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| Cabinet 16 May 2024 |  TOWER HAMLETS |
| Report of: Julie Lorraine, Deputy Chief Executive & Corporate Director – Resources | Classification: Unrestricted |
| Improving Our Homelessness Services | |

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| Lead Member | Councillor Kabir Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development & Housebuilding |
| Originating Officer(s) | Nicola Klinger, Programme Lead Karen Swift, Director of Housing Leah Sykes, Interim Director of Customer Services |
| Wards affected | All wards |
| Key Decision? | Yes |
| Reason for Key Decision | Financial threshold |
| Forward Plan Notice Published | Special Urgency to be requested from Chair of OSC. |
| Exempt information | None |
| Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome | Providing Homes for the Future Tackling the cost-of-living crisis Investing in public services |

Special Circumstances justifying urgent consideration / Reasons for urgency

The cost to all local authorities of meeting their obligations to those experiencing homelessness has increased exponentially recently. Higher levels of investment have been made by Tower Hamlets. However, the additional investment made has been driven by substantial increases in 3rd party costs of temporary accommodation for a higher number of people. The consequent burden and pressures faced by internal staff teams to support the substantial increase in demand now needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Although there has been heavy investment, the lack of a suitable structuring of the service fit to deal with the changing external service landscape and demands – coupled with the omission of a comprehensive service review, redesign and new delivery plan – has compounded these issues.

This paper seeks significant additional investment to the resources available to the service, to address its fundamental structural issues driven by lack of a cogent and adapted service design and delivery plan and missing front-line resources that have been offset by an increase in management positions. This has led to a drop in

service-satisfaction for residents and inability to meet exponentially increasing demand. The investment will help to strengthen and support the invaluable work being undertaken by our skilled and professional staff teams in our current operations, and to complete a full service review and redesign underpinned by a robust delivery plan.

Executive Summary

The complexity and significance of the national housing crises alongside the London wide additional pressures associated with the characteristics of the capital's housing landscape have an amplified impact on Tower Hamlets due to the unique demographics of the Borough.

The Council's Housing Options Service is facing unprecedented levels of increasing demand and levels of complexity in homelessness cases. This is the underlying driver constraining the services' ability to discharge our statutory duties effectively. Housing is a primary corporate priority for the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. The Council's commitment to ensuring accessible high-quality customer centric public services drives our ambition to exceed, rather than simply meet the minimum levels of statutory housing duties.

The exponential increase in volumes of homelessness cases in Q4 (Figure 1, p3.26) to the last financial year drives an immediate call to action. Over the years, there has been reconfiguring of resources, which has seen resources moved from the front end of the service into management positions. This – alongside the growing demand on the service – has had a negative impact on the service's ability to adapt to these demands and deliver. We do not have the luxury of waiting for longer term transformation to materialise - we need to act now, or we will not resource the bigger changes effectively.

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This report sets out a recommendation to immediately invest in additional resources for frontline services to:

- Develop capacity on the frontline to provide an empathetic and dignified response to every service user seeking support.
- Address the pressures within the service caused by increasing demands including high caseloads and backlogs.
- Alleviate pressures on the workforce and build capacity for staff to access additional support and development.
- Implement expanded face to face service hours to provide those in need with wider access to the service including later opening hours on weekdays and on a Saturday morning.
- Secure improvements to the council's telephony services providing benefits to the wider organisations.

Recommendations:

The Mayor in Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Approve the immediate release £1.93m additional revenue allocation from the council's budgeted service contingency general fund provision for improvements to the Housing Options homelessness services as summarised in section 3.5 and detailed in Appendix 1 to the report.
2. Agree that the service improvements will include:
 - Development of capacity on the frontline to provide an empathetic and dignified response to every service user seeking support by identifying gaps, shortages and whether there are capacity and skills issues.
 - A full and complete service review and redesign, with immediate reorganisation to be initiated.
 - Cultural and structural changes, to prevent staff churn and ensure that the newly recruited frontline workers are retained within the organisation.
 - Review of the structural composition of the service to identify key issues that may be affecting service delivery.
 - Review senior management arrangements and the performance across the service to understand the relationship with frontline workers, both outward-facing and in the back office.
 - Establish a service review, with a view to creating a revised and refreshed service delivery plan to address key areas of cultural concerns and staffing shortages in the service.
3. Establish a special taskforce designed to give focused and prioritised attention to overseeing the recruitment and restructuring of the service. This will include the Corporate Directors for Resources and Housing and Regeneration (or representative), a representative from the Mayor's Office, representatives from the Council's recognised Trade Unions and delegates from the service.

