

Blaby District Council

Cabinet Executive

Date of Meeting	16 January 2023
Title of Report	Recruitment and Retention of Homelessness Case Officers This is a Key Decision and not on the Forward Plan This is an Urgent Report.
Lead Member	Cllr. Les Phillimore - Housing, Community & Environmental Services
Report Author	Housing Services Manager
Corporate Priority	A Place to Live

1. Explanation for Urgency

- 1.1 This report has not been included in the last Forward Plan. It is a Key Decision. The matter has become apparent since the publication of the Forward Plan and requires urgent consideration as the impact of recent changes in the team require a swift response to enable the service to be delivered to our vulnerable residents. Therefore it is impracticable to defer the decision on this report until after the operative date of the next Forward Plan on which it could appear. Accordingly, the Special Urgency Procedure contained in Part 4 Section 2 Paragraph 10 of the Constitution has been invoked to enable its consideration. The Chairman of the Scrutiny Commission has been informed and a public notice has been published on the Council's website and displayed at the Council Offices.

2. What is this report about?

- 2.1 To review and address the staffing requirements within the Housing Services Team by converting 2 fixed term posts to permanent positions.

3. Recommendation(s) to Cabinet Executive

- 3.1 That Cabinet approve the proposal to make 2 current fixed term posts within the Housing Services Team permanent.

4. Reason for Decisions Recommended

- 4.1 To provide a long term solution to the current increased demand on the homelessness team and provide service stability through more effective staff recruitment and retention.
- 4.2 To ensure that the Housing and Homelessness Service is sufficiently resourced to tackle the level and pressure of homelessness demand.

5. Matters to consider

5.1 Background

The Homelessness Case Officers are responsible for preventing and relieving homelessness. This is achieved through comprehensive advice and assistance covering the full range of housing options offered by the Council and other agencies to enable customers to find solutions to their housing issues. In doing so Officers need to have a good understanding of the homelessness legislation, statutory guidance and the Councils policies and procedures. In addition Officers require a high level of empathy combined with a high level of resilience in order to successfully manage the complexities involved in this role.

The Homelessness Case Officer Team is positioned within the wider Housing Services Team and currently consists of 3.5 full time permanent Case Officers, plus 2 further fixed term posts that are currently funded through Contain funding and the Homelessness prevention grant due to the impacts of Covid 19 on homelessness numbers and overall increased demand.

With a view on meeting current homelessness demand the Senior Leadership Team agreed to utilise Homelessness Prevention Grant to introduce a further Case Officer post on a 12 month fixed term contract. However, despite advertising this post on 3 occasions a suitable candidate has yet to be appointed. Recruitment of experienced Homelessness Officers is becoming extremely difficult, and our current situation with failing to recruit is consistent across the wider Leicester and Leicestershire area and is an issue that is being discussed regularly at the Leicester and Leicestershire Chief Housing Officers Group.

Historically, at times of increased pressure Homelessness Prevention Grant has been utilised to recruit temporary staff through an agency. However, this way of meeting increased demand is costly and can be unpredictable depending on the experience and suitability of agency staff available at the time. The latest agency worker recruited into the team came at an annual cost of £67,600. The estimated cost of recruiting 1 permanent case officer is approximately £46,000 (depending on experience and entry level).

Homelessness Demand

There has been a significant rise in homelessness demand over the past 3 years, this is due to several factors including;

- The overall housing demand within the District with a shortage of available, affordable accommodation in both the affordable and market sectors. Demand has increased as a result of the cost of living crisis, an increase in complexed and vulnerable cases, the approaches from Ukrainian nationals and the lasting effects of the pandemic.
- Whilst the increased demand affects all forms of housing it has had a particular impact on social housing. The latest Housing and Economic Needs Assessment shows that the need for new affordable homes in the District now stands at some 536 (96% increase over the last 5 years) homes per year, this being the highest number per population across the Leicestershire Districts.
- With a below average number of private rented sector homes, escalating rent levels and letting agents reporting long lists of professional people waiting for each property that becomes vacant, we have a scenario whereby the private rented sector is realistically out of reach for many of our customers.
- Another important factor to the increased levels of homelessness is the extremely limited number of supported accommodation options which before the increased demand would provide suitable options for some of the most vulnerable of our customers.
- As a result of the points outlined above there has been a significant rise in the use of temporary accommodation, numbers have increased on average by some 200% since 2019 and have remained at that rate for some time.

