



PURPOSE: Final Decision Report

KEY OR NON-KEY DECISION: Non-key decision

COMMITTEE: Homes and Housing Delivery Committee

DATE: 01 November 2024

TITLES: Strategic Housing Review

Ward(s): All

Officer presenting the report: Paul Martin

Job title: Chief Executive

Committee Chair: Cllr Barry Parsons

Executive Director lead: Paul Martin Chief Executive Officer

Proposal origin: BCC Staff

Purpose of Report:

This report is presenting the findings and recommendations from an external independent review of the senior structure of the Homes and Landlord Services division.

The report is seeking the committee's views on the housing challenges facing the council and its potential responses. These cover actions to make improvements in, amongst other things, ways of working and culture that, combined with organisational change, will better enable the council to meet its housing responsibilities as a landlord and as a statutory housing authority.

Evidence Base / Options to consider:

Purpose of the Strategic Review

1. This paper considers the findings and options from the external strategic housing review, attached as Appendix A to this report.
2. The review was co-commissioned by the chief executive and executive director of Growth and Regeneration to look at leadership, management, structure and capacity of the Housing and Landlord service at Bristol City council, and to assess potential options and actions to improve effectiveness to deliver services and the housing investment programme.

Key Considerations

3. The review considers the importance of a one council approach to successfully meet the substantial housing challenges in the city. It contends that the structure of the council and the

department is important in terms of efficient and effective management as well as helping to organise resources around key priority areas of work. However, the review also says that culture, ways of working and high-quality leadership taking responsibility for areas outside of post holders' direct area of management is critical to success.

4. The review also considers the relevant findings and lessons learnt from the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry, phase one and phase two reports and related regulatory and legislative safety obligations. Safety of residents is and must always be the top priority for the council.
5. There are important services and duties that are delivered from the existing housing department, such as prevention of homelessness, support for homeless families, private sector housing and building new homes (development). The review considered where these might be best located, considering the need for effective joint working as well as appropriate governance and professional oversight. The overall breadth of services in the department was also a consideration.

Requirements for improvement

6. The immediate requirement is that council housing services comply fully with all regulatory and legal landlord obligations to the satisfaction of the social housing regulator.
7. Further improvements are required to reduce complaints, especially to the social housing ombudsman, in relation to, for example, living conditions, damp and mould, anti-social behaviour, building safety.
8. The Phase two report of the Public Inquiry into the fire at Grenfell Tower focusses on building safety and highlights shortcomings in relations between the landlord and tenants. The inquiry report is intended to serve as a landmark for change across the whole social housing sector. The review report considers how the organisation and leadership of the council can respond to these sector-wide challenges, to strengthen the council's performance, accountability, and quality (of homes and services) for its tenants.
9. The demand for homelessness services remains historically high, with large numbers of households in temporary accommodation and a long waiting list for council homes. Work is already underway to address issues and this will need continued attention, especially to reduce demand, make best use of the private rented sector and secure better value temporary accommodation for those that need it.
10. There is a well-documented need for an increase in the availability of affordable housing in the city. Building new affordable homes is part of the solution to the pressures of homelessness and high numbers of households in temporary accommodation. The council will continue to need to explore all avenues for funding and partnership working to unlock the potential for more homes that are within reach of people on low to moderate incomes.

Organisation challenges

11. There are severe budget constraints affecting the Housing Revenue Account (largely this is rent paid by council tenants), which is insufficient to meet all the potential demands to invest in existing homes as well as building new council homes. Severe budgetary pressure also presents a challenge to the council's services intended to prevent homelessness and to assist

households that are homeless.

12. Leadership needs to have capacity, capability, and authority to deal with the above, taking it from a 'housing problem' to a 'council solution'. This means initiating whole council response and managing immediate steps, as well as tackling the underlying issues, such as culture.
13. Evidence from other council landlords shows that the problems faced by Bristol council are widespread and there is a need for action locally and nationally.
14. The strategic housing review report, attached as appendix A, recognises that changing the structure of the council is just one part of the change that is needed to meet the expectations of residents and requirements of law, regulation, and external assessment.

Change Proposals

15. The review report sets out changes to the structure that could be made, including the creation of a new housing department and executive director, housing. The Chief Executive will be considering options which will strengthen the council's performance, accountability, and quality for its tenants and its leadership and management in critical areas.
16. The Chief Executive is minded to decide to implement the option to create a housing department and executive director, housing, as set out in Appendix A and for the reasons also set out in the that appendix.
17. Consideration will be given to a phased approach to changes to allow for the involvement of the executive director housing in the selection of any further new post holders, should that arise.

