

To: Councillor Lovelock (Chair)
Councillors Duveen, Eden, Ennis, Gavin,
Hacker, Hopper, Hoskin, Jones, Page,
Skeats, Stevens, Terry and White

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17 November 2017

Your contact is: Simon Hill - Committee Services

NOTICE OF MEETING - POLICY COMMITTEE - 27 NOVEMBER 2017

A meeting of the Policy Committee will be held on Monday 27 November 2017 at 6.30pm in the Council Chamber, Civic Offices, Reading. The Agenda for the meeting is set out below.

Please Note - the Committee will first consider items in closed session. Members of the press and public will be asked to leave the Chamber for a few minutes.

ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION IN CLOSED SESSION

The following motion will be moved by the Chair:

“That, pursuant to Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) members of the press and public be excluded during consideration of the following items on the agenda, as it is likely that there would be disclosure of exempt information as defined in the relevant Paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A (as amended) of that Act”

<u>ACTION</u>	<u>WARDS AFFECTED</u>	<u>PAGE NO</u>
1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FOR CLOSED SESSION ITEMS	-	-
2. CAPITAL EXPENDITURE IN CONNECTION WITH WASTE DISPOSAL Councillor Terry / Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services	BOROUGHWIDE	A1
3. STRATEGIC PROPERTY ACQUISITION Councillor Lovelock / Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services	ABBEY	To follow

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ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PUBLIC SESSION

4. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors to declare any interests they may have in relation to the items for consideration in public session.

6. MINUTES

B1

To confirm the Minutes of the Policy Committee meeting on 30 October 2017.

7. PETITIONS AND QUESTIONS

To receive any petitions from the public and any questions from the public and Councillors.

8. DECISION BOOK REFERENCES

9. POLICY CHANGES TO MEET HOUSING NEED

BOROUGHWIDE

C1

Councillor Ennis / Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services

This report sets out proposals to amend and adopt Housing policies to ensure consistency in the offer of accommodation to homeless households.

10. ELECTORAL REGISTRATION AND ELECTIONS UPDATE

BOROUGHWIDE

D1

Councillor Lovelock / Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer

This report reviews the UK Parliamentary Election held on 8 June 2017, and provides an update on the annual electoral registration canvass which will produce the 2018 register on 1 December 2017.

11. BUSINESS RATES BERKSHIRE PILOT & POOL

BOROUGHWIDE

E1

Councillor Lovelock / Director of Finance

This report seeks approval for Reading joining a Berkshire Business Rates Pool and endorsement of a joint Berkshire Pilot Bid for 100% Business Rates Pooling.

12. BUDGET MONITORING

BOROUGHWIDE

F1

Councillor Lovelock / Director of Finance

This report sets out the budget monitoring position for the Council to the end of September 2017.

WEBCASTING NOTICE

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Members of the public who participate in the meeting will be able to speak at an on-camera or off-camera microphone, according to their preference.

Please speak to a member of staff if you have any queries or concerns.

POLICY COMMITTEE MINUTES - 30 OCTOBER 2017

Present: Councillor Lovelock (Chair)

Councillors Duveen, Eden, Ennis, Gavin, Hacker, Hopper, Hoskin, Jones, Page, Skeats, Stevens, Terry and White.

37. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved -

That pursuant to Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), members of the press and public be excluded during consideration of item 38 below as it was likely that there would be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in the relevant paragraphs specified in Part 1 of Schedule 12A to that Act.

38. CONTRACT AWARD - PROCUREMENT CONSULTANCY SUPPORT

The Director of Finance submitted a report setting out details of the confidential financial model and detailed financial implications of the proposal for additional procurement consultancy support to be considered elsewhere on the agenda (Minute 46 below refers).

Resolved -

That the confidential information be taken into account when considering the Contract Award - Procurement Consultancy Support item (see Minute 46 below).

(Exempt information as defined in paragraph 3).

39. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2017 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

40. QUESTIONS

Questions on the following matters were submitted by members of the public:

	<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
1.	James Berrie	Proposed changes to Bus Services in Caversham	Cllr Page
2.	James Berrie	Consultation on Proposed Changes to Bus Services	Cllr Page
3.	James Berrie	Proposed Bus Service Changes - Access to Community Facilities	Cllr Page

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4.	Paul Matthews	Proposed Bus Service Changes in Caversham	Cllr Page
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(The full text of the questions and responses was made available on the Reading Borough Council website).

41. THAMES VALLEY POLICE

Anthony Stansfeld, Thames Valley Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC), and Francis Habgood, Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police (TVP), attended the meeting to give presentations and answer questions from members of the Committee. Superintendent Stan Gilmour also attended to answer questions on local issues.

