

## **Housing Options and Homelessness Audit – Context and Position Statement**

This context and position statement accompanies the recent Housing Options and Homelessness Audit. Internal Audit provides an important check and balance that services and functions are operating as intended and it is a role that we value.

This audit was undertaken at a time of transition for the Housing options Service, with a number of new staff members in post and a time of focussed improvement and transition, alongside leadership of a range of complex policy areas including resettlement and other support to some of our most vulnerable residents. This is busy and complex service areas to lead and deliver, and at every stage, safeguarding and supporting vulnerable people at a time of need is a priority and can be seen throughout the work of the team and through the audit. The audit has provided an opportunity to take stock, reflect on the huge amount of progress made and focus on working smarter, and with a focus on consistency and high quality in every aspect of the service and supporting documentation.

It is positive that the audit found that the housing applications process (allocations policy, system and allocation processes) is operating broadly as intended. The recommendations on this aspect of the service are welcomed and will further strengthen our work in this area. A planned review of the Housing Allocations Policy has taken place and will be considered by the Scrutiny and Cabinet later this year.

No two homelessness cases are the same, and there are often complexities and vulnerabilities to manage at pace to achieve positive outcomes for individuals and households in need. It is positive that colleagues were already aware of and were actively assessing and addressing matters relating to the completion, consistency and quality of documentation (particularly Personal Housing Plans) relating to the service and it is to their credit, that an open, honest and transparent approach was taken in responding to the audit and working with audit colleagues. It is important to maintain integrity of process in all cases, documentation must be complete and accessible. The audit confirmed the improvement areas that needed to be more fully embedded, and the recommended checks and balance will provide a valuable tool to ensure quality and compliance alongside the resilience required to withstand service pressures and any future staffing changes.

The team we currently have in place are capable, committed and represent the Council in a professional way in all that they do. This is a team that is dedicated, understand people and have the ability to balance the statutory elements with the flexible approach needed, going above and beyond in their roles. The improvements that were being embedded have continued, and evidence of improved consistency has been provided to the Director. There is routine management oversight in place and the audit actions are being progressed.

There is also now a compliance monitoring framework in place and a programme of quarterly compliance checks, through which officers and managers will be able to monitor the quality and consistency checks undertaken on a range of processes.

Colleagues would welcome an opportunity to have internal audit colleagues back to review progress in the 2025/26 audit programme should this be agreed. We are confident that any issues identified as part of this audit will have been addressed.

Director for Housing and Communities (Deputy Chief Executive)

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