

**Cheltenham Borough Council**  
**Cabinet – 12 June 2018**  
**Relocation of the Housing Options Service**

<b>Accountable member</b>	<b>Councillor Peter Jeffries, Cabinet Member - Housing</b>
<b>Accountable officer</b>	<b>Martin Stacy, Lead Commissioner – Housing Services</b>
<b>Ward(s) affected</b>	<b>All</b>
<b>Key Decision</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<p>Cheltenham Borough Homes (CBH) took over the management of the council's Housing Options Service in December 2013, following approval by Cabinet (in June 2013) to transfer the service from the council to CBH. Throughout this period the Housing Options Service has been delivered from Cheltenham First Stop on the High Street in Cheltenham.</p> <p>Following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2018, Additional Burdens Funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has been used to provide additional staffing within the Housing Options Team to support the requirement to provide additional duties/services to households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. This increase in staff, in combination with an estimated increase in the number of households likely to present to the Housing Options Service in housing need, means that it is now necessary to move this service to larger, more suitable accommodation.</p> <p>The proposed move to the municipal offices will support these requirements, by better meeting the team's back office needs, whilst also providing a larger reception area and more interview room space to see households in housing need.</p>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<p><b>To approve the relocation of the Housing Option Service from Cheltenham First Stop, High Street to the Municipal Offices.</b></p> <p><b>To delegate authority to Lead Commissioner – Housing Services, in consultation with Cabinet Member – Housing to approve any further changes to these proposals, should this become necessary in order to meet future customer requirements.</b></p> <p><b>To note that the lease to CBH will be granted at a peppercorn rent.</b></p>

<b>Financial implications</b>	<p>There will be one-off costs required to refurbish the urban design room to create more interview room space in the council's reception area, plus IT costs and potential minor works to the back office where the Housing Options Team will be based. These costs are estimated to be around £35,000, and can be met from earmarked reserves.</p> <p>This arrangement will provide an annual saving to the General Fund of approximately £26,000/year (which is the cost of the current lease arrangements with CCP).</p> <p><b>Contact officer: Paul Jones</b></p> <p><b>Paul Jones @cheltenham.gov.uk, 01242 775154</b></p>
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<b>Legal implications</b>	<p>Under an agreement dated 29<sup>th</sup> November 2013 made between CBC and CBH, CBH were contracted to deliver housing options services. The Agreement obliges CBH to deliver the services from the Cheltenham First Stop and is required to give CBC 6 months' notice if it intends to end its occupation of these premises. CBH are required to obtain CBC's approval to a new location.</p> <p>Occupation at CBC's offices will require CBH to enter into a lease on terms to be agreed by the Head of Property Services. Under the Council's constitution, the decision to grant a lease where the annual rental or capital value does not exceed £250,000 is delegated to the Director responsible for property.</p> <p>The duty under S123 of the Local Government Act 1972 to obtain best consideration on a disposal does not apply to leases under 7 years. The Council does still need to consider its fiduciary duties to residents in deciding to let properties at less than best consideration. As CBC is changing the location of a service it is required to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty contained in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. CBC must also comply with its own equality policy and conduct Equality Impact Assessments to assess the likely or actual effects of proposed changes in the service on persons who share a protected characteristic (as defined by the Act).</p> <p>The Authority has a duty under Section 3(2) of the Local Government Act 1999. This is a general duty which requires the Council to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. In deciding how to fulfil the duty there is a requirement to consult those persons referred to in the Act which includes representatives of council tax and non-domestic rates payers and persons who use or are likely to use the service. The Authority must also have regard to guidance on this duty issued by the Secretary of State. As part of the review of the location of the housing options service CBH have carried out consultation with users and stakeholders.</p> <p><b>Contact officer: Donna Ruck, Solicitor</b>  <b>donna.ruck@tewkesbury.gov.uk 01684 272696</b></p>
<b>HR implications (including learning and organisational development)</b>	<p>The Housing Options Service Team are employed by Cheltenham Borough Homes and any HR implications relating to the team and the relocation will need to be managed by the CBH HR Team.</p> <p>The report outlines that CBC customer services team will support by providing the first point of contact at the main reception and when appropriate and where possible will signpost to other services. The team have not supported this service area for a number of years and so will require training and support in order to support effectively.</p> <p><b>Contact officer: Julie McCarthy,</b>  <b>julie.mccarthy@cheltenham.gov.uk, 01242 264355</b></p>
<b>Key risks</b>	<b>As detailed within Appendix 1 of this report.</b>

