

Report subject	Housing Management Model Review
Meeting date	28 July 2021
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>The council's housing stock within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is situated within the Bournemouth and Poole neighbourhoods and comprises 9,592 owned properties (5,080 in Bournemouth and 4,512 in Poole) and 1,139 leasehold properties (as at 1 April 2021).</p> <p>Council housing within the Bournemouth neighbourhood is managed in-house within the officer structure of the housing service unit. Poole Housing Partnership (PHP) is an Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO), a wholly owned company, and manages the council housing in the Poole neighbourhood whilst BCP Council retains ownership and ultimate responsibility.</p> <p>This report sets out the national policy context for council housing and proposes some core objectives to guide future delivery.</p> <p>This report presents the council's strategic key drivers for service delivery in this area and, measuring these against the various governance options, proposes a preferred model for housing management in the future.</p> <p>It is recommended that the council should align and create a new combined hybrid service, the 'best of both worlds', within the council.</p> <p>It is recommended that the new combined in-house hybrid service has a robust 'advisory board', providing oversight, expertise and informed advice. A number of other councils, including some which have recently changed from an ALMO model, have similarly set up or are considering setting up an advisory board to ensure robust visibility and monitoring for continued good service delivery.</p> <p>The report requests approval to commence extensive consultation with residents and other stakeholders over summer and autumn 2021 to help determine implementation.</p>

Recommendations	It is RECOMMENDED that Cabinet approves:
	<p>(a) The proposed objectives of a new combined service within the council:</p> <p>(b) The preferred governance model for a new combined hybrid service within the council overseen by an advisory board:</p> <p>(c) The outline principles of governance arrangements for the advisory board: and</p> <p>(d) The commencement of extensive consultation with all council housing tenants/leaseholders and other stakeholders on the preferred model and the future nature of services to be delivered.</p>
Reason for recommendations	The alignment of the housing management services is necessary to meet the council's overarching alignment agenda and emerging transformation strategy, with the outcome of delivering excellent services for our council housing tenants and leaseholders.
Portfolio Holder(s):	Councillor Robert Lawton - Portfolio Holder for Homes
Corporate Director	Kate Ryan – Chief Operating Officer
Report Authors	<p>Lorraine Mealings – Director of Housing, BCP Council</p> <p>Su Spence – Chief Executive Poole Housing Partnership</p> <p>Seamus Doran – Head of Neighbourhood Management, BCP Council</p>
Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Decision

Background

1. The council's housing stock within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is situated within the Bournemouth and Poole neighbourhoods and comprises 9,592 owned properties (5,080 in Bournemouth and 4,512 in Poole). 33 of these are shared ownership whilst the vast majority are rented. There are a further 1,139 leasehold properties (as at 1 April 2021). There is no council owned housing stock in the Christchurch neighbourhood as the stock was transferred to a housing association several years ago.
2. There is council housing across multiple wards of BCP although there are certain wards with high concentrations e.g. Kinson, Hamworthy. Council housing constitutes approximately 6 percent of all households across BCP Council geography, just over 1 in 20 homes.
3. Council housing within the Bournemouth neighbourhood is managed in-house within the officer structure of the housing service unit.

4. Poole Housing Partnership (PHP) is an Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO), a wholly owned company, and manages the council housing in the Poole neighbourhood. BCP Council retains ownership and ultimate responsibility for the homes, whilst PHP manage the homes in line with a Commissioning and Performance Management Framework overseen by the housing service unit and with formal input from the Chief Operations Officer, Director of Housing and the Portfolio Holder for Homes.
5. ALMOs were created by some councils in 2002 and numbers have since fallen to 27 now in operation, with several of these remaining in the process of being brought in-house by the council. There are approximately 165 councils who own their own Council Housing stock, the majority of which are managed in-house.

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

6. The HRA is a ring-fenced account within the council and records the income and expenditure associated with the landlord function in respect of the council's housing stock. The account is separate from the wider General Fund budget.
7. The council's HRA was formed on 1 April 2019 when BCP Council was created and combined the former HRA's of Bournemouth and Poole Councils. BCP Council can only operate one HRA legally but continues to maintain two separate neighbourhood accounts within it, one for the Bournemouth neighbourhood and one for the Poole neighbourhood.
8. The HRA is a sizeable and significant account within the council involving an annual rent roll of £43.2 million in 2021/22.
9. In 2018 the Government removed the HRA borrowing cap. Total borrowing within BCP Council's HRA is forecast to be £16.5 million in 2021/22, £23.1 million in 2022/23 and £23.8 million in 2023/24.