4. Note the allocation of this additional funding in the current year will be built into the Medium-Term financial planning for future years and is not forecast to compromise the council's sustainable financial position across the current medium.
5. Note contingency sums for the current year have been set aside within the approved budget for exactly such specific purpose. Our MTFs was approved by members with explicit reference to demand-based risks relating to temporary accommodation. Further information and assurance are set out in the Chief Financial Officer's comments at section 6 of this report.
6. Note all impact on staffing will be compliant with the council's stated principles of focussing investment in front line services, protecting the lowest paid and avoiding compulsory redundancy situations wherever possible.
7. Note the specific equalities considerations as set out in Paragraph 4 of this report.

1 REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 The national housing crisis is a pressing issue affecting millions of people across the United Kingdom. The national crisis affects London more than other places because of its large population, economy, and housing market conditions, and this is especially true in Tower Hamlets.
- 1.2 The Mayor and Elected Members have made clear their expectations for the service delivery model the council seeks to secure. Concerns with the performance of the service expressed publicly by the Mayor and elected members have been underpinned by feedback from several residents who have expressed dissatisfaction at their customer journey. It is evident that there is a critical need for a service review, redesign and robust delivery plan.
- 1.3 The Housing Options Service is facing increasing demand and increasing levels of complexity in cases, which is constraining the services' ability to provide the best service to residents, address staff concerns and mitigate risks to the council's ability to discharge its statutory service obligations to a high standard. Frontline staff feel under-resourced and overworked, and in need of additional resources and support.
- 1.4 The exponential increase in demand is evidenced in the remarkable increase in those we owe a homelessness duty to - up 7% on the previous quarter and 9% compared to Q4 in the previous year.
- 1.5 The consequent pressure on the homelessness service is illustrated by the volume of caseloads, caseload volumes which have significantly increased and double that of the optimum level.

- 1.6 There is also a cultural issue between senior management and frontline staff. Staff have formally raised this through a collective grievance as well as staff engagement sessions. The lack of support felt by frontline staff is resulting in an inhibited ability to support residents and provide an empathetic and dignified service. Frontline workers cannot be reasonably expected to provide the best support to residents if they do not feel supported themselves.
- 1.7 The Service Improvement Programme will see a full review of the processes, organisation, and structures of the entire Housing Options service. Changes need to be made to the most senior management structures both to drive and enable improvements, and to respond to the current high demand.
- 1.8 The Service Improvement Programme for Housing Options will deliver transformative improvements including expansion of the service operating hours; however, these improvements will not be realised unless the immediate cultural, structural, and resourcing challenges are resolved at pace. The timeline for the wider transformation programme is attached at appendices 2.
- 1.9 The following guiding principles set out the outcomes required of the transformation programme:
- Monday – Friday 9am to 8pm opening hours
 - Saturday morning 9 am to 12 noon opening hours
 - 24-hour access to a form of service that can be accessed virtually
 - An analysis of the capacity of the front end of the service through service design to identify gaps and shortages, with findings to be addressed through a new service delivery plan.
 - An appropriately resourced and enhanced rota available during out of hours in order that we can respond more efficiently to those in need.
 - A re-alignment of generic and specialist front and back-office resources to secure and enhance telephony service that will benefit the housing options service and the wider council.
- 1.10 By investing in frontline services now, the Council will:
- Develop capacity on the frontline to provide an empathetic and dignified response to every service user seeking support.
 - Identify the gaps and issues with the current structure and delivery model of the service to facilitate and implement a long-term service plan and redesign to address ongoing pressures.
 - Address the pressures within the service caused by increasing demands including high caseloads and backlogs.

- Alleviate pressures on a dissatisfied workforce and build capacity for staff to access additional support and development.
- Develop and implement expanded face to face service hours to provide those in need with wider access to the service operating longer opening hours on weekdays and on a Saturday morning.

2 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

2.1 The first alternative option is to not invest additional resources (or invest less resources) in the service. The risks of this are:

- Lack of capacity within the service and failing to mitigate the risk of repeating service failures. For example, mitigating actions committed to ensuring the issues recently been identified by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman are never repeated.
- Inability to provide the best service to service users and residents.
- Low service user satisfaction and increasing complaints.
- Low workforce satisfaction, high workplace stress and increasing sickness absence/retention issues.
- Inability to transform service and achieve improvements.

