

Bolsover District Council
Meeting of the Employment and Personnel Committee
on 6th November 2024
Housing Options Triage Officer - Permanent Post
Report of Sandra Peake, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Classification	This report is public.
Contact Officer	Elizabeth Ellis, Housing Options Manager

PURPOSE/SUMMARY OF REPORT

- To seek approval to recruit a Housing Options Triage Officer. This would be a permanent post on the establishment.
- To recommend to Council funding the post through the General Fund revenue budget associated with the establishment from 2026/27.

REPORT DETAILS

1. Background

- 1.1 The Housing Act 1996 Part 7, as amended by The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (which came into force in April 2018) placed new duties on Councils to intervene earlier to actively prevent homelessness, and to work with people who are homeless, or threatened with homelessness, for longer periods of time. As such, it brought a much wider group into the Council's area of responsibility, not just those that are in 'priority need.'
- 1.2 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 amended Part 7 of the 1996 Act to strengthen the support available to victims of domestic abuse. The Act extends priority need to all eligible victims of domestic abuse who are homeless as a result of being a victim of domestic abuse. The 2021 Act brought in a new definition of domestic abuse which housing authorities must follow.
- 1.3 The Housing Options Team has a leading role in meeting the Council's statutory responsibilities to prevent and relieve homelessness in line with the Act. Since the Act came into force, the Council has seen a gradual increase in the demand on the service.
- 1.4 The Council responded to an increased demand for homelessness advice and assistance by recruiting a dedicated Housing Options Manager, Housing Options Triage Officer, and Temporary Accommodation Officer in 2021. Having dedicated roles has improved the service offered to customers within the district and ensured statutory duties are met. Despite best efforts to maximise productivity, the number of approaches to the service continues to grow.

- 1.5 The Housing Options Team are directly impacted by the external cuts/limitations of support services we have seen over the last 5 years. Lack of resources and capacity in services such as Social Care, Probation, Police, Health (specifically mental health services, and addiction support) places additional strain on the department as service user's needs are often not being met in other areas. Without timely intervention for these needs, often the result is homelessness where a person is unable to sustain accommodation.
- 1.6 There has been an increase in the number of approaches from single applicants who have multiple needs. Often when these people reach our service, their options are very limited, or in some cases non-existent. This results in the Housing Options Officers taking more time to make complex decisions on homeless applications which are subject to legal challenge.
- 1.7 Local Housing Authorities report their homelessness activities under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 to The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, by completing the quarterly H-CLIC statistical return. H-CLIC is an upload of all cases about statutory homelessness and the authority's activities within the legislative framework. We receive a homeless prevention grant which is calculated in part, on the number of prevent and relief cases we report on. It is therefore imperative that we are accurately recording this data.

2. Details of Proposal or Information

- 2.1 We currently have one Housing Options Triage Officer in place, this Officer is the first point of contact and provides a triage service for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, assessing cases, providing advice and assistance, and completing an assessment. They then pass cases onto a Housing Options Officer. Having the Triage Officer post in place has had a significant impact on the service giving the Housing Options Officers' time to make more decisions on more complex homeless applications.
- 2.2 The table below shows the increase in homeless approaches to the housing options service over the last two financial years, and quarter 1 & 2 of this financial year:

Homeless Figures	2022/23	2023/24	Q1 & Q2 2024/25
Total approaches to Housing Options	476	656	586
Triage only	174	338	382
Total prevention duty opened	215	182	139
Total relief duty opened	86	119	65

- 2.3 It is felt, with the increase in homeless approaches and the increasing complexities of cases, that the demand on the service necessitates another Housing Options Triage Officer, to ensure the service continues to meet the demand shown in the above table. The team frequently deal with emergency cases which require emergency assessments on the day of presentation. The additional post would ensure statutory duties are met, and that assessments take place in a timely manner.

2.4 Members will be aware that Homelessness is a General Fund responsibility, not the Housing Revenue Account. The Council has accumulated an amount of unspent homeless prevention grant in a general fund reserve. The post has been job evaluated as a grade 6 and the current annual costs to the Council of the post (subject to pay award) is £38,810, which includes all oncosts. There is sufficient in the reserve to fund the new Housing Options Triage Officer, until 31st March 2026. The report seeks to obtain approval that from April 2026 this would be funded as a permanent post on the establishment, with the salary and oncosts being met from the general fund.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

3.1 Due to the consistent increase in demand over the number of approaches to the homeless service over the last 2 financial years, and the first two quarters of this year, we are seeking an additional Housing Options Triage Officer to ensure that we continue to meet our statutory duties, and complete homeless assessments in a timely manner to meet the needs of our customers.

3.2 The proposal for a permanent post is to increase the calibre of applicants. Given the increased demand on the service, we would benefit from an applicant with relevant experience who can meet the consistent demand. We currently have homeless prevention fund reserves, these are limited, but can cover the cost of the post for the remainder of 2024/25, and the financial year 2025/26.

4 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

4.1 There are alternatives which could be considered:

To do nothing, however, the demand on current staffing resources at this time is not sustainable. The additional post would help in spreading the workload amongst the team and allowing Housing Options Officers to focus on decision making for more complex cases which can be subject to judicial review. They are currently assisting the Housing Options Triage Officer on a frequent basis, due to the consistent increase in homeless approaches.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 1. To approve a new full-time permanent Housing Options Triage Officer on the establishment, to be funded from the general fund from April 2026.
- 2. To recommend to Council a revenue budget increase per year of £38,810 (subject to pay award) to the general fund from April 2026.

Approved by Councillor Peake Portfolio Holder for Housing

<u>IMPLICATIONS.</u>		
<u>Finance and Risk:</u>	Yes – X	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Details: The Council is at risk if we cannot meet our homeless statutory duties. The proposal would mean an annual increase to the general fund budget of £38,810 (subject to		

pay award) from April 2026. Salary costs can be met from a Homeless general fund reserve until this time.

On behalf of the Section 151 Officer

Legal (including Data Protection): Yes – X No

Details:

All legal requirements are set out within the body of the report.

On behalf of the Solicitor to the Council

Staffing: Yes No

Details:

On behalf of the Head of Paid Service

DECISION INFORMATION

<p>Is the decision a Key Decision? A Key Decision is an executive decision which has a significant impact on two or more District wards, or which results in income or expenditure to the Council above the following thresholds:</p> <p>Revenue - £75,000 <input type="checkbox"/> Capital - £150,000 <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Please indicate which threshold applies</p>	No
<p>Is the decision subject to Call-In? (Only Key Decisions are subject to Call-In)</p>	No

<p>District Wards Significantly Affected</p>	N/A
<p>Consultation: Leader / Deputy Leader <input type="checkbox"/> Executive <input type="checkbox"/> SLT <input type="checkbox"/> Relevant Service Manager <input type="checkbox"/> Members <input type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/></p>	Details:

<p>Links to Council Ambition: Customers, Economy, Environment, Housing</p>	
<p>Preventing and responding to homelessness through early intervention and personalised solutions</p>	
<p>DOCUMENT INFORMATION</p>	
<p>Appendix No</p>	<p>Title</p>
<p>Background Papers</p>	
<p>(These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when preparing the report. They must be listed in the section below. If the report is going to Executive, you must provide copies of the background papers).</p>	