National policy context

10. In the context of the Grenfell tragedy in June 2017, national policy around social housing has gained significant focus over the last few years. This has culminated in a White Paper published in November 2020, 'The Charter for Social Housing Residents'. The key principles embedded within this include increased resident voice and empowerment to shape services, increased redress for residents, increased regulation across the whole social housing sector including in-house council housing services, improved quality of homes, improved fire safety and an increased focus on new build with options for home ownership.
11. A Building Safety Bill was published in July 2020. There is clear guidance within the bill about the direction of travel – greater accountability for fire safety, improved standards and greater regulation.
12. Further national developments focus on the review of the Decent Homes Standard that sets the minimum standards for council owned homes. This is expected to report in 2022 and to focus on how councils' impact on wider "place" and community across its stock and the delivery of measures to improve energy efficiency across all council owned stock.
13. Council owned stock will also be subject to the wider national policy statements around energy efficiency as well as the local declaration of the climate emergency. To meet national carbon targets all housing, including council housing, must meet net zero carbon levels by 2050, with the local target for BCP Council being 2030, as

declared in 2019. There are ongoing national discussions regarding how this will be funded as well as whether the technology is available to deliver this.

14. The White Paper and the focus on regulation is also being supported by an enhanced role for the Housing Ombudsman. The development of thematic reviews, 'naming and shaming' providers with poor standards and taking a more aggressive approach where the benefit of the doubt no longer rests with the landlord suggest a time of greater focus on the quality of experience of the resident than has been seen for the past 10 years nationally.
15. The future of our council housing stock across both neighbourhoods clearly needs to embrace these agendas more proactively and innovatively to make sure we deliver excellent services for our residents.

Review of the housing management model

16. In light of the need to align policies and practices across BCP Council, it is necessary to review the future housing management model which is currently based on the two different models for Bournemouth and Poole.
17. There are a number of policies which remain significantly different for the two neighbourhoods, including the tenancy types granted. The tenancy management procedures, systems and ways of working are also quite different across both areas.
18. As with many alignment discussions since local government reorganisation and the creation of BCP Council, the discussions around the housing management model are contentious and sensitive and need to be handled very carefully with engagement of all parties. The existence of an ALMO as a company with separate governance to the council, although wholly owned, makes the governance and communications for this project complex.

Proposed core objectives

19. In considering a model for the housing service, it is necessary to set out the objectives that this service will meet. These will in themselves be partly driven by national and local considerations as well as best practice elsewhere and linked to the council's corporate objectives. The following are proposed as core objectives to be refined further in consultation with residents:
 - To provide new homes that are energy efficient and improve the efficiency of existing homes to tackle the climate emergency.
 - To engage with residents to reduce fuel poverty and raise awareness of climate friendly actions.
 - To manage our external communal areas and green spaces well so that residents can enjoy these areas and be proud of where they live.
 - To develop and provide affordable housing in a range of tenures and types to the highest standard of construction.
 - To maintain and manage our homes to deliver the best outcomes for those living in them.
 - To provide homes that are safe and healthy to live in by ensuring that all building safety standards are met, and residents can easily raise concerns.
 - To support skills development through a programme of apprenticeships.

- To deliver services that are influenced by and reflect the needs of local communities.
- To work in partnership with many agencies to promote social inclusion and support residents to be involved and thrive in their local communities.
- To deal effectively with complaints of anti-social behaviour and ensure there is appropriate support for victims.
- To work in partnership to support the needs of vulnerable residents to enable them to lead safe and independent lives.
- To work in partnership to reduce poverty wherever possible and to promote financial inclusion.
- To provide support for residents so they can manage and maintain their tenancies.
- To make the best use of technology and deliver new ways of working that benefit our residents.
- To ensure staff receive appropriate training and development to enable them to provide a high standard of service.
- To ensure that our services are responsive to diverse needs and that residents can access these in ways that are most convenient to them.
- To continually benchmark service delivery and ensure cost and performance outcomes are upper quartile.
- To promote resident involvement in service development and review by providing support, information, and resources to individual tenants and community organisations.
- To robustly measure resident satisfaction and provide services that are shaped by the views of our residents.
- To provide transparent information to residents about how well we are performing including how we deal with complaints.