<b>Corporate and community plan Implications</b>	This decision will support our community vision to help people and communities to thrive.
<b>Environmental and climate change implications</b>	None as a direct result of this report.
<b>Property/Asset Implications</b>	<p>Approval by planning committee will be required to configure and use the current Urban Design Room in the customer service area primarily for the use by the Housing Options Service. This additional space in the reception area will also support other Council Services as and when required. CBH will provide 2 self-serve computer points within the new reception area.</p> <p>Back office space will be required within the municipal offices for the relocation of the Housing Options Team. Current staffing levels require space for 11 desks with room for expansion as it is likely further grant funding will be available. These staff can be accommodated within the building, and we will work with CBH to identify the most suitable, available location. The commercial rental value of a room for 11 desks within the municipal offices is estimated to be approximately £12,000/year. The arrangements for the Housing Options service are covered within the financial implications section of this report.</p> <p>The council is likely to remain within the municipal offices in the medium to long term, so we must balance the desire for services such as Housing Options, which is a General Fund service, to be delivered from the municipal offices, against the broader priority of releasing surplus office space to let to prospective tenants on the open market.</p> <p>It is proposed that we will enter into a lease arrangement with Cheltenham Borough Homes for a period of 5 years, with a break option of 6 months by either party, giving notice in writing.</p> <p><b>Contact officer: Dominic Stead@cheltenham.gov.uk</b></p>

## **1. Background**

- 1.1** Cheltenham Borough Homes (CBH) took over the management of the Council's Housing Options Service in December 2013, following approval from Cabinet in June 2013 to transfer the service from the council to CBH. Prior to this, the service had been delivered from a number of locations (both in and out of town) including Whaddon Lodge before it was relocated to First Stop in 2006. Since then the Housing Options Service has continued to be delivered from Cheltenham First Stop on the High Street in Cheltenham. CBH have an annual licence with Caring for Communities and People (CCP) at a cost of approximately £26k/year, financed from the council's general fund.
- 1.2** At present, customers who are homeless in an emergency can access the service Monday to Friday from 9.00am to 5.00pm (from 10.00 am on Wednesdays). Customers who are not homeless straightaway are encouraged to contact by phone, email or by using the online portal in the first instance, where they can then be booked into a pre-arranged appointment. The Housing Options Service currently also offers a drop in service for general advice and enquiries on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Fridays between 10 and 12.30 p.m. All customers can access telephone advice from Monday to Friday 9.00am to 5.00pm (Wednesdays 10.00am to 5.00pm).
- 1.3** Under the proposed arrangements, customers will be able to access an improved level of service in the town centre from the Municipal Offices. The improved accommodation will offer a larger waiting area, more confidentiality and a more accessible service.
- 1.4** CBC customer services will support by providing the first point of contact at the main reception and when appropriate and where possible will signpost to other services. CBH plan to use the CBC reception technology to record visits, monitor waiting times and will use the business intelligence to inform service improvements.
- 1.5** CBH appreciates that the service needs to always be flexible and to adjust, according to uptake and demand. The service also needs to actively promote itself, encourage all methods of access and seek to increase the number of home visits.

