

CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL	Cabinet 5 June 2019
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Report title	Tackling homelessness together – a proactive service approach in line with prevention strategy	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Peter Bilson City Assets and Housing	
Key decision	Yes	
In forward plan	Yes	
Wards affected	All Wards	
Accountable Director	Kate Martin, Director of City Housing	
Originating service	Housing Strategy & Policy	
Accountable employee	Anthony Walker	Homelessness Strategy and External Relationships Manager
	Tel	01902 551631
	Email	anthony.walker@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	Housing Leadership Team	5 March 2019

Recommendations for decision:

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Approve a review of the 2019-2020 Housing Options Service and Temporary Accommodation provision.
2. Approve the setting up of a supplementary expenditure budget of £718,000 in 2019-2020 as a result of receipt of Homelessness grant funding and to delegate authority to the Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing and the Director of City Housing to allocate the grant.
3. Approve the use of an additional ten Council housing properties for temporary accommodation use.

Recommendations for noting:

The Cabinet is asked to note:

1. The transition in 2017 transferring operational homelessness and support services from the City Council to Wolverhampton Homes, the City's management agent.
2. The initial findings in relation to the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 on service delivery.
3. The City's partnership working that has arisen as a direct response to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update following the transfer of Council homeless and prevention services to Wolverhampton Homes (WH).
- 1.2 To outline the new service proposals and agree the way in which the service will be structured and funded, in order to meet the needs of current legislation and contribute to meeting the aims of the City's Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2018 – 2022 priorities.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 A review of housing related services was requested by the Council in 2017.
- 2.2 The main principal established through this review was that it would be more logical and consistent for the homelessness and the related services of temporary accommodation and housing support to be managed by WH as the in-house service provider, giving better value for money.
- 2.3 The final transfer of services took place on 1 December 2017 and sought to achieve a saving in terms of delivery costs (a total of £400,000 spread of over 2017-2018 and 2018-2019).
- 2.4 At the time of transfer the current legislation under which homelessness was delivered changed via the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRAAct) 2017.
- 2.5 The HRAAct, as was reported to Cabinet in April 2018, is one of the biggest changes in homelessness legislation in England for 15 years. It effectively puts two new duties to the original statutory rehousing duty to prevent and relieve homelessness.
- 2.6 The HRAAct also placed a requirement on local authorities to assist those threatened with homelessness within 56 days (compared to 28 days before the Act), placed a new statutory duty to take 'reasonable steps' to help resolve homelessness for all (unless they are ineligible based on their immigration status), and became 'blind' to priority need, local connection and intentionality.
- 2.7 Other significant HRAAct duties include:
 - A new obligation to provide those who approach with a Personal Housing Plan (PHP).
 - A new duty to 'relieve' the homelessness of eligible persons. In such cases, there may be a requirement to provide accommodation for 56 days even if the applicant is found not to be defined as vulnerable under the previous legislation.
 - A duty for statutory organisations to refer customers who it believes are homeless or at risk of homelessness into the local authority homeless provision, i.e. Wolverhampton Homes.
- 2.8 The HRAAct has therefore led to the need for WH to remodel the services that were transferred in 2017 based on the ability to respond to the Act and ensure a continued reduction in homelessness and meeting the statutory duties.

3.0 Post HRA Findings and Implementation of new Service Model.

- 3.1 The Act has extended legal obligations to broader set of circumstances, for longer and for a wider range of people. This means anyone with a potential housing problem which potentially creates the risk of them losing their home within 56 days can seek assistance within the new statutory framework.
- 3.2 Single person households or couples of working ages who have previously qualified just for advice, will now have to be supported more extensively, including in some cases to the point of providing short-term accommodation. The challenges we are now having to respond to include:
- Increased demand for support and assistance;
 - Increase in need to place in temporary accommodation;
 - Need for greater levels of suitable (including affordable) permanent accommodation.
- 3.3 The requirement to take applications at an earlier point (within 56 rather than 28 days) has led to an increase in initial approaches.
- 3.4 **Table 1** - Number of initial contacts vs applications made

2016 - 2017			2017 - 2018		2018 - 2019	
	Contacts	Applications	Contacts	Applications	Contacts	Applications
Q1	650	404	655	398	947	353
Q2	702	495	730	449	1007	386
Oct	231	138	248	147	349	121
Nov	202	129	139	116	262	122

