

**TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL****CABINET - 19<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2015****RESPONSE TO SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD REPORT: ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING****REPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTORS: FAMILY, COHESION & COMMISSIONING AND DEVELOPMENT, BUSINESS AND EMPLOYMENT****LEAD CABINET MEMBER: CLLR CHARLES SMITH****PART A – SUMMARY REPORT****1 SUMMARY OF MAIN PROPOSALS**

This report provides a response to a series of recommendations made by the Scrutiny Management Board in relation to dealing with homeless issues within the Borough. In summary, eight of the nine recommendations have been wholly accepted with one recommendation rejected for the reasons set out in Appendix 1 of this report.

**2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

**That Cabinet note the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Management Board and the responses included at Appendix 1 of this report.**

**3 SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

<b>COMMUNITY IMPACT</b>	Do these proposals contribute to specific Priority Plan objective(s)?	
	Yes	Proposals within this report directly contribute towards the Council priority of regenerating those neighbourhoods in need and working to ensure that local people have access to suitable housing.
	Will the proposals impact on specific groups of people?	
	Yes	Residents in the borough in need of housing options advice and information and communities affected by homeless issues.
<b>TARGET COMPLETION/ DELIVERY DATE</b>	Initiatives will commence immediately following and subject to Cabinet Approval.	
<b>FINANCIAL/ VALUE FOR MONEY IMPACT</b>	Yes	<p>The responses to the Board's recommendations which are detailed in Appendix 1, if accepted in 8 of the 9 cases will not have an impact on the current budget strategy. The resources within the 2014/15 budget and ongoing take account of the proposals which are accepted and therefore these actions can be met from within existing resources.</p> <p>The current service is dependant on an additional temporary member of staff funded from one off funding, a post recruited until around December 2016, therefore consideration needs to be given to the maintenance of existing service levels when this</p>

		funding is exhausted. RP-11.2.15
<b>LEGAL ISSUES</b>	Yes	<p>Homelessness legislation places a general duty on local authorities to ensure that advice and information about homelessness, and preventing homelessness, is available to everyone in their district free of charge. The legislation also requires authorities to assist individuals and families who are homeless or threatened with homelessness and apply for help.</p> <p>In 2002 amendments to the homelessness legislation through the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002 strengthened the assistance available to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness by extending the priority need categories. The legislation also imposed an obligation upon local authorities to carry out Homelessness Reviews and thereafter develop strategies to prevent homelessness from occurring emphasising the need for joint working between local housing authorities, social services and other statutory, voluntary and private sector partners in tackling homelessness more effectively.</p> <p>The current collection of homelessness legislation places duties on the local authority, and gives it the necessary powers, to meet the aims outlined in the recommendations of the Scrutiny Management Board. PM – 10/02/2015</p>
<b>OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS &amp; OPPORTUNITIES</b>	Yes	Up to July 2014 the Choose Your Home Scheme offered limited affordable accommodation and created an unrealistic waiting list. The new Telford Housing Options Tool enables residents to assess their own housing needs and offers suitable and affordable accommodation based on their needs.
<b>IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS</b>	Yes	Borough wide impact, with a process that now offers a more positive choice for people to live.

## 4.0 INFORMATION

### 4.1 **Background**

Scrutiny has been involved in the issue of housing and homelessness for a number of years. In 2010 the Scrutiny Review on Housing and Homelessness made a number of recommendations and subsequently the Scrutiny Management Board considered the draft homelessness strategy in November 2013. More recently the Management Board received an update report on the implementation of Telford Housing Options and held a discussion with the four Registered Social Landlords about access to affordable housing. The Chair of the Scrutiny Management Board then met with representatives of two local voluntary organisations that support vulnerable homeless people. The scrutiny recommendations respond to the issues raised at these meetings.

### 4.2 **Response to Recommendations of the Scrutiny Report**

Members of the Scrutiny Committee agreed a number of recommendations which are summarised in Appendix 1. The majority of recommendations have

been or are in the process of implementation. Considerable progress has been made over the past three months to assist homeless people within the Borough.

Since April 2014 we have advised 278 clients, out of these we received 134 homeless applications, 158 homeless presentations were prevented from becoming homeless through advice or financial assistance through Discretionary Housing Payments or through DCLG Prevention Funding. Out of the 134 homeless applications 34 were withdrawn through various reasons from the client, 6 were found to be intentionally homeless, 2 were not found to be in priority need, 4 were not found to be eligible for housing and 18 were found not to be homeless. 62 of these were of priority need and a duty was accepted where support was provided to these clients to assist them to find further accommodation.

Based on an appraisal of statutory homeless clients and the available housing stock held by registered providers, we are aware that over half would be unable to find suitable accommodation that met their needs. This is mainly due to the number of bedrooms funded under Housing Benefit Regulations. Some clients will struggle to meet eligibility criteria put in place by the registered providers, particularly regards accumulated debt and past anti social behaviour. The Allocation Policy will start to address some issues regards eligibility by setting out clear criteria for the allocation of social housing as well as nomination rights for homeless clients.

Up to July 2014 the Choose Your Home Scheme offered limited affordable accommodation and created an unrealistic waiting list with over 16,000 clients. The new Telford Housing Options Tool enables residents to assess their own housing needs and signposts clients to more appropriate and affordable accommodation. Since the launch of the on line Telford Housing Options Tool over 2,200 clients have accessed the housing options tool, out of which over 1,400 were needing homeless advice and information.

With considerable positive action completed and underway, the Scrutiny Committee recommendations provide some valuable new ideas and advice on which to develop the service further. Each of the recommendations made has been responded to in detail in Appendix 1.

## **5. PREVIOUS MINUTES**

Cabinet Report, Homelessness Strategy November 2013.

Cabinet Report, A new approach to Choice Based Housing Options 12<sup>th</sup> June 2014

Cabinet Report, Approval of the Homelessness Strategy 13<sup>th</sup> November 2014.

## **6. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Scrutiny Report

**Report prepared by Toni Kever, Home Improvement Team Leader, 01952 381860 and Jas Bedesha, Service Delivery Manager- Cohesion, 01952 382101.**

**Appendix 1**

**Cabinet Response to Scrutiny Report**

Scrutiny Committee: Scrutiny Management Board		Cabinet Member: Cllr. Charles Smith	
Report:		Response prepared by: Toni Keever (Telford HomeFinder Team Leader)	
Lead Scrutiny Member: Cllr. Derek White		Date of Cabinet meeting: 19 March 2015	
Lead Scrutiny Officer: Fiona Bottrill			
Scrutiny Recommendation	Response and summary of action being taken to implement, or reason for rejection	Date by which action will be taken	Person responsible for action (name and title)
1) A forum for the 4 major RSLs, Maninplace and the Council should be urgently established to oversee and co-ordinate demand and housing supply issues. The forum should ensure that the Council, RSLs and Maninplace are communicating effectively to ensure the Council can discharge its statutory homelessness duty effectively and that local people in the most need are housed in the Borough. This will also be an opportunity to clarify roles and responsibilities of the different organisations to ensure that tenants / prospective tenants are able to register and that their progress through the system is monitored.	<b>Wholly Accepted</b> – A forum called the Homelessness Partnership with RSL’s, Maninplace, KIP and a cross section of council services is in place to discuss in detail the issues raised. It has been agreed that at the next meeting some time will be spent understanding where referrals are arising and what pathways we should have in place. In addition to this, work is underway through the Homelessness Partnership to mitigate the risks of sustaining a tenancy and ensure appropriate accommodation is sourced.	February 2015 and ongoing	Jas Bedesha – Service Delivery Manager Family & Cohesion
2) That the Council brokers discussions with the RSLs and Maninplace regarding the management of hard to let properties. This should include the option for the RSLs to lease hard to let properties to Maninplace who would manage this on a long term basis. The discussions about the working relationship between Maninplace and the RSLs should also consider extending the floating support provided through the Thrive Partnership to vulnerable tenants with the RLS.	<b>Wholly Accepted</b> – Discussions will be held at the Homelessness Partnership Meeting to determine any hard to let properties that may be acceptable for Maninplace. Links have also been made with Thrive to provide floating support to vulnerable tenants. The Council, working with Maninplace and Stay, are looking to develop a pooled approach to property management allowing each organisation to accommodate homelessness tenants in properties owned by partner organisation to alleviate pressures and reduce voids.	February 2015 and ongoing	Jas Bedesha Service Delivery Manager Family & Cohesion.
3) The Council works with partner organisations to identify other suitable accommodation that can be let to and managed by Maninplace to extend the provision of accommodation to vulnerable people in the Borough.	<b>Wholly Accepted</b> – Discussions will be held with accredited private landlords to determine any properties that could be leased to Maninplace.	July 2015	Toni Keever, Telford HomeFinder Team Leader.

<p>4) That in line with co-operative values, the Council works with relevant organisations to ensure that local people have the skills to access online services to register their housing need and bid for properties. The Board recommends that information is easily available to the public on the Council's website and other channels that set out where there is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• unsupported online access ( including opening times)</li> <li>• supported on line access where staff / volunteers can support someone to complete the on line registration for housing ( including opening times)</li> <li>• access to training to enable people to register and bid independently. ( it was suggested that this could be linked to the ASL funding that the Council currently disperses)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Wholly Accepted</b> – We will work with the Corporate Communications Team to develop an Awareness Raising Campaign about access to Homelessness Advice and promote links to unsupported online access and to Southwater One Housing Options Officer to enable supported on line access. Presentations are also being carried out to voluntary organisations, internal services and partner agencies to inform key workers on the new housing process and the assistance available.</p>	<p>April 2015</p>	<p>Jas Bedesha Service Delivery Manager Family &amp; Cohesion.</p>
<p>5) Where online services can be currently accessed through mobile devices this should be publicised to tenants / prospective tenants. The Local Authority and Registered Housing Associations should work together to ensure where possible all services should be easily accessible via mobile devices.</p>	<p><b>Wholly Accepted</b> - All the websites through Telford &amp; Wrekin Council are accessible through mobile devices, this includes: <a href="http://www.telfordhousingoptions.co.uk">www.telfordhousingoptions.co.uk</a> and <a href="http://www.telfordhomefinder.co.uk">www.telfordhomefinder.co.uk</a> . Homes Direct and the Wrekin Housing Trust websites are also accessible via mobile devices</p>	<p>February 2015</p>	<p>Toni Keever, Telford HomeFinder Team Leader.</p>
<p>6) That systems are in place to ensure that anyone in housing need is not deterred from registering and finding accommodation due to difficulty in providing the information required by the online registration systems.</p>	<p><b>Wholly Accepted</b> - Application forms on websites hosted by Wrekin Housing Trust and Homes Direct only ask for information relevant to the person and will not ask for information that clients cannot find. Homes Direct has a helpline number if a client needs assistance and the Wrekin Housing Trust has several shops located across the Borough</p>	<p>February 2015</p>	<p>Jas Bedesha Service Delivery Manager Family &amp; Cohesion.</p>
<p>7) That the capacity of the Homelessness Service is monitored to ensure that the response rate for calls improves without resulting in resources being diverted from other homelessness services.</p>	<p><b>Wholly Accepted</b> – A task and finish group has been in place which has monitored the call response rate over the last 3 months. This identified that the main reason for poor call statistics was a combination of poor use of the call centre telephone system and a lack of an appropriate message for members of the public calling in. As a result of changing the message and a new staffing rota to answer the calls the number of unanswered calls, abandoned calls and length of waiting has reduced considerably.</p>	<p>Feb 2015</p>	<p>Jas Bedesha Service Delivery Manager Family &amp; Cohesion.</p>

<p>8) That the Council negotiates access to the Homes Direct and the Wrekin Housing Trust system so that proxy bids can be made on behalf of people who are statutorily homeless or in unsuitable accommodation.</p>	<p><b>Wholly Accepted</b> – We have already negotiated access to the Homes Direct system to enable housing officers to actively ensure that homeless clients are registered and bidding. Training is being carried out on the system throughout February</p>	<p>March 2015</p>	<p>Toni Keever, Telford HomeFinder Team Leader</p>
<p>9) The Council should consider extending the existing Bond Scheme to cover the initial cost of up to £70 made by private sector landlords. This facility should be available to individuals at short notice who would otherwise be unable to find accommodation.</p>	<p><b>Rejected</b> – The Bond scheme is in place to provide a security paper deposit for landlords to take vulnerable tenants. The Discretionary Housing Benefit now provides deposits for vulnerable clients which is a preferred option to landlords and tenants. This deposit is refundable to the client as long as there are no rent arrears or damage to the property which allows the client to move to another property with a deposit. The £70 fee would be for letting agency administration fees which are non refundable and cannot be covered by public funds and if the client is already known to council services as being vulnerable and would potentially fail any credit checks, we would look to support them through the Bond scheme.</p>		