BCP Council's strategic key drivers for council housing delivery

20. It is suggested that the following are the key drivers for BCP Council against which to measure the most appropriate governance model and consider the best way forwards:

Driver	Detail
Direct residents voice heard by the council as landlord	<p>The White paper is very clear that tenants and residents should have a greater voice with the landlord.</p> <p>The changing national policy context with the White Paper and the transformation journey for BCP Council presents an opportunity for positive change.</p>
Accountability - the council as the accountable body irrespective of management arrangements in place	<p>The council's accountability for resident services is high profile in light of fire safety, the White Paper and the increasing regulation coming for council's with social housing stock.</p>
Clear line of sight – need for oversight, scrutiny and full visibility of services and issues	<p>The council needs a clear line of sight in light of accountability, White Paper direction and increasing regulation.</p> <p>The Building Fire Safety agenda is high profile nationally and there is a clear expectation that the council needs to have a clear line of sight on all issues and holds ultimate accountability.</p>
Control over resources and outcomes for residents	<p>The council will want to have control over its valuable 10,000 council home assets to deliver its strategic drivers in the best way which mitigates risks and delivers the local and national agendas.</p>
Deliver value for money with savings reinvested into resident services	<p>There are opportunities for removing duplication and driving inefficiencies that can ensure all funds are reinvested in delivering even better services for residents.</p>
Joined up service delivery to improve resident outcomes	<p>Housing management needs to join well with other council services such as anti social behaviour, housing delivery and housing options to create seamless services to its residents.</p> <p>The council's Smarter Structures project is key to making sure services operate seamlessly across teams.</p>
Maximise ability for council Housing services to be fully part of the council's transformation programme to modernise	<p>The council's emerging transformation journey importantly needs to embrace all services to help maximise best use of resources and ultimately ensure we deliver consistently excellent services for our many customers.</p>

and deliver the right outcomes for our customers	Council housing tenants and leaseholders clearly need to benefit from this too.
Deliver equity of service delivery for our tenants	There is a need to deliver fairness with the same services to all of our tenants. Possible risk of challenge if services remain unaligned.
National reputation and credibility of new BCP Council	Need to consider national context on these issues and what other councils are doing. Need to consider credibility of BCP Council two years on from Local Government Reorganisation with unaligned services. Council housing and the Local Plan are the two key areas that still remain unaligned.

Financial considerations and securing efficiencies

21. Whilst the HRA is ring-fenced, there still needs to be a focus on gaining efficiencies across all services to make sure services deliver the very best value for money to our customers. It is critical that we maximise the opportunity to reduce inefficiencies and duplication of spend within the HRA so that we can reinvest funds in the right service priorities for our tenants. This housing management model review is key to help us to do that.
22. We know from the alignment of the multiple other services over the last two years since the creation of BCP Council in 2019, that the joining of services into one combined service creates significant financial savings. These savings can be secured, whilst retaining and enhancing service delivery for our customers. The business case for alignment based on securing net savings is clear and will be subject to greater due diligence as the project moves forwards. It should be noted that potential savings will need to be considered against the additional costs of implementing this change.
23. As a ring-fenced account, the reinvestment of these savings and efficiencies back into tenant services is key – the funds would be reinvested back into the HRA to deliver the right service priorities for tenants. The savings will benefit our residents and would help fund the following activities, plus more, depending on evolving priorities:
 - Enhanced housing management and estate management services provided for the benefit of tenants (e.g. additional resource to address anti social behaviour, additional support for vulnerable tenants).
 - Improved maintenance of existing homes.
 - Increased new build activity to increase the number of much needed affordable homes.
 - Increased programme to retrofit existing stock and meet the national climate emergency target of being zero carbon by 2050, with the added benefit of lowering fuel bills for tenants.

