

Report to: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 27 November 2019

Public Document: Yes

Exemption: None

Review date for release None



Subject: Request for additional Housing Officer for a fixed term period of 12 months.

Purpose of report: Due to rising demand and increased workload within the Housing Options team, the report sets out the reasoning behind the need to seek approval for an additional Housing Officer for a fixed term period of 12 months.

This is being requested as an immediate temporary measure that will allow us time to review the current structure of the team in order to ensure we are fit for purpose going forward.

Recommendation: That Cabinet recommend to Council an additional spend of £8,221.00 in 2019/2020 and an additional amount of £25,155.00 for 2020/2021 to enable the appointment of a Fixed Term Housing Officer for 12 months.

Reason for recommendation: To ensure day to day service delivery within the Housing Options team can be maintained and that we are meeting all legislative duties in relation to persons approaching the Council who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Officer: Housing Service Lead, Amy Gilbert-Jeans

Financial implications: The Financial implication are contained within the report. The current year cost if approved will be met from the General Fund Balance and next year's costs will be factored into the new budget.

Legal implications: There are no legal implications arising from the report.

Equalities impact: High Impact
Persons approaching the Housing Options team are often deemed vulnerable and needs can be high in relation to protected characteristics.

Climate change: Low Impact

Risk: High Risk
The Council has a Statutory duty to ensure we are meeting legislation in relation to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2014.
Not meeting these duties places vulnerable people at significant risk.

Links to background information: .

Link to Council Plan: Encouraging Communities to be outstanding

1. Due to increasing demand and workload within the team we are currently facing a situation where the Housing Options team are under resourced and an additional staff Member is required urgently to assist in stabilising the work-load of the team with immediate effect.
2. Our review of staffing levels show that, despite restructuring the team within existing budgets to better meet the anticipated increase in activity following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act, the service is struggling to cope with the demands placed upon it through a greater than expected rise in approaches to the service and the increased complexity of the cases that are arising.
3. The positive benefits of the homelessness service provided by the Housing Options team have been identified in the EDDC Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2018 and are also highlighted in the recent report "Poverty – A Local Picture", due to be presented to the Overview Committee on 14th November.
4. The lack of resources that the Options team are working with have been acknowledged, and existing resources are stretched by the following factors:
 - An increase in the number of homeless cases (see table 1 – number of approaches)
 - An increase in the levels of responsibility for each homeless case since the Homelessness Reduction Act was introduced, in April 2018, resulting in a huge rise in the time needed to deal with each case thoroughly
 - Existing resources being stretched by covering two full time drop-in services, a commitment that is not provided by any other local homelessness services. There is an advantage that meets our philosophy of making ourselves available so that the public can contact us at the earliest opportunity to give us the best chance of assisting them to prevent or relieve their homelessness.

Table 1 – Number of approaches:

1a: Pre HRA

1b: Post HRA

Year	Total
2014-2015	394
2015-2016	371
2016-2017	320
2017-2018	261

Year	Total
2018-2019	871
2019-2020*	555

*for the six month period from April 2019 to September 2019 inclusive

5. The Options team are currently in a difficult situation, with limited staffing resources available to take on the high volume of homeless approaches and the demanding consequences of those approaches. The figures in table 1 demonstrate the higher levels of demand clearly, not to mention the additional responsibilities tied to the Homelessness Reduction Act attached to the higher level of numbers approaching. This situation is compounded by the housing environment where higher levels of homelessness exist due to welfare reforms, poverty, affordability issues in the private sector and a reduction in the numbers of supported accommodation projects in existence. All factors contribute towards a rise in homelessness and subsequent approaches to the Options team, as potential alternative options are simply not available. The lack of suitable supported accommodation projects, and overall support for vulnerable people, has contributed towards an increase in customers approaching the Options service with a higher level of complex needs, most

notably with mental health issues. As a result these cases are more challenging to deal with and securing a suitable positive outcome is a more difficult objective.

6. Temporary additional resources aimed specifically at assisting rough sleepers have been added through external funding via the Rapid Rehousing Pathway and Rough Sleeper Initiative funding, this has helped us manage our outreach work but is not alleviating any demand that is currently being dealt with by the Housing Officers.
7. Officer caseloads are reaching an all-time high, with full time members of the team facing in excess of 40 cases each and part-time members of the team facing in excess of 20 cases each. Although there are no official guidelines for the appropriate numbers of cases that Housing Officers should or could manage at one time, 40 is widely considered a tipping point where positive preventative work cannot be achieved as all resources are taken up fire-fighting. This opinion was quantified in a recent conversation with the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government. Each Housing Officer is currently over this limit.
8. The Housing Officers are currently having to work in a reactive manner, and not in a proactive preventative manner. The lack of time available to effectively case manage the individual needs of the customers is resulting in an increase in customers becoming homeless and requiring expensive emergency accommodation.
9. There is a need for another Housing Officer to be installed in the team in order to meet the sustained demand levels. This would contribute towards bringing existing numbers of caseloads per existing Housing Officers down and to be able to focus on a preventative, positive service for our customers in need of assistance, ultimately providing better outcomes for customers and reducing aspects of the budget including expenditure on temporary accommodation and the prevention fund.
10. It is proposed that a further piece of work is undertaken to review the recent restructure of the team to assess what is required going forward but that in order to alleviate the current pressure on the team an additional Housing Officer is recruited for a period of 12 months in order for us to undertake this piece of work.
11. The costings in the recommendation have been worked out on the basis of a split between the current financial year (2019/2020) and the next financial year (2020/2021). This has been divided to reflect 3 month's worth of expenditure coming from this year's budget and the remaining 9 coming from next years budget.