

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Executive
Date: 16th March 2020
Report for: Decision
Report of: Executive Member for Housing and Regeneration

Report Title

Housing Options Service Trafford (HOST) Service Delivery 2020/21 and 2021+

Summary

The Housing Options Service Trafford (HOST) has been contracted to Salix Homes since April 2016 which delivers the Council's statutory homelessness service. This contract arrangement was for an initial three year period up to March 2019, with an option to continue by a further two years on a plus one, plus one basis. These options have been utilised and the contract with Salix Homes will end on 31st March 2021.

This report details the future options for the delivery of the HOST service and the identification of a preferred option.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Executive takes a decision with regards to the future of the Housing Options Service Trafford (HOST) from 1st April 2021 based on the options identified.

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

Name: Stephen James, Head of Strategic Growth
Caroline Siddall, Housing Strategy & Growth Manager

Extension: ext. 4330
ext. 5776

Background Papers: None

Implications:

Relationship to Policy Framework/Corporate Priorities	The HOST service meets the Council's Corporate Objectives of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health and Wellbeing • Children and Young People • Targeted Support
Relationship to GM Policy or Strategy Framework	Each authority in GM will operate their own housing options service to meet the needs of their locality.
Financial	The financial implications of the options outlined below are detailed in the Part 2 report. There are financial risks both in terms of the availability of grant funding from April 2021 and also the set up and ongoing operating costs of the preferred operating model from this date.
Legal Implications:	The Council has statutory duties in respect of housing and homelessness as contained within the Housing Act 1996, the Localism Act 2011 and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
Equality/Diversity Implications	None as a consequence of this report.
Sustainability Implications	None as a consequence of this report.
Resource Implications e.g. Staffing / ICT / Assets	There are considerable resource implications associated with bringing HOST back into the Council. However the service is statutory and the Council has no other option in terms of its future delivery.
Risk Management Implications	None as a consequence of this report.
Health & Wellbeing Implications	None as a consequence of this report.
Health and Safety Implications	None as a consequence of this report.

1.0 **Background**

1.1 The Housing Options Service Trafford (HOST) has been contracted to Salix Homes since April 2016. This contract arrangement was for a three year period up to March 2019, with an option to continue by a further two years on a plus one, plus one basis. Salix Homes has taken the option to continue the contract into Year 4 and 5 to the end of March 2021 (i.e. utilising the plus one, plus one).

1.2 In April 2018, the contract with Salix Homes was modified to meet the new duties of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA), which came into force on 3rd April 2018. The HRA amended Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 which provides local authorities' statutory duties when dealing with homelessness. The HRA amended and introduced a number of new duties which included:

- A duty to provide information and advice to all.
- A duty to formulate a Personal Housing Plan (PHP) for those applicants who are homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days.
- A duty to prevent homelessness within 56 days – 'Prevention Duty'.

- A duty to relieve an applicants' homelessness by helping them to secure accommodation that would be available for them to occupy for a period of at least 6 months, within 56 days –'Relief Duty'. The Relief Duty also includes a duty to provide interim accommodation where there is reason to believe there is eligibility, homelessness and priority need. This accommodation must be available for the 56 day Relief Duty period unless move on accommodation¹ is secured.

1.3 The modification in April 2018 was to provide additional resources to enable HOST to increase staff capacity to meet the new duties of the HRA. These additional statutory responsibilities have been funded by grant from FHSG and the contract value was increased accordingly from the original contract amount of £295k to £590k for 2018/2019. In January 2019, a further modification of the contract was made to increase the contact value for 2019/20 from £590k to £611k in line with pay inflation. A final modification of the contract was made in January 2020 for Year 5 to continue delivery of HOST to the end of March 2021 at a contract amount of £611k as per 2019/2020. The current £611k contract sum is funded £295k from the Council's original base budget and £316k grant from the FHSG for the additional HRA duties. The FHSG grant has been confirmed for 2020/21 but there are currently no guarantees on future grant funding beyond March 2021.

