

Report to: **Housing Review Board**

Date of Meeting: 17th September 2020

Public Document: Yes

Exemption: None

Review date for release None



Subject: **Structure of the Housing Service**

Purpose of report: This report gives an overview of some changes to the housing structure that have been implemented over the past few months. The detail in the report sets out the reasoning for these changes and appendix 1 sets out a new structure chart for the housing service. Undertaking a review of the structure of the housing service was an objective as set out in the 2020/2021 Housing Service plan.

Recommendation: To note changes to the structure
Approve the need for the recruitment of a specialist Mental Health Support Officer to work within the Housing Services Team. To recommend additional funding is designated from the Housing Revenue Account and this request is made to Council.
Funding required £37,500 (Grade 6 with all associated costs)

Reason for recommendation: To ensure Members are aware of changes to the housing structure.
To better manage our increasing demands in the area of mental health and the impact this is having across the service.

Officer: Amy Gilbert-Jeans. Housing Service Lead

Portfolio Holder: Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes and Communities

Financial implications: Total employment costs for 2019/20 amounted to £3.5m or 21% of total HRA expenditure. The councils operating costs per unit in the previous year's CIPFA HRA publication were the lowest in the South West region compared to our peers at £2,777 per property. (2019/20 version is yet to be published)

Legal implications: Legal Services have no additional comment to make at this time, the legal and HR issues are addressed within the report.

Equalities impact: High Impact
This review has been undertaken jointly with human resources to ensure equalities matters are considered that relate to roles of individuals and employment legislation.

Climate change: Medium Impact
The report refers to the need to ensure the housing service is fit for purpose in order to meet the challenges that relate to Climate Change. This so far has recognised the need for an additional Officer in the

Programme Works team who will focus on Energy Efficiency measures within our stock.

Risk: High Risk

It is essential that the Housing Service structure is set up to ensure we can continue to meet our challenges as set out in the Housing Service Plan. Not achieving this creates risks in our ability to deliver a frontline service.

Links to background information:

Link to [Council Plan](#): Choose Priorities and delete what not appropriate.
Outstanding Place and Environment
Outstanding Homes and Communities
Outstanding Economic Growth, Productivity, and Prosperity
Outstanding Council and Council Services

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The structure of the housing Service has not been considered for some time and therefore a review of the structure has been considered necessary to ensure we are fit for purpose moving forward, the need to do this was highlighted in our 20/21 Housing Service Plan. The housing sector is fast moving with regular changes in legislation and central government policy, it is therefore critical to ensure we are able to adapt to these changes and that our service and teams are set up to achieve everything we need to as set out in the Council Plan/Housing Service Plan.
- 1.2 We have worked closely with the Human Resources team to undertake this review and this was started prior to Covid. We have pressed ahead with some of this work in order to complete some of these changes, recognising the need to settle the team down particularly through some of the challenges of the past 6 months. The changes are not particularly radical and have not involved any formal consultation with Officers or teams, the changes are better described as a re-organisation of the teams. Some of these changes have also come about as a result of Officers leaving the Authority, such times always present opportunities to review posts and job descriptions and ensure we are replacing in the right way moving forward.
- 1.3 The Housing Service is a successful service and continues to provide excellent, vital and much appreciated services to its customers. There is a wealth of passion, good-will and excellent experience across the team. There are however considerable pressures in a number of areas partly due to increasing demands on services generally and in particular increasing demand of a complex nature often due to mental health issues presented by an increasing amount of residents who present with these support needs and the withdrawal of support from other partnering agencies.
- 1.4 With increasing demands, ensuring we have the right people in the right roles is critical with a view also to being able to future proof our services and to ensure we are able to

succession plan where we can. The sections set out below summarise changes within each area of the service.

1.5 Although not strictly part of the remit of the Board, as part of this review we have also taken the decision to return the Private Sector Housing team back to Environmental Health. Members will be aware that for the past few years the Private Sector Housing Team have sat within the Housing Service. Due to the retirement of the Manager post, we took the opportunity to review this and for a few reasons including the growing focus in the area on enforcement it was decided to return the team back to Environmental Health.

2. Housing Services (previously Landlord Services)

2.1 We have introduced a name change here to replace the somewhat archaic reference to 'landlord'. The area generally deals with all of the living in and support services and this includes the Rentals team, Mobile Support Officers, Estate Management, Community Development, Tenant Participation and the Home Safeguard service. The Landlord Services Manager title has been changed to Housing Services Manager.

2.2 We have reviewed the job description of the Senior Support Officer position (currently vacant) and have re-launched this position as the Sheltered Housing Manager post. This better reflects the management responsibilities of a large dispersed team. This post is currently being recruited into urgently as we recognise the necessity of this post (recruitment has been further impacted by Covid). This is being advertised externally and we hope to fill the position within the next couple of months.

