team and which posts work effectively. It is considered by the management of the Options team (Housing Solutions Manager and Housing Options Manager) that it is not possible to successfully and proactively manage a homeless caseload whilst only working two and a half days a week. Due to the intense nature of the cases and the homeless situations being managed, there is a much stronger possibility of arriving at a positive outcome with the Housing Officer working on a full-time basis. The benefits of successful prevention of homelessness not only benefit the customer but also benefit the council, as there would be less need for the use of expensive emergency accommodation. The most effective and efficient method of reducing emergency accommodation expenditure levels is by setting the service up to prevent homelessness at an early stage.

3.3 Also to be considered in looking at the viability of a part time role is that responsibilities of all Housing Officers include taking part in the duty rota, dealing with new homeless approaches on the day they present. Working part time severely restricts the Housing Officer from effectively managing their caseload and meeting the needs of the service.

3.4 Therefore the request is made to bring this part time post up to the status of a full time post. This will ensure the team are better equipped to cope with the rising demands on the service with Housing Officers enabled to effectively and proactively manage a caseload with the emphasis on preventing homelessness, ultimately saving expenditure on emergency accommodation. The request is to upgrade the post from part time (18.5 hours a week) to full time (37 hours a week) by adding an additional 18.5 hours a week to the position.

3.5 The additional funding for 2021-22 (referred to in 2.3) could be used to cover the additional £14,611 (including on costs) that would be needed to upgrade the vacant part time post to a full time post.

3.6 In summary, this staffing recommendation has been made with the intention of maintaining the focus on preventing homelessness and avoiding a rise in the numbers of individuals and households that become homeless, which would in turn become extremely costly to the service through additional temporary accommodation placements.