

Appendix 4

1 Recommendations

That Cabinet:

- 1.1 Approves the £3.7m revenue over 5 financial years to provide the Housing Solution Service AFT, Complex Case staffing levels and programme support, to deliver on the execution of The Strategy.
- 1.2 Approves the £2.4m revenue over 5 financial years for additional staffing resource to deliver The Strategy PRS access programmes and to support the creation of an income collection and TA arrears management team.

2 Background

- 2.1 A new operating model for Housing Solutions Service was mobilised in March 2022 that focuses on homeless prevention work and effective casework to move households out of TA in a timely fashion and into suitable accommodation. The change from crisis management to an effective prevention and case management model, supported by a robust accommodation offer for our customers will help the service to significantly reduce the B&B budget by 2025.
- 2.2 Temporary resources were appointed to July 2023 to accelerate homeless prevention and Temporary Accommodation Move On activity, to reduce the number of households in B&Bs. With the increase in presentation demand (a 24% increase on 2021 to 2022 with the increased pressure continuing into 2023), to realise the objectives set out in The Strategy there is a need for additional housing capacity, working to a consistent methodology, defined governance and leadership model to manage and deliver this programme.

3 Options considered and Recommended Proposal

- 4.2. **Resource existing headcount on Fixed Term Contracts.** Additional officer resource will be needed to implement the proposals in The Strategy as well as the funds to continue the ongoing housing solutions work, currently only funded on a temporary basis. There are 23 operational staff and 4 programme staff resourced on a fixed term basis to the end of July 2023. The operational staff form the Complex Case Team and Accommodation Funding Service Team. Both teams are contributing to the reduction in the number of households in TA.
- 4.2.1. **Option - Extend the Fixed Term Contracts to March 2024.** The current team have been in post for 10 months on fixed term contracts. The posts could continue on a fixed term basis to the end of the next financial year in order to allow further time to evaluate the impact and benefit of the interventions. During this time, City Housing will also be designing a new Operating Model and structure. The risk with

this option is staff retention and loss of expert knowledge as individuals on fixed term contracts will seek to secure permanent positions resulting in potential high turnover and disruption to service provision.

- 4.2.2. Option - Resource the posts currently on Fixed Term Contracts with annual review for up to 5 years. The current team have been in post for 10 months on fixed term contracts. The posts could continue to be funded annually on a fixed term temporary basis however this could only be for a period of up to 4 years after which they are entitled to permanent employment rights. This is therefore **NOT A VIABLE OPTION** for the 5-year period.
- 4.2.3. Option - Stop providing the service currently delivered by staff on Fixed Term Contracts. This is not viable as current limitations in service delivery and housing capacity are being exacerbated by changes in the current economic climate which means the numbers of people presenting as homeless has increased and is likely to continue to do so in the short term. This will maintain or enhance cost pressures on the service. To cease funding and remove staff currently providing the service on Fixed Term Contracts directly impact the services ability to reduce people in TA. This option is **NOT PREFERRED.**
- 3.1.1 Option - Resource the posts on a permanent basis. Continue to employ the full complement of staff currently working for the Complex Case and Accommodation Finding Service Team on a permanent basis to ensure continuation of service and staff retention. Staff in these teams are currently funded temporarily through the City Housing Transformation budget to the end of July 2023 - **THE PREFERRED OPTION**
- 4.3. **Additional headcount for PRS incentives and income collection and TA arrear management.** In addition to the current services being delivered by the Accommodation Finding Service team, there is also considerable merit in employing officers specifically to set up and run a 'Find your own' PRS property scheme. This aims to add to the properties procured by the Accommodation Finding Team by empowering citizens who are in TA or who would otherwise be in TA to find a PRS property they would be interested to move to and approach the landlord themselves.

This is used in many other local authorities and has the potential to substantially increase the number of moves into the PRS. It also increases households' agency in finding a solution to their own housing crisis. Once a property is found, the Council is then able to help with negotiations with a landlord which may involve inspecting the property and paying an incentive. The scheme officers could train other staff in TA, Housing Solutions and EIP to support applicants in this way, as well as setting up systems and supporting applicants directly.

The incentives and funding for the Accommodation Finding Team between them aim to increase the number of homelessness duties ended in the PRS from around 200 per year currently to 500 per year i.e. An increase of 300 lettings per year.

The service recognises that rent account management and Housing Benefit support has not been the primary focus for TA support staff historically, however, resources were temporarily re-aligned in February 23 following the provision of the additional winter Homeless Prevention Fund and a small team of complex case officers have been working with other TA and central rent team colleagues to proactively identify and work with TA customers that have not been successful in securing Housing Benefit.

The pilot has been operational for 2 months with the objective of recouping TA rent areas which currently are circa £8.93m. Although still in its early days it has already supported 191 cases in Temporary Accommodation which previously had no housing benefit in payment resulting in (with backdated payments) to approximately £335k to date. There are a further 388 Housing Benefit cases pending which could lead to projections of approximately £1m in additional revenue. We anticipate that the above outcomes will continue to grow as more claims are placed into payment.

- 4.3.1. Option - Recruit staff on Fixed Term Contracts for a year. This option would allow for the pilot to operate for a longer period of time and resource could be flexed to respond to achievement of outcomes. This option is **NOT PREFERRED** as there is a risk with staff recruitment and retention. Individuals on fixed term contracts potentially will seek to secure permanent positions resulting in potential high turnover and disruption to service provision.
- 4.3.2. Option - Do not increase resource in the Accommodation Finding Service or TA arrear management team Investment in these teams is required to implement proposals in the TA strategy. This option is **NOT PREFERRED** because through pilots it has been demonstrated that both teams proactively work with customers to reduce people in temporary accommodation and therefore increasing resource is on an invest to save basis.
- 3.1.2 Option - Resource the posts on a permanent basis. Investment on a spend to save basis in an income recovery team on a permanent basis would better support the effective recruitment, training and retention of this new income recovery team - **THE PREFERRED OPTION**