The presentation by the Police & Crime Commissioner covered the overall level of crime and level of various crime types in the Thames Valley for 2016/17, a comparison of the rates of violent crime and burglary in the Thames Valley with other police force areas, the results of the 2016 PCC survey of adults and young people, and the PCC's strategic priorities for 2017-21.

The presentation by the Chief Constable covered achievements and targets under the following areas of the 'Force Commitment': Keeping people safe and bringing offenders to justice; Building stronger, more resilient communities; A modern police force which meets the needs of communities, and Being a skilled and trusted workforce. He also outlined the operational priorities for 2017/18.

The Committee asked questions on subjects including the apparent reduced visibility of Neighbourhood Policing, concerns from residents about street drug dealing, returning IS fighters, CSE and police attendance at MASH.

Resolved -

That the Police & Crime Commissioner and Chief Constable be thanked for their presentations.

42. NARROWING THE GAP COMMISSIONING FRAMEWORK

The Chief Executive and Director of Adult Care and Health Services submitted a report on a 'Narrowing the Gap II' (NTG II) community services commissioning framework which sought approval to commission services through the framework from 2018, to award a series of contract extensions and interim contracts to ensure continuity of service, and to award funding for the management of community buildings through the Community Buildings Transition Fund. The NTG II schedule of bidding opportunities was attached to the report at Appendix 1 and an Equality Impact Assessment was attached to the report at Appendix 2.

The report explained that all services commissioned under the first NTG framework had been reviewed along with all other commissioning of non-mandatory services

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across the Wellbeing Team, use of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Grant, and Council support for managing community buildings. The review had taken into account the latest information about local need, including that drawn from the detailed monitoring reports provided by the NTG service providers, and information on inequalities in the Reading Poverty Needs Analysis and the Reading Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

The report stated that the new framework set out in the NTG II proposals was intended to focus support on those who were vulnerable and in greatest need, include support to maintain a strong and sustainable voluntary sector, aim to eliminate duplication of services and avoid using Council funding where alternative sources of funding were available. There were additional areas of community investment which had not been included in the first NTG framework, but were recommended for inclusion in NTG II, as follows:

- social prescribing (including Making Every Contact Count training)
- peer support for adult mental health
- carers' information advice and support
- peer support and condom distribution to reduce HIV health risks
- peer support for breastfeeding

The social prescribing, mental health peer support and carers' information advice and support services were all to be commissioned jointly with the Reading CCGs, and West Berkshire Council were an additional funding partner for the carers' information advice and support service.

Current NTG providers were commissioned to deliver services up to 31 May 2018, with the NTG II contracts due to commence the following day. In the case of new areas being brought into NTG II, however, the Council was currently contracting with the provider organisations until 31 March 2018. It was therefore proposed to exercise contract extension provision or to award new short-term contracts to cover April and May 2018 in order to avoid a gap in provision and provide for a safer transition to new contracts.

Alongside the proposed NTGII Commissioning Framework, changes were proposed to the Community Buildings Transition fund which was used to assist those organisations managing community buildings. From 2018/19 there would be a reduction in funding from £82k to £60k, a Bidding Fund which had not been drawn on would be deleted, and discussion would take place with the individual organisations currently in receipt of funding to manage their transition to reduced support. It was proposed that the Head of Customer Services, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, be authorised to apportion the amounts for individual organisations affected by the Community Building Transition Fund within a total allocation of £60k p.a. over four years.

Resolved -

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- (1) That the Narrowing the Gap II framework containing a series of bidding opportunities as set out in the summary at Appendix 1, and the likely equality impacts of adopting the framework as set out at Appendix 2, be noted;
- (2) That the Director of Adult Care and Health Services, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Health, be authorised to grant contract extensions to 31 May 2018 to:
 - (a) The Breastfeeding Network for the provision of peer support to establish and maintain breastfeeding at a cost of £30k p.a. (pro-rated);
 - (b) Thames Valley Positive for the provision of an HIV peer support and condom distribution service at a cost of £52k p.a. (pro-rated);
- (3) That the Director of Adult Care and Health Services, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Adult Social Care, be authorised to negotiate and enter into contracts from 1 April 2018 to 31 May 2018 to:
 - (a) Reading Your Way (Together for Mental Wellbeing) at a cost of £76k p.a. (pro-rated);
 - (b) the Reading and West Berkshire Carers Hub (Carers Trust East Midlands) at a cost of £95k p.a. (pro-rated);
- (4) That the Director of Adult Care and Health Services and the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, be authorised to negotiate and enter into:
 - (a) a legally binding agreement with South Reading Clinical Commissioning Group and the North and West Reading Clinical Commissioning Group pursuant to Section 75 of the National Health Service Act 2006 to manage a pooled budget for commissioning a Social Prescribing Service, a Peer Support Service for Adult Mental Health, and a Carers Information Advice and Support Service, as described as specifications 3.2, 14.1 and 15.2 respectively in the Narrowing the Gap II framework;
 - (b) appropriate funding agreements for 2018-22 with the organisation or organisations which succeed in each service area of the Narrowing the Gap II commissioning exercise;
- (5) That the Head of Customer Services, in consultation with the Leader