- 3.5 This information is available nationally between April 2018-June 2018 with 64,960 homelessness assessments made under the new duties, and 58,660 households were assessed as being owed a statutory homelessness duty in the UK.
- 3.6 In stark contrast in the same period in 2017 Local Housing Authorities made 27,470 homeless assessments of which 14,400 were owed a statutory homelessness duty.
- 3.7 The number of households in temporary accommodation nationally was 82,310, up 5% from 78,540 on 30th June 2017, and up 71% on the low of 48,010 on 31 December 2010.
- 3.8 Wolverhampton has seen an increase of 22% from 89 in 2017 to 109 in the same period in 2018.
- 3.9 These and other implications of the Act are now better understood, however there is a need to urgently monitor other ways of working to ensure that an effective service that provides value is continued to be delivered given the significant demand.

3.10 Along with greater emphasis on partnership working between the Council, Wolverhampton Homes and other organisations, the following systems changes have been put in place:

- All cases are subject to a triage service, either face-to-face in one-stop-shops or using call operatives in Homes Direct specially trained to assist those presenting as homeless or threatened with homelessness;
- Other than roofless households, all other cases are prioritised ensuring the most urgent cases are seen most quickly, whilst managing the flow through of non-urgent cases more effectively;
- Service delivery from (mainly two) WH locations plus in the field;
- Recruitment to several key posts within the team using a Transitional Fund was completed in 2018-2019. These posts, in the form of Homeless Prevention Assistants and Visiting Officers, focus on more effective triage and prevention approaches;
- Introduction of new case management processes, including more robust temporary accommodation placement and move-on arrangements;
- A refreshed private sector landlord offer using Transitional Funding (see more below);
- A Prevention Fund available for Officers to use at their discretion (within a framework) to make payments where it will prevent/relieve homelessness;
- Tenancy sustainment support with assistance to maximise income, welfare advice and budgeting advice;
- More robust management of temporary accommodation;
- Supporting the Council's Homelessness Prevention Strategy via working as part of the multi-agency team accommodating and supporting rough sleepers;
- Work on the development of increased single homeless persons provision;
- Assistance in the development of specialist primary health service for homeless people;
- Pilot of a Housing First model for rough sleepers, whereby individuals are offered a secure tenancy with wrap around support;
- Sharing good practice at a regional level;
- New Service Level Agreements for the delivery of homelessness services with clear agreed objectives;
- Homelessness Partnerships.

4.0 Recommendations

4.1 At the point of transfer of services, a commitment was given not to alter employees' terms and conditions for at least a year, however with an understanding of the HRAct and the potential for the increase in demand there is a need to review and realign the service.

- 4.2 Therefore, the first recommendation is for Cabinet to approve a review of the structure of all teams within the homelessness and housing options service area and temporary accommodation as set out in Appendix 1 to this report.
- 4.3 The new model will be more flexible and responsive to the needs of the increasingly diverse client group. It will look to capitalise on the strengths of not only Housing Options but other teams within WH.
- 4.4 The proposed structure, attached at Appendix 1, relies on three very distinct, but interrelated teams that are focused on:
- People and compliance with statutory requirements – Homelessness Services Team.
 - People and the provision of accommodation (both temporary and settled across all tenures) – Housing Solutions Team.
 - People and support and safeguarding – Support and Sustainment Team.
- 4.5 To implement the proposed structure, there will be a need for additional funding from the Council via Homelessness Grant Funding. Therefore, the recommendation is to establish a budget in 2019-2020 for the use of available Homelessness Grant Funding of £718,000. Authority to allocate the funding to enable the remodel of the service is delegated to the Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing and the Director of City Housing.
- 4.6 Alongside the proposed new service model, some of the grant will be utilised by the City Housing department for strengthened monitoring of the delivery of the service, via a monitoring post, as required statutorily.
- 4.7 WH will also utilise a projected underspend of the base budgets of Housing Outreach and Housing Prevention and Assistance. The underspend will be around £280,000 and has occurred due largely to vacant posts not being filled because of the uncertainty around the impact of the new legislation in 2018, and the need to understand the impact before looking to realign services. It is proposed that the costs of any initial additional staffing costs which result from the restructure are met from this underspend.
- 4.8 Whilst continuing to deliver existing initiatives that prevent and relieve homelessness effectively, Wolverhampton Homes are proposing that some of the additional funding be used to commission a full 'value for money' and efficiency review of the service. This review would consider:
- The time and costs associated with the provision of advice, support and assistance to help households dealing with housing and housing related issues particularly in terms of helping them prevent homelessness.
 - Review the contribution of other services (specifically health and social care) within the City in preventing homelessness and alternative service demand.
 - Any additional service contribution Wolverhampton Homes can make in terms of the aims of other services – for example, the acquisition/management of temporary accommodation for children's social care, the management of temporary accommodation used for No Recourse to Public Fund families, hospital discharge, and other health and social care initiatives.