2.2 The second alternative option is to invest further resource (beyond that recommended), which would further build capacity within the services.

2.3 However, alongside the budgetary impact of further investment, it should be considered that the Service Improvement Programme will be assessing best use of resources, focussing on improving productivity and creating capacity by streamlining processes with significant investment in outcome focussed innovative technology. This in turn may drive a comprehensive reorganisation of the service. Any further need for additional resource over and above that requested at this time will be subject to detailed consideration by elected members.

3 DETAILS OF THE REPORT

3.1 National policy and context

3.1.1 The Homelessness Act (2002) sets out the definition of homelessness, and the duties that local authorities owe to applicants who are accepted as being homeless or threatened with homelessness, while Part 7 of the Housing Act (1996) provides the primary homelessness legislation setting out the statutory duties on local housing authorities to prevent homelessness and provide assistance to those who are at risk of being homeless or actually homeless. The Localism Act (2011) also amended the 1996 Housing Act by allowing local authorities to discharge their homelessness duty by arranging

a suitable offer of accommodation in the private rented sector.

3.1.2 The most recent and notable change in legislation came from the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA 2017). The Act implemented on 3 April 2018 placed new duties on local housing authorities to intervene earlier to prevent homelessness and to take reasonable steps to relieve homelessness for all eligible applicants, not just those that have priority need under the Act. This legislation sought to provide increased protection to people facing homelessness. It extended the length of time an individual or household could be seen as at risk of homelessness, from 28 to 56 days, which in turn increased the length of a local housing authority's prevention duty.

3.1.3 The changes the HRA (2017) effected from 3 April 2018 included:

- A new 'prevention duty', requiring local authorities to take reasonable steps to assist those likely to become homeless earlier, so within 56, rather than 28 days.
- A new 'relief duty', which applies to those already homeless when they ask the local authority for help. It requires local authorities to provide support for 56 days.
- A requirement to carry out a holistic assessment of the applicant's housing and support needs (free advice to anyone in a local authority, whether they are owed a duty or not) and to set out how these will be addressed in a 'personal housing plan' which sets out the steps that will be taken by the applicant (and the local authority) to stay in or find suitable accommodation.

3.1.4 More recently, the enactment of the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) has placed a duty on local authorities in England to provide support to survivors of domestic abuse and their children. All eligible homeless survivors of domestic abuse automatically receive 'priority need' status for homelessness assistance - providing re-assurance and certainty for individuals and their families presenting as homeless because of domestic abuse and simplifying the decision-making process for officers.

3.1.5 The Act also introduced a new definition of domestic abuse and requires that local housing authorities, should provide a secure lifetime tenancy to applicants who held a similar security of tenure in the past. The new priority need category means councils should no longer assess whether someone at risk of domestic abuse is also vulnerable to access assistance.

3.1.6 Tower Hamlets has not been immune to the nationwide cost of living crisis which has seen increasing fuel and energy prices coupled with negative economic growth - resulting in a dire situation for the national and local economy. This poses a significant challenge to all of our residents but particularly those already facing precarious financial situations and struggling

to meet housing costs.

- 3.1.7 Increasing house prices, rising private sector rents and the reduced income many households have experienced because of the pandemic and now the cost-of-living crisis have all contributed to the rise in homelessness.
- 3.1.8 The current cost-of-living crisis has seen a decline in households living standards with lower wages, higher inflation, rising energy, fuel and housing costs all contributing to and increasing the pressures on households and in turn driving demand for support and assistance on local authorities and the third sector. Rising rent costs in the Private Rent Sector as well as mortgage interest rate rises are already increasing the pressures on local authorities' homelessness services who (prior to the pandemic) had already been beset by austerity and reductions in public finance.
- 3.1.9 These pressures undoubtedly put further strain on people's finances and will in many cases lead to homelessness as stagnating wages struggle to keep up with rising rents, food, and energy costs.

