

REPORT TO CABINET

Open		Would any decisions proposed :			
Any especially affected Wards	Discretionary	Be entirely within Cabinet's powers to decide		Yes	
		Need to be recommendations to Council		No	
		Is it a Key Decision		No	
Lead Member: Cllr Rust E-mail: <i>cllr.rust@west-norfolk.gov.uk</i>		Other Cabinet Members consulted: None			
		Other Members consulted:			
Lead Officer: Nikki Patton E-mail: <i>Nikki.patton@west-norfolk.gov.uk</i> Direct Dial: 01553616726		Other Officers consulted: Oliver Judges Executive Director of Place Duncan Hall Assistant Director of Regeneration, Housing & Place Becky Box Assistant Director Central Services Sarah Daly Finance			
Financial Implications Yes	Policy/ Personnel Implications YES	Statutory Implications YES	Equal Impact Assessment YES If YES: Pre-screening/	Risk Management Implications Yes	Environmental Considerations No

Date of meeting: 15th January 2024

HOUSING OPTIONS OFFICER POST

Summary

The purpose of the report is to seek agreement to increase the Housing Options team by one permanent full time post to respond to an increasing demand for homelessness services, fulfil statutory duties in relation to housing and support strategic objectives of preventing homelessness.

RECOMMENDATION

That an additional permanent full time Housing Options Officer post be created.

Reason for Decision

To ensure that the Council fulfils its statutory duties in relation to homelessness and has the resource and capacity provide advice and assistance to those in greatest housing need.

1 Background

Enquiries to the Council's Housing Options team have increased by 25% in the last year and by 127% in the last three years. Homelessness presentations have doubled in the past year. These trends are expected to increase due to cost of living pressures, a shrinking private rented sector and low levels of affordable housing supply and turnover. Caseload numbers per

full-time officer (average 45 cases per officer) are significantly higher than the recommended case load number by DLUHC (30-35 per officer)

In summary numbers have been driven upwards by:

- High levels of single people with multiple and complex needs (including mental health, substances and offending histories),
- High levels of victim-survivors of domestic abuse.

2 The proposal

As part of the transition of Housing Options to Place Directorate an internal review identified a number of gaps in relation to capacity. A recent re-structure has increased capacity within the team utilising existing posts and other temporary funding streams. However, a gap still remains. In order to fulfil statutory duties and support the prevention objective a full time permanent Housing Options post is required. This proposal forms part of longer-term sustainable options to address staffing issues across the Housing Options area and to appropriately respond to increased numbers of homeless households and subsequent demand on the service area.

3 Impact on the service's ability to prevent homelessness.

The Homelessness & Rough Sleeping strategy, which is currently being reviewed, will include firm objectives around homelessness prevention ie preventing the household from becoming homeless in first place and therefore reducing the need for temporary accommodation). We would like to see the council in the top half nationally of Government performance tables within the first year of the strategy and within the top 25% within its lifespan.

To address this, the forthcoming Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy will have prevention at its heart. It will:

- improve the outcomes achieved for people facing homelessness,
- reduce Temporary Accommodation and B&B use and
- potentially increase the level of Homelessness Prevention Grant paid to the council by central government via improved data collection and reporting which in turn supports further homelessness prevention work

The proposal will enable the team to dedicate more time to prevention moving away from reactive position and towards achieving a 'prevention first' approach that has long been its aim.

In summary, the service needs to:

- be effective in its response to Homelessness and Rough Sleeping
- meet the objectives of the Council's adopted Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy and

- fulfil its statutory duties.

To achieve this, it is imperative that it moves away from a reactive response to a more sustainable prevention strategy that:

- provides better outcomes for people seeking housing support,
- supports staff wellbeing and retention via reduced caseloads and
- is more financially sustainable for the Council overall (reducing numbers in B&B and reducing staff turnover).

The proposal as part of wider staffing changes would strengthen the team significantly, enabling officers to provide:

- A higher quality of advice and assistance to homeless applicants,
- A greater emphasis on partnership working (with statutory services, commissioned agencies and private landlords, amongst others) to resolve homelessness,
- A significantly reduced level of spend on bed and breakfast and nightly paid accommodation,
- A reduction in staff turnover and burnout (and a subsequent reduction in recruitment costs)
- Ultimately, a service that aims to prevent homelessness in all cases, seeking to minimise the impact and trauma caused where homelessness cannot be prevented.