2.0 Housing and Homelessness Service - Trafford

2.1 HOST is contracted to Salix Homes to provide the following statutory functions on behalf of the Council:

- To make inquiries into the cases of homelessness or threatened with homelessness within 56 days.
- To notify an applicant in writing as to the outcome of those inquiries and of their right to request a review of any decisions.
- To secure temporary accommodation in accordance with homelessness legislation – for those where there is reason to believe that a person is eligible, homeless and with a priority need.
- To create a Personal Housing Plan and agree the steps that the Council will take to assist in securing accommodation. A copy must be given to the applicant including any steps that are not agreed.
- To keep the Personal Housing Plan and assessment of the applicant's case under review and up to date.
- To make an assessment as to the reasons why an applicant is homeless or threatened with homelessness, whether that applicant has any support needs and also what housing is required to meet the needs of the client.
- To prevent homelessness for 56 days and to inform the client in writing that they are owed the Prevention Duty. The Council must also inform the client of the right to review any decision including any reasoning when the decision is a negative one.
- To relieve homelessness for 56 days and to inform the client in writing that they are owed the Relief Duty. The Council must also inform the client of the right to review any decision including any reasoning when the decision is a negative one. Any accommodation secured to end the Relief Duty must be for at least six months.
- To investigate what 'Main Homelessness Duty is owed (eligibility, homeless, priority need, intentionality and local connection). To inform the client in writing what duty is owed and also the right to review any decision including any reasoning when the decision is a negative one.
- To inform the client in writing at each stage of the HRA i.e. when the Prevention Duty ends and the Relief begins.
- To inform clients when any duties are ceasing due to a either a suitable offer of accommodation being made and accepted/refused or when a client deliberately refuses to co-operate.

¹ Move on accommodation includes permanent accommodation including supported housing.

- To secure ongoing accommodation for those in the Main Homelessness Duty – this must be for at least 12 months.
- To receive and adhere to the appropriate duties for clients referred by another authority where the connection lies with Trafford.
- To inform other authorities of any placements made by Trafford to that authority.
- To provide interim accommodation when a client has been referred to another authority until the receiving authority has secured interim accommodation for the applicant.
- To protect an applicant’s personal property- may include placing into a storage facility.
- To obtain the consent of any applicants that are referred to social services unless there is a safeguarding issue when consent is not required.
- To review homeless decisions and suitability of accommodation offers. This is a Council responsibility and currently not carried out by HOST.

2.2 In addition to the HRA, there are a number of other housing duties that the Council has a statutory requirement to undertake and are therefore included as part of the HOST contract:

- Provide information to complete FOI requests.
- Provide the required information to submit relevant quarterly returns to MHCLG
- Hold and maintain a Housing Register and Allocations system.

2.3 HOST’s performance is monitored on a quarterly basis to ensure that Salix Homes is meeting the requirements of the contract. Table 1 shows HOST performance before HRA (2017/18) and (2018/19 and 2019/20):

Table 1: HOST Performance

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20 (Q1-3 only)
Number of homeless applications	330	1698	1866
Number of homeless households seeking advice only	0	675	904
Number of actual homeless cases/applications	330	1023	975
Number of Personal Housing Plans opened	n/a	576	515
Number of visits undertaken (home, work, hospital, prison etc.)	n/a	894	1796
Number of applications within the Prevention Duty (as at end of the year/quarter)	n/a	83	84
Number of applications within the Relief Duty (as at end of the year/quarter)	n/a	121	117
Number of applications within the Main Homelessness Duty (as at end of the year/quarter)	261	122	123
Number of applicants prevented from becoming homeless.	654	416	344
Number of applicants who’s Duty ended due to an offer of accommodation in the Private Rented Sector	n/a	80	59
Number of applicants who’s Duty ended due to an offer of accommodation in the Social Rented Sector	n/a	291	289
Number of enquires received (reception, email and telephone)	22,385	17,822	24,431
Number of households in TA (as at the end of the year/quarter)	77	64	101
Number of households in B&B (as at the end of the year/quarter)	5	8	5
Average length of stay in B&B	14	25	26.41

2.4 As Table 1 shows, the number of applications received has increased by 415% between 2017/18 and 2018/20. Also the number of applications during Q1-3 of 2019/20 has seen an increase of 10% when compared to the total in 2018/19. This increase is due to the changes within the HRA that altered the definition of homelessness. The HRA now defines a homeless applicant as ‘someone who is homeless or threatened with homeless within 56 days’, previously this was 28 days.

