

## Part A

<b>Report to:</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	22 January 2018
<b>Report of:</b>	Head of Housing
<b>Title:</b>	Housing Service New Operating Model - Implementing the Homeless Reduction Act 2017

### 1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out the planned changes to the housing services operating model for dealing with the requirements of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017. The report sets out the changes that will be necessary to the customer journey and supporting processes, the organisational structure and the job roles contained within it, technology requirements to deal with the provision of services to meet the requirements of the act and the information requirements of the service going forward.

The service must specifically deliver a housing service to meet the obligations of

The Housing Act 1985  
The Housing Act 1996  
The Housing Act 2004  
The Homeless Reduction Act 2017.

- 1.2 Primarily the changes to the service have been necessitated by a number of factors;-

Changes required to comply with The Homeless Reduction Act 2017  
Changes required to deliver the Watford 2020 Vision and Principles  
Changes required to improve service provision and deliver operational efficiencies.

- 1.3 To meet the requirements of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 (HRA) the service is implementing a new housing software system. This brings with it new capabilities and potential which require an element of service redesign to fully exploit. The housing service asks Cabinet to agree the changes to the service operating model and approve the organisational structure changes which will support the delivery of the new model and the finance for the proposed changes.

## 2.0 Risks

2.1 See Risk Log attached – Appendix C

## 3.0 Recommendations

3.1 It is recommended that the new customer journey based on the Watford 2020 Vision and principles be adopted.

3.2 It is recommended that the services organisational redesign and its associated costings be approved.

### **Contact Officer:**

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**Report approved by:** Nick Fenwick (Deputy Managing Director)

## 4.0 Detailed proposal

4.1 A revised Customer Journey is put in place which is aligned with the Watford 2020 vision and principles and which improves the customer experience and delivers operational efficiencies.

The Homeless Reduction Act 2017 will not only increase the demand placed on the service in terms of absolute numbers it will also increase the amount of work that needs to be done with each customer and places a duty on local authorities to keep the plans it produces in conjunction with clients under review. In order to mitigate the effects of this increased demand the service examined its current customer journey and looked to change this to minimise the staffing increase required and at the same time improve the customer experience.

Currently housing provides a drop in service for clients which sees them attending on the day and seeing a housing officer after filling in a paper form. This process means housing officer time is wasted collecting and entering applicant details onto the

computer system and more importantly the housing officer has little to work with and initially is unlikely to be able to do much with the client other than give some basic advice. This leads to an element of failure demand and multiple visits for the client.

The new customer journey will see customers completing their application online using either the new housing systems web pages or the housing system apps. Where necessary this online application will be supported or mediated. This may be done by either council staff in the shared service centre or housing or by our third sector partners. The only drop in service offered will be for those who are “homeless on the day”. The system will produce for customers a draft plan as well as providing them with housing advice and signposting to relevant agencies dependent upon their housing issues. This application will then be triaged and the customer contacted so that any information required creating a detailed housing plan or processing their application can be collected. Where possible the triage service will try and resolve the client’s issues but if they are unable to do so they will escalate to an interview with a caseworker who will have the necessary skills and experience to help the client produce a relevant and fit personal housing plan.

In putting together a personal housing plan the caseworker will ensure that they utilise services provided by the third sector as well as in house resources and will make referrals where appropriate. The caseworker will then continue to work with the client and keep their plan updated and under review until the client’s issue is resolved.

Further details on the customer journey can be found in Appendix A.

- 4.2 A revised Organisational Structure is put in place with revised job descriptions which allow the service to best meet its duties, deliver the requirements of the HRA, improve service resilience and improve staff retention.

The new organisational structure has been put in place to achieve a number of objectives.

- Cope with the anticipated demand increase
- Provide increased resilience to the housing function
- Exploit the efficiencies afforded by the new housing IT system
- Reflect the changes required in staff skills and competencies required to deliver the act.

An exercise was undertaken to estimate the increased staffing requirements that the service will require to deliver the requirements of the HRA. This was based on the methodology and assumptions used by the Association of Housing Advice Services and are based on the experience of Welsh authorities and London Trailblazers in

implementing the act. This exercise can be found in Appendix B.

Efficiency savings from the new customer journey and housing IT system were factored in and used to reduce the number of posts required and minimum staffing increase levels were identified. Thought was given to how the structure could provide more resilience for the service in both operational and management roles and also how the service restructure could provide clearer career paths in an effort to ensure that recruitment and retention could be improved, an important consideration at this time of increased demand for housing professionals.

From this a structure was put together which is thought would have the potential to deliver a statutorily compliant service. A proportion of the roles are different enough that the changes to the job descriptions were substantial and need to go through job evaluation to confirm the job grades.

This has resulted in a structure that the service feels it will be able to recruit to with most of the current staff being able to slot into one of the new roles. There will be a small number of staff whose jobs will be placed at risk though it is likely that there will be suitable jobs for them in the new structure which they could apply for.

The main changes around the new structure are as follows:

### **Creation of Triage Service**

The triage service will be the first line of contact between the client and the housing service. This will remove a component of the lower level admin work that caseworkers currently deal with and move it to officers at a lower level. The triage service will also undertake the administrative function in relation to the housing register (HR) and choice based lettings (CBL). By creating a specific team and amalgamating the administrative work for HR and CBL the service will not only gather information in which to proceed with housing advice and homeless applications in a more efficient manner it also increases resilience in relation to both the administration of the housing register and the choice based lettings schemes. This role is also seen as a good entry level role into the housing service, with progression available to Caseworker. The triage officer role is not seen as location specific and potentially could lend itself to being home sourced giving the potential for the council to further reduce its accommodation requirements going forward.