- Issues relating to the provision, acquisition and demand for temporary accommodation generally and consider the recommendations following the options appraisal of all current existing temporary accommodation across the City.

- 4.9 The acquisition and demand for temporary accommodation mentioned above has been heightened with the increase in placements mentioned in paragraph 3.8.
- 4.10 Therefore, the final recommendation is for the approval of use of 10 additional Council properties to be made available for usage as temporary accommodation for homeless households who are statutorily homeless.
- 4.11 These 10 properties will be dispersed across the City and will offer both greater stability to vulnerable homeless families.
- 4.12 Each of the 10 properties used will mean that households will not have to access bed and breakfast which currently costs the council a minimum of £50 a night where utilising of Council stock costs an average of £15.00 a night which is supported by through Housing Benefit.

5.0 Evaluation of alternative options

- 5.1 The alternative options available are for the service to be transferred back under the control of the Council, however with the impending review and potential savings available any whole scale transfer would have a negative impact on both Council and WH.
- 5.2 A total operating model review of the Landlord Services has been agreed by Cabinet in January for 2019-2020.

6.0 Reasons for decision

- 6.1 Approval will allow the implementation of a needed restructure to enable the service to meet the requirements of current legislation and the increasing demands for temporary accommodation.

7.0 Financial implications

- 7.1 In May 2018 WH received £365,000 from the Council funded from Homelessness Grant funding to aid the transition from the former homelessness duties to those required by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The additional money has been used to fund several posts to supplement the transferred team and to enhance the offer made to private sector landlords. WH forecast that £200,000 of this funding will have been spent up to 31 March 2018. The balance of the funding will be carried forward by WH to continue to fund these posts.
- 7.2 The Council has been awarded final, third year grant allocations in 2019-2020 of £383,000 Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and £143,000 New Burdens Funding. It is forecast that £192,000 will be carried forward from 2018-2019. Therefore, a total budget of £718,000 for 2019-2020 will be established with delegated authority to allocate the grant to the Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing and the Director of City Housing.
- 7.3 This grant funding can be allocated to Wolverhampton Homes to support the service review when the additional costs have been confirmed and funding carried forward from budget under spends in 2018-2019 have been utilised. Funding after 2019-2020 will be

dependent on future Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government grant allocations.

- 7.4 Some of the additional activities noted in Section 11 are scalable meaning there are existing resources in place to handle an amount of additional work or potential to be realigned to accommodate growth, but there is likely to be further financial impact on service delivery as the effect of Act becomes more apparent. With the Act extending the duty to accommodate more households, the cost of temporary accommodation is likely to rise, particularly in relation to difficult to place complex cases. There is also the potential for additional spending to encourage private sector landlords to work with WH to prevent and relieve homelessness by way of financial incentives.

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8.0 Legal implications

- 8.1 The detail of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 are set out elsewhere in this report.
- 8.2 The implementation of the proposals may necessitate changes to the allocation policy. Legal advice and further approvals will be sought as and when necessary.

[DC/22102018/T]

9.0 Equalities implications

- 9.1 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 changes are all led by Central Government and the impact of the changes are national. However, it is suggested that an equalities analysis be carried out in due course when enough data is available.

10.0 Environmental implications

- 10.1 There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

11.0 Human resources implications

- 11.1 Wolverhampton Homes will continue to monitor the impact the legislation has on our capacity to deliver services and review staffing as necessary.
- 11.2 The recruitment done so far has been met from the additional funding provided by the Council.
- 11.3 The recruitment of further additional staff and/or the realignment of existing staff will be managed in accordance with WH's normal policies and procedures.

12.0 Corporate landlord implications

- 12.1 The Whitehouse hostel is subject to review by the Council. The decision to retain the property and to continue to use it as temporary accommodation will have impact on the outcome of any proposed service model.

13.0 Health and wellbeing implications

- 13.1 Improved health and wellbeing through a range of services available to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

14.0 Appendices

Appendix 1 – Service Model Diagram