## **2. Reasons for recommendations**

- 2.1** The council originally took the decision to accommodate the Housing Options Service within Cheltenham First Stop on the basis that these premises would accommodate a number of related agencies, thereby enabling the customer to see multiple agencies (if required) all under one roof. The agencies delivering services from CFS have changed over time. Currently, CCP's advice and inclusion service, along with CCP's advocacy services are accommodated within CFS. There are also other agencies that provide surgeries there, such as P3's community based support service.
- 2.2** The driver for change is largely due to the implementation of the Homeless Reduction Act which has created a greater demand for the service and has seen the Housing Options Team grow in terms of numbers. The current location with limited reception area and office space has been outgrown by the service. At the municipal offices, there are up to 2 pods that can be used in the reception area, plus there will be the availability of up to 4 interview rooms and a separate and larger customer reception area. The location is serviced well with major bus routes able to transport customers to the front of the building and charged for on and off street town centre parking is available close by.
- 2.3** The Housing Options service deals with some of the most vulnerable people in our society, frequently dealing with traumatic and highly sensitive issues. The service receives approximately 50 visits/week from households in housing need. Following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 in April 2018, the number of homeless households approaching the service has increased by over 100% compared with the same period last year. Although this substantial increase is expected to be only short term, nevertheless it is anticipated that numbers will remain significantly higher than before the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act. Those accessing the service will receive more support through their application with contact increasing

from 1 hour to 2 hours. The new accommodation with increased interview rooms offering greater privacy are needed to support this new ongoing demand.

### **3. Alternative options considered**

- 3.1** Remain at Cheltenham First Stop. It is proposed that this is rejected for the following reasons: There is no access to the first floor (where the Housing Options team are located) for any staff member with a mobility issue or disability. There are relatively limited private or secure facilities for customers to interact with the service on the ground floor, and with the demand on Housing Options services increasing, meeting this demand within these relatively small confines is likely to become more challenging.
- 3.2** Continue to explore the option of moving into 340 High Street, in partnership with CCP. CBH have been in discussions with CCP over the potential use of 340 High Street as an alternative to the current premises. It is understood, however, that a substantial amount of building works will be required, taking a number of years to complete. In addition, there would be a rental requirement likely to be equal to, or potentially more than, the current licence cost of £26k/year, based on indicative square footage.
- 3.3** Find an alternative town centre location for the Housing Options team. CBH have investigated the current market to see whether there are available alternative town centre office locations for the Housing Options team. There are none available at present. It is also likely that the costs of basing the team in town centre premises on a commercial footing would exceed current costs for leasing CFS premises on a similar square footage.

### **4. Consultation and feedback**

- 4.1** Consultation has been undertaken with tenants at a Shaping Services meeting in January 2017, and by the Tenant Scrutiny Improvement Panel, also in January 2017. This was followed by a Customer survey at CFS in February 2017. Feedback from this consultation supported the relocation of the service to be administered from alternative accommodation in the town centre. Opportunities for greater privacy were welcomed, with more private interview space available at the municipal offices.
- 4.2** CBH have consulted with CCP, the owners of CFS and have advised of its desire to move the service to the municipal offices. There are clear benefits to CBH Housing Options Services continuing to work closely with CCP, and both organisations recognise this. CBH have therefore committed to agreeing protocol arrangements with CCP over future working practices, prior to CBH vacating CFS. This will ensure that as seamless a service as possible can continue to be provided to clients of both CCP's Advice & Inclusion Service and CBH's Housing Options Service. In addition, both services will continue to be based within the town centre, with only a short distance separating them.
- 4.3** Consultation has also been undertaken with the council's Customer Services Manager and Head of Revenues and Benefits over the practicalities of having a Housing Options presence within the municipal offices. The Customer Services Manager is keen for the council's Customer Services team to support CBH's Housing Options service, and will look at ways in which assistance can be provided prior to and during the implementation phases. A number of risks have been identified as a result of the proposed move, and these are detailed in the risk register at Appendix 1, along with actions that CBH's Housing Options Team have committed to implement prior to the proposed relocation.

### **5. Performance management –monitoring and review**

- 5.1** The timeline for implementation of these proposals for the Housing Options Team will be Autumn 2018, subject to planning consent and successful completion of approved building works. During this time CBH will undertake the following, with assistance where required from the council: Termination of licence with CCP (3 months' notice), Office logistics, IT (telephony, data links, network equipment etc.), promotion of services to partnering agencies and Health and Safety

considerations. A project team has already been formed between CBC and CBH that meets on a weekly basis to support the move.