3.2 Local context

- 3.2.1 Implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) has brought additional assistance for those at risk of homelessness but has increased the number of applicants qualifying for assistance, further stretching the resources of local authority housing needs teams. While new burdens funding was provided by the government to assist local authorities with their new responsibilities, the rising costs for local authorities has increased due to the increased costs of providing assistance.
- 3.2.2 The pressures on homelessness and temporary accommodation are London-wide challenges, with London Council's latest data collection (published on 3 May 2024) finding that:
- Homelessness presentations continue to increase year-on-year, rising by 17% in January 2024 compared to the previous year.
 - In January 2024, 28 London councils reported the number of households owed a prevention or relief duty increased by 6.3% on a year earlier.
 - The number of households living in temporary accommodation in January 2024 was 8.4% higher than the year before, rising from 52,963 to 57,437 households.
 - The number of families living in B&B accommodation over 26 boroughs in January 2024 rose by 70% compared to the prior year, and there was an increase of 131% of those living in B&Bs for beyond the six-week limit,

compared to the prior year.

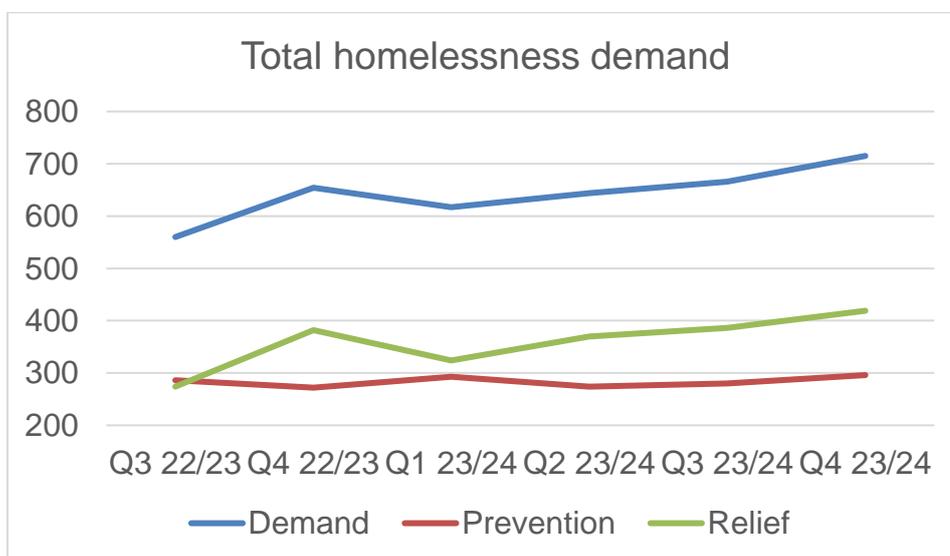
- Data from 22 councils shows the gross total monthly TA spend for January 2024 is up 28.1% on the year before, reaching £65.2m.

3.2.3 Since 2018, data suggests that the Council has seen a higher number of households accessing our housing options and advice services, as well as an increase in the number of residents who have been placed in temporary accommodation.

3.2.4 Currently, there are more than 24,000 applicants on the Council's Housing Register; this number has continued to increase over the last year (a 4% increase compared to April 2023).

3.2.5 In the last quarter, there were 715 households assessed as owed a homelessness duty; this represents a continuous rise in demand (15% rise when compared with the same quarter of the previous year). In total, homelessness demand in the year 2023/24 increased by 17% compared to 2022/23. This followed a 20% increase seen in the year 2023/24 compared to the prior year, demonstrating the consistent rise in homelessness and demand for homelessness services.

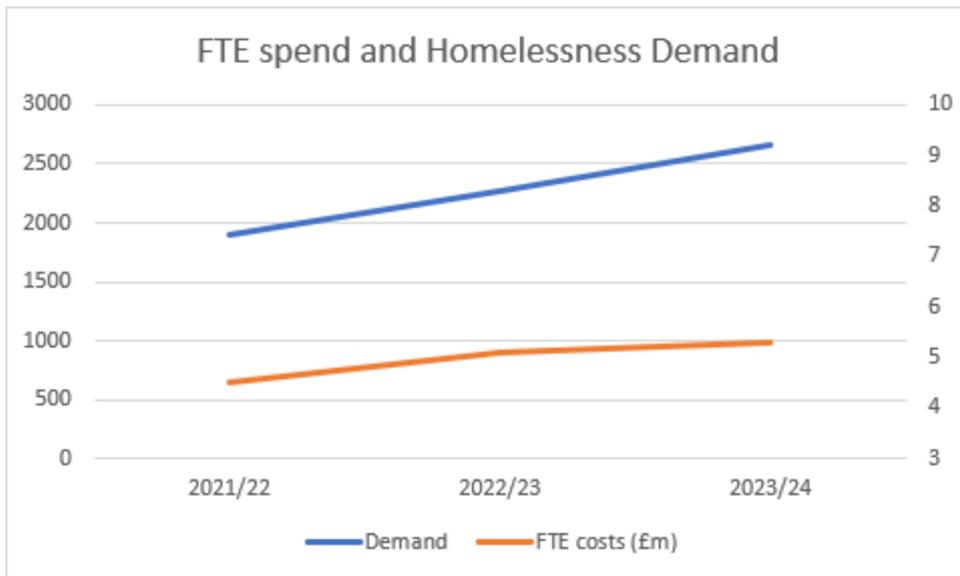
3.2.6 Figure 1: Exponential increase in homelessness demand over time



