

Policy Group – 18 April 2018

Housing Needs Team – additional member of staff

1. Purpose of report

To seek approval to employ an additional Housing Needs Officer on a two year fixed term contract.

2. Key issues

- 2.1 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 was implemented on 3 April 2018. The Act is regarded as the most significant change in homelessness since the original homelessness legislation was passed in 1977.
- 2.2 The Act places duties on local authorities to intervene at earlier stages to prevent homelessness in their areas. It also requires housing authorities to provide homelessness services to all those affected irrespective of whether they are in priority need or intentionally homeless. Details of the changes can be found in Further Information.
- 2.3 The Welsh Government introduced similar legislation in April 2015 with the result that in 2015/16 Welsh authorities (including those similar to Purbeck) experienced an average rise of 26% in homelessness applications. The Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government has forecast that in England the increase is likely to be in the region of 26%. It is anticipated that as in Wales the rise in applications will largely be attributed to single people.
- 2.4 The legislation is likely to increase the casework for the Housing Needs Team in the following ways:
 - an increase in homelessness applications;
 - an increase in the time taken for each homelessness application interview and the preparation of personal housing plans which set out the actions to be taken by the applicant and the local authority to prevent and alleviate homelessness; and
 - additional administration and on-going casework with applicants until their housing needs are met.
- 2.5 It is considered that at least one additional 0.8 FT Housing Needs Officer working in the Housing Needs Team is required to meet these workloads. The post will also improve the resilience of the team and reduce the increasing case work involvement of the Housing Needs Team Leader, allowing the role to focus on more complex cases. A copy of the Job Description for the post is provided in **Appendix 1**.
- 2.6 Discussions are also taking place with Purbeck Citizens Advice about how they may be able to assist the Council to fulfil its new duties without impinging on this role.

3. Recommendation

A report be submitted to Council to approve the employment of an additional 0.8 FT Housing Needs Officer working 30 hours a week on a two year fixed term contract at a cost of £23,150 (including on-costs) per annum.

4. Policy issues

4.1 How will this affect the environment, social issues and the local economy?

There are no implications for the environment or the economy associated with this report.

The role will help the Housing Needs Team meet the increased workload the new legislation will involve and assist the Council to meet its corporate objective of “being an efficient and effective council”.

4.2 Implications

4.2.1 Resources

Consideration has been given to whether a specialist role is required to meet the requirements of the new Act. It was decided that as the current team already provide a broad range of advice and support, rather than specialise in certain areas, the appointment to an existing role would meet the needs of the team.

The cost of an additional 0.8 FT Housing Needs Officer working 30 hours per week is £23,150 (including on-costs) per annum. The role will use existing desk space and ICT.

The table below shows there is sufficient money available to fund the new post:

Grant income	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	Total
Overhauling statutory homeless data grant	£9,202	£0	£0	£9,202
New Burdens - Homelessness Reduction Act	£11,496	£10,530	£11,763	£33,789
Flexible Homelessness Grant	£63,116	£66,473	£74,777	£204,366
Total funding available	£83,814	£77,003	£86,540	£247,357
Planned expenditure				
IT costs - new homeless module	£5,625	£3,577	£0	£9,202
Housing Needs Officer (2 year fixed term contract)	£0	£23,150	£23,150	£46,300
Housing Benefit costs	£6,500	£6,500	£6,500	£19,500
	£12,125	£33,227	£29,650	£75,002
Balance of funding available				£172,365

The Flexible Homelessness Support Grant is paid by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). It replaced the Temporary Accommodation Management Fee (TAMF) the Department of Work and Pensions paid to councils. The funding is designed to support the Homelessness Reduction Act by providing additional funding to local authorities to enable them fund a range of homeless services to prevent homelessness.

The initial funding allocation was for two years. A third year was announced in March 2018. The grant is ring-fenced and can only be used to prevent or deal with homelessness.

4.2.2 Equalities

There are no equalities implications associated with this report.

5. Further information

5.1 The Homelessness Reduction Act

The Homelessness Reduction Act amends rather than replaces existing homelessness legislation. The Act is not retrospective and will not apply to any household who applied to the Council as homeless before 3 April 2018.

The intention of the legislation is that all eligible applicants will go through the prevention duty (if threatened with homelessness) and the relief duty (if their homelessness cannot be prevented, or they are homeless when they contact the local authority). If the local authority is unable to successfully prevent or relieve the homelessness of a household in priority need, they will proceed to the main homelessness duty as they did before the Act was implemented. **Appendix 2** provides an overview of the new approach.

The main changes introduced by the Act are outlined below:

5.2 Duty to refer

The Act places a duty on certain public authorities to notify a local authority if they come into contact with someone they think may be homeless or at risk of homelessness. The service user must give consent and can choose the local authority they wish to be referred to.

