

BRECKLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report of: Cllr Gordon Bambridge, Executive Member for Growth

To: Council, December 6th 2018

Author: Matthew Hogan, Executive Manager for Growth

Subject: A report concerning the resourcing of the Council's Housing Strategy and Enabling Service

Purpose: To set out a proposal concerning the resourcing of the council's Housing Strategy and 'Enabling' function, following a change in the current delivery model.

Recommendation(s):

- 1) That in response to the change to the current delivery model for the council's Housing Strategy and Enabling service, that the role of Housing Strategy and Development Officer (1FTE) is created within the Council's permanent staffing establishment.

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Housing Strategy and Enabling team at Breckland Council is a small yet busy team which covers a number of functions in relation to housing delivery, policy development and research. The type of work presently undertaken by the team includes the following;
- 1.2 **Affordable housing 'enabling'**. A major function of the team involves 'enabling' the delivery of affordable housing through work with housing associations, developers and landowners. The team does this through building individual relationships with development staff at housing associations, sharing with them development opportunities, identifying forms of funding and supporting housing associations to access those fund, negotiating with private developers the percentage of affordable housing to be delivered on market sites (taking into account viability matters) and working with housing associations to secure the delivery of those affordable housing units. Through taking a proactive approach to enabling affordable housing, this has seen 94 affordable homes delivered during 2017/18 and a further 185 affordable dwellings anticipated to be delivered in 2018/19. This includes developments on schemes at Denny's Walk in Narborough, Kimms Belt in Thetford, York Place in Dereham, the 'Fenlands' in Weeting, an exception site in Old Buckenham and the Bury Road in Thetford, alongside a significant number of affordable homes negotiated with developers on wider market housing schemes.
- 1.3 **Undertaking research into the housing market and housing need.** Over recent years the team has led on a significant amount of research-based work as a means of supporting the right type of housing growth to meet the needs of the district. This has included work in respect of the delivery of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment, the commissioning of a new Gypsy and Traveller Needs Assessments, the creation of a rural profiling tool (used to understand rural housing needs in individual localities), a large degree of work with parishes to commission housing needs surveys to support exception site development, and work to engage with Norfolk County Council to deliver an updated evidence base for older persons accommodation needs. The team are currently

commissioning research into custom and self-build housing, designed to support any future activity that the authority may wish to take in order to support that sector.

- 1.4 **Work on detailed housing policy and strategy development.** The team have played a key role in developing the housing policies within the Breckland Local Plan, providing housing expertise to support the council's planning policy service. This has included undertaking viability assessment work to ensure that the council's affordable housing policies are pitched at a level where they are viable and deliverable, and working on policies relating to housing mix. The officers within team have also played a major role in developing the Breckland Housing and Homelessness Strategy, which was approved by the authority in 2017.
- 1.5 **Rural affordable housing, community-led housing, investment in homeless accommodation, and the delivery of 'custom and self-build' housing.** The team are also leading on a range of other housing delivery projects of relevance to the council's housing strategy and its corporate plan. This includes the ongoing work to invest in temporary accommodation provision to meet the needs of homeless households within the district, engagement with parishes and town councils on the delivery of rural and 'community-led' housing, and an ongoing programme of work focused on supporting the growth of custom and self-build housing across Breckland.

2.0 THE CURRENT DELIVERY MODEL

- 2.1 Since October 2015, the Housing Strategy and Enabling service at Breckland Council has been shared with the Borough Council of Kings Lynn and West Norfolk (BCKLWN). The shared team consist of three FTE posts;
- One FTE employed and funded by Breckland
 - One FTE employed and funded by BCKLWN
 - One more senior and experienced officer employed jointly funded by both authorities, but a BCKLWN employee.
- 2.4 Since its inception in 2015 the shared service arrangement with BCKLWN has worked well and has delivered a number of notable benefits for both parties, including resilience in terms of service provision and delivery, efficiency through the alignment of process, and the sharing of expertise and knowledge on a number of key issues.
- 2.3 However, in October 2018 officers at BCKLWN notified officers at Breckland of a desire to bring the shared arrangement to an end. BCKLWN have advised that, despite satisfaction with the current operation of the shared arrangement, there is a growing requirement for BCKLWN to focus their resources on their own growth programme. BCKLWN have advised that a major catalyst for this change is the recent award of substantial levels of funding from Homes England to BCKLWN to deliver housing in seven sites within their ownership by March 2021. This programme of activity will require a reprioritisation and refocusing all of their existing staffing resources (including the 2FTE currently deployed in the shared team with Breckland), in addition to generating a potential need for further resources.
- 2.4 Consequently, officers at BCKLWN have requested that the shared arrangement come to an end by March 2019 at the latest. It is important to note that there are no TUPE implications of what is proposed.
- 2.5 It should be noted that, as part of the discussions with BCKLWN concerning the ending of the shared arrangement, agreement has been reached that officers from across the two authorities will continue to communicate closely as a means of ensuring that the

