

Report to: Cabinet



Date of Meeting: 8 September 2021

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Request for additional staffing resources

Report summary:

To address a staffing requirement within the Housing Options team

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

That Cabinet recommend to Council to approve the additional budget in respect of two additional fixed term, full time Housing Officer posts, for 12 months each, to deal with the additional demand on the homelessness service. Budget in the region of £67,576 for two 12 months posts is recommended to Council for approval.

Reason for recommendation:

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

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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

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 report 3 March 2021 item 348](#)

[Link to Council Plan:](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

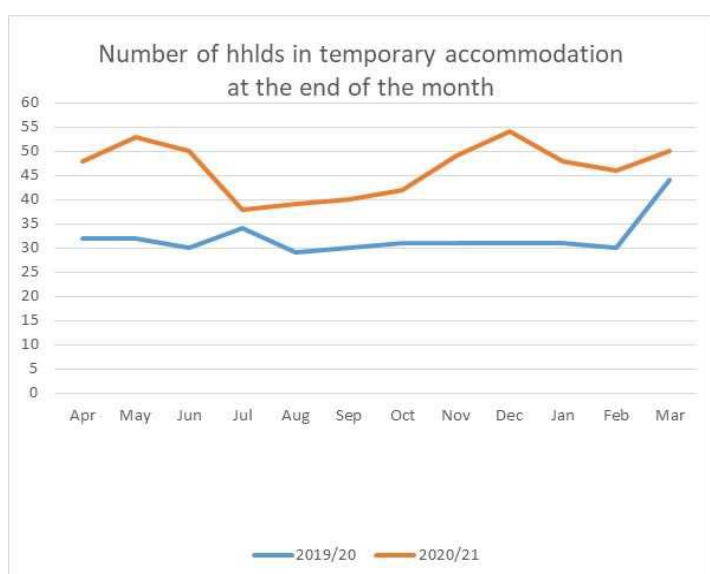
- Outstanding Place and Environment
- Outstanding Homes and Communities
- Outstanding Economic Growth, Productivity, and Prosperity
- Outstanding Council and Council Services

Report in full

1. Current levels of homelessness in the district and effects of the pandemic

1.1 The pandemic has resulted in large numbers of homeless situations for members of the public and this has been reflected in a significant rise in the need for emergency accommodation. There have been consistently higher numbers of people requiring emergency accommodation compared to the pre-pandemic era. Since the pandemic we have seen high numbers of people approaching as homeless for various reasons, most notably fleeing domestic violence, relationship breakdowns and no longer being able to move around freely and 'sofa-surf'. Also to be factored in are the economic factors created by the pandemic including people losing jobs and income being reduced, creating difficulties in affording rent and mortgage payments and ultimately creating homeless situations for members of the public.

1.2 This rise in the need for emergency accommodation, effectively showing the number of homeless presentations where people are immediately homeless with no viable alternative accommodation options, can be seen in the graph below. It is important to note that this increase has occurred without the inclusion of households being evicted from the private sector, due to the restrictions placed on landlords for over a year. Loss of accommodation in the private sector is ordinarily and consistently, year on year, the main recorded reason for homelessness in the region so to experience this rise in need without the main contributing factor being included is a significant situation.



1.3 We are now in the position where the expected 'second wave' of homelessness is upon us as restrictions previously placed upon landlords in the private sector, where they had been unable to evict tenants, have been lifted. This restriction had been in place for over a year and therefore there are a large number of households now facing homelessness due to

being served notices to quit. We are seeing a large number of homeless approaches with the serving of a notice to quits as the reason for impending homelessness and this is mirrored by a large rise in demand in new applications for social housing through Devon Home Choice, where notices from private landlords have been included in the application. The rise has been so significant that we have had to move a member of the Allocations team across from another role to help the Devon Home Choice Officer meet the increased demand.

- 1.4 To give an idea on the demand levels for customers who are facing imminent homelessness, over the past two weeks 70 cases have been passed by the Allocations team to the Options team where new applicants have stated they will become homeless due to notices to quit, parental evictions or domestic violence. These levels are unsustainable. As of 5th August 2021 there were 252 open homeless cases and we are expecting to see a substantial rise in the number of households placed into temporary accommodation in the coming weeks and months due to the number of new cases of people being evicted from the private sector. Housing Officers within the Options team are all holding high caseloads, to the point where we are unable to assign new cases due to a lack of capacity. 26 cases stood unassigned as of 5th August 2021, which is a level we have never experienced previously.
- 1.5 An effect of the restrictions being in place for so long is that there is less opportunity to intervene and prevent homelessness where it was previously possible, pre-pandemic. Under usual circumstances, once a notice has been served by a private landlord there is potential to intervene and mediate, negotiate or provide financial assistance or advice in order for the notice to be retracted and the impending homeless situation prevented. However, with such long notices period currently being experienced we have seen cases of relationships between landlords and tenants beyond the point of repair, and rent arrears escalated beyond potential prevention practices.
- 1.6 It has been well documented that rent levels have been increasing within the private sector. Families working full-time are being priced out of the market due to the rise in home working and people relocating to the area, resulting in increased rent levels. This will impact on homelessness levels and our demand and need for temporary accommodation. The housing register is receiving high levels of new applications each week.
- 1.7 There has been a notable increase in cases of domestic violence coming through. As a measure, the monthly Multi Agency Risk Assessment Committee (MARAC) meetings that deal with domestic abuse cases in the region have moved from monthly to fortnightly to meet demand, and this arranged is expected to remain.
- 1.8 Another factor is the effect of the pandemic and increase in homelessness on members of the Housing Options team, who have faced increased pressure levels. At present we have two full time Housing Officers who have been off work with work related stress issues, both now on a phased return with one of the Housing Officers not having completed a full working week since October 2020. Two other members of the team have reported incidents of stress and have had time off work as a result.

2. Funding for staffing

- 2.1 The current structure of the Housing Options team consists of thirteen full time posts and one part time post, including a manager and two senior Housing Officers, which are all

funded through the general fund. Increased funding to tackle homelessness has been received from the MHCLG for 2021-22 compared to the previous year. The Homelessness Prevention Grant for 2021-22 totals £261,375, compared to a combined £181,600 in 2020-21 through the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant (£111,394) and the Homelessness Reduction Grant (£70,206). This increase is in reaction to increased demand levels which are demonstrated through regular statistical returns to the government.

2.2 Four additional fixed term posts exist within the team due to further MHCLG funding through the Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI). This funding has been available annually for the past three years through a bidding system and is specifically aimed at assisting rough sleepers. For 2021-22 a total of £161,999 has been awarded to EDDC, with the following full-time posts all funded for this financial year:

- Two Rough Sleeper Navigators
- One Private Sector Liaison Officer and
- One Housing Officer focusing on Housing First support

3. Staffing recommendation

3.1 Due to the significant rise in homeless cases and the overall effects of the pandemic, and with particular reference to the high number of new approaches being made from private sector tenants facing eviction now that the restrictions have been lifted, it is considered that additional resources are required for a fixed term period. It is believed that it is essential to bring in two additional fixed term Housing Officer posts at the earliest opportunity in order to maintain the focus on preventing homelessness and avoiding significant rises 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. Any funding for this post would need to be drawn from the general fund.

3.2 The cost for each post, based on the posts being full time and at the bottom of scale 6, would be £33,788 (£25,991 plus on costs) for 12 months. The cost for both posts would be £67,576 for 12 months.

Financial implications:

Financial implications are included within the report.

Legal implications:

There are no additional legal comments at this time.