



Report to: Cabinet Meeting – 7 June 2022

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Tim Wendels, Homes & Health

Director Lead: Suzanne Shead, Director - Housing Health & Wellbeing

Lead Officer: Julie Davidson, Business Manager - Housing & Estates Management Extension 5542.

Report Summary	
<b>Type of Report</b>	Open report Non key decision
<b>Report Title</b>	Proposals for additional resources for Housing Options Services in the Housing Health & Wellbeing Directorate in 2022/23.
<b>Purpose of Report</b>	To seek approval to introduce additional staffing resources into the Directorate to support the delivery of the housing options service within the current and continuing challenging landscape.
<b>Recommendations</b>	That approval be given for the additional staffing resource of a permanent Housing Options Officer noting this will increase the establishment by 1 x Full Time Employee (FTE).  That approval be given for the additional fixed term 12 month contract for the Housing Assistant role.  That approval be given to use the homeless prevention grant to allocate £64,921 to fund these roles.

## 1.0 Background

- 1.1 Housing Options is the Council’s Statutory Homelessness service providing advice and assistance to any person who considers themselves homeless or threatened with homelessness, with the aim of preventing homelessness wherever possible. This service also manages the use of temporary accommodation at Seven Hills, Newark and Wellow Green, Ollerton and our accommodation ring-fenced for Rough Sleepers.
- 1.2 Cabinet may be aware of some/all of the current demands on the housing options service:

- i. the significant increase in the cost of living resulting in increased approaches from families and individuals through loss of private and socially rented accommodation and mortgage failures;
  - ii. The need to temporarily realign some existing staff from within the service to support the Homes for Ukraine scheme;
  - iii. Potential for increased approaches to NSDC from the Homes For Ukraine scheme;
  - iv. The intensive management of Northgate Almshouses as part of the Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI)
  - v. The project management and establishment of a service offer for the new temporary accommodation being built at Seven Hills
  - vi. Covering long term sickness absence in the team
- 1.3 The team have reported that private landlords are saying that they are serving notice because they want to sell the property, when they gain possession they can re-let at a higher rent due to both the demand levels in the Private Rented Sector (PRS) and to meet their own financial obligations.
- 1.4 Within the Housing & Estate Management team, two officers have been temporarily realigned for a portion of their working week to support the Homes for Ukraine scheme (supporting those fleeing the Ukraine and being housing in the District via host families); this has resulted in a loss of administrative assistance meaning the Housing Options Officers are undertaking administration duties alongside their complex case management work. Additional recruitment is happening right now to resource the Homes for Ukraine scheme and the Council expects numbers of hosts and guests continue to increase resulting in increased workload for Council teams.
- 1.5 Initial support to ease the impact of long term absences within the team was put into place; the temporary secondment of the Housing Options Assistant into the Housing Options Officer role with the Housing Management Apprentice providing the administration support. However, the Housing Management Apprentice is now working 3 days per week in support of the Homes for Ukraine scheme as part of their placements.

### **The Data and Current Picture**

- 1.6 In 2021-22 there were a total of 1162 applications (homeless approaches resulting in cases) recorded, compared to 803 in 2020-21. To provide a picture without the impact of Covid, 2019/20 figures are included as well:

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Quarter 1	275	200	262
Quarter 2	273	212	333
Quarter 3	211	183	275
Quarter 4	212	208	292
Total	971	803	1162

- 1.7 2019-20 may be the more accurate comparison due to the Courts being closed for a proportion of 20-21, however the cases that are coming in now are of a much higher complexity. The Council are now beginning to see the true effect of people's

heightened mental health issues, relationship breakdowns, landlords serving notice and pursuing in the Courts (both Private Rented Sector and Registered Providers) following Covid. To compound this, the cost of living crisis is already hitting the service.

- 1.8 A comparison of case management further evidences this and analysis on the cases that have been received from 1<sup>st</sup> April of this year to date compared to last year demonstrates an increase of 150%.
- 1.9 An additional burden is the need on minimise the use of Temporary Accommodation due to the redevelopment of the Seven Hills site.

## **2.0 Proposal/Options Considered and Reasons for Recommendation**

- 2.1 As indicated in section 1 of this report, cases of homelessness are very much on the increase and within the current climate it is difficult to see the landscape changing. In order to support the delivery of the Housing Options Service, additional staffing is required.
- 2.2 The alternative is to do nothing which could provide significant risk of the service being unable to respond to the level of cases presenting to the Council or a reduction in other services the Council provide.
- 2.3 The proposal is to increase the establishment by 1 Full Time permanent post and 1 FTE temporary post; 1 permanent, full-time Housing Options Officer and 1 temporary, full-time Housing Options Assistant on a temporary 12 month.
- 2.4 The temporary resource proposed for the Housing Assistant role is based on the Housing Options Officer returning from sickness later this year thus releasing the seconded employee to her original post; however the Homes for Ukraine Scheme will continue to grow and require resource so this builds in some resilience across the wider Directorate.
- 2.5 The recommendations will enable the Directorate to continue to meet the Council's statutory duties and respond to current social challenges that are increasing approaches and use of our statutory services.

## **3.0 Implications**

- 3.1 In writing this report and in putting forward recommendations officers have considered the following implications; Data Protection, Digital and Cyber Security, Equality and Diversity, Financial, Human Resources, Human Rights, Legal, Safeguarding and Sustainability, and where appropriate they have made reference to these implications and added suitable expert comment where appropriate.
- 3.2 There will be a need for a laptop for these posts but there are no wider digital implications.

- 3.3 The proposal is to recruit to two additional posts. The Council’s usual recruitment and selection processes will be followed to ensure that there is due regard for equalities legislation and there is no detriment to anyone with protected characteristics. Consideration will be given to advertising posts internally in the first instance to ensure opportunity for progression for existing staff, noting that if an internal person is successful in securing the temporary post, if they do not have a substantive role to return to, there may be a redundancy cost at the end of the temporary contract.

#### **Financial Implications FIN22-23/399**

- 3.4 The annual cost for the two posts in the current financial year is shown in the table below. These figures exclude any pay awards pending in 2022/23.

<b>Post Title</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Cost (Including oncosts)</b>
Housing Options Officer	NS9	£37,085
Housing Options Assistant	NS6	£27,836
<b>Total</b>		<b>£64,921</b>

- 3.5 These posts can both be funded from the annual Homeless Prevention Grant which the Council receives from DLUHC (Dept. for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities). For 2022/23, the grant allocation is £232,543 and isn’t currently fully utilised within the service. Depending on when the 12 months temporary post terminates, this grant will continue to fund the additional permanent Housing Options Officer.

#### **Background Papers and Published Documents**

None