- 2.5 In addition, the government introduced the ‘Duty to Refer’ in October 2018 which enforces public authorities such as prisons, job centres, hospitals and colleges to refer anyone who is homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days. Since this Duty was introduced, 309 referrals have been received by HOST which in turn has increased the number of homeless applications. The service has also seen an overall increase in those homeless or threatened with homelessness since 2017 which may be due to benefit changes and property prices in Trafford increasing each year making some areas unaffordable for some.
- 2.6 The average length of stay in B&B has increased by over 10 days which is due to the new Relief Duty which lasts for up to 56 days. The Relief Duty is in addition to the Main Homeless Duty which already existed prior to the HRA. The increase in B&B placements is also as a result of the overall increase in applications which is increasing demand on temporary accommodation, leaving B&B the only option. HOST proactively work to increase the provision of temporary accommodation in Trafford to try and eradicate the use of B&B.
- 2.7 In 2018/19 and additional 34 units were secured within the private sector for use as temporary accommodation, bringing the total number that HOST are able to access to 80. The increase in temporary accommodation is as a result of the dedicated HOST Officer who is tasked with landlord engagement and acquiring properties within the private rented sector.

3.0 Housing and Homelessness Service - Greater Manchester

- 3.1 Housing and homelessness services are provided by the other GM local authorities and Table 2 below identifies the current numbers of staff and costs to the LA of providing the service.

Table 2: GM Service Comparisons

Local Authority	Current Operating Arrangement	Number of Staff within the Housing Options Team	Cost of the Service to the Local Authority
Bury	Provided in-house	10	c£915k
Bolton	Provided in-house	15	c£580k
Manchester	Provided in-house	38	c£1.8m
Oldham	Provided in-house	18	c£900k
Salford	Provided in-house	19	c£650k
Stockport	Provided by ALMO	15	c£245k*
Rochdale	Provided by Registered Provider	10	c£610k
Tameside	Provided by Registered Provider	14	Unavailable
Trafford	Provided by Registered Provider	23** (16)	£611k (£400k)
Wigan	Provided in-house	18	c£565k

* The cost of providing the service in Stockport is low compared to other GM LAs. This is due to Stockport having an ALMO which enables them to utilise staff and resources (i.e. temporary accommodation) from other departments within Stockport Homes to work within the housing and homelessness service.

** Other LA Housing Options Team do not include the Tenancy Support Officers or the Temporary Accommodation staff. Trafford's HOST service has more staff as it is all under one service rather than spread across different teams as in other GM LA's.

- 3.2 To ensure a proper comparison between Trafford and the other GM authorities, the Temporary Accommodation staff and Tenancy Support Officers in HOST should be discounted from the staffing numbers which reduces the staff numbers from 23 to 16 with a cost to the Council of c£400k.

3.3 As can be seen in Table 2, seven out of the nine GM LAs provide the service in-house, one of which is via an ALMO, and only two LAs currently contract out the service to Registered Providers. Oldham Council brought the service back in house in 2019 and Salford in 2018. The cost of providing the service in Trafford is low compared to the other GM authorities, apart from Stockport where they utilise staff and resources within the ALMO at no additional cost.

4.0 Service Provision Post 2021

4.1 In light of the contract ending with Salix Homes on 31st March 2021, a number of options for service delivery from 1st April 2020 which are set out in more detail in the Part II report:

1. Negotiate a further contract with Salix Homes
2. Go out to tender for another service provider for a 3-5 year period
3. Bring the service back in-house into the Council

4.2 The financial and other implications of each option are detailed in the Part II report.

5.0 Wider Corporate Links

5.1 The delivery of the housing and homelessness service meets the Council's Corporate Objectives of "Health and Wellbeing" and "Targeted Support". The service coupled with the Homelessness Strategy 2019-2024 and the wider GM strategic homelessness priorities, forms a comprehensive and fully joined up approach to managing homelessness in Trafford.

6.0 Other Options

6.1 There is not an option to cease providing the housing and homelessness service in Trafford, as there is a statutory requirement to deliver this as contained within the Housing Act 1996, the Localism Act 2011 and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

7.0 Consultation

7.1 Options 2 and 3 will require staff consultation.

8.0 Reasons for Recommendation

8.1 It is recommended that Executive takes a decision with regards to the future of the Housing Options Service Trafford (HOST) from 1st April 2021 based on the options identified.

Key Decision Yes

If Key Decision, has 28-day notice been given? Yes

Exempt Information

By virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by The Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order, the following information has been excluded from Part 1 of this report and included in Part 2 of the report:

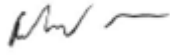
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

In all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

Finance Officer Clearance ...PC...

Legal Officer Clearance ...TR.....

DIRECTOR'S SIGNATURE

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M. W.', written over a horizontal line.

To confirm that the Financial and Legal Implications have been considered and the Executive Member has cleared the report.