

REPORT TO CABINET

19 September 2018

Subject:	Restructure of the Housing Choice Service in Response to the Homeless Reduction Act
Presenting Cabinet Member:	Councillor Kerrie Carmichael – Cabinet Member for Housing
Director:	Executive Director - Neighbourhoods - Dr Alison Knight
Contribution towards Vision 2030: 	
Key Decision:	Yes
Forward Plan (28 day notice) Reference:	SMBC09/07/2018
Cabinet Member Approval and Date:	Cllr Carmichael
Director Approval:	Dr Knight
Reason for Urgency:	Urgency provisions do not apply
Exempt Information Ref:	Exemption provisions do not apply
Ward Councillor (s) Consulted (if applicable):	Consultation with ward councillors is not required
Scrutiny Consultation Considered?	Scrutiny have not been consulted
Contact Officer(s):	Stephen Gabriel – Service Manager Housing Management Stephen_Gabriel@sandwell.gov.uk Kevin Tebbett – Business Manager Housing Choice Kevin_tebbett@sandwell.gov.uk

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

1. Review the consultation undertaken with employees and Trade Unions on the revised Housing Choice structure during the formal consultation period.
2. Approve the revised structure for the renamed Housing Solutions Service for implementation from the 1st of November 2018

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 2 A report detailing the revised structure proposals for the restructure of the Housing Choice service was presented to Cabinet on the 25 July 2018, Appendix A. The revised structure was approved as a basis for consultation with employees and Trade Unions and all relevant stakeholders.
- 3 Cabinet requested a further report be submitted to approve the restructure for the Housing Choice Service to be renamed the Housing Solutions Service. This report provides details of the consultation process that has taken place with employees and Trade Unions and all relevant stakeholders.
- 3.1 The consultation period was originally planned for 30 days. However, this was extended to 45 days following consultation with Trade Unions. Consultation with employees and Trade Unions was undertaken between 26 July 2018 and 10 September 2018.

4 IMPLICATION FOR THE COUNCIL'S AMBITION

- 4.1 Preventing and reducing homelessness in all its forms contributes to improving a wide range of physical and mental health factors that will have a direct impact on Sandwell's vision. In particular, it will impact on Ambitions Two and Five.

5 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1 Consultation with Trade Union representatives is an essential requirement in the implementation of any changes to structures and job roles. Within the consultation period of 45 days there has been a structured and comprehensive approach to consultation with Trade Union colleagues and affected employees.

- 5.2 Trade Union consultation has been productive and timely. Management have held weekly formal consultation meetings with Trade Unions. This has provided the opportunity to discuss the proposals in detail and provided the platform to discuss both Trade Union and management issues. Prior to any information being shared with employees, Trade Unions have been consulted first and their views taken into consideration. Questions or queries which have been raised outside of the formal meetings have been addressed and responded to promptly.
- 5.3 Employees have been consulted and communicated with, in a range of ways throughout the consultation period. Staff briefings have been held on two occasions within the formal consultation period and one within the informal process. A dedicated intranet page has been set up on the Council's intranet which has provided details of Job Descriptions, Person Specifications, Job Matching information and all relevant documentation associated with the restructure proposal. All documentation has also been provided to Trade Unions.
- 5.4 Following a suggestion from Trade Unions, a frequently asked questions section was included on the intranet page.
- 5.5 The initial process of job matching employees to roles was concluded and shared with employees and Trade Unions at the employee briefing held on 7 August 2018. Employees who were not originally job matched were provided with the opportunity to appeal and all appeals were concluded prior to the end of the formal consultation period. Both employees and Trade Unions were informed of the results of appeals quickly after appeals were heard. Following the appeals, a number of employees were successful through the job matching process.
- 5.6 Management have made themselves available to both employees and Trade Unions throughout the process.

6 THE CURRENT POSITION

- 6.1 Consultation with employees and Trade Unions was concluded on 10 September 2018.
- 6.2 A selection process has been agreed with Trade Union colleagues during the consultation period. This agreed process will be implemented following the approval of this report.
- 6.3 In response to feedback from both employees and Trade Unions, interview skills training has been organised for all employees in advance of interviews. Dates for this have been shared at the employee briefing and via the intranet page.

- 6.4 A number of roles are available within the revised structure which will be on two-year fixed term contracts due to Central Government grant funding being time limited. All fixed term posts will be offered on a secondment basis and employees will have secured a substantive post which will be protected. The full time equivalent posts will number 44 of which eight will be two-year fixed term posts. They will consist of:

Post	Grade	No of Posts Full Time Equivalent (FTE)	No of Grant Funded Posts (Two- year Fixed Term Contracts)
Neighbourhood Services Manager – Housing Solutions	H	1	
Team Leader	G	3	
Complex Needs Officer	F	2	1
Housing Solutions Officers	E	13	
Visiting Officers	E	2	2
Accommodation Officer	E	5	3
Lettings Officer	E	6	1
Lettings Support Officer	D	6	1
Apprentices	Level 2	6	
TOTAL		44	8

- 6.5 The vacant positions will be ring fenced initially to those officers who may be potentially displaced by the restructure.

