

Classification: Public

Key Decision: No

Gravesham Borough Council

Report to: Council

Date: 05 October 2021

Reporting officer: Stuart Bobby, Chief Executive

Subject: Housing Options and Private Sector Housing Restructure

Purpose and summary of report:

To outline a proposal to the Council to restructure the Housing Options and Private Sector Housing Teams, which will see an increase in the level of resources within each team to ensure that they are sufficiently resourced to comply with statutory duties and to deliver proactive and preventative services in the future.

Recommendations:

1. Council is requested to approve the proposals to increase the resources within the teams as outlined in this report.

1. Background

- 1.1 The post of Service Manager (Housing Options) was created in June 2020, to provide strategic management and direction for the Housing Options and Private Sector Housing Service areas. Housing Options incorporates Allocations and Rough Sleeping.
- 1.2 Since being appointed, and by working with the various teams, a number of reviews took place to understand how each service operated, what barriers they faced in delivering the service whilst also considering how things could be improved.
- 1.3 One of the main barriers highlighted throughout these reviews was the inadequate level of resources within the teams in order to effectively and proactively respond to statutory duties and in particular to those who may be at risk of, or that are experiencing homelessness, and to those who live in the private sector.
- 1.4 By analysing the historic and current throughput of work within these teams, and by benchmarking against other local authorities it became apparent that the structure of the teams did not reflect the ever-changing demands and agreed priorities of each service area. A copy of the structure as at 01 June 2021 can be found in Appendix 2.
- 1.5 On 01 June 2021, the Service Manager (Housing Options) set out a proposal to Management Team, the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Housing

Services to consult with the existing teams to jointly develop proposals for a new staffing structure with a view to increasing the resources within the teams to ensure the ever-increasing demands on each service area could be properly managed.

2. Consultation and Revised Structure

- 2.1 Formal consultation started with the teams on 16 June 2021 and ended on 15 July 2021. An initial structure was proposed to each team as a starting point along with an outline of new job descriptions, and throughout the consultation each member of staff had an opportunity to meet on a one to one basis with managers to discuss their thoughts and to give feedback on the revised roles and staffing structures which heavily influenced the final proposed structure, and a copy of that structure can be found in Appendix 3.
- 2.2 In designing the new structure every existing established post was reviewed to ensure it was still relevant resulting in all roles being renamed during the review. The final proposed structure will:
 - 2.2.1 **Strengthen the management structure within the services** – this will be achieved by introducing new focused and dedicated management positions within both the Private Sector Housing and Housing Options. The new managers will have operational management responsibility to ensure each service complies with statutory duties whilst ensuring their officers are proactively and sensitively assisting our residents.
 - 2.2.2 **Give the services the adequate resources to meet the Council's statutory duties** – whilst operational leadership is important, so too are the resources within each team in order to deliver the statutory functions and the Council's ambitions as set out within the Corporate Plan.
 - 2.2.3 **Enable early intervention to prevent homelessness and avoid households reaching crisis points resulting in temporary accommodation** – this will be achieved with the creation of a new homeless prevention service, the aim of which will be to focus solely on preventing people becoming homeless in the first place and thereby preventing the need for formal intervention from the housing service.
 - 2.2.4 **Introduce a new Landlord Liaison Service that will support our private sector whilst aiming to sustain tenancies** – key to preventing homelessness occurring, is building a healthy and respectful relationship with the Boroughs private sectors landlords. This new team will work with landlords and will provide assistance and guidance to those landlords who may be experiencing difficulties with their tenants to minimise any potential eviction action, known as a ring before you serve approach.
 - 2.2.5 **Provide a responsive service to customers living in poor housing conditions within the borough** – Private Sector Housing plays an important role within the Borough in terms of responding to and managing housing needs. Before letting a property to a tenant, private sector landlords must comply with certain requirements, including licencing for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO's). The increase in resources within this team will ensure robust and proactive management of private sector housing within the Borough, and in particular, enforcement action where landlords fail in these duties.

- 2.3 The final structure proposed will increase the FTE's within the service by 7 and this will have an impact on future budgets as explained in Section 3 of this report.

