

Housing Value for Money Review Report

Phase 2

November 2011

Rachel Dawson
Housing Section Head

This report sets out progress on the review of the Housing Service and proposes a new model and a new structure for service delivery.

1. Introduction

Under the programme of service prioritisation, the Housing Service has been set savings targets of:

Phase 1 £50,000 for 2011/12

Phase 2 £150,000 for 2012/13

The Phase 1 savings were approved by Cabinet in June 2011 and are being implemented. Anticipated profiling will be £51,000 in the current financial year and an additional £4,000 in the following year. This leaves £145,000 savings to be identified.

The Phase 2 savings will inevitably be located within employee costs, as non staffing budgets have already been reduced during Phase 1. The current staffing budget post Phase 1 is £880,000.

This level of savings will require a fundamental remodelling of the service. Even without the necessity of achieving savings, this would have been imperative in the near future in order to manage the current and future demand for services and new workstreams that are emerging.

2. Review process

The Housing Service has undertaken an extensive review over the past year which has included:

- Data analysis of performance, costs and demands on the service including the impact of impending national policy changes
- Comparison with other authorities in key areas of activity
- Workshops and interviews with staff, other services, partners and elected members
- External challenge from consultancy Campbell Tickell and the Communities and Local Government Specialist Advisor on Homelessness
- Service user consultation in line with the Channel Shift Project
- Cross departmental work to move towards improved integrated working between services which interface with Housing e.g. Planning, CSC, Environmental Services, Property, Housing Benefit

3. Contextual change

Over the lifetime of the review, there has been considerable change within the operating and strategic context. The service has needed to respond to a significant increase in demand for our services, particularly around

homelessness and has had to set up and resource systems for operating B&B placements which have not been in place for a number of years.

The impact of funding cuts by Supporting People is beginning to take effect e.g. loss of Floating Support provision. The mechanisms for funding affordable housing have changed and there is a considerable amount of policy work in progress to respond to the impacts for Watford. Similarly the impending Localism Bill has brought an urgent requirement for a strategic and operational review of our nomination policy and arrangements for managing the housing register.

4. **Headline findings**

A synopsis is provided at Appendix A which identifies the key findings from:

- The internal review
- Campbell Tickell consultancy report
- Communities and Local Government Peer Review
- Channel shift and service user consultation
- Head of Service frontline shadowing exercise

There is clear evidence of good practice within the service, experienced and professional staff who are keen to see the service improve and develop and good working relationships with partners.

The findings of our internal review work and external challenge reviews points to the need to:

- Manage demand for housing services more effectively and proactively e.g. get prevention in place earlier, be a more effective client to our accommodation providers, use our staffing and other resources to best effect
- Achieve a more flexible structure which can respond to changing tasks and peaks in workload and in particular new areas of work which are emerging e.g. private sector leasing
- Achieve a more resilient structure – to get away from cover issues where we have individuals with specialist skills and a number of small teams carrying out different roles necessitating managers for each of these
- Minimise duplication between teams which results in double handling of cases or fragmented activity e.g. homelessness, private sector
- Encourage a more “tenure blind” approach to the different housing options, reinforced by colleagues dealing with social housing and private sector housing within the same teams

5. Proposed new model for Housing Services

The proposed new model moves away from having 4 separate teams towards having 2 main areas of activity (**demand and supply**) which better reflect the nature and volume of work that the service needs to respond to, with an overarching strategic function across both of the main service areas.

The model is predicated on an active and co-ordinated approach to managing demand for the council's housing services though integrated working between all the appropriate services. It also anticipates parallel activity taking place to review the council's nomination policy (which could potentially see changes to the volume of applications registered if Band E is reviewed) and work with Herts Choice Homes to develop a self service assessment tool which can be accessed remotely or within the CSC.

Housing Section	
Demand Functions	Supply Functions
Housing advice (homelessness and housing register), casework	Placements into social housing, private rented, temporary accommodation, refuges, hostels (including Choice Based Lettings shortlisting)
Assessment for Choice Based Lettings and Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme (RDGS) processing applications, banding decisions	Rent deposit bonds administration including sign up and claims
Homelessness investigation and decision making, out of hours standby	Liaison internal and external partners e.g. HARI, Housing Benefit and supply sustainment e.g. Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme, B&B trouble shooting
Case management, workflow management, escalation of complex cases	Supply commissioning, monitoring and liaison (public and private sector, permanent and temporary), asset management, development of new affordable housing, local lettings policies, nomination agreements, private sector leasing, empty

Appendix A

	properties opportunities, standards, funding,
Visits for all demand related activities	Disabled Facilities Grant processing, assessment, technical function
Demand management and communication strategy including with partners	
Corporate working groups, budget monitoring and control, accounts, training, partnerships	
Strategy/policy/performance/consultation/equalities/asset management	
Integrated working Housing Benefit, Property, Service Support Team, Env. Health, CSC, Corporate Strategy, Planning, Legal, IT, Members	

6. Proposed structure

The proposed structure is included at Appendix B.

The structure sees a reduction in the number of FTEs and significant change to the majority of roles which will necessitate new working practices and/or a new range of skills. The roles of officers delivering the Disabled Facilities Grant function have not been amended as the county wide review of service delivery is continuing and outcomes are not clear at this stage.

