

Report to:	EXECUTIVE CABINET
Date:	24 November 2021
Executive Member:	Councillor Gerald Cooney, Executive Member (Housing, Planning and Employment).
Reporting Officer:	Ian Saxon, Director of Place Emma Varnam, Assistant Director of Operations & Neighbourhoods
Subject:	CHANGES TO THE PROVISION OF A STATUTORY HOUSING OPTIONS SERVICE
Report Summary:	This report outlines the current provision of a Housing Options Service in Tameside, outlines the need for a change to the way in which the service is provided and the three options available to the Council for the future of the House Options Service.
Recommendations:	The Executive Cabinet be recommended to grant permission to serve 6 months' notice of termination on Jigsaw Homes in respect of the current contract and move the service "in house", to be operated and managed as a Tameside Council service within the existing Community Safety & Homelessness Service.
Corporate Plan:	Provision of an effective Housing Options Service contributes to the corporate priorities of Starting Well, living well and ageing well.
Policy Implications:	The recommendations will ensure increased access to services in preventing homelessness and increasing the resilience of vulnerable people in the borough.
Financial Implications: (Authorised by the statutory Section 151 Officer & Chief Finance Officer)	<p>The report sets out options for the future provision of the Tameside Housing advice service. As stated in section 1.1 the annual contract value of the existing Tameside Housing Advice Service commissioned from Jigsaw Homes is £0.433m. This contract expires on 30 September 2022.</p> <p>The Homelessness service has a savings allocation of £0.050m in 2021/22, increasing to £0.100m per annum from 1 April 2022. These savings contribute to the overall savings allocation for the Operations and Neighbourhoods directorate of £1.823m in 2021/22 increasing to £2.415m by 2025/26.</p> <p>Initial savings are not expected to be realised (as originally envisaged) when comparing the cost of the existing contract value to the cost of the proposed internal provision. Sections 3.15 to 3.19 of the report provide the supporting details. However, the internal provision will enable the Council to implement a homelessness prevention model to reduce the future demand on temporary accommodation and associated cost of this provision. It is advised that a review of the service provided internally is facilitated post transfer to evaluate whether related savings can be subsequently realised when compared to the cost of the current contract value. It is essential that the Homelessness service identify mitigating savings proposals as a matter of urgency to ensure that the aforementioned allocations of £0.050m in 2021/22 and £0.100m from 2022/23 are realised. Section 5 of the report provides details of a temporary accommodation provision review that will be carried</p>

out in 2021/22. Additional non-recurrent net budget of £1.112m has been included within the Homelessness Service for 2021/22 (£1.660m gross expenditure and £0.548m gross income via housing benefit rebates). It is envisaged that this review and the previously referenced homelessness prevention model that is proposed to be delivered via the internal service, will significantly reduce the requirement for temporary accommodation and the associated net cost of this provision on the Council. Consequently, the net budget allocation has been reduced by 50% in 2022/23 to £0.556m. The progress of this review together with the expected reduction in net expenditure will be reported to Members in subsequent monthly revenue monitoring reports. It is essential that advice is sought via STAR on the recommendation to ensure procurement compliance on the proposed contract termination and service transfer.

**Legal Implications:
(Authorised by the
Borough Solicitor)**

As set out in section 2.4, the Council has a statutory duty to provide a housing service.

The project officers have clearly invested significant efforts in improving the current offer, especially during the Covid lockdowns and wish to keep delivering improvements to the service, which it is understood is inhibited by the current contract for the delivery of the service.

The project offices should continue to work closely with STAR in relation to the termination of the existing contract and mobilisation of the new service in order to be confident that they can undertake the required actions within the suggested 6 months.

The project officers should also take advice in relation to any employment and Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment Rights Regulations (TUPE) implications arising from these proposals.

It would also be advisable for the project officers to liaise with offices in Exchequer to ensure that the proposals in relation to benefits especially housing benefit have been thoroughly tested.

Finally it will also be critical to ensure that the views of the services users are considered and that the EIA is given due consideration and updated as required.

Risk Management:

Risks are being monitored and mitigated via regular meetings of the Community Safety & Homelessness Team, Human Resources, and Finance Teams.

