

Report of Head of Housing Support

Report to Director of Environment and Housing

Date:

Subject: Housing Needs Assessment – Transfer to Strategic Housing

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. In April 2013 Executive Board made the decision to transfer housing needs assessment activity to Leeds Housing Options, which was part of Statutory Housing Services.
2. The proposal was deferred pending the establishment of Housing Leeds and now relates to the transfer of the housing needs assessment function from Housing Management to Strategic Housing Services.
3. A proposal has been drawn up that involves the Leeds Housing Options Service, based at Great George Street, being the central housing needs assessment service Hub; with an outreach 'spoke' services being provided at a range of locations. This will deliver consistency of service whilst at the same time maintaining a localised focus.
4. Funding of £320k from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) has been earmarked to fund 12 C1 Housing Advisor posts as agreed by the Director of Environment and Housing. .

Recommendations

- 1 Approve the establishment of an outreach housing needs assessment service in Strategic Housing and the funding of 12 C1 Housing Advisor posts. .

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To approve the transfer of the housing needs assessment function from Housing Management to Strategic Housing with the accompanying funding resource of £320k from the Housing Revenue Account.

2. Background information

- 2.1 The April 2013 Executive Board approved the proposal to transfer housing need assessment activity from the then Leeds ALMOs and BITMO to the Housing Support Service which was then part of the Statutory Housing Division. The functional transfer was put on hold pending the closure of the three ALMOs and the establishment of Housing Leeds. The housing needs assessment activity that this report concerns is now carried out by Housing Leeds – Housing Management and the Housing Support service is now part of Housing Leeds – Strategic Housing.
- 2.2 The functional transfer proposal reflects the overarching principle of the Housing Leeds re-structure that there should be a single point of accountability in relation to specific housing functions.
- 2.3 The Leeds Housing Options Service, which is part of Housing Support group, is the principal Council service offering housing advice to people who are homeless, threatened with homelessness or in some other form of housing need. The key strategic priority of the Leeds Housing Options Service is to maximise homeless prevention outcomes whether by enabling people to ‘stay put’ on an on-going basis in their existing housing or to make a ‘planned move’ to alternative long term suitable accommodation. The Housing Options Services carries out a range of housing need assessments, depending on the nature of the housing need, to determine whether a housing duty is owed by the Council and the priority status for Council (and other social landlord) re-housing that should be awarded. The most prominent assessment of housing need is a homeless assessment which, if a series of legal tests are met, results in the Council awarding high priority for re-housing and accepting a temporary accommodation duty to the applicant which is generally only ended when an offer of a suitable Council tenancy is made.
- 2.4 The Health and Housing Service, which is part of the Housing Support group, carries out medical re-housing assessments to determine whether priority for re-housing should be awarded, on the basis that current housing is unsuitable on medical grounds, and the type of housing (such as sheltered or adapted) that is required.
- 2.5 The Council Housing Management Division, Housing Options and Health and Housing Service all carry out Additional Needs Assessment that potentially award priority for re-housing for a variety of reasons including overcrowding, disrepair and poor housing conditions.
- 2.6 The Housing Support Service (Housing Options and Health and Housing) carried out 5717 housing needs assessments in 2012/13 with 2712 being carried out by the Leeds ALMOs and BITMO.

- 2.7 There has been a significant rise in the number of people presenting for housing advice at Leeds Housing Options in recent years: in 2008 8,000 households presented for housing advice'; by 2013 this number had risen to 12,643.
- 2.8 Despite the increase in service demand, the Council now has the lowest number of people placed in temporary accommodation as homeless households since at least the late 1980s. In September 2008, the Council has 385 homeless households placed on a nightly basis in temporary accommodation with private sector landlords and bed and breakfast providers. In July 2014, the Council has 2 households, both single households who cannot live in hostel accommodation, placed with private providers and no households placed in bed and breakfast. In contrast, Birmingham City Council, at the end of March 2014, placed 344 households in privately leased units, 195 in council owned units and 149 in bed and breakfast accommodation.
- 2.9 The reduction in temporary accommodation placements can be attributed to a focus on homeless prevention, accurate and timely housing need assessment and a proactive approach to temporary accommodation move on; with this approach being underpinned by an intensive case management approach that is led by Housing Options service management.
- 2.10 It is reasonable to determine that, without this approach being adopted, there would be approximately 300 households being placed in privately leased temporary accommodation and a further 100 households being placed in bed and breakfast accommodation on a nightly basis. Expenditure on such placements would be approximately £4m per year. In addition, the Council has had to make a number of challenging decisions in recent years in respect of decommissioning hostel/other supported housing services and these decisions could not have been made without the reduction in temporary accommodation placements.
- 2.13 It is believed that the integration of the housing needs assessment function, with the benefits of having one service fostering a consistent approach to service delivery whilst still maintaining localised services, will create a platform for delivering further improved service outcomes, on prevention and accommodation placements, and budget savings.