3. Budget

- 3.1 Detailed work has been completed to apportion salaries for posts between the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and the General Fund, based on anticipated activities. Following consultation there were further changes to proposed roles and subsequent grades and finance have incorporated all confirmed changes to outline the budget position.
- 3.2 The whole service structure detailed in Appendix 4 shows that the maximum gross budget growth to the Councils General Fund is £101,100 and the impact to the HRA is £12,950 at the top of scale with on-costs.
- 3.3 Due to a number of posts held vacant within the service pending the restructure, the revised structure can be implemented within existing budgets. However, from 2022/23 onwards, a provision will need to be made within the MTFP for the budget growth as outlined in Appendix 4. Consequently, as the proposals outlined within this report increase the council's establishment beyond what was agreed in the budget proposals put to the Council in February 2021, these latest proposals do require the approval of the Council, due to the impact on budgets in future years.
- 3.4 Whilst the salary budget will need to be increased to facilitate the changes from 2022/23 onwards, it is anticipated that with the introduction of more focused and proactive officer positions within each service that there will be an increase in income from additional housing benefits and private sector housing licensing and enforcement fees that will off-set the increase required to the MTFP, ensuring that the revised structure is cost neutral.

4. Recommendation

- 4.1 Changes to the staffing structure are necessary to ensure Gravesham's Housing Service can meet statutory obligations whilst also providing an excellent robust and proactive service to our residents and landlords. Therefore, the recommendation is for the Council to approve the increase in resources and associated budgets as outlined in the report.

5. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 5.1 None

Anyone wishing to inspect background papers should, in the first place, be directed to Committee & Electoral Services who will make the necessary arrangements.

IMPLICATIONS	APPENDIX 1
Legal	<p>The Council has a duty to provide statutory homelessness services and ensure tenants of Gravesham are in good quality private sector housing. The proposed changes within this report will ensure the Housing Service achieves this.</p> <p>Human Resources are required to provide detailed advice about relevant employment law and the process must be followed throughout the consultation and implementation.</p>
Finance and Value for Money	<p>A summary of the financial impact of these proposals is contained within the body of this report. The summary includes the impact on core salary budgets which contributes to a legal and more customer focussed housing service.</p> <p>The maximum impact on General Fund is £101,100</p> <p>The maximum impact to HRA is £12,950</p> <p>As explained within the report, it is anticipated that the additional income generated following the implementation of the proposed structure will at least equal the budget growth required and therefore, the proposed changes will be cost neutral.</p>
Risk Assessment	<p>The change in structure will ensure proactive work can be undertaken, homeless prevention work can be increased, officers can reduce temporary accommodation and ensure meaningful advice is given to Gravesham residents. In addition, officers can work with the private sector to ensure that landlords and tenants are in good quality, safe and compliant homes. Failure to meet any of our statutory duties under the legislation would have a seriously detrimental effect on the reputation of Gravesham Borough Council and more importantly the safety of our customers</p>
Data Protection Impact Assessment	<p><i>A data protection impact assessment (DPIA) should be carried out at the start of any major project involving the use of personal data or if you are making a significant change to an existing process.</i></p> <p>a. Does the project/change being recommended through this paper involve the processing of personal data or special category data or criminal offence data? A definition of each type of data can be found on the Information Commissioner's Office website via the above links.</p> <p>b. If yes to question a, have you completed and attached a DPIA including Data Protection Officer advice? No</p> <p>c. If no to question b, please seek advice from your nominated DPIA assessor or the Information Governance Team at gdpr@medway.gov.uk.</p>
Equality Impact Assessment	<p>a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community? If yes, please explain answer. No</p> <p>b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality? If yes, please explain answer. No</p> <p><i>In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above</i></p>

Corporate Plan	The proposed restructure will impact positively on the corporate objectives of the council, by: 02 - Stronger Gravesham 04 - Sound and self-sufficient council
Climate Change	n/a
Crime and Disorder	n/a
Digital and website implications	n/a
Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults	The provision of safe, secure and appropriate accommodation will help to ensure the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults.