



STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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HOUSING COMMITTEE MEMBER / OFFICER REPORT

NAME OF ORGANISATION/BODY	Stroud District Council
BRIEF REPORT: HOUSING SERVICES SERVICE REVIEW	
1 INTRODUCTION	
1.1	A thorough review of the staffing structure within tenancy management took place during 2023. The aim of the review was to ensure the staff service model is affordable for the long term, to reduce duplication of work whilst improving the customer journey and to enhance service quality. As a result of the review, consultation with staff on a new service structure commenced in October 2023. A new staffing structure has been agreed and is due to be implemented from 04 March 2024.
1.2	This report is to update members on the ongoing service review of the tenancy management team.
2 BACKGROUND	
2.1	The primary purpose of our Housing Service is to deliver good quality, safe and affordable homes for our residents that create sustainable communities, and resilient neighbourhoods, prevent homelessness and enable home building. We aim to provide quality, empathetic, and compassionate services, where we get things right first time and deliver a comprehensive and professional service.
2.2	The housing service can be defined in three main areas: Housing Solutions, Tenant Services, Asset & Investment.
2.3	Our Housing Solutions service incorporates Housing Advice and Homelessness, International Migration, Housing Strategy and Enabling as well as leading on countywide partnerships delivering housing-related work such as rough sleeping, supported housing and domestic abuse.
2.4	Our Tenant Services maximise rent collection for Housing Revenue Account (HRA) homes and provide tenancy management services to support residents to sustain their tenancies, engage in community activities, provide signposting services as well as safeguard those that are vulnerable. The team manage our independent living schemes, supporting residents to maintain their independence and reduce social isolation. The team conduct tenancy audits, estate inspections and improvement plans, manage leaseholders, resident engagement, respond proactively to antisocial behaviour and promote antifraud activities. The team oversee ongoing performance management and complaints and they are in the process of developing and enhancing the housing management system.

- 2.5 Our **Asset & Investment** Team are required to manage and deliver a statutory compliant and cost-effective repair and maintenance service across our HRA owned stock. The team provide a comprehensive property maintenance service, which includes liaising with residents and technical functions including the procurement of various contracts. The team lead on our decarbonisation, retrofit and planned works programmes to ensure our stock meets the Decent Home standard and keeps our tenants safe. A key part of this role is ensuring the Council is compliant with regulation, including gas, electric, legionella, asbestos, lifts and fire safety.
- 2.6 The service review focussed on the Tenant Services area of the service.

3 RATIONAL FOR CHANGE

- 3.1 The review of the tenancy management service created an opportunity for the Council to review the current staffing arrangements and take positive steps to ensure our service provision successfully meets our statutory and regulatory requirements, whilst aligning the service areas to work collectively and to contribute to the wider one Council approach.
- 3.2 The Social Housing Regulation Act received royal ascent in July 2023 and is changing the way it regulates social housing. The service review was designed to ensure that we have adequate attention and focus on the new requirements, whilst also being aware of the financial pressures facing the HRA (Housing Revenue Account). The service review and new service model mean that we will have a service that is designed to offer value for money whilst still achieving excellent customer service, best practice and regulatory compliance.
- 3.3 There have been several vacancies within the tenancy management team and difficulties with recruiting to specific roles. Due to the nature of the team set up i.e. smaller specialist roles, the impact of vacancies on the team means that there has been limited resilience and cover for key aspects of tenancy management role. The Housing Officers manage a patch size of c.900 homes, which is difficult to sustain.
- 3.4 The review of the service staffing structure focused on the changes to regulation and HRA budget pressures, however also factored into the review was feedback from staff, analysing complaint trends and data, responding to feedback from tenants, including consulting with our Housing Committee Tenant Representatives.
- 3.5 The service review set out to tackle the issues identified and to ensure sufficient staff resource in the right areas and to ensure our services are fit for purpose and designed to best meet customer demand and respond to those who are most vulnerable.
- 3.6 The review gave us the scope to ensure that we are supporting our teams by ensuring there is clarity in job roles and responsibilities, sufficient resilience built into the team to manage workloads and that staff wellbeing is carefully considered throughout the proposals.

4 OVERVIEW OF THE CHANGES

- 4.1 The Social Housing Regulation Act has a clear focus on resident engagement, making sure that tenants have a voice and are included in the designed and delivery of services. The service review has created a new resident engagement team. This team will specialise in resident engagement, leading on the social housing regulators Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) returns, leasehold management and communication with our tenants.

- 4.2 The review acknowledged that Housing Officers patch sizes are large in volume and therefore there is a risk that opportunities to support our tenants may be missed. This team and the income management team have had a number of vacant posts and difficulties in recruitment in recent years and therefore the proposal was to merge the two teams to focus on a 'generic' style of tenancy management. By creating one larger team the team should be more resilient to staff absence and upskills officers to have multiple of skills and knowledge.
- 4.3 The proposals include new Housing Assistant roles. These roles will give the team support whilst also learning the various roles within this new Tenant Relationships service area. The vision for these roles is to give the team immediate support and valuable work to deliver on our objectives, whilst also future proofing the service by having ready made replacements for roles that may become vacant in the future.
- 4.4 The review presented an opportunity create a Tenancy & Sustainment team that will continue to deliver the lettings functions i.e. when a tenant signs up to one of our Council homes, but this support will be extended for a reasonable period tailored to the tenants needs. Too often tenants are signed up to properties without any experience of managing a home. This team will provide signposting and buddy support to the new tenants to ensure that they understand the requirements of their tenancy agreement and are more likely to be able to sustain their tenancy in the future. This will mean more regular interaction with the tenant, creating opportunities to identify areas of concern and proactively resolve these.
- 4.5 In addition, this team will support with the development of our temporary accommodation review. A report will come to Housing Committee shortly which will set out our current approach and a proposed strategy to change how we manage temporary accommodation in the future.

5 CONSULTATION PROCESS & NEXT STEPS

- 5.1 The housing team were consulted on the proposals in line with Stroud's two-tier consultation process. This gave staff the opportunity to review the proposed service model and to provide feedback. The feedback was considered during the consultation process and the finalised structure was presented to staff in November 2023.
- 5.2 Staff were assigned a role through the allocation and selection process and most of the team had had their role confirmed prior to the Christmas closure period. All staff impacted by the service review have now had confirmation of their position in the new structure.
- 5.3 The new service model is set to take effect from the 4th of March 2024. During the period between now and the March commencement date we will undertake an implementation phase. The implementation phase is to ensure that staff have training, adequate time for shadowing and learning and that process and procedures are updated in advance of commencement.
- 5.4 There are several vacancies in the team, many of which are being advertised during January and we hope to successfully recruit to these roles in advance of the new structure commencing. Communication with tenants will be rolled out over the next few weeks.
- 5.5 This has undoubtedly been an unsettling and worrying time for staff, so I've noted in this report my thanks and appreciation to the team for their patience, understanding, feedback and commitment during this process.

6 CONCLUSION

6.1 In conclusion, the service restructure has been completed, and every officer has been assigned a role in the new structure. The restructure went out to consultation and followed an A2 tier consultation process, which gave people the opportunity to have a voice and provide feedback. The feedback was taken into account during the consultation process to conclude and finalize the final version of the structure. The implementation phase is currently underway, and the restructure is set to start on March 4th, 2024. The proposals were made to ensure that the service model is affordable and budgeted in the long term, while improving the customer journey, reducing duplication, and enhancing service quality.

REPORT SUBMITTED BY	Andy Kefford, Strategic Head of Housing
DATE	22 January 2024