3. Main issues

3.1 Staffing Numbers

- 3.1.1 The proposal is to integrate all housing needs assessment activity into Strategic Housing Services/Housing Support Group under the banner of Leeds Housing Options. The Housing Options service would act as the central service hub with a system of delivering localised 'spoke' services linked to the hub. The localised services will operate in the Council's One Stop Services, including the emerging community hubs, housing management offices, localised services, hospitals, prisons and home visits. The central hub will operate to foster a consistent approach to intervention, assessment and decision making whilst the 'spoke' services will mean that there is a localised focus. It is likely that there will be a more intensive service around the St George's Centre, Dewsbury Road, Reginald Centre, Compton Road and Armley One Stop Centres. Nevertheless, the service will

operate so that people living in outlying areas, such as Pudsey, Wetherby or Horsforth, receive an equally timely, comprehensive and bespoke service.

- 3.1.2 The proposal relates to the transfer of responsibility for, on the basis of 2013 figures, 2712 housing needs assessments that are carried out by the housing management service. There are resource implications relating to this functional transfer including staffing. The staffing would become Housing Advisors (Outreach).
- 3.1.3 The best comparator service to the Outreach Service was the old Medical Re-Housing Officer who carried out medical re-housing assessments on a home visiting basis.
- 3.1.5 The top performing then Medical Re-Housing Officer carried out 180 assessments in 2012/13. Service management would be expecting that all Outreach Officers would achieve this performance rather than it being the performance of the top performing group of staff. A figure for 2013/14 is not applicable as the Medical Re-Housing Officer post was changed to become Independent Living Officers in April 2013 and the post remit was extended to include Disabled Facilities Grant 'means test' assessments.
- 3.1.6 A calculation of 2712 assessments with each officer carrying out 180 assessments per year equates to 15 FTE Housing Advisors. A further efficiency of 3 FTE Housing Advisor post can be generated by linking the new Outreach Service with the Housing Registration Service that was transferred into Strategic Housing Services in May 2014. The service transfer has resulted in Housing Registration Officers being able to immediately pass applications, in which an applicant has detailed an unmet housing need, to a Housing Advisor for a further intervention. Such interventions include a housing needs assessment, an invitation to engage in parental mediation or a safeguarding referral. The proposed connection between the Housing Registration and Outreach Service will mean that 12 FTE Housing Advisors are required.
- 3.1.7 £320k has been identified within the HRA to fund the 12 posts and this has been approved by the Director of Environment and Housing.
- 3.1.8 Service management will be covered by existing Housing Support resources.
- 3.1.9 The 12 FTE Housing Advisor posts will be recruited in accordance with Council policy procedure with posts initially recruited to through the Talent Pool and then through internal Council advertising. It may well be that a second Talent Pool matching exercise, after internal advertising/recruitment, is required.
- 3.1.10 An implementation plan is being drawn up with Housing Management with this focused on incrementally introducing the service across the 8 housing management areas.
- 3.1.11 It is anticipated that the Outreach Service will be operational by 01/02/2015.

4. Corporate Considerations

4.1. Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1.1. Due to the proposed changes to the terms and conditions of employment, which were unanimously agreed by the Council's General Purpose Committee on 29 July 2014, the implementation of restructure and assimilation process will be in accordance with the Council's policies and procedures in place at the time implementation commences.
- 4.1.2. A recruitment exercise will commence with the first option being to identify candidates from within the 'Talent Pool' and, if required, a Council wide recruitment exercise for any remaining posts.
- 4.1.3. It is intended to recruit to the 12 posts using the existing Housing Advisor job description. Existing staff at Leeds Housing Options will be given the opportunity to express an interest in carrying out outreach work on either a full or part time basis. Discussions will take place with staff as to how this option should be organised.

4.2. Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1. The proposal will ensure that the Council is better able to respond to unmet housing need in a timely, consistent and imaginative way. An Equality Impact Screening exercise is attached to this report.

4.3. Council policies and City Priorities

- 4.3.1. The housing need assessment function contributes to the Leeds City Priority Plan priorities of 'helping children to live in safe and supportive families' and 'support more people to live safely in their own homes'

4.4. Resources and value for money

- 4.4.1. The cost of 12 FTE Housing Advisors on the highest C1 spinal point is £320k per year and the earmarked funding has been approved by the Director of Environment and Housing.

4.5. Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

- 4.5.1. Leeds City Council has a legal duty to provide a housing advice service to any person who requires it and to assess whether a housing duty is owed/re-housing 'preference' award should be made.
- 4.5.2. The report contains no exempt information.
- 4.5.3. The proposals set out in this report are not subject to call in.

4.6. Risk Management

4.6.1. None identified.

5. Conclusion

5.1 The April 2013 Executive Board approved the proposal to transfer the housing needs assessment function from the Leeds ALMOs (now Housing Leeds Housing Management) to Statutory Housing Services – now Housing Leeds Strategic Housing. The report sets out the benefits of implementing this decision and the resources required to fund the staffing requirement.

6. Recommendation

6.1 To approve the transfer of the housing needs assessment function from Housing Management to Strategic Housing with the accompanying staffing resource requirement.

7. Background Information

7.1. None