relationships developed over the past three years are maintained and developed to the benefit of both authorities. Agreement has also been reached that the cessation of shared service provision should not prevent future joint working on areas of commonality, including through sharing of best practice and joint procurement of research.

3.0 THE OPTIONS FOR FUTURE SERVICE DELIVERY

- 3.1 The cessation of the shared arrangement with BCKLWN generates a need for the authority to consider the options for service delivery moving forward. Currently, the authority is dependent upon the shared arrangement with BCKLWN to delivery all of its statutory and non-statutory (yet corporately important) functions, such as those listed in Section 1 of this report.
- 3.2 Consequently, officers have been exploring a number of options concerning service delivery following the cessation of the current arrangements with BCKLWN. The options have ranged from 'do nothing' (i.e. delivering the service with 1FTE), sharing a service with another Norfolk-based authority (in a similar vein to the arrangement that the authority has had with BCKLWN for the past three years), and a wholly-shared service with South Holland District Council (with whom the council shares a senior management team).
- 3.3 In exploring these options, officers have given detailed consideration to the nature of the service and the most appropriate model for delivery, the current resource requirement emanating from the council's current programme of activity in relation to housing enabling and delivery (including the future resource requirements that any future review of the Local Plan may generate for the housing team), and the timescales associated with establishing some of the potential options (notably the timescales involved in establishing a shared service with another Norfolk authority ahead of the cessation of the current arrangements with BCKLWN).
- 3.4 Following consideration of all of the options, a delivery strategy is proposed based around the creation of a Housing Strategy and Development Officer to sit within the Breckland establishment. This arrangement would provide the team with a total resource of 2FTE once the shared arrangements with BCKLWN come to an end in March 2019.
- 3.5 This resourcing approach will see the team return the staffing structure that it had in place prior to the creation of the shared service with BCKLWN. It is anticipated that this level of resourcing would enable the authority to continue to promote its areas of non-statutory interest in relation to custom and self-build housing and investment temporary accommodation, whilst providing an appropriate level of resilience to ensure effective service provision and provide the necessary capacity to support the elements of housing policy development associated with any future review of the Breckland Local Plan.
- 3.7 It is also proposed that the role is scoped to reflect the skill set and expertise required to support the agenda of the council's Growth and Commercialisation directorate. This includes a focus on development expertise to support projects such as the temporary accommodation investment work, alongside supporting the work associated with the delivery of sites in the council's ownership, including those that have attracted funding from the MHCLG's 'Land Release Fund'.
- 3.8 It is worth noting that the management of the council's Housing Strategy and Enabling team will continue to be provided through a Shared Strategic Housing Manager role; a post shared across Breckland and South Holland as part of the council's wider shared management structure. This management arrangement will ensure that, whereas the proposed new post will have a Breckland specific-focus, the wider benefits of the shared

management arrangement with South Holland (notably the alignment and sharing of best practice, collaboration on key projects, shared procurement, and the fostering of strong cross-council working relationships) will be embedded as part of the approach to service delivery. This will be in addition to the proposed continued informal collaboration at an officer level with the team at BCKLWN.

4.0 **OPTIONS**

4.1 **Do nothing.** Under the 'do nothing' option, the shared arrangement with BCKLWN will end in March 2019 and the authority will revert to its existing establishment (1 FTE) for the delivery of its Housing Strategy and Enabling function. Whereas this is an option available to the authority, a team of 1FTE would represent a reduction in resources based on current and historic levels at a time where the authority is actively pursuing a housing programme with a strong focus on proactively enabling the delivery of affordable housing, supporting investment in temporary accommodation to meet the needs of homelessness households, and supporting projects such as rural affordable housing and 'custom and self-build' accommodation. If the 'do nothing' option was pursued, there would be a requirement for the authority to evaluate the scope of its current housing programme.