Risks will be identified and managed by the implementation team and through ongoing performance monitoring once the direction of travel has been agreed.

Background Information:

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting John Gregory, Head of Community Safety & Homelessness.



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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The statutory provision of a Housing Options Service is currently delivered under contract by Jigsaw Homes through their Tameside Housing Advice Service (THA) on behalf of Tameside Council. Although the most recent contract was awarded in 2017, THA have provided this service for over 20 years. The basic service currently costs £432,640 per year and the contract runs until September 2022. Additionally, the single point of access housing register and hospital discharge worker are contracted to the combined value of £167,500.
- 1.2 The contract includes a clause which allows the Council terminate the contract at any time, giving at least 3 months' notice.
- 1.3 The Council also commissions Jigsaw Homes to provide 76 units of Temporary Accommodation.
- 1.4 The Council's Community Safety & Homelessness Service has undergone significant change over the past two years under a new Head of Service and Management Team. The Service has dramatically changed the way in which non-statutory (rough sleeping) homelessness services are provided, having significant success in tackling rough sleeping in Tameside.
- 1.5 The Council have developed an exceptional, highly acclaimed and robust Rough Sleeper and Homelessness service. The team has changed the landscape for people facing homelessness and rough sleeping. They have introduced a more collaborative approach with related in-house services and developed strong relationships with the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government and key stakeholders, including the private rented and the third sectors.
- 1.6 The service successfully reduced rough sleeping in Tameside by 86% in 2019, the highest percentage reduction in the country, and in 2020 recorded a zero in the rough sleeping count. In the last year, the service facilitated over 200 moves for individuals in service to permanent tenancies. The guiding principle of this new service is to support people through homelessness and on from emergency provision to permanent homes.
- 1.7 The implementation of the Rough Sleeper Service has positively impacted on the demographic of homelessness in Tameside. This has led to changes in the commissioning of other homeless-related services, including supported housing and the recent award of the contract to provide 66 units of nightly charged temporary accommodation. This change in the landscape around homelessness in Tameside means that the current contract that was awarded in 2017 has become increasingly less aligned with the Council's Strategy on Homelessness.
- 1.8 The number of households living in temporary accommodation, where a statutory duty is owed to them under the homeless legislation, has remained fairly static over the same period. However, the numbers in temporary accommodation have significantly increased in recent months. There is a strong possibility that this may increase further as the block on evictions introduced during the pandemic is lifted.
- 1.9 As of 16 August 2021, 179 households were accommodated in temporary accommodation. This included 78 households in B&B accommodation.
- 1.10 A wealth of evidence exists regarding the adverse impacts on households who reside in temporary accommodation, for example: in terms of poorer health, educational achievements, lower levels of employment, offending, and community integration.
- 1.11 Individuals and families who present as homeless will have needs that extend beyond their housing situation and can include challenges such as: poor health, poverty, debt, addiction, domestic abuse, criminal exploitation, loss of benefits and unemployment.

- 1.12 These challenges highlight the importance of a service that delivers improvement in outcomes for service users. A statutory homeless service that is a one-stop shop approach, going way beyond an immediate housing need.
- 1.13 The cost of providing temporary accommodation in the form of B&B accommodation last year was £219,000 after receipt of income from Housing Benefit claims.
- 1.14 The Covid-19 pandemic has brought significant challenges to the homelessness service and has resulted in new and innovative ways of working. In addition, the pandemic has also brought huge financial challenges, placing greater pressures on services across the Council to implement cost savings and work more efficiently, whilst maintaining a high quality service.
- 1.15 This report outlines the requirement for local authorities to operate a Housing Options Service. It also outlines the need for significant change in the way in which the service is operated within Tameside. Three options are outlined in the table below.

1. Implement no changes to the service currently contracted out to Jigsaw Homes.
2. Serve six months' notice of termination on Jigsaw Homes, in respect of the current contract and re-tender for provision of a service, which is closer aligned with the ambitions and changing demands of the service.
3. Serve six months' notice of termination on Jigsaw Homes in respect of the current contract and move the service "in house", to be operated and managed by Tameside Council within the existing Community Safety and Homelessness Service.