The proposals would result in the following posts being deleted:

- 1 FTE Housing Needs Manager
- 1 FTE Homelessness Prevention and Housing Advice Manager
- 1 FTE Private Sector Housing Manager
- 1 FTE Senior Homelessness Officer
- 1 FTE Homelessness Officer
- 3 FTE Housing Needs Officers
- 1 FTE Housing Advisor
- 4.43 FTE Homelessness Prevention and Advice Officers
- 1 FTE Private Sector Access Co-ordinator
- 0.5 FTE Tenancy Liaison Officer
- 1 FTE Housing Development Co-ordinator
- 1 FTE Housing Strategy Manager

The following post would remain without significant change although additional duties have been incorporated:

1 FTE Housing Section Head

The following posts would remain without significant change:

1 FTE Disabled Adaptations Surveyor
1 FTE Private Sector Housing Officer

The following new posts would be created

1 FTE Housing Demand Manager (Grade 8)
1 FTE Casework Management Officer (Grade 7)
4 FTE Housing Advice Officers (Grade 6)
2 FTE Housing Officers (Demand) (Grade 5)
1 FTE Housing Supply Manager (Grade 8)
2 FTE Housing Supply Officers (Grade 6)
2 FTE Housing Officers (Supply) (Grade 5)
1 FTE Housing Strategy Officer (Grade 8)

Employee costs under this model reduce from £880,000 to an anticipated £747,000. Exact costings cannot be determined as they depend on the spinal point at which staff are appointed to the new roles, whether or not they opt for the pension scheme etc

7. Consultation

The principles of the supply and demand model have been presented to Housing staff and colleagues in other services through a number of workshops and have been received very positively.

Formal staff consultation on the actual structure commenced on 25 October which will give the opportunity for more detailed testing with colleagues on how the model will work in practice and to identify training and implementation issues which will need to be addressed.

A consultation with other services who interact on housing issues is also taking place in parallel to the Housing staff consultation. This includes services such as the Customer Service Centre, Revenues and Benefits, Property Services, Environmental Health and Planning in order to identify opportunities for greater integrated working across the council, how this can be implemented and what the likely impacts could be both from an internal and a customer perspective.

8. Provisional Timetable

21 October 2011 am	Proposed structure to Awayday for approval to consult
21 October pm	Meeting with Unison
25 October 2011	Staff consultation on structure begins
3 and 4 November	Individual consultation meetings (1)
10 November 2011	Consultation workshops with other

Appendix A

	services
21 and 22 November 2011	Individual consultation meetings (2)
24 November 2011	30 day staff consultation ends Cabinet reports to print
25 November – 29 November	Results of consultation processed and addendum to Cabinet report prepared if necessary
5 December 2011	Cabinet decision on new model and structure
6 December – 14 December 11	Staff briefing, completion of skills audits (optional), expressions of interest and internal applications for new roles, voluntary redundancy or jobshare
14 and 15 December 11	Interview skills training for all affected staff
19 and 20 December 11	Interview for manager posts
w/c 9 and 16 January 12	Recruitment to next tier of posts
From 16 January onwards a detailed implementation plan will apply, headlines of which will be tabled at Cabinet on 5 December as critical aspects are under discussion as part of the current staff consultation.	

Appendix A

Analysis key findings from review

<p>Internal</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick wins are achievable: Online form, Enhanced Housing Options Self Service, Alpha splits to avoid double handling, improved working with Housing Benefit, CSC, Environmental Health • Increase activity around supply in private sector • Reduce number of managers • Staff have informal specialisms – need to share the learning • Review Band E (no identified housing need) • Improve work to attract Private Sector Landlords • Reduce duplication e.g. forms and documents collected for different purposes
<p>Campbell Tickell</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional structure, not flexible or adaptable, needs a transformational approach • Reduce number of managers • Introduce more generic working • Join up housing actions to corporate work programmes • Increase focus on private rented activity • Investigate outsourcing Disabled Facilities Grant • Need to streamline P&A activity, remodel advice offer, reduce duplication • Housing benefit is a key area for attention • Joint approach on private rented needed across the council • Other services need training to deal with clients • Need alternative prevention not reliant on Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme • Review visiting activity
<p>CLG</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility of service is a strength • Review where our front line is positioned e.g. improve website, training and enhanced role for CSC, advisory literature, consult customers • Review prevention scripts for CSC, training • Keep service safe re homelessness approaches (open to challenge), earlier intervention, more home visits • Improve case management, consistency • Increase generic working around prevention and statutory homelessness • Repackage private rented offer, more intervention at interviews with landlords, tie in with Credit Union • Housing benefit delays are fuelling demand and compromising supply • Translate strategies into team plans • Use homelessness grant or lose it – consider landlord and benefit liaison officer

Appendix A

Channel shift and service user consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sample of contact data shows same clients see Housing Benefit and Housing on one visit• Need to improve pathway starting with website, CSC, deter applications where no realistic opportunity of social housing, provide mini assessment with options, provide information while waiting for interview• Staff professional and respond quickly• Shorten process for DFG and homeless applications• Need to build more houses• Main preference telephone contact, but face to face still feels like a better way to get an effective response if not achieved in another way• Need to improve communication on cases between the teams
Head of Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demand management needs to be introduced• Visiting function to be reviewed• Re-active operational casework management requirement• Supply side issues identified• DFG – need to stabilise provision pending future analysis of partnership options• Role of Housing GMT and Section Head needs to link to changes to any future corporate model emerging from the Road Map work.• Integrated working needed between all services which impact on Housing operational and strategic delivery

Appendix A

Appendix B Proposed Structure

(Working titles, provisional grades)

