

Report to: Housing Review Board



Date of Meeting 16th March 2023

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

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## Housing Service – changes to the senior officer team.

### Report summary:

This report considers a proposal for increasing the capacity and resilience in the Housing Leadership team and provide more resource for the Housing Service. It is in response to increasing demands on the Service, rising expectations from external bodies and our own customers, and to ensure that we have sufficient resources, capacity and capability to meet our purpose and corporate priority of a decent home for all, whilst operating a high performing Housing Service.

### Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes  No

Policy Framework Yes  No

### Recommendation:

The Housing Review Board recommend to Cabinet and Council the creation of a new post of Head of Housing Operations to be funded through the Housing Revenue Account.

### Reason for recommendation:

To create increased capacity in the Housing Service to meet demands and ensure improved coordination of Service departments towards the Housing Service purpose of a decent home for all. This addition to our staffing establishment will help ensure that we have a structure that is 'fit for purpose' to meet the demands placed on a social housing provider with wider housing responsibilities, including homelessness, housing register, community development, community alarm service, housing repairs and housing development. It will also ensure the Service can meet the requirements of the up and coming Social Housing Bill.

Officer: John Golding, Director – Housing, Health & Environment.

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### Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergency Response
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Democracy, Transparency and Communications
- Economy and Assets
- Finance
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities

Tourism, Sports, Leisure and Culture

**Equalities impact** Low Impact

**Climate change** Low Impact

**Risk:** Low Risk; .

**Links to background information** .

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

Better homes and communities for all

A greener East Devon

A resilient economy

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## 1. Resourcing and capacity proposal

- 1.1 The demands of operating a high quality housing service have become greater and more complex in recent years. Expectations have risen and standards are being driven up across the sector. Combined with recruitment and retention issues for some key posts we are constantly attempting to match capacity, capability and resources to meet the demands on the Service.
- 1.2 We have been monitoring workloads and performance and it is clear that we have experienced increased demand for our core housing management services with higher rates of housing presentations, increased housing register applications, higher levels of repair and improvement requests, cost of living and other pressures affecting rent collection, mental health impacting on tenant behaviour, an aging population impacting on our sheltered and supported housing service, to name a few societal pressures that impact on social housing.
- 1.3 I have become concerned for the wellbeing of staff some of who have been overwhelmed by the volumes of work. We have seen a considerable increase in sickness and absence, some of which is linked to work pressures. We have undertaken a number of workforce stress risk assessments and work demands consistently feature as a service issue.
- 1.4 There are a whole range of new requirements, regulatory pressures, customer expectations and continuous improvement desires that are adding to existing work pressures. The refreshed approach from the Housing Regulator and the Housing Ombudsman is bringing with it ongoing changes and in line with the new standards around inspection powers from the Regulator, we have to ensure our housing function is complaint. These challenges have led to the need for an agile and flexible Housing Service structure. Gone are the days of establishing a staffing in structure 'in stone' for a number of years and we now need to flex our structure to accommodate new requirements, projects, bidding opportunities, surveys etc. Periodically we need to bring in temporary specialist consultancy support as we have been over the past 2 years.
- 1.5 Whilst we have maintained a dynamic staffing structure and increased capacity in some areas to meet demand (compliance team, homeless/housing options) we have not addressed our capacity at senior management level for some time. The Housing Service

is a large Service with well over a hundred staff employed, with many high value contracts and contractors supporting service delivery, significant compliance and safety requirements, 4,200 homes and a turnover of £19 million. It necessitates a robust and competent Leadership Team to meet the needs of service users.

- 1.6 I am aware that the Assistant Director and I are regularly sucked into operational matters, drawing us away from leadership, management and strategic issues. This necessitates neglecting some of the policy development, updating strategies, horizon scanning, and ensuring that we are following best practice in the sector work. Whilst it is good to be 'in the work' and aware of frontline service delivery issues, the balance has been forced towards a high proportion of day to day operational involvement.
- 1.7 I am proposing that we create a new position of **Head of Housing Operations** to line manage the senior housing managers heading up the teams dealing with Housing Options & Allocations; Property & Asset; Housing Services; and the Housing Systems Team. This new post holder will oversee and manage day to day housing management ensuring that these specialist and discrete areas of the Service are coordinated and working effectively towards our housing vision and aims. The current staffing structure chart has been reproduced in **annex 1**.
- 1.8 This new post would help coordinate and tie together as 'one team' the four main departments in the Housing Service – Housing Options; Property & Asset; Housing Services; Housing Systems Team, and manage the housing operations. This in turn would enable the Assistant Director to focus on strategic leadership of the Service, oversee policy and direction, and manage the changes being introduced by the DLUHC, Social Housing Regulator, Housing Ombudsman, and increasing customer expectations. To maximise immediate impact, I propose filling this post on an interim or acting up arrangement as soon as possible, whilst also preparing full recruitment to a permanent post on the staffing establishment.
- 1.9 The Head of Housing Operations would be a senior officer with the ability to deputise for the Assistant Director, providing greater resilience and accountability in the Service, strengthening the Leadership Team and increasing capacity. The new role would have specific responsibility for customer satisfaction, complaints handling, performance monitoring and the day to day operational service delivery.
- 1.10 Due to ongoing changes centred around building safety and compliance, the Assistant Director has recently began to consider what specific changes this might mean for our Property and Asset service structure. Challenges around retrofit of the stock, outcomes of the stock condition survey and the need to deliver a new strategic asset management plan are all increasingly important priorities that we have to be able to deliver on. The outcome of this may drive further changes in our senior team set-up.
- 1.11 I anticipate that the post will be graded new scale 7, subject to job evaluation, positioned between the current senior housing managers and the Assistant Director post. The salary range would therefore be £56,925 - £65,428 plus on-costs. This post if agreed would be funded through the Housing Revenue Account.
- 1.12 A post of this nature is not uncommon in housing associations, some councils and larger landlords. It has the potential to add considerably towards achieving the ambitions and actions set out in the Council Plan and the Housing Service Plan. Further adjustment of the staffing structure will likely be needed in the future to ensure that we are able to meet the changing work demands on the Service.



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**Financial implications:**

The additional budgetary requirements are considered in the body of the report.

**Legal implications:**

There are no legal implications requiring comment.