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of the Council, be authorised to enter into agreements with individual organisations affected by the Community Buildings Transition Fund, apportioning the total fund as grant aid payments to these organisations as deemed appropriate, with the final agreed amounts to be published through the Decision Book.

(Councillors Hoskin and Eden declared non-pecuniary interests on this item.)

43. DRUG AND ALCOHOL STRATEGY

The Director of Adult Care and Health Services submitted a report seeking approval for consultation on a draft Drug and Alcohol Strategy for adults and young people 2018-2022. The strategy was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report explained that a drug and alcohol misuse needs assessment for adults had been carried out in December 2015 (Minute 63 of the meeting held on 18 January 2016 refers). The findings of the assessment had informed the draft strategy which outlined the priorities for the next five years. The strategy was intended to set out the broad vision of the Council in terms of what needs to be done to put in place a sustainable treatment system for drug and alcohol use in Reading as well as a multidisciplinary approach that joined up the various different services provided across all agencies and partners.

The report proposed that a 12 week consultation take place between November 2017 and January 2018, and that, following a review of the consultation response, the strategy be updated and an action plan developed for submission to the Health & Wellbeing Board in March 2018.

Resolved -

That the draft Drug and Alcohol Strategy for adults and young people 2018-2022 be approved for a 12 week formal consultation process.

44. AWARD OF CONTRACT: REFURBISHMENT OF FLATTED BLOCKS AT HEXHAM ROAD

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report seeking authority to award a contract for the refurbishment of two blocks on the Hexham Road Estate.

The report noted that the Council had committed to improving the Hexham Road Estate area in Whitley, by refurbishing five blocks of flats/maisonettes, with work funded from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). Refurbishment of Rothbury Court and Kershope Court was complete and work on Kielder Court was due to complete in February 2018. Works to refurbish the final two blocks, Redesdale Court and Denton Court, would go through a further tendering exercise to establish value for money, and the report sought delegated authority to award the contract further to the

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completion of the tender exercise.

The report stated that a total expenditure of £7m had previously been approved for the refurbishment of the Hexham Road Estate. Additional capital expenditure approval of up to a further £750,000 for the programme of works across all phases was now sought, to allow for cost inflation, some unforeseen works and revisions to project scope over the period.

Resolved -

- (1) That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Housing, be authorised to award a contract for the internal and external refurbishment of 27 properties at 1-55 (odd) Redesdale Court, Bamburgh Close, scheduled to commence in March 2018 and complete in April 2019 with an option to extend the contract to a further 27 properties at 92 - 144 (even) Denton Court, Hexham Road, to commence in May 2019 and complete in June 2020, subject to a satisfactory tender evaluation exercise;
- (2) That additional capital expenditure of up to £750,000 in the Housing Revenue Account (further to the £7m spend approval in 2014) to fully fund all phases of the works be approved.

45. REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES

The Chief Executive submitted a report on the outcome of a mid-year review of fees and charges and a proposal to increase a limited number of fees from 1 November 2017. A summary table of the proposed changes was set out at Appendix 1 attached to the report.

The report explained that the review of fees and charges formed an integral part of the Council's overall budget setting process and assisted with the delivery of income-related saving targets. Each service had considered benchmarking/market pressures, the rate of inflation and cost recovery in proposing fees for November 2017. A number of services had not proposed any changes as part of this review, which was broadly due to either benchmarking identifying no scope for fee increases without loss of business, or the service completing a broader review of fees and charges through a separate process.

Resolved -

That the schedule of revised Fees and Charges as set out at Appendix 1 to the report be approved for implementation from 1 November 2017.