Feedback from the Committee

18. The Committee's views are sought on the findings and recommendations of the review. Under the Council's constitution, it is for the Chief Executive (designated as Head of Paid Service) to consider the overall senior leadership structure and propose and implement changes as needed. The views of the Committee are being sought through this report and will be taken into account as part of the next steps in this process.

Next steps

19. A number of "strategic issues" are addressed in the strategic housing review, such as governance, culture, training, staff and resident engagement. Plans of action for all these areas will form part of the change programme mentioned above.

Officer Recommendations:

That the Homes and Housing Development Policy Committee:

1. Notes the Strategic Housing Review report at Appendix A.
2. Notes that the feedback from the Committee will be considered by the Chief Executive and taken into account in implementing the recommendations arising from the review.

3. Discusses and comments on the specific proposal that the Chief Executive is minded to create a housing department and an executive director, housing.
4. Discusses and comments on the proposal for a phased approach to implementation of changes arising from the strategic review of housing (Appendix A)
5. Notes a report will be brought back to the Committee to update it on progress in relation to matters in this report, in due course.

Corporate Strategy alignment:

The council's corporate strategy sets priorities aimed squarely at housing; healthy, resilient, and inclusive neighbourhoods with fair access to decent, affordable homes. Specifically, to:

1. Increase all housing supply including affordable and council housing
2. Decarbonise housing while improving warmth and benefitting people's health
3. Reduce and prevent homelessness and rough sleeping, tackling the underlying causes
4. Create improved approaches to enable and support disabled people throughout their lives
5. Make sure that more people can actively participate in their community.

City Benefits:

1. Approximately 14 per cent of Bristol's population live in a home owned by the council (either as a tenant or leaseholder or a member of their family). Good housing is essential for a good start in life and stable family conditions, it has a profound impact on lifetime health and the right housing can help older and disabled people to live longer and more independent lives.
2. Additionally, housebuilding, other construction work, repair and maintenance of existing homes all contribute to the economy and skills in Bristol.
3. Investment is also taking place, and planned, to improve the thermal efficiency of the council's homes as well as building new homes to higher environmental standards.
4. By strengthening the council's capability and capacity to address the issues raised in the report at Appendix A (investing wisely in existing homes, tackling homelessness and increasing prevention, continuing to support the building of new homes) the council will be making a positive impact in the areas mentioned above.

Consultation Details:

35 council officers, including trade union representatives, and councillors were consulted or engaged during the course of the strategic housing review. Member of the public, including tenants and leaseholders were not consulted, as the review was looking at management issues. However, the strategic report suggests that future delivery plans that might arise from the report should be informed by engagement with council residents and those benefitting from homelessness services.

Background Documents:

None

Revenue Cost	n/a	Source of Revenue Funding	n/a
Capital Cost	n/a	Source of Capital Funding	n/a
One off cost <input type="checkbox"/> Ongoing cost <input type="checkbox"/>		Saving Proposal <input type="checkbox"/> If yes - existing or new saving? Choose an item. OR Income generation proposal <input type="checkbox"/>	

Professional comments section:

1. Finance Advice: This report and associated appendix provides a report on potential changes to the Housing directorate with a number of new senior roles recommended, including a new Executive Director of Housing. If agreed in principle by the Homes and Housing Committee, the Council will need to consider more fully the financial implications of this change. This includes the additional cost of these new roles whether permanent or interim and how those costs will be apportioned to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and General Fund. This is in the context that both the HRA and General Fund are currently subject to severe pressures that limit the deployment of additional resources.

Finance Business Partner: Ben Hegarty, Finance Business Partner Growth and Regeneration, 14 October 2024.

2. Legal Advice: There are no specific legal implications arising from this report which is for noting and for the Committee's comments.

Legal Team Leader: Husinara Jones, Team Manager/Solicitor 11 October 2024

3. Implications on IT: BCC I.T. are already engaged with the HIT program and are supportive of the report. BCC IT are available to aid in progressing relevant work and can be engaged through the existing work request process.

IT Team Leader: Alex Simpson – Lead Enterprise Architect 8 October 2024

4. HR Advice: Any reorganisation that may affect the Council's workforce should be progressed in line with the framework set out in the Council's 'Managing Change Policy'. HR advice and support will be provided throughout to ensure a smooth transition

HR Partner: Celia Williams, HR Business Partner, 15 October 2024

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Strategic Housing Review

YES

Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)	YES
Appendix C – Environmental Impact Assessment	YES
Appendix D – Decision Risk Assessment	NO
Appendix E – Exempt Information	NO
Appendix F – Details of consultation carried out - internal and external	NO
Appendix G – Options appraisal matrix	NO
Appendix H – Business case / financial analysis	NO