24. Whilst the HRA sits outside of the General Fund there is a direct connection with the General Fund in terms of recharges. As such, it is again important that the HRA is as efficient as it can be. For example, the HRA contributed £1 million from each neighbourhood in 2020/21 towards the transformation agenda. There are also ongoing annual recharges in place back to the council's General Fund where the HRA pays for services it receives.

Governance model options appraisal

25. In order to address the alignment issues, BCP Council commissioned an independent review in 2019 which was completed in summer 2020. This review considered the various options going forwards and presented related issues.
26. The review presented two decisions, firstly whether to align the two neighbourhoods into one (Option 1).
27. Secondly, if aligning into one, then which model to implement as one aligned model (Option 2). The four options for the one aligned model were set out in the independent review as follows: -
- Option 2a collapse PHP into the existing inhouse Bournemouth service
 - Option 2b collapse the Bournemouth service into a (renamed) PHP ALMO to cover the whole area
 - Option 2c disbands both existing services and creates a new local authority company, with a board of directors, distanced, and branded differently from either of the two predecessor services
 - Option 2d disbands both existing services and creates a new entity, as a distinct stand-alone service within the council, with an advisory board, clearly distanced and differently branded from either of the two predecessor services.
28. The independent review did not recommend a particular option but suggested that BCP Council should now consider the options against its strategic key drivers to determine the best way forwards.
29. Since the independent review, a Councillor Working Group (CWG) has been convened from February 2021 to advise the Portfolio Holder for Homes in the development of the housing management model review and help move any change through to implementation. The CWG is chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Homes with five cross-party councillor members, together with officer support.
30. The CWG has shaped the proposals presented in this report. An approved governance framework is in place which includes the CWG as well as additional officer, resident and staff groups to ensure the right expertise, information sharing and decision-making as the review moves forward.
31. A staff 'sounding board' is proposed to be convened on a regular basis to help shape the project from here as part of ongoing consultation with the teams delivering the services.

Considerations to retain different governance models

32. Consideration has been given as to whether we should retain the two neighbourhoods as separate services or create a single aligned service covering all council housing tenancies across the BCP area. Table one in Appendix 1 sets out the advantages and disadvantages of these in detail.

33. Retaining the two current models of delivery causes little service disruption, both neighbourhoods deliver good services and they could work to align policies and practice. However, this is not in line with the council's transformation programme, does not deliver savings for reinvesting in the service, will still result in different cultures and ways of working and is inequitable for tenants and leaseholders across the two areas.

Considerations to align different governance models

34. If aligned into one model, either service could be collapsed into the other which would cause minimal service disruption. This could however be perceived as a "take over" and reduce impetus for fresh thinking and service redesign.
35. Alternatively, the independent review presented two further aligned options involving creating a new branded service with a new identity - a new single service which would be distinct from either of its predecessors. The creation of BCP Council has involved the creation of new combined services across many teams as a result of the new organisation. For many, a new service was created with a new identity, picking the best of the legacy services to create something combined which is even better. There are two clear options for consideration here:
- Option 2 (c): A single new 'best of both worlds' service, set up as a local housing company, clearly distinct from either of its predecessors
 - Option 2 (d): A single new 'best of both worlds' service, clearly distinct from either of its predecessors, set up as a hybrid service with a form of 'advisory board', providing oversight, expertise and informed advice

Table two in Appendix 1 sets out in more detail the advantages and disadvantages of each option.

Recommended governance model

36. The CWG, with officer support, considered the independent review and measured the options against BCP Council strategic key drivers set out above. On this basis, it was recommended to progress with Option 2 (d) above, involving a single new 'best of both worlds' hybrid service within the council, clearly distinct from either of its predecessors, set up with a form of 'advisory board', providing oversight, expertise and informed advice.
37. The advantages and disadvantages of each option are set out in Appendix 1. In summary, Option 2d has the following advantages:
- the 'tenants voice' is closer to the landlord.
 - clear line of sight/transparency and accountability for the council in the context of increasing regulation, accountability required by the landlord and an increased focus on safety.
 - connect, re-integrate and join-up with other council services to achieve better customer outcomes.
 - enable better delivery of the council's transformation journey to modernise and improve services.
 - greater control for the council of its assets.
 - no additional company overhead costs.
 - scope for securing further savings with economies of scale from operating in the wider council.