Homelessness Demand measured by number of approaches:

Financial Year	Number of homeless approaches
2019-20	761
2020-21	834
2021-22	848
2022-23	705 (to date – estimated to be 920 by year end)

The table above shows the increase in homelessness approaches year on year, this in turn has resulted in higher caseloads for Homelessness Case Officers.

Generally speaking, the acceptable average number of cases that is considered reasonable for each officer to manage is between 25 to 35. In

recent months Officers have been consistently managing 40 cases and in December 2022 this rose to an average of 44.5 cases per officer. As is demonstrated in the points made above it has become extremely difficult to resolve these cases due to the situations our customers are in and the reality that there are limited accessible options with which to prevent or relieve homelessness.

Homelessness Prevention Grant

The Homelessness Prevention Grant is allocated annually to the Local Authority by Government on the understanding that the Council can evidence that the grant is spent on the prevention of homelessness. This year 2022/23 the grant was £137,000 with an additional £21,350 provided as a winter top up to the grant. All the funds need to be spent before the end of each financial year.

We have recently received the details of the Homelessness Prevention grant for 2023/24 and 2024/25 which is £142,707 and £150,127 respectively. These allocations represent a significant increase in grant provided in previous years under the old Flexible Homelessness Support / HRA Grant system which combined amounted to £74,336 in 2019/20 and £95,157 in 2020/21.

The increased levels of Homelessness Prevention Grant and the early commitment by Government to future years provide the opportunity for the recommendation to make the 2 temporary posts permanent.

5.2 Proposal(s)

That Members agree to the proposal at 3.1 to make the existing fixed term post and the vacant fixed term post permanent due to on-going demand and a need for service stability through staff recruitment and retention. This will require an annual budget of around £92,000 (depending on experience and entry level) for the post, for which there is sufficient headroom in the Homelessness Prevention Grant to cover the additional cost.

5.3 Relevant Consultations

None

5.4 Significant Issues

None

6. What will it cost and are there opportunities for savings?

- 6.1 The full year cost of an additional two Homelessness Case Officers being added to the establishment is approximately £92,000. In the draft 2023/24 budget, provision has already been made for two fixed term posts up to 31st

October 2023 at a cost of £52,600. The cost differential in 2023/24 is therefore £39,400, and this can be covered by the Homelessness Prevention Grant. We have already received our grant allocation for 2024/25 and this gives us certainty that there is sufficient available to fund the two new established posts on a permanent basis, so long as we continue to receive grant of a similar magnitude. There is no additional impact on Reserves as we are able to take the costs from the Homelessness Prevention Grant.

7. What are the risks and how can they be reduced?

7.1	Current Risk	Actions to reduce the risks
	Without stabilisation of existing resources the Council run the risk of not meeting their statutory duty to prevent homelessness	The additional resource will help the Council to maintain its statutory duty to prevent homelessness
	Staff on temporary contracts will look for alternative employment increasing the risk that the homelessness service will not be adequately resourced	Recruiting to the vacant fixed term post will provide adequate resource for the future and provide the successful candidate with the security of a permanent contract.

8. Environmental impact

8.1 None

9. Other options considered

9.1 The Council has a statutory duty to prevent and relieve homelessness, therefore there is no other option but to resource the service adequately.

10. Other significant issues

10.1 In preparing this report, the author has considered issues related to Human Rights, Legal Implications, Human Resources, Equalities, Public Health Inequalities, and Climate Local and there are no areas of concern.

11. Appendix

11.1 None

12. Background paper(s)

12.1 None

13. Report author's contact details

Ian Jones	Housing Services Manager
ian.jones@blaby.gov.uk	0116 272 7516