5.3 Duty to provide advisory services

The Act extends the current duty to provide free advisory services to everyone in the district and sets out in detail the advice local authorities must provide. It also requires the advice to be tailored to meet the needs of certain listed vulnerable groups such as people leaving hospital, young people leaving care, victims of domestic abuse and people suffering from mental illness.

5.4 Definition of homelessness/threatened with homelessness

The Act extends the definition of threatened with homelessness from 28 to 56 days. A person is threatened with homelessness if they are likely to become homeless within 56 days, or they have been served with a valid section 21 notice which expires within 56 days or less.

This should provide more opportunity to respond to the threat of homelessness rather than dealing with homelessness when it has occurred.

5.5 **Duty to assess all eligible applicants' cases and agree a plan**

If a local authority is satisfied a household is homeless or threatened with homelessness and eligible for assistance it must assess the household's case. The aim of the assessment is to identify what has caused the homelessness or threat of homelessness, the housing needs of the household and any support the household may need to retain or secure accommodation. Following this assessment the authority must work with the household to develop a personalised housing plan (PHP) which will set out the steps the household and the authority are required to take to ensure accommodation is secured or retained.

The assessment is required regardless of any priority need status. Both the assessment and the personal housing plan must be kept under constant review.

5.6 **The prevention duty: in cases of threatened homelessness**

If a local authority is satisfied a household is threatened with homelessness and eligible for assistance, it has a duty to take "reasonable steps" to help the household avoid homelessness. This means either helping the household to stay in their home or helping them find a new home before they become homeless. The prevention duty lasts for 56 days unless it is brought to an end by accommodation being secured or the household becoming homeless.

5.7 **The relief duty: in cases where the applicant is homeless**

If a household is already homeless, or becomes homeless despite the work done during the prevention phase, the "reasonable steps" will be focussed on helping the household secure accommodation for at least six months, unless the household has no local connection with the authority they have applied to and has a connection with another. In such instances the local authority dealing with the application can ask the other authority to take responsibility for the case. However, a referral cannot be made if the household would be at risk of violence in the other authority. The relief duty lasts for 56 days unless it is brought to an end in another way. If a local authority has reason to believe a homeless household may be eligible for assistance and has a priority need they must provide interim accommodation.

5.8 **Reviews**

The new legislation introduces more stages at which local authorities need to provide applicants with written notifications of their decisions and thirteen instances in which there is a right to request a review.

Appendices

1 - Job description - Housing Needs Officer

2 – HRA overview

Background papers: Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities (February 2018) Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government

For further information contact:

Fiona Brown, Housing Manager



Job Description for Post No. PBES034

JOB TITLE: Housing Needs Officer

GRADE: 5

SECTION: Public Health and Housing Services

ORGANISATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS: Reports to Housing Needs Team Leader

JOB PURPOSE: Provide a high standard of housing advice, homelessness prevention, housing support and housing options to customers or their representatives requesting assistance with housing.

Meet the Council's statutory duties under the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002, Localism Act 2011 and Homelessness Reduction Act 2017)

MAJOR TASKS:

1. To work with households to assess, advise clients and investigate homeless applications made under the terms of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002, Localism Act 2011 and Homelessness Reduction Act 2017).
2. Work in partnership with other public bodies and agencies such as Adult and children Services, Probation, Community Mental Health Teams, Police, Prison Service, NHS and supported/housing providers to identify help and assistance for households.
3. To complete an assessment of the applicant's circumstances, in all cases, to determine the duty owed to the client and inform the client in writing of the Council's decision in accordance with the relevant legislation and procedures in consultation where appropriate with the Senior Housing Needs Officers. Recommend the appropriate homelessness duty to the Housing Needs Team Leader.
4. To complete a Personal Housing Plan with each client, compiling a tailored set of actions both the client and Housing Needs Officer will complete in order to prevent or relieve the client's homelessness.
5. Work with the Housing Needs Team Leader to allocate vacant properties through Choice Based Lettings and nominate successful households to landlords.

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6. Assess and recommend to the Senior Housing Needs Officer households eligible for the Council's Rent Bond/Rent Deposit Scheme. Carry out follow up visits to all clients to ensure loans are repaid and tenancies conducted satisfactorily.
7. Interview customers at the office, at advice surgeries in the District and in their homes.
8. Provide office cover on a rota basis on behalf of the Housing Needs Team
9. Support clients who have been assisted into private sector rented accommodation to sustain their tenancies
10. Assist in the provision of the emergency out of hours homelessness service
11. Produce good quality information which meets the needs of the user, is easy to understand, reliable, accurate, complete and timely: ensure that data and information are securely stored and confidentiality is maintained where applicable.
12. Report on performance, providing data which is 'fit for purpose' to enable effective management of service(s).
13. Observe equality and diversity practices and procedures and promote equal opportunities at all times.
14. Discharge such other reasonable duties appropriate to the appointment and grading of the post as may be assigned from time to time, including work in connection with the Council's emergency planning function and in particular to arrange for the Council's Control Room to be immediately set up if notified that this is required.

HRA overview:

LA duties