- 5.2** Thereafter, there will continue to be close liaison between CBH's Housing Options Manager and the council's Customer Services Manager to ensure that any practical issues relating to the delivery of services from the municipal offices are resolved.
- 5.3** CBH will deal with any practical issues arising from ICT and/or One Legal concerning the discontinuation of services from CFS prior to implementation.
- 5.4** CBH will liaise with Property Services and other officers from within the council in order to locate any back office staff (i.e. up to one or two officers from the Housing Options team) in the most suitable available place within the municipal offices.
- 5.5** The implementation of this project will be overseen by the Lead Commissioner – Housing Services.

<b>Report author</b>	<b>Contact officers:</b>  <b>Martin Stacy, Lead Commissioner – Housing Services and Waste</b> <b><a href="mailto:martin.stacy@cheltenham.gov.uk">martin.stacy@cheltenham.gov.uk</a>,</b> <b>01242 264171</b>  Matt Ward, Head of Housing Services, Cheltenham Borough Homes <a href="mailto:Matt.ward@cbh.org">Matt.ward@cbh.org</a>  01242 387551
<b>Appendices</b>	1. Risk Assessment  2. Community Impact Assessment
<b>Background information</b>	None.

The risk				Original risk score (impact x likelihood)			Managing risk				
Risk ref.	Risk description	Risk Owner	Date raised	Impact 1-5	Likeli- hood 1-6	Score	Control	Action	Deadline	Responsible officer	Transferred to risk register
HOS1	If the Housing Options service is delivered from the Municipal Offices, then the reception could experience an increased levels of challenging behaviour	Judy Hibbert	13.6.17	2	5	10	Reduce	<p>Customer Services Team to share protocol on dealing with challenging behaviour, for CBH to input into and follow.</p> <p>Housing Options Team are trained to focus on de-escalation techniques. These are rarely used as challenging behaviour is very infrequent. There is no expected increase in this kind of behaviour solely because the service is moving within the town.</p> <p>Design of area lends itself to an environment that supports de-escalation</p>	Ongoing	Paul Tuckey, CBH	
HOS2	If demand for customer services increases due to external factors (such as, Homelessness Reduction Act, and UC) then the reception area may not be able to cope with potential demand.	Judy Hibbert	15.09.17	3	2	6	Reduce	<p>The current urban design room will be converted into 2 extra interview rooms spaces to accommodate any additional demand on reception space.</p> <p>Greater emphasis will be placed on the Housing Options Team carrying out home visits on households who are threatened with homelessness.</p>	Ongoing	<p>Garrie Angove, CBC</p> <p>Paul Tuckey, CBH</p>	



								<p>More telephone appointments will be promoted as an alternative option for households with more routine enquiries.</p> <p>The Housing Options team will work closely with the CBC Customer Service team to ensure that should congestion arise in the reception area, it is kept to a minimum, with the potential to prioritise interviews through a triage/meet and greet system.</p>		<p>Paul Tuckey, CBH</p> <p>Paul Tuckey, CBH</p>	
HOS3	If homeless clients seek assistance shortly before the Municipal Office building is due to close, then there may be delays in closing the building at the usual time.	Judy Hibbert	13.6.17	2	3	6	Reduce	<p>All homeless clients arriving before 5pm will be assessed for their accommodation needs and housed accordingly.</p> <p>Normal duty time will close at 4pm, to ensure that Officers are available to deal with last minute</p>	Ongoing	<p>Paul Tuckey, CBH</p> <p>Paul Tuckey, CBH</p>	