3.2.7 The continued increase in demand can be seen in Q4 2023/24, with households owed duty increased by 7% on the previous quarter, and 9% compared to Q4 in the previous year.

3.2.8 This follows on from increasing demand in previous years, with homelessness demand consistently increasing over the past three years.

3.2.9 Figure 2: Increase in homelessness demand and staff costs



- 3.2.10 Figure 2 demonstrates the rising demand in homelessness and full-time equivalent spend between 2021/22 and 2023/24.
- 3.2.11 In an average month, the service receives 3,800 phone calls and 1,400 visits to the Residents' Hub related to Housing. There has been a 25% increase in demand since moving to the new Town Hall in Whitechapel (with 251 extra applications from Jan – June 2023 compared to the previous 6 months).
- 3.2.12 Key causes of homelessness are eviction by friends and family and end of private rented tenancy, with cases of PRS homelessness doubling in 2022/23, a rise of 97% compared to the previous year. Following that rise, Q1 2023/24 of PRS homelessness was up by 49%, compared to Q1 2022/23.
- 3.2.13 This overall increase in demand has led to a continuous rise in the number of households living in temporary accommodation. At the end of Q4 2023/24 there were 3,110 households living in temporary accommodation, an increase of 21% compared to the same time last year.
- 3.2.14 Our latest estimates indicate that 2024/25 we will see at least a 10% increase in those customers presenting as homeless although this could be higher due to the current financial climate. To ensure we are prepared, we will continue to use data to plan and work in an agile way. Our resourcing decisions are data led and agile and the above case load analyses has been used as the basis for the additional front-line resources recommended, this will help us future-proof our ability to meet best value obligations.

3.3 Caseload analysis

3.3.1 Figure 3: Increase in caseload volumes

| Period | Grand Total | Monthly Average | Average Caseload |
|--------|-------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 2020 | 2,069 | 172 | 34 |
| 2021 | 2,170 | 181 | 36 |
| 2022 | 2,298 | 192 | 38 |
| 2023 | 3,173 | 264 | 53 |
| 2024 | 1,145 | 286 | 57 |

3.3.2 There has been a rapid increase in caseload volumes, particularly over the past year, with the increase in cases rapidly rising in 2023 and continuing that trajectory into 2024.

3.3.3 The optimum casework volume is thirty (almost half the current caseload), which would allow the service to provide a high-quality service to our customers and improve staff wellbeing.

3.3.4 This evidences the sheer pressure and overwhelm on frontline resources, and immediate need for additional investment in the service to meet demand.

N.B: It cannot be guaranteed that all cases have been identified and it is likely that there are more cases yet to be identified; this is under investigation. The caseload is an average for all teams, and some teams may have higher caseloads than the average.

3.4 Analysis of current situation

3.4.1 There is a high demand and limited supply of social housing and suitable temporary accommodation, which is putting the service under significant pressure.

3.4.2 This also leads to complex and challenging issues such as overcrowding, damp and mould, and rough sleeping.

3.4.3 As well as the volume of demand, the complexity of casework is also increasing.

3.4.4 This, alongside high staff attrition and elevated levels of sickness absence, is creating significant pressure on the service meaning there is no time or resource within the service to do anything but be reactive.

3.4.5 For example, due to resource pressures, the service is not able to adequately quality assure casework (as identified in a recent internal audit) or manage casework so that it is completed in a timely way, preventing backlogs. This

has a serious impact on the service and customer experience.

- 3.4.6 There is also a cultural issue between senior management and frontline staff. Staff have formally raised this through a collective grievance as well as staff engagement sessions. The lack of support felt by frontline staff is resulting in an inhibited ability to support residents and provide an empathetic and dignified service. Frontline workers cannot be reasonably expected to provide the best support to residents if they do not feel supported themselves.
- 3.4.7 Further, frontline staff and managers' emotional capacity to be empathetic and support customers with complex/challenging needs is diminished. There is limited space for reflection or ability to get/provide wellbeing support "on the job", for example after a frontline worker has managed a complex case involving prominent levels of trauma, they need to immediately address the next case due to pressures in the system. This is undoubtedly impacting customers' experience and the customer journey, as well as staff attrition and workplace stress.
- 3.4.8 Staff within the service have low satisfaction with their working environment and have raised several concerns. While immediate concerns raised by staff about their working environment are being addressed, particularly in relation to concerns around health and safety, additional resource is required to support staff wellbeing, capacity to develop and general satisfaction by alleviating the significant pressure on staff individually and the service as a whole.
- 3.4.9 For example, by increasing resource on the frontline, the Residents' Hub could be opened for longer hours while simultaneously ensuring rotas are developed so that shifts are staggered, and staff are not working long hours. This will be reviewed within the Service Improvement Transformation Programme.
- 3.4.10 It is indisputable that the current situation demonstrates that a service wide review, restructure, redesign, and improvement plan - that empathises and focuses on culture and trust between frontline staff and Senior Management, and by extension between frontline staff and residents - is critical.
- 3.4.11 It is known that improvements are required to the entire service across multiple areas (e.g. service standard, ICT, strategy and vision, policies and procedures, customer journey, Value for Money, staff wellbeing and training, trust and culture, and partnership working) and these will be addressed by the Service Improvement Programme. That said, there is currently limited capacity to affect change and drive these improvements at the pace required, particularly while the service is facing significant pressure and largely reactive.
- 3.4.12 While both challenges and solutions are well understood, there is a lack of resource (both within the service and by way of dedicated support) to rapidly implement solutions, react strategically to challenges and develop sustainability within the service.

3.5 Immediate investment in resources

3.5.1 The required investment in services is concentrated on frontline roles with the investment creating thirty-four new roles with a sustainable funding source to meet the increasing demand and footfall and address backlogs, as well as extend hours that residents can access a face-to-face service.

3.5.2 Of the thirty-four posts, thirty are frontline posts across teams within either Homelessness and Rough Sleeping or Temporary Accommodation and Procurement including:

- “Front door” Lead Professional team
- Vulnerable singles – HOST Complex
- Complex Assessment Team
- Emergency Bookings and Allocations Team (Temporary Accommodation)
- Customer services – Whitechapel Residents’ Hub

3.5.3 The remaining four roles will help us ensure we are continuously improving and increase our capacity for quality assurance. These roles will assist in identifying trends to improve the customer experience and reduce the volume of complaints and ombudsman cases. This is a crucial step in our commitment to provide the best possible service to our customers

- Head of Homelessness– to bring together homelessness and temporary accommodation functions under one operational manager.
- Service Improvement Practitioner – to be ringfenced and recruited to from service to ensure staff voice is heard, implanting service improvements with operational expertise at pace and bringing staff along on the transformational journey, while also offering opportunity for an existing staff member to develop.
- Senior Legal Officer – to take the significant increase in judicial reviews and complaints and local government Ombudsman complaints, relieving pressure on frontline staff who are currently drafting responses as part of their roles.
- Accommodation Procurement Specialist – to support the increase required in Private Rented Sector (PRS) and Temporary Accommodation (TA) properties to reduce the number of households in unsuitable accommodation including B&Bs/hotels.

3.5.4 The roles set out in Appendix 1 are either additional roles to those currently in the establishment, or the conversion of fixed term roles to permanent roles. This approach will support recruitment and retention as well as sustainability and security within the service.

3.5.5 These additional roles and their impact on the service will be reviewed as part of the broader service review; delivery plan; and special attention given to a prospective service-wide restructuring.

3.6 Specialist triage team

- 3.6.1 A realignment of generic and specialist front and back-offices resources will be undertaken to secure and enhance telephony services.
- 3.6.2 A specialist triage team will be created both to improve the customer experience and to streamline the entire process, creating efficiencies within the service and wider corporate customer services.
- 3.6.3 The team will provide expert homelessness advice at the first point of contact, making sure that 'the first advice is the best advice'. This will significantly improve the customer experience and ability to get customers the right support straight away.
- 3.6.4 It will produce efficiencies by creating capacity within the wider teams to complete casework, which will in turn reduce the creation of backlogs and requirement to dedicate additional resources to casework and backlogs.
- 3.6.5 Further, efficiencies will be generated by gaining capacity within the wider telephony service, which serves customers across the wider council.

3.7 Separation of strategic and operational functions

- 3.7.1 The Service Improvement Programme will see a full review of the processes, organisation, and structures of the entire Housing Options service.
- 3.7.2 At this stage, proposals for the new structure of the Housing and Regeneration directorate propose that changes are made to the most senior management structures both to drive and enable improvements, and to respond to the current high demand.
- 3.7.3 This will separate the strategic and operational roles and responsibilities of the current Housing division, so that there would be:

An operational-focused Housing Solutions division which will focus on reducing homelessness and improving the customer journey for people needing temporary accommodation under the Council's statutory obligations and accessing homes through a strengthened acquisition approach and PRS function.

A strategic Housing Policy and Strategy division which will be a strengthened policy function for housing and homelessness strategy, embedding coherent forward-looking governance, shaping future services and ensuring that we have a robust approach to compliance with regulation and new national policy initiatives.

- 3.7.4 These proposals are in formative stage, the high-level indicative structure of the housing and regeneration directorate is included in a report to the HR committee on 16th May 2024. Many of the essential and more immediate

changes described above, such as changes to line management of the homelessness team will be subject to any relevant staff consultation, however, immediate temporary arrangements will be made to respond to the immediate context and needs of the service.

4 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Investing additional resources in the frontline will have a positive impact on vulnerable residents or groups who may be experience inequalities in housing by increasing the capacity and ability of services to provide a tailored and empathetic service to residents.
- 4.2 Increasing capacity and alleviating pressure on individuals and the service will support staff health and wellbeing and contribute all round to the improvements being sought within the Service Improvement Programme.

5 OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:
- Best Value Implications,
 - Consultations,
 - Environmental (including air quality),
 - Risk Management,
 - Crime Reduction,
 - Safeguarding.
 - Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment.
- 5.2 The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017 places a statutory duty on the Council to prevent homelessness (the Prevention Duty) and to give relief to those already homeless (the Relief Duty).
- 5.3 The Council has a statutory duty to take reasonable steps to prevent and relieve homelessness; Duty can be discharged through offer of a suitable home in the private rented sector (PRS).
- 5.4 S.188 interim accommodation duty – temporary accommodation duty to homeless families and vulnerable adults ('priority need' groups) with recourse.
- 5.5 S.193 full housing duty – owed to unintentionally homeless households with priority need. Duty can be discharged through offer of a suitable home in the private rented sector (PRS).

- 5.6 The Housing Act 1996 requires local authorities to have an allocation scheme. Within this they must give reasonable preference (i.e., give certain groups an advantage over other groups that have a lesser or no housing need), in their allocations policies to people with high levels of assessed housing need.
- 5.7 In keeping with our commitment to best value, these additional resources seek to secure immediate capacity improvement. This agile investment is not being done in isolation, in parallel we are currently considering options for further efficiencies in our supply chain and fast-tracking acquisitions to grow our own TA stock within the Housing Revenue Account as the cost of TA is the greatest single pressure the general fund currently faces.

6 COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 6.1 The report requests funding of £1.93m to address and improve Housing options homelessness services. This will be met from the approved current year's revenue contingency budget. This budget is set aside to address critical risks such as Homelessness and to avoid any additional cost pressures. Future ongoing costs will be accommodated within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) during the 2024-2025 budget setting, ensuring that this can be achieved without reliance on reserves or contingency budgets.

7 COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 7.1 This report requests additional funding for the improvement of the Housing Options Service to include the provision of additional staffing resources and a review of the current service which may include potential changes to current terms and conditions relating to hours of work and shift patterns for existing staff.
- 7.2 Improvements to the service will assist the Council in meeting its statutory obligations with regard to homeless assistance and the increasing demands on the current service.
- 7.3 Any proposed changes to terms and conditions of existing employees must be implemented in line with the Council's Organisational Change process.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- NONE

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Details of Additional Investment Required
- Appendix 2 - Housing Options Transformation Programme Timeline

Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012

- NONE

Officer contact details for documents:

N/A