4 Options Considered

There is no option to carry on as we are. All other options utilising temporary funding streams from central Government to create additional fixed term capacity (fixed term posts) have been utilised along with re-structuring existing posts. There is no further capacity within the service area to respond to the significant increase in demand for the service. Without the additional permanent post we will be unable to fulfil statutory duties in relation to homelessness and support the objective of preventing homelessness at an earlier stage to reduce the use of temporary accommodation and the use of B&B accommodation for homeless households including families with children.

5 Policy Implications

None

6 Financial Implications

It is proposed that the Council utilises some of the funding it receives from Central Government ringfenced for Housing services to support the post for three years. The Homelessness Prevention Grant that Council receives annually from Central Government specifies supporting staff costs as an acceptable use of funding.

The approximate cost for a PG10 Housing Options Officer including oncosts will be £40,000, in addition to this there will be costs for IT equipment and office costs. This can be funded for 3 years from the Homelessness Prevention Grant.

Wider financial implications- without additional staff capacity to support homelessness prevention work and respond to existing high case loads, the numbers in temporary accommodation and B&B are likely to remain high which has a direct financial cost to the Council.

7 Personnel Implications

The proposals outlined in this report will see the Council's permanent staff establishment increase by one full time post in order to meet increased demand for services within the Housing Options team. The team has recently undertaken a review of existing capacity within the team and the need for an additional post has been highlighted as part of this review. The additional post will help the team to respond effectively to the increased number of homeless households accessing the service, supporting the corporate objective of ensuring efficient and effective delivery of services which met the needs of our local communities.

8 Environmental Considerations

None

9 Statutory Considerations

The post will provide additional staff capacity to ensure the Councils statutory duties in relation to providing Housing advice and assistance to homelessness households are fulfilled. The post also will provide resource to support the objectives of the Councils Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2024 and the new objectives in the emerging Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024- 2029

10 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

Pre-screening report attached.

11 Risk Management Implications

The Council has a statutory duty to support homeless households. The risk of not appropriately resourcing the Housing team to respond to the increasing demand for homelessness services will significantly impact on the Councils ability to fulfil its statutory duties in relation to Homelessness and provide support and assistance to some of the most vulnerable members of the community.

12 Declarations of Interest / Dispensations Granted

none

Appendix 1 - Pre-Screening Equality Impact Assessment

Borough Council of
King's Lynn & West Norfolk



Name of policy/service/function	Housing Needs				
Is this a new or existing policy/service/function?	New post				
<p>Brief summary/description of the main aims of the policy/service/function being screened.</p> <p>Please state if this policy/service is rigidly constrained by statutory obligations</p>	<p>To increase the Housing Options team by one permanent full time post to respond to an increasing demand for homelessness services, fulfil statutory duties in relation to housing and support strategic objectives of preventing homelessness.</p>				
Question	Answer				
<p>1. Is there any reason to believe that the policy/service/function could have a specific impact on people from one or more of the following groups according to their different protected characteristic, for example, because they have particular needs, experiences, issues or priorities or in terms of ability to access the service?</p> <p>Please tick the relevant box for each group.</p> <p>NB. Equality neutral means no negative impact on any group.</p>		Positive	Negative	Neutral	Unsure
	Age			x	
	Disability			x	
	Gender			x	
	Gender Re-assignment			x	
	Marriage/civil partnership			x	
	Pregnancy & maternity			x	
	Race			x	
	Religion or belief			x	
	Sexual orientation			x	
	Other (eg low income)			x	

Question	Answer	Comments
<p>2. Is the proposed policy/service likely to affect relations between certain equality communities or to damage relations between the equality communities and the Council, for example because it is seen as favouring a particular community or denying opportunities to another?</p>	No	
<p>3. Could this policy/service be perceived as impacting on communities differently?</p>	No	
<p>4. Is the policy/service specifically designed to tackle evidence of disadvantage or potential discrimination?</p>	yes	To ensure that the Council fulfils its statutory duties in relation to homelessness and has the resource and capacity provide advice and assistance to those in greatest housing need.
<p>5. Are any impacts identified above minor and if so, can these be eliminated or reduced by minor actions?</p> <p>If yes, please agree actions with a member of the Corporate Equalities Working Group and list agreed actions in the comments section</p>	No	<p>Actions: N/A</p> <hr/> <p>Actions agreed by EWG member:</p> <p>.....</p>
<p>If 'yes' to questions 2 - 4 a full impact assessment will be required unless comments are provided to explain why this is not felt necessary:</p> <p>Decision agreed by EWG member:</p>		
<p>Assessment completed by: Name Nikki Patton</p>		
<p>Job title Housing Services Manager</p>		
<p>Date 4th Dec 2023</p>		