								<p>emergencies as they arise prior to the building closing.</p> <p>Verbal applications will be taken in the case of emergencies so that focus can be made on securing accommodation, where appropriate.</p> <p>Back-up support from the wider Housing Options Team will be called upon where necessary to make appropriate calls so that the client's needs can be dealt with quickly.</p> <p>Should clients continue to be seen after 5pm, the main building will close and the client will be seen with two Housing Options staff in attendance. Exit will be through the committee suite doors.</p> <p>All presentations after 5 pm will continue to be dealt with under the normal out of hours service.</p>		<p>Paul Tuckey, CBH</p> <p>Paul Tuckey, CBH</p> <p>Paul Tuckey, CBH</p> <p>Paul Tuckey, CBH</p>	
HOS4	If the Housing Options team relocate their town centre presence	Jayne Gilpin	15.9.17	2	3	12	Reduce	Procedures will be agreed so that referral arrangements to Housing Options and CCP's Advice	July 2018 and ongoing	Paul Tuckey, CBH	

	from Cheltenham First Stop to the Municipal Offices, then there may be confusion from Customers Services staff over whether to send benefit enquiries to Housing Options or to signpost them to CCP's Advice and Inclusion service, based at Cheltenham First Stop.							and Inclusion service on benefits issues are understood by relevant Officers. In the event of any doubt by Reception staff, a member of the Housing Options team will assist.  As part of Housing Options exit strategy, all partners, including CBC, will be notified of all changes to the service. Once the service is established, customers and partners will know where to access the service from.	review	Paul Tuckey, CBH	
HOS5	If customers present accompanied by family members, including young children, then the experience for other customers may be negatively impacted with increased noise levels and insufficient waiting space in the reception area at the Municipal Offices.	Judy Hibbert	6.8.16	2	3	6	Reduce	Officers will interview and advise as efficiently and as effectively as possible. Should queues develop, then Housing Options staff will seek to manage customer expectations, and prioritise how advice is given, potentially offering alternative appointment times, if appropriate.  Conversion of urban design room to create more space/interview rooms.  Appointment times will be	Ongoing	Paul Tuckey, CBH  Garrie Angove, CBC	

								<p>utilised wherever possible. This will maximise opportunities for using the interview rooms, and reduce potential waiting times.</p> <p>Housing Options staff will have access to the CBC queuing system, to monitor waiting times to ensure that Housing Options customers are not waiting for any unreasonably period of time in the main reception area.</p>		<p>Paul Tuckey, CBH</p> <p>Paul Tuckey, CBH</p>	
HOS6	If the relocation of the Housing Options Service is not communicated effectively to relevant agencies and potential customers, then customers may fail to receive a timely service.	Martin Stacy	13.6.17	2	3	6	Reduce	A communications/marketing plan will be prepared by CBH and approved by Lead Commissioner – Housing Services prior to implementation.	July 2018 and ongoing	Paul Tuckey/Matt Ward, CBH	
HOS7	If the relevant approvals are not given for the proposed conversion of the urban design room into additional	Martin Stacy	17.5.18	3	2	6	Reduce	<p>Await confirmation of approval of works before CBH gives notice to CCP on the lease at Cheltenham First Stop.</p> <p>Review any new risks and</p>		Gary Angove	

	interview room space, then the proposed works will not be undertaken, leading to capacity issues for the reception area in terms of coping with additional demand.							for the project team to identify new actions to mitigate before proceeding with the relocation.			
HOS8	If the service remains as part of CBC's main office, when relocation from the Municipal Offices occurs, a financial & accommodation space pressure may arise in the long term (impacting on the saving identified) and arrangements required for a new reception space.	Martin Stacey	30.05.18	2	4	8	reduce	<p>As part of the council smart / agile working and OD programme more effective ways of accommodating staff and partner working are being investigated.</p> <p>The space and reception area requirements will be managed as part of the accommodation strategy, looking at publicly accessible spaces and partner working.</p>	ongoing	Martin Stacey	
<b>Explanatory notes</b> <b>Impact</b> – an assessment of the impact if the risk occurs on a scale of 1-5 (1 being least impact and 5 being major or critical) <b>Likelihood</b> – how likely is it that the risk will occur on a scale of 1-6 (1 being almost impossible, 2 is very low, 3 is low, 4 significant, 5 high and 6 a very high probability) <b>Control</b> - Either: Reduce / Accept / Transfer to 3rd party / Close											