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46. CONTRACT AWARD - PROCUREMENT CONSULTANCY SUPPORT

The Director of Finance submitted a report seeking approval for the award of a contract for procurement consultancy support following a competitive tendering exercise. A project brief was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report noted that the Council's programme of savings and medium term financial plan required reductions in budgeted expenditure on goods and services provided by third party suppliers over the next three years. To improve the Council's capability and capacity to deliver further value for money from contracting and contract management arrangements, it was proposed to seek an external partner to supplement existing resources and provide access to a range of subject matter experts. There was a well-established market of these specialist providers who worked with organisations to identify and deliver cost reductions on a risk and reward basis, and a provider had been procured through a mini-competition under a framework agreement provided by the Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation.

The report explained that Phase 1 of the project would be scoping work to identify where significant savings could be delivered. A specialist forensic audit of historic payments would also be undertaken alongside the scoping work, on a 'no win no fee basis' with the provider being paid a percentage of any amount recovered. When the payments audit and phase 1 work were completed, the Council had the option to terminate the contract should it not be possible to agree a satisfactory programme of savings to be delivered in Phase 2 of the project. It was, however, anticipated that a significant programme of additional savings would be identified.

The report stated that for Phase 2 the cost of the external support was designed to be self-financing, with the work undertaken by the consultants being funded through a gainshare arrangement whereby the fees would be a percentage of the spend reductions achieved. The contract would run for a maximum of four years, should ongoing opportunities continue to be identified where the expertise of the provider could be demonstrated to add value. The consultants would be expected to work with officers across the Council to embed best practice across all procurement, contract management and revenue generating activity so that the Council could continue to find savings in the long term.

Resolved -

That the Committee approve the award of a contract to V4 Services Ltd for Procurement Consultancy Services for a period of four years from the commencement date.

47. CONTRACT AWARD - CIVICA PAYMENTS ENTERPRISE LICENCE

The Director of Finance submitted a report seeking approval for the award of a contract for a five year contract for software licences and maintenance.

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The report explained that the Council's current contract with Civica for incoming payments processing would end in July 2018. In addition to this, there were a number of issues to be addressed in the near future including maintaining Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard compliance, compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation by 28 May 2018, support for homeworking call centre staff to enable them to securely handle payments from customers, rationalisation of server usage to ensure all data was held and accessible in a single place, and improvements to the Council's bank reconciliation process to address issues raised by the Council's external auditors.

The report noted that the current payment system supplied by Civica did not provide an adequate solution to these challenges, but that the product could be upgraded to a version which was suitable to address these issues. Under the terms of the Crown Commercial Services Framework RM1059 (Local Authority Software Solutions), Civica had made a proposal for a five year, enterprise licence, which included all future system upgrades for the duration of the licence at no further cost to the Council over the proposed upgrade implementation and fixed annual charges.

Resolved -

That a contract be awarded to Civica UK Ltd (Civica) for a period of five years from the commencement date for the provision of an enterprise licence and associated maintenance and services for upgraded Civica ICON payments, hosted software.

(The meeting started at 6.30pm and closed at 8.42pm).

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	POLICY COMMITTEE		
DATE:	27 NOVEMBER 2017	AGENDA ITEM:	9
TITLE:	POLICY CHANGES TO MEET HOUSING NEED		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	CLLR ENNIS	PORTFOLIO:	HOUSING
SERVICE:	HOUSING	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
LEAD OFFICER:	BRYONY HALL	TEL:	
JOB TITLE:	HOUSING NEEDS MANAGER	E-MAIL:	Bryony.Hall@reading.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report sets out proposals to amend Housing policy to ensure consistency in the offer of accommodation to homeless households.
- 1.2 In the report *Homelessness Strategy 2016 - 2021* to Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure (HNL) Committee in July 2016, the Local Authority published its Homelessness Strategy which set out priorities for meeting acute housing need in the borough. Among a range of activities, the strategy included the implementation of a Private Rented Sector Offer (PRSO) allowing the authority more flexibility in the way it meets its housing duty through a formal offer of suitable private rented accommodation.
- 1.3 A year on from having successfully implemented the PRSO it is apparent that amendments are required to the policy to ensure that there is parity in the approach for all offers of suitable private rented accommodation and to ensure that the local authority is best placed to meet housing need.
- 1.4 Furthermore, this report seeks approval to implement policies relating to the Procurement and allocation of temporary accommodation for homeless households.
- 1.5 Appendices:

- Appendix 1: Private Rented Sector Offer Policy
Appendix 2: Temporary Accommodation Procurement Policy
Appendix 3: Temporary Accommodation Allocations Policy

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

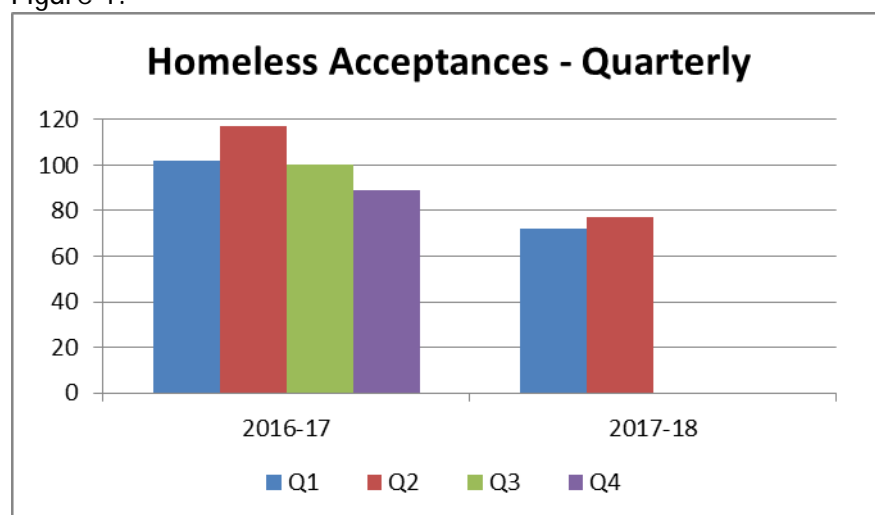
- 2.1 That members approve the proposal to amend the Private Rented Sector Offer (PRSO) Policy to remove current restrictions as detailed at paragraph 5.1 and Appendix 1.
- 2.2 That members approve the implementation of the Temporary Accommodation Allocations Policy as detailed at paragraphs 5.3 and 5.4 and Appendix 2.
- 2.3 That members approve the implementation of the Temporary Accommodation Procurement Policy as detailed at paragraph 5.5 and Appendix 3.

3 BACKGROUND AND POLICY CONTEXT

Background

- 3.1 Wherever possible the Council aims to prevent homelessness through early intervention, targeted advice and support and the provision of alternative housing options.
- 3.2 Several reports in recent years have detailed the increasing pressures on the Council's housing services and the need to continue to innovate and adapt to mitigate these, including *'Homelessness Strategy 2015-2020 and Reducing the Use of Bed And Breakfast Accommodation'* to HNL Committee in November 2015, and *'Homelessness: Update on Demand Pressure and Actions to Mitigate'* to HNL in November 2016, and *'Meeting Housing Need for Households Affected by the Benefit Cap'*, to HNL in November 2016.
- 3.3 Since the beginning of 2017 the Council has started to see a decline in the numbers of households who are owed the main housing duty after approaching for homeless assistance and a linked reduction in the use of emergency accommodation. The average monthly number of homelessness acceptances has reduced from 34 in 2016/17 to 24 in 2017/18 to date.

Figure 1:



- 3.4 The number of households in Bed and Breakfast has also reduced from 144 households at the beginning of the year to 80 at the end of October. Additional new temporary accommodation coming online in January should see a further decline in occupancy.
- 3.5 This reduction can confidently be attributed to a number of strands of activity underpinning a sustained and concerted effort to reduce the use of B&B, to prevent homelessness and manage demand. This has included:
- increasing the supply of, and access to, affordable permanent and temporary accommodation through the Council's new build housing programme
 - building on measures introduced in 2016-17, additional staff have also been engaged to work intensively with individual homeless households to support them to secure private rented sector accommodation
 - development of a more commercial Rent Guarantee Scheme (RGS) to secure vetted and affordable private rented sector (PRS) housing - with circa 300 properties on the scheme at any one time
 - implemented the Private Sector Offer to discharge homelessness duty from Summer 2016.

- strengthened homelessness prevention activity with enhanced training for specialist staff 35 temporary accommodation units refurbished and brought back into use over 2 years and 40 flats vacated as part of a regeneration brought back into use as pending redevelopment
 - incorporated Homes for Reading Ltd to purchase and responsibly let private rented housing - with properties now in management.
 - effective planning and regular monitoring of supply and demand - reforecasting and refocusing activity.
 - working across services to ensure a collaborative and targeted case management approach to support families affected by the Benefit Cap and other welfare reform measures
- 3.6 Whilst this reduction is positive it is not necessarily expected to be an indefinite long term trend. Many of the risks already identified in the housing market and discussed in previous reports (including the lack of supply of social housing, static Housing Benefit Local Housing Allowance, and the further reduced benefit cap) continue to place a strain on the availability of affordable housing. In addition 2017/18 sees the introduction