2.3 We are proposing to recruit into the Housing Services Team a Mental Health specialist support worker. This is being carefully considered with a view to exactly how we will introduce this new role, it will directly address some of the issues we are highlighting through our up and coming Mental Health Strategy. There is a view that taking on more responsibilities in this area strays us into an area that we are not specialist in and therefore we need to be cautious about the extension of our service in this way, I would encourage the Board to debate this matter as part of considering the recommendation. We have seen a move from housing providers over the past couple of years where they have established such roles within housing teams recognising the ongoing pressures in this area and that it is now something that social housing providers need additional skills and resources in. We touched on this within the Housing Service Plan as an area of significant challenge ahead hence the need for us to consider an additional resource here. In order to ensure clarity on the role it is essential that we draft a clear job description and person specification that captures exactly how this role will work alongside existing Officers in the service. As an example, it is important that we have a clear referral process for cases that the Officer might be involved in, at the risk of overwhelming the post-holder. It should be noted that supporting tenants generally with mental health issues is still a key part of our day to day support services, we have recognised this with increased training to date and accept that there is further training to be undertaken in order to equip our Officers with the right skills.

3. Housing Options, Allocations and Strategy.

3.1 Recognising the increasing demand in homelessness and pressure on the allocations team, we have reviewed the management structure carefully to ensure capacity. We have detached the Housing Strategy team away from the Housing Needs Manager and the Housing Strategy team and the Housing Systems team are now reporting into the Housing Service Lead directly. This is a better fit due to the Housing Service Lead having responsibility for the whole of the service and the Housing Strategy/Systems team very

much working across the service as opposed to solely reporting into one area of the service. We have changed the title of the Housing Needs and Strategy Manager to the Housing Solutions Manager to better reflect the direct link with housing needs and housing allocations.

- 3.2 Following the departure of the previous Allocations and Enabling Manager, we have separated back out these two functions. After carefully reviewing this post and together with feedback from the previous post holder we have recognised that over 90% of the role is taken up on allocations work and the enabling role needs a separate focus. We have since recruited into the post of Housing Allocations Manager.
- 3.3 Corporately, we have been in discussion with the Property and Estates team about support they can offer in relation to our enabling function and the team will be supporting us more closely with this moving forward. This has already seen the transfer of some of our acquisition work going across to the team but with careful oversight and links maintained with our Housing Enabling Officer. We recognise the additional resource that we have lost since the departure of our Housing Needs and Enabling Manager and are currently considering the best way forward with a view to what resources/support is required.
- 3.4 Our Information and Analysis Officer will now report directly into the Housing Systems Team. This sits more appropriately with the need to ensure our Housing System is fit for purpose and picks up on the need for the emphasis on data and in particular dashboard reporting that we are keen to enhance across the service.

4. Property and Asset

- 4.1 We are still considering some elements of the Property and Asset team, particularly in relation to compliance and tenant safety matters and the changing legislation we are seeing in this area which will likely result in the need for increased resources. We are bringing forward a report on the Building Safety Act to the November meeting and are likely to request additional funding for at least one post that can oversee this area. We are in the process of recruiting for a Property and Asset Manager following the departure in June of the previous post-holder.
- 4.2 The climate change report presented to Members today also supports the edition of an additional Programme Works Officer who will specialise in energy efficiency. This will ensure we are able to accelerate the considerable amount of work required to our housing stock to meet the aspirations as set out in the climate change action plan.
- 4.3 We have been pleased to recruit into the position of Contract Manager for our Asset Management Contract. Prior to recruitment we have once again revised the role and re-focused the emphasis on contract management and the need to ensure we have a role dedicated to the delivery of what we have set out to achieve over the next 10 years in our Integrated Asset Management Contract.
- 4.4 We have developed the previous Senior Repairs Advisor role into a Customer & Business Improvement Manager. This builds on the need to keep a tighter focus on customer satisfaction within the Property and Asset team. This will help us to ensure we are focused on 'what matters' to tenants and explore opportunities to continuously improve our service offer. We also intend for this role to focus more robustly on closing some of the gaps between teams and to always ensure good liaison internally between teams to ensure residents benefit from a better service.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 The report has outlined a number of changes that have taken place but also highlights areas where a review is ongoing. This work has been impacted by the pandemic, at the start of lockdown we initially put all recruitment matters on hold in order to manage our response. We are now making considerable progress with a number of face to face interviews now being able to resume.
- 5.2 As we work towards the Service Plan for 2021/2022 (once the new Council Plan has been released) and as we continue to recover from Covid, we must be alert to changes in priorities and the strategic direction of the housing service under our new Cabinet, it is therefore right to keep the structure under constant review in order to ensure we can deliver on everything we need to achieve.
- 5.3 There are some significant challenges ahead in relation to work required in relation to climate change, building safety as well as future development aspirations. All of these areas need careful planning and consideration as it is vital that the right resources are in place to drive these projects forward at the pace required.