38. It is recommended that the new combined hybrid service within the council has a robust 'advisory board', providing oversight, expertise and informed advice as described in more detail later in the report. A number of other councils, including some which have recently changed from an ALMO model, have similarly set up or are in the process of considering the set-up of an advisory board as above e.g. Exeter, Gateshead and Kirklees.

Scope

39. The recommended hybrid model within the council clearly needs to operate in the context of the council's organisational wide operating model and transformation. In terms of establishing the scope of a new service, this needs to give due regard to the Smarter Structures project which sets out the way in which teams and services across the council should/could be line managed and structured going forwards. The new way of working brings teams together in different ways to help create efficiencies, provide resilience and build centres of excellence and specialism. The aims of Smarter Structures are:
- Reducing the duplication of work and roles.
 - Grouping like work into 'job families' and creating 'centres of excellence'.
 - Reducing structural layers across the organisation.
 - Increasing spans of control for managers.
 - Delivering savings in the short and long term.
40. The application of the Smarter Structures principles needs careful consideration to help define the operational structure for implementation. This will define what falls within the direct line management of a new team and what might be provided as part of the council housing service offer, albeit line managed in a different specialist team within the council. Further discussion is needed on this as the review progresses. However, it is important to note that the proposed consultation needs to focus on the service offer to be delivered, irrespective of the operational arrangements and future line management arrangements within the council yet to be determined.

Governance

41. A proposed outline governance arrangement, to be firmed up over the period of consultation, is described below. This is proposed to involve an advisory board composed of council members, resident representatives, and independent members with expertise in the field to oversee performance, contribute to strategy and operating plan/budget, as well as consider policy or service changes before formal approval through the council's established decision-making routes as per the constitution.
42. The purpose of an advisory board can be summarised as overseeing the activity of and offering advice, expertise and insight to the council, in the delivery of services to residents.
43. In greater detail, the advisory board would:
- Assist the new combined service to meet the objectives set by the council in consultation with residents.
 - Oversee and monitor the performance of the new service against its targets, annual operating plan and the strategy for the new service.
 - Offer advice, expertise, and insight in seeking continuous improvements and innovation in performance and service delivery.

- Assist the council to develop a strategy for the new service to be reviewed from time to time, and an annual operating plan to deliver that strategy.
 - Within the budgetary envelope set by the council for the HRA, and subject to the expectations of the new service strategy, assist and support in the development of the annual HRA budget report and associated operating plan.
 - Ensure that the new service and the council as landlord meet the revised and enhanced landlord expectations embodied in the housing White Paper.
 - Ensure that the new service meets the new enhanced regulatory expectations in respect of safety, compliance and the consumer standards.
 - Ensure that principles of resident involvement and engagement are fully embedded in the work of the new service, that the views and needs of residents are clearly taken into account in delivering and improving services and that 'Together with Tenants' commitments are delivered as anticipated by the White Paper.
 - Receive and act on reports from resident scrutiny panels.
44. It is recommended that the advisory board would comprise residents (i.e. tenants/leaseholders), council elected members, and independent individuals selected for their skills and expertise in the field. It is suggested that exact numbers from each constituent group should be determined following consultation. The board would be chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Homes and be supported by BCP Council officers as appropriate.
45. It is proposed that there should be consideration of wider supporting resident engagement structures that could feed into the board's work.
46. Further consideration should be given as to where the advisory board sits within the established governance arrangements of the council and its relationship with existing scrutiny committees, the Cabinet and the Council. This would need to ensure clarity on roles, responsibilities and reporting lines.

