

17th June 2015

Environment and Housing Management Committee

Getting our House in Order

Report of: *Helen Gregory, Acting Head of Housing*

Wards Affected: *All wards*

This report is: *Public*

1. Executive Summary

1.1 The Housing & Health Committee on the 7th January 2015 approved the implementation of a modernisation programme of the Housing department. The programme is scheduled to take place over the next 12/18 months. The modernisation programme named the 'Getting our house in order' will be extensive and involve an improvement plan for each service area. Staff attended briefings in December 2014 to discuss the programme.

1.2 The Housing department has prioritised performance improvement since July 2014; notably with the introduction of the KPI workshops held with Staff and Managers. This is beginning to produce improvements in performance.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1 That the establishment of a restructured post of Housing Manager (Estates and Repairs) on a grade J (£43,553 - £47,600) be agreed and that the recruitment process be undertaken.

2.2 That the direction of travel of the 'Getting our House in Order' modernisation programme be noted.

3. Introduction and Background

3.1 We commenced the 'Getting our House in Order' modernisation programme in September 2014 (Q3). The scope of the modernisation programme covers all service areas within the Housing Department. All areas require a review to improve standards, develop procedures and processes to ensure they are compliant with best practice. To

review the time-table of the Getting our House in Order modernisation programme please see Appendix A.

4. Issue, Options and Analysis of Options

- 4.1 As outlined in the time-table in Appendix A. The income management and Repairs service has been prioritised to be reviewed at the beginning of the modernisation programme. The new income management policy was approved by Housing Committee on the 11th March 2015. The new income management system went 'live' on the 6 April 2015.
- 4.2 As part of the changes outlined in the Welfare Reform Act 2012 - the onset of universal credit is programmed to be rolled out during 2016/2017. Rent collection will become increasingly more difficult to collect as tenants will be paid housing benefit direct four weeks in arrears; rather than to the Landlord. This has been identified as a significant risk to the income stream to the HRA with approximately 60% of our tenants are in receipt of partial or full housing benefit.
- 4.3 As part of the service improvements and to help to mitigate the risk of direct payments of housing benefit to tenants. We propose to set up a new Pre-tenancy service. Officers will start to work on pre-tenancy service beginning 22nd June 2015. A pre-tenancy service works with applicants before they become tenants to help to plan to budget for their new home, and will help to identify vulnerable tenants who may require extra support.
- 4.4 In addition to the income management review; we are also continuing to review our Repairs back office function. At present we do not have property lettings Standard.
- 4.5 We will be consulting with Tenants talkback group on the 1 July 2015 regarding the setting up new property letting standard. The creation of a letting standard will help to improve our lettings service and reduce our void costs.
- 4.6 We also plan to introduce a pre-termination visit to all tenants who submit a request to terminate their tenancy. The tenant is required to give 4 weeks notice. The Housing Officer will arrange to visit the property and conduct an inspection.

- 4.7 As part of the inspection, advice will be given on the condition the property is required to be handed back to council in; as outlined in the terms and conditions of tenancy. Advice will be given on any damage found and how the tenant can put it right with the 4 weeks time-frame; and any details of any re-charge that may apply if any damage remained outstanding.
- 4.8 Staffing - we are pleased to inform Committee that since our last report on the 11th March 2015, Nicola Hitchen has successfully been appointed Estate Team Leader on an internal secondment for approximate 3 to 4 months while we recruit a new Estates Manager.
- 4.9 A continuous part of the modernisation programme is to identify efficiency savings both cashable and non-cashable. We propose to combine the posts of Repairs Manager and Estate Manager to a single new Housing Manager (Estates & Repairs) post. Both posts are currently vacant.
- 4.10 The estates manager post is budgeted at Grade H (£35,391- £39,588) the property manager is budgeted at Grade J (£43,553 - £47,600). We plan to grade the post on a Grade J; which will release a saving to the HRA of £35,391.

5. Reasons for Recommendation

- 5.1 The service improvements proposed in the 'Getting our House in Order initiative' will improve service and value for money for residents and stakeholders.

6. Consultation

- 6.2 We will consult with Midland HR for legal advice on the correct consultation required with Staff and Trade Unions to ensure we are compliant with good practice.

7. References to Corporate Plan

- 7.1 Improving service delivery will meet the Council's commitment to service improvements and increased customer satisfaction.

8. Implications

Financial Implications

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- 8.1 The creation of a new Housing Manager Post which will generate a saving of £35,391 to the HRA through restructuring; which supports the Council's corporate objective to provide value for money and identify areas where efficiency savings can be made.

Legal Implications

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- 8.2 None.

- 9. Background Papers** (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright)

None

- 10. Appendices to this report**

Appendix A – timetable of Getting our House in Order modernisation programme.

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