- 1.16 The report also outlines the timescales for transfer, should Option 3 be the preferred option. Additionally, it outlines the processes involved and examines how the service could be redesigned once it has returned to the Council.

2. THE REQUIREMENT TO OPERATE A HOUSING OPTIONS SERVICE

- 2.1 Local Authorities are under a statutory obligation to provide a Housing Options Service. In Tameside, this service is currently provided by Jigsaw Homes, under a contract with Tameside Council – Tameside Housing Advice Service (THAS).
- 2.2 The existing contract was awarded to New Charter Homes (now Jigsaw Homes Group) in October 2017 and is due to expire in September 2022.
- 2.3 The purpose of THAS is to enable Tameside Council to fulfil its statutory duties, powers and obligations for Tameside residents who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- 2.4 The Council is legally obliged to provide the service in accordance with a variety of legislation, Codes of Guidance and recommendations, some of which were implemented after the commencement of this contract, including:
- Part 7 of the 1996 Housing Act
 - The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
 - The Homelessness Act 2002
 - The Localism Act 2011
 - The Equalities Act 2010
 - Domestic Abuse Act 2021
 - Armed Forces Covenant (Guidance)
 - The Suitability of Accommodation Order 2012
 - Supplementary Guidance on the Homelessness changes in the Localism Act 2011 and on the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012
 - Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (England) Regulations 2006 (SI

2006 No.1294) (“the Eligibility Regulations”)

- Ofsted Recommendation- Children’s Services; Use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for care leavers.

2.5 The service should provide advice and information in relation to homelessness and the prevention of homelessness. The advice and assistance provided should be robust and in line with current legislation if it is to be effective, helping to achieve the strategic aim of preventing homelessness. The service should be wide-ranging, providing advice and information; not only housing options, but also the broad range of factors that can contribute to homelessness.

2.6 This might include, for example: advice on social security benefits, household budgeting, tenancy support services and family mediation services. Sign posting to specialist advice should be available and include: debt management, health care, drug and alcohol misuse etc.

3. THE DRIVERS FOR CHANGE

3.1 The current landscape includes a range of drivers for change. These include:

- The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which provided a framework for Local Authorities to develop service models based on the proactive prevention of homelessness, to improve outcomes for homeless people.
- The need to provide a holistic service model that meets the range of presenting needs in order to improve outcomes for homeless people.
- Financial Considerations.
- Embedding and developing good practice and lessons learned during the continued development of the Rough Sleeper Service.
- Service Accessibility.
- Delivering operational resilience and effective Strategic and Operational Management.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017: Developing a Prevention led Service Model

3.2 The current commissioned housing options service is defined by a very specific contract, which was agreed in 2017. The current contract pre-dates the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which was implemented in 2018.

3.3 Prior to the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, many authorities tendered to provide an approach that was reactive in nature, in terms of addressing homelessness. Homelessness presentations determined whether a person was homeless, eligible for assistance, in priority need, intentionally homeless and/or had a local connection.

3.4 Once the Local Authority was satisfied that a person met these criteria, it would accept a main homeless duty and the household would remain in temporary accommodation until such time as the Local Authority could end its main duty, usually through an offer of social housing.

3.5 There is currently a national and local shortage of social housing. This model of service delivery is essentially creates demand for social housing that will take years to realise.

3.6 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 undoubtedly placed a greater administrative burden on Local Authorities. However, it also placed a greater emphasis on Local Authorities to prevent homelessness, regardless of whether the Local Authority owed a main duty under the homeless legislation. The Act significantly changed the legal framework within which Local Authorities could discharge its duty to homeless applicants.

3.7 Local Authorities were actively encouraged to adopt a more proactive approach to resolving homelessness in their districts.

- 3.8 Successful interventions by a Local Authority, under the new legal duties to “prevent” and “relieve” homelessness cases, could be resolved without the need for the Local Authority to accept a main homeless duty. This led to a reduction in homelessness, improved outcomes for homeless people and reduced temporary accommodation costs.
- 3.9 The existing contract does not fully reflect these changes. It does not facilitate a move to a more dynamic, flexible and person centred approach. These limitations can be identified in the low incidences for homelessness prevention and homelessness relief activity that should result in the successful prevention of homelessness. In many cases, placement decisions are not made until the date that someone presents homeless.
- 3.10 In many ways, the current contract remains focussed on fulfilling homeless duties that arise due to the Local Authority accepting a main duty and meeting the administrative requirements of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017. This is, of course, important but the Housing Reduction Act allowed much more flexibility for Local Authorities to assist homeless people at the prevention and relief stages.
- 3.11 Improving partnerships will ensure more effective prevention. Embedding the service within the Council will result in closer partnership working with other Council departments including Growth, Adults and Children Social Care, health partners and Housing Benefit.
- 3.12 The current contractual arrangements do not allow the Council to embed a prevention led model of service delivery within its statutory homeless service.

A Holistic Service Delivery Model

- 3.13 An “in-house” Housing Options Service, managed by the Council and co-located with the Rough Sleeper service, alongside other key internal services, will deliver much more than the statutory minimum currently provided by the existing contracted service. The aim of the redesigned service will be to embrace each individual and family who present as homeless and assist them to address all the issues that have contributed to their homelessness.
- 3.14 The Rough Sleeper service model was designed to deliver a holistic, person-centred approach, allowing the team to provide comprehensive support for the individual, not limited to just their housing and homelessness issues. There is growing evidence that Trauma Informed Practice is effective in delivering behavioural change and better outcomes for individuals. This approach is already providing significant savings and a reduction in wider costs for the Council.

Financial Considerations

- 3.15 Bringing the statutory service in-house will not bring an immediate reduction in the cost of providing the front-facing housing options service. There are, however, significant savings to be found in new, more efficient ways of working and a different and fresh approach to the way that homelessness is tackled in the Borough.
- 3.16 As already noted, the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 encourages Local Authorities to adopt a more proactive approach to homelessness prevention. The implementation of a prevention led model, delivered by an in house team will lead to saving opportunities, as the costs of homeless prevention is far less than the cost of Temporary Accommodation.
- 3.17 The demand for temporary accommodation has significantly increased over the life of the housing options contract.
- 3.18 However, procurement of this accommodation type sits outside the scope of the commission for the statutory service. The current provider has no incentive or authority to seek alternatives to current costly provision.
- 3.19 An in-house housing options service will be able to work more closely with housing providers,

the Growth Directorate and procurement colleagues. It will encompass the value base of the Operations and Neighbourhoods Directorate. As a result, this provision will be delivered to meet demand and will bring substantial cost savings to the authority.

Embedding Learning from Development of Rough Sleeper Team

- 3.20 The Rough Sleeping Team have achieved significant success in developing an innovative, flexible, person-centred approach to dealing with rough sleeping and the causes of rough sleeping. This innovative culture embedded within the statutory homelessness service would greatly improve outcomes.
- 3.21 Bringing the service in-house and the co-location of the teams will facilitate good practice to be shared and eliminate duplication in work that currently exists due to the services being split.
- 3.22 Shared service delivery will enable improved services and outcomes for homeless people. One current example of this is the development of services for ex-offenders.
- 3.23 The Rough Sleeper Initiative team have been successful in accessing additional government funding to develop an innovative project to support those being released from prison, which accounts for approximately 60% of those accessing the service. This will be of great benefit in terms of reduction of risk to the Borough, reduction in demand on hostel / emergency beds at the Town House, reduction of costs in the quest to rehouse and the likelihood of reoffending.
- 3.24 Under the current arrangements, most ex-offenders released from prison need to present to THA at the point of release, which allows no time for effective homelessness prevention. In some cases, people will be placed under a statutory homeless duty in costly B&B accommodation or be provided with an emergency referral to Homelessness Service and The Town House emergency provision facility.
- 3.25 This reactive approach increases the likelihood of re-offending and the cycle of homelessness and rough sleeping.
- 3.26 The in-house service has also developed a focussed, holistic approach to implementing the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. Alongside internal and external partners providing services to both victims and perpetrators. Homelessness due to domestic abuse is one of the top three priorities for the Community Safety Partnership in Tameside.
- 3.27 There is no requirement under the current contract for Jigsaw to innovate or improve services. In-house provision would allow further innovation and better outcomes for homeless people with a broad range of needs.

Service Accessibility

- 3.28 The guiding principle of an in-house service would be homeless prevention with a specific aim to prevent homelessness using a toolkit of appropriate advice and interventions.
- 3.29 Accessible services are key to early intervention and successful prevention. The service must be accessible to all service users regardless of their geographical location. The service is currently in Ashton-under-Lyne and it is not proposed to change this location. However, a redesigned service will provide accessible outreach so everyone can access the service effectively.
- 3.30 Physical improvements are needed to ensure the existing office space is fit for purpose. The current service delivery of face-to-face interviews for all, in a centralised location has led to many homeless families waiting for extended periods of time in a waiting room until they were seen by a Homeless Prevention Officer. Incidents of aggression or anti-social behaviour in the waiting room are regular occurrences, which causes distress and increased anxiety for

other people presenting in the building and pose a risk for staff. A new approach is required to provide advice safely in a positive and constructive atmosphere.

- 3.31 The pandemic has resulted in significant changes to the way organisations are delivering their services and has increased reliance on technology. These changes to working practices have demonstrated the versatility of staff and their ability to implement new models of working to meet service demands. Developing these models of working will ensure that the service is available to all Tameside residents.
- 3.32 The current Jigsaw telephone systems are limited in their functionality. Whereas a Council-managed service would utilise the Council's existing call-centre, telephone and online functions, to significantly improve accessibility for all residents of Tameside. A triage system would prioritise work streams.
- 3.33 An in-house service will allow us to utilise Council IT services and expertise to develop the ability of the current homeless database, which is provided by Locata, to enhance service accessibility, provision and delivery and to increase efficiency.
- 3.34 A service which is sensitive to individuals' needs and which promotes confidentiality is essential. The current model compromises confidentiality by requiring service users to discuss sensitive information in an open reception area and through security screens. Instead, the service should enable people to make contact from their chosen location and discuss sensitive information in private. This will also enable compliance with the implementation of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

Operational Resilience, Strategic and Operational Management

- 3.35 Resilience within the THA team is limited – a bigger, co-joined team would address this issue. It would improve the service's flexibility and ensure that staff with a specialism are available when required. The Community Safety and Homelessness Managers are also flexible and are able to support to cover absence and leave. This lack of resilience is an ongoing issue with THA as they are a standalone service within Jigsaw's wider provision.
- 3.36 One of the major benefits of a move to in-house provision is the current lack of strong leadership within the statutory service. Having lost its operational manager earlier this year, the current position of Interim Manager is limited and line management is also disjointed. Strong alignment with the RSI Team will bring clear and direct in-house leadership with an established management structure. In addition, adoption of joint working and shared strengths along with the Council's vision, values and ethos in this area of work will be beneficial.
- 3.37 There are very different approaches by the two distinct teams, as a result of different management cultures in their respective organisations. Bringing the statutory service in house under the strong leadership of the Community Safety and Homelessness team is the only way to shift the existing dated and inflexible approach currently being delivered by Jigsaw. The in house approach also aligns with the Council's core values and beliefs.

4. POTENTIAL FOR SAVINGS

- 4.1 As already stated, a move in-house will not bring a reduction in the cost of providing the front-facing Housing Options Service. The primary driver for change is to improve outcomes for homeless people. However, it is possible to achieve this while also delivering savings.
- 4.2 The table below provides three examples of potential areas where savings could be achieved:

Objective	Explanation of activity	Savings Potential
Increase the number of successful homeless prevention cases by 5%	In 2019-20, 91 households who were owed a prevention duty went on to become homeless. This activity would mean 5 households would not become homeless (based on 2019-20 prevention data).	The cost of providing TA to a single person for 1 month is on average £1600 pm (after HB income). The cost of providing TA to a family with a 2 bed need is on average £1050 per month. Assuming successful prevention for 5 families, amounts to a monthly saving of £5250.
Increase the use of the Private Rented Sector to end main homeless duty in 5% of cases	This would mean 8 households, per month, are accommodated in the private rented sector.	Using the same TA costs as above and assuming this is used for single people only, this would represent an annual saving of circa £12,800 pm.
Implementation of housing project for ex-offenders.	The Council has is in the process of developing a project to provide accommodation for 50 people leaving prison in the next 12 months. Of those 50, 10 would likely be priority need which means there is a duty to provide Temporary Accommodation.	The cost of providing TA for 10 single households is on average £16,000, per month. Avoiding the use of TA for 10 individuals represents a saving of £16,000 per month.

4.3 These are three examples of where potential savings have been identified. Should the service move in-house, it is proposed that a full service review is conducted within six months. This would fully consider and identify potential for further savings and opportunities.

5. SHORTFALL IN HOUSING BENEFIT – VIREMENT OF BUDGET

5.1 In addition to considering the future provision of a Housing Options Service, Members are asked to note an existing net budget pressure of £1.3m in 2020/21 currently reported within Exchequer Services of the Council.

5.2 Individuals or families who are assessed as homeless and for whom the Authority has a duty to house are often placed in temporary accommodation until a more permanent home can be identified.

5.3 These individuals and families are entitled to claim housing benefit from the Authority to cover the cost of their accommodation.

5.4 The Authority normally receives 100% subsidy from central government for correctly paid Housing Benefit, but in “exempt accommodation” the rate is sometimes reduced to 60% or even zero in some cases. The majority of temporary accommodation used in Tameside is of the budget hotel / B&B type, which is classed as exempt accommodation.

5.5 The growing shortfall in subsidy from central government is summarised in the table below.

Final Audited Subsidy Claim	Total No of claims received	Amount of claim where no subsidy paid	No of claims where no subsidy being received
2014/15	104	£15,296	57
2015/16	249	£95,719	186
2016/17	349	£259,403	272

2017/18	356	£393,599	306
2018/19	434	£629,522	384
2019/20	419	£756,116	370
2020/21 (pending audit)	495	£1,323,031	455

Increased demands due to the Covid pandemic meant that the shortfall for 2020/21 increased by 75% from the previous year's figure (and by 18% from the 2020/21 mid-year estimate of £1.123m)

- 5.6 The service is much better placed to proactively engage with providers to find more suitable and cost-effective solutions for temporary accommodation across the borough, which will reduce this shortfall over time.
- 5.7 In 2021/22 the expenditure and income of this provision is reported within the Homelessness Service of the Operations and Neighbourhoods directorate. In recognition of this change, a non-recurrent net budget allocation of £1.112m has been included within the Homelessness Service for 2021/22 (£1.660m gross expenditure and £0.548m gross income via housing benefit rebates) pending a review of the temporary accommodation provision process. It is envisaged that this review together with the implementation of the homelessness prevention model that will be delivered by the proposed housing options service transfer, will significantly reduce the requirement for temporary accommodation and the associated net cost of this provision on the Council. Consequently, the net budget allocation has been reduced by 50% in 2022/23 to £0.556m. The progress of this review together with the expected reduction in net expenditure will be reported to Members in subsequent monthly revenue monitoring reports.

6. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

- 6.1 The three options available to the authority in respect of the Housing Options Service are detailed below:

1. Implement no changes to the service currently contracted out to Jigsaw Homes.
2. Serve six months' notice of termination on Jigsaw Homes, in respect of the current contract and re-tender for provision of a service, which is closer aligned with the ambitions and changing demands of the service.
3. Serve six months' notice of termination on Jigsaw Homes in respect of the current contract and move the service "in house", to be operated and managed by Tameside Council within the existing Community Safety and Homelessness Service.

OPTION 1 – Implement no changes

- 6.2 This option would leave the Authority with a service which is unchanged from pre-Covid times and which would not address the needs and opportunities outlined in Section 3 of this report.
- 6.3 The advantages of this option are that it would be an easier decision to maintain the status quo.
- 6.4 The disadvantages of this option are that the existing contract and service level agreement does not allow for the improvements and innovations which the Council wishes to implement. A refreshed housing options service, under new management, could work much more flexibly and innovatively in developing not just solutions for those already homeless, but also for preventing homelessness.

Advantages	Disadvantages
This option would be the easier management decision.	This option would not address the drivers for change detailed in this report.
	This option would not allow the Council to innovate and improve services to improve outcomes and prevent homelessness.

OPTION 2 – Re-tendering for Provision of the Housing Options Service

- 6.5 This option would involve a process of re-tendering for an external organisation to provide the Housing Options Service.
- 6.6 The advantages of this option are that this is one way to update the service specifications to incorporate lessons learnt throughout the Covid pandemic and to ensure the service continues to meet changing needs.
- 6.7 The disadvantages of this option are that there may be a limited number of providers to bid for the contract, which would make it difficult to procure a service, which would be either flexible or cost-effective. Setting out a service specification and then asking providers to bid based on that specification leaves the Authority with a fixed, inflexible provision for the length of the contract. This would result in similar challenges in the future.

Advantages	Disadvantages
This option would offer a mechanism to update service specifications so as to meet changing needs.	There is a risk that there would not be a sufficient number of alternative providers to bid for this contract.
	This option may result in difficulties in the Council's ability to procure a flexible and cost effective service.
	This option may lead to a situation where the Council is faced with the same challenges to improving services.

OPTION 3 – Transferring the service back “in-house” to be operated and managed by the Community Safety and Homelessness Service.

- 6.8 This option would involve a fundamental change in approach by terminating the current contract, with six months' notice with Jigsaw Homes. Creating a service that is provided by Tameside Council staff.
- 6.9 The advantages of this option are that it offers the most benefits, enabling the Council to have full control of ongoing costs in addition to control over service provision and improvements, adapting and innovating to meet changing needs.
- 6.10 Additionally, the service will be redesigned and operate in a much more cohesive and holistic way, bringing together both the statutory and non-statutory homelessness services to work seamlessly together. Improving partnership working between Council services, and other public, private and third sector organisations to improve outcomes.
- 6.11 A steering group of representatives from Legal Services, Human Resources, Homelessness and Community Safety and STAR procurement has been established to assess the feasibility, risks and benefits of this option. It is the Group's view that this is the most appropriate option for the Authority to take.
- 6.12 The disadvantage of this option is that the process to transfer the Housing Advice Service back in-house is complex.
- 6.13 It is the view of the steering group that, if this option was the preferred option, the contracted service should be brought back in house “as is”, with the current model of service delivery. A subsequent service redesign can then be undertaken within the first six months of the date that the service transfers to the Council. The benefits of this approach are:

- It allows for a smooth transition of the service without adversely impacting service users and/or staff.
- It allows a period to fully evaluate and specify future needs and to do this with the involvement of staff who are transferred to the Council's employment.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>This option offers the most benefits:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It would allow the Council to control ongoing costs. 2. It would enable the Council to have more control over service provision and improvements. 3. It would allow the Council to adapt and innovate to meet changing needs. 	<p>The process to transfer the Housing Advice service in house will be complex.</p>
<p>This option would allow the service to be redesigned so that the statutory and non-statutory functions could be integrated. It would allow the design of a more cohesive service with improved partnership working with internal Council departments alongside other public, private and third sector stakeholders.</p>	

6.14 An Equality Impact Assessment form has been completed in respect of this option and is attached at **Appendix 1**.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 In light of increasing financial pressure, increasing demand on services and the desire to introduce new and innovative working practices, the Authority should consider the three above options in respect of the Council's Housing Options Service. It is for the consideration of Members to decide which option will provide the best service to the residents of Tameside in the most cost-effective way.

7.2 The current position – contracting the service out to an external provider – does not fit with the changes required to the service or with the increasing demand.

7.3 Keeping the service contracted-out, either with the existing provider or with a new provider, significantly reduces the opportunities to redevelop the service into a more flexible and responsive service. It does not offer the level of control that the Council should have over how that service is managed or the financial aspect of that provision. In addition, it will limit opportunities to reduce costs and make significant changes to how temporary accommodation is managed in Tameside.

7.4 Should Option 3 be chosen, the working group established to oversee the process has drafted a timetable for change:

- November 2021: Service of 6 months' notice on Jigsaw Homes for early termination of the contract
- December 2021: Consultation with existing THAS staff over TUPE process, terms & conditions
- March 2022: Report to ECG for TUPE process
- May 2022: Service & staff transfer to TMBC
- September 2022: Service redesign process undertaken

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 As set out at the front of the report