4.2 **That the role of Housing Strategy and Development Officer is added to the Council's establishment (recommended).** Under this option, the role of Housing Strategy and Development Officer will be created within the council's establishment as a means of providing continuity in the delivery of the council's housing programme following the cessation of the current shared arrangement with BCKLWN. This arrangement would provide the team with a total resource of 2FTE, returning the resourcing levels within the team to the levels prior to the introduction of the shared service in 2015.

5.0 **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)**

5.1 To provide continuity in the delivery of the council's housing programme following the cessation of the current shared arrangement with BCKLWN

6.0 **EXPECTED BENEFITS**

6.1 It is anticipated that the major expected benefit, delivered through the report recommendation, will be a level of officer resource required to support continuity in the delivery of the council's housing programme, that being a housing programme focused on matter including (but not exclusive to) the following;

- The proactive 'enabling' of the delivery of affordable housing, through working proactively with housing associations, developers, land owners and bodies such as Homes England
- Policy development and research to underpin work such as future reviews of the Breckland Local Plan
- Supporting rural and community-led housing through engagement with parish and town councils across Breckland
- Work on developing the council's approach to supporting custom and self-build housing; a major government priority, for which there is local evidence of need and demand
- Investment activity in respect of temporary accommodation for homeless accommodation, and work to support the delivery of housing sites within the council's ownership (including those that have recently attracted funding allocations through national programmes such as the MHCLG's Land Release Fund)

7.0 **IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 Contracts

- 7.1.1 It should be noted that the cessation of the shared arrangements with BCKLWN does not create any contractual issues for the authority.

7.2 Corporate Priorities

- 7.2.1 The work of the council's Housing Strategy and Enabling services supports a wide range of the authority's corporate and strategic objectives, both in terms of the council's corporate plan and the delivery of the authority's Housing and Homelessness Strategy. In respect of the council's corporate priorities, the report recommendation supports the delivery of 1) supporting Breckland to develop and thrive, 2) developing the local economy to be vibrant with continued growth, and 3) enabling stronger and more independent communities.

7.3 Financial

- 7.3.1 The report recommendation carries with it a number of financial implications.
- 7.3.2 The council's current annual financial contribution to the cost of the shared service with BCKLWN is c£35,000 per annum. For the purposes of the new post, budget calculations have been based on the new post being graded at Breckland Grade 7 (note that the post is yet to be formally job evaluated). Inclusive of on-costs, the cost to the authority of employing a Grade 7 post is £39,380 (based on the bottom of Grade 7). Consequently, the report recommendation carries with it a minimum net additional budgetary cost of approximately £5,000 per annum.
- 7.3.3 A 'Proforma B' form setting out the financial strategy for the funding of the post is included in Appendix 1. This funding strategy includes the use of uncommitted funding from MHCLG, currently undesignated in reserve, which was paid to the authority to support general work in respect of supporting the delivery of 'community-led' housing and custom and self-build housing. The use of that funding to support the funding of the proposed post is considered by officers to be an appropriate use of that funding, taking into consideration the purposes for which the funding was provided to the authority.
- 7.3.4 Furthermore, it should be noted that the Housing Strategy and Enabling service has already met its 10% efficiency target through the deletion of a previous vacant post within the council's establishment, which has generated an annual saving of c £38,000 (representing 17% of the total service budget).

7.4 Staffing

- 7.4.1 The report carries with it staffing implications through the proposed creation of a post on the Breckland establishment. It should also be noted that the cessation of the shared service with BCKLWN does not bring with it any TUPE implications.

7.5 Stakeholders / Consultation / Timescales

- 7.5.1 The current shared service with BCKLWN is anticipated to come to an end in March 2019. Consequently, if the recommendation contained within this report is agreed with members, recruitment will commence as soon as practically possible as a means of ensuring continuity of service when the arrangement with BCKLWN comes to an end.

8.0 WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED

8.1 All Wards

9.0 ACRONYMS

- BCKLWN – Borough Council of Kings Lynn and West Norfolk
- MHCLG – Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government
- TUPE – Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006.

Background papers:- [See The Committee Report Guide for guidance on how to complete this section](#)

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Key Decision: No

Exempt Decision: No

This report refers to a Mandatory Service

Appendices attached to this report:

Appendix A Proforma B