There will be 6 x Apprentices Level 2. Some of these apprenticeships will be recruited based on individuals having ‘lived experience’. This will include liaising with the Children’s Trust to include Care Leavers within this approach. This will enhance the holistic customer centred approach.

- 6.6 Following approval of this report it is proposed that the new Housing Solutions Structure will be implemented from 1 November 2018.

7 CONSULTATION (CUSTOMERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS)

- 7.1 Consultation with Trade Unions has consisted of weekly formal meetings, discussion on key issues and individual cases on an ad-hoc basis throughout the consultation period. All information has been shared with Trade Unions prior to providing this to employees.
- 7.2 Consultation with employees has been via employee briefings held with all affected employees and the provision of an intranet page providing a range of documentation and relevant information.

- 7.3 The consultation with Trade Unions has highlighted three main areas: -
- Communication of information;
 - Opportunities for all employees at risk of redundancy to apply for any of the remaining posts
 - Request for employees 'at risk' not to go through an interview process to secure a role.
- 7.4 In response, we have ensured that all information is timely, frequent, consistent and transparent throughout the formal consultation period and responded to Trade Union and employee requests for information quickly. The vacant posts within the restructure will be ring fenced initially to those that are "at risk" and will be recruited to in descending order starting with the higher grades.
- 7.5 The Homeless Reduction Act has significantly changed the approach to the prevention of homelessness. There has been a move away from a process driven approach to a holistic person-centred approach. This is completed through an assessment process which not only identifies their housing needs but also their support needs. It is felt that undertaking an interview process will allow management to assess some of the key elements of the person specification in a more effective way than through a written submission.
- 7.6 Furthermore, it has been agreed that employees will only be required to undertake one interview if they express an interest in more than one role. The interview questions will be apportioned to the relevant job grade.
- 7.7 Consultation with Trade Unions and employees has resulted in a change to the proposed structure. In response to concerns raised by the Trade Unions and following further discussions with the Finance Team, one Complex Needs Officer role will be made available as a permanent vacancy, as a result. This will be considered for a Housing Choice Co-ordinator (Band G/F roles) being displaced.

8 **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 8.1 The current structure is not an option to respond to the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act. The Act requires a greater emphasis on early intervention and prevention and moves away from a process driven approach to a person-centred approach which provides a holistic approach to the needs of the client. The current structure is not sufficient in terms of the types of roles to deliver the new approach to preventing homelessness as required by the Homeless Reduction Act.

9 STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Implementation of the revised Housing Choice structure was originally planned for 1 October 2018, due to the extension in the consultation period this is now scheduled for 1 November 2018. This will not have any major financial or service delivery implications.
- 9.2 The availability of the Central Government grant funding is sufficient to cover the cost of the additional posts over the two-year period.

10 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

- 10.1 There are no legal or governance implications because of this proposal.

11 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 11.1 The Equality Impact Assessment undertaken is unaffected and the consultation undertaken with trade unions and employees supports the outcomes of the EIA.

12 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 12.1 As a result of the work to meet the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulations a full review of data protection requirements has been carried out and the service will comply with the relevant legislation.

13 CRIME AND DISORDER AND RISK ASSESSMENT

- 13.1 Some crime and disorder is associated with homelessness, most notably in the context of rough sleeping. In this context, the approach to a holistic assessment of a clients housing and support needs will have a positive impact on helping to reduce crime and disorder.

14 SUSTAINABILITY OF PROPOSALS

- 14.1 There revised approach to homelessness is compliant with the Homeless Reduction Act. The additional resources over the two-year period will ensure that the revised approach is fully embedded. It anticipated that this will lead to a reduction in the use of temporary accommodation as well as the number of homeless applications taken.

15 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIAL VALUE)

- 15.1 The revised approach to the prevention of homelessness will contribute to improved health and wellbeing.

16 IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND

16.1 There are no implications on any council managed property or land arising from this proposal.

17 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

17.1 During the 45 day formal consultation period, consultation with employees, Trade Unions and all relevant stakeholders has been productive and positive. The consultation period provided the opportunity to resolve issues and to jointly plan how the proposed structure will be implemented to ensure the Housing Choice service is fit for purpose to respond to the Homeless Reduction Act and support the delivery of Vision 2030.

18 BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 None

19 APPENDICES:

19.1 Appendix A – Cabinet Report 25 July 2018 – Restructure of Business

**Dr Alison Knight
Executive Director – Neighbourhoods**