Consultation

47. The recommendations in this paper will be subject to extensive consultation.
48. Initial consultation has already commenced with a new Joint Resident's Group with involved tenants/leaseholders from both neighbourhoods. This consultation commenced in June 2021 to help shape the project including finalising how we undertake the consultation and the group is intended to continue throughout the project into implementation.
49. It is anticipated that an extended period of consultation will commence in August and last for approximately 12 weeks ending in October 2021.
50. Engagement will take various forms with residents, staff, housing register applicants and councillors during the consultation period, and will focus on the following key issues:
- The proposed objectives of the new service.
 - The nature of services to be delivered.
 - The recommended governance model including the role and composition of an advisory board.
51. The consultation plan involves extensive engagement as set out in Appendix 2. This will include a paper survey mailed to all tenants and leaseholders on the above issues, as well as asking tenant and leaseholders their thoughts on the current

service and what is important to them. A full residents survey is felt necessary to make sure engagement is as inclusive as possible. The opportunity will be taken through the household survey to improve our knowledge of our customer base, including demographic data, preferred means of contact, contact details etc. to better enable us to understand customers and tailor services for the future.

52. Engagement will be further facilitated by encouraging feedback through the council's online engagement website, face to face roadshows and resident meetings. The methodology for this will be reviewed to make sure practices are safe and in line with COVID19 guidance.
53. The consultation content is drafted and will be finalised subject to Cabinet agreeing the recommendations within this report.
54. A comprehensive equalities impact assessment has been undertaken to ensure that the consultation is as inclusive as possible and encourages wide engagement by residents and the many other stakeholders.

Summary of financial implications

55. BCP Council can only legally operate one HRA although in practice this is managed through two separate financial accounts, one for the Bournemouth neighbourhood and one for the Poole neighbourhood. Both finance teams have been working together since the creation of BCP council to move towards more consistent accounting across both neighbourhoods.
56. The recommendation for one combined model for all council housing tenants and leaseholders of BCP Council will generate efficiencies by removing duplication where resulting savings can be reinvested in enhanced services for tenants and leaseholders. The business case for aligning based on securing net savings is clear and will be subject to further due diligence as the project moves forwards.
57. The next stage of the project will be to work through in detail the financial implications including the potential efficiencies as well as any costs related to implementing the proposed changes.

Summary of legal implications

58. The preferred model will require ceasing trade within Poole Housing Partnership (PHP) which will require legal due diligence in due course. Formal notice will also need to be served by BCP Council to PHP to end the management agreement in place.

Summary of human resources implications

59. The staffing implications of creating one combined service will require a restructure of staffing into one team in due course. HR colleagues will help guide this process as part of the implementation. The recommendation for one new combined hybrid service within the council will need to have due regard to the council's Smarter Structures project with some staff expected to be supporting service delivery from complementary specialist 'centres of excellence'.

Summary of sustainability impact

60. The recommendation for creating one combined new service will realise savings which can be reinvested in services for tenants. One key spending priority here is to ensure that council housing is environmentally sustainable and meets the local and

national climate change targets. This will involve retrofitting the existing housing stock and building new sustainable homes.

Summary of public health implications

61. The effective management and maintenance of council housing stock brings clear public health benefits to residents. Good health outcomes can be achieved by good housing provision. The housing management model review is aimed at ensuring excellent outcomes for residents.

Summary of equality implications

62. Council housing stock involves approximately 10,000 households, comprising residents with the wide range of protected characteristics. The housing management model review is aimed at ensuring excellent outcomes for residents, catering for a wide range of needs and vulnerabilities, delivering services which are inclusive and supportive to help build communities.
63. An equalities impact assessment (EIA) has been undertaken and has continued to evolve over the last few months as the project has moved forwards. The key focus within the EIA has been to ensure that engagement with tenants and leaseholders during the consultation phase is as inclusive as it can be and that any issues likely to have an impact on protected groups are considered. The initial consultation will not only seek views on the preferred model, but the outcome and the other information gathered from it will also help design the service and any future equality impact assessments that are required.
64. The Councillor Working Group (CWG) advising the Portfolio Holder for Homes importantly includes the Cabinet Lead Member for Equalities to help ensure that these issues remain central to the considerations throughout.

Summary of risk assessment

65. The housing management model review is a complex project with many issues and risks which will be managed through effective project management as the review moves forwards. Specialist support will be required from areas such as Finance, HR and Legal to ensure effective project management where risks are identified and mitigated. A robust risk log will be further developed as part of the project plan.

Background papers

- Cabinet report : Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget Setting 2021 to 2022 – 10 Feb 2021
- Equality Impact Assessment

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Governance Model Options

Appendix 2 – Consultation Plan