### **Creation of the Property Officer Role**

The property officer role amalgamates three current roles and will give the housing service the best opportunity to acquire and manage lettings with which to discharge our obligations. By amalgamating the roles in a more general property role the service builds much needed capacity in this area and increases the resilience of the service over the current model where business continuity is threatened by having specific

roles with only one individual in those roles.

### **Creation of the Senior Property Officer Role**

This role supports the Housing Supply Manager and Property officers, in particular deputising for the Housing Supply Manager in their absence. The role involves liaising with landlords, the procurement of property, contract monitoring, overseeing placements in temporary accommodation, and management of the private sector access scheme.

### **Creation of the Housing Performance and Policy Trainee Role**

This role will support the strategic and policy aspirations of the service and will provide support to the management team in developing the Housing Department's strategic approach and assisting in managing the performance of the section. This role will undertake the contract monitoring that will be required, specifically the contract for the IT provision and with the reviews provider as well as any contracts / Service Level Agreements that end up in place with external partners.

The change in the organisational structure has been supported by a growth bid that is within the Budget report and is aligned with the additional cost of the service of £165k

A full breakdown of the current and proposed structure and relevant costings can be found in Appendix B along with a copy of the growth bid submitted.

## **5.0 Implications**

### **5.1 Financial**

5.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that a growth bid is included in the 2018/19 budget proposals.

### **5.2 Legal Issues (Monitoring Officer)**

5.2.1 The Head of Democracy and Governance comments that the councils HR policies will be complied with when undertaking the proposed reorganisation. The proposed increase in establishment numbers will need to be approved by Cabinet and Council during budget setting. The council will need to have regard to the provisions of the GDPR in setting up the new IT systems and also have appropriate contracts in place if third party providers are to process personal data on the council's behalf.

### 5.3 **Equalities/Human Rights**

#### 5.3.1 An equalities impact assessment is underway though not yet complete.

As this is a change in service delivery, an equalities impact analysis is being undertaken. The emerging conclusions of that analysis are:

Accessibility to the service is increased as the service will now provide online capabilities to not only make applications to the housing register and choice based lettings but also to apply for housing advice and make a homeless application. Customers will also be able to upload their own documents onto the housing system unlike presently where they need to physically submit documents. This change should help those with mobility issues who may struggle to attend the housing service in person.

The service is aware that there are a proportion of clients who may find difficulty in making an online application either because they do not possess equipment on which to make an online application or the capability to make an online application. In order to mitigate this service will intend to provide both supported and mediated self-service. This can be provided through the customer service centre or through some of our third party partners who have indicated a willingness to support their clients make applications.

The new housing IT system is able to use Google Translate and therefore is able to be a system that applicants can use in languages other than English. This should be helpful to those clients for whom English is not a first language.

The service will monitor delivery in these areas and amend the process if required.

### 5.4 **Staffing**

#### 5.4.1 There is an increase in staffing which is outlined in both 3.2 and in more detail in Appendix B

### 5.5 **Accommodation**

#### 5.5.1 The accommodation requirements of the housing service will change. The emerging customer journey model is one where all initial applications will be made online. Where required this might require some sort of mediated access and it has already been established that some of our third party partners are prepared to do some of this

mediated access for some cohorts of customers. However, there will be a requirement to retain the provision for mediated and supported self-serve at the customer service centre. Our outline accommodation requirements have been relayed to the Facilities Management Section Head who is overseeing the changes to the council's buildings and in particular the building changes that will affect the customer contact centre. These requirements have also been relayed to the Customer Services Section Head.

For these customers, it is anticipated they will need access to a PC (ideally private) and the facilities to scan and upload documents (which can also be completed via an app accessed via phone or tablet). Information from other organisations which take a similar approach indicate that up to 90% of people are typically able to self-serve.

As they move through the customer journey a high proportion (approximately 70-80%) of those presenting will require an interview. It is known that demand will increase, though not by how much. Local Authorities in Wales, who have already implemented the HRA, have seen a 26% increase in presentations whilst the London Borough of Southwark, a pilot area for the legislation, has report a 50% increase in presentations. It is anticipated that the increase in demand in Watford will be closer to the 50% because of the similarities with London Boroughs in terms of current housing supply and demand. As a result, it is expected that the number of customers applying for housing to be between 25 and 30 a week on average, with 70 to 80% of these requiring interviews. The number of interviews expected would therefore be somewhere between 18 and 24 a week, with interviewing lasting approximately 2 hours.

## **5.6 Community Safety/Crime and Disorder**

5.6.1 The service does not envisage any changes that will affect community safety or crime and disorder.

## **5.7 Sustainability**

5.7.1 The increased move to online services and vision to share access to our housing systems will mean a reduction in the printing, storage and dissemination of documentation increasing the sustainability of the council. In addition to this the move to a daily bidding cycle for properties under choice based lettings will improve the asset usage of our registered providers.

The reduced requirement for clients to be physically present in our buildings will also we believe reduce the amount of journeys undertaken in Watford by clients who need to interact with the housing service.

## **Appendices**

- Appendix A – Customer Journey
- Appendix B – Organisational Redesign
- Appendix C – Risk Log

## **Background Papers**

- No papers were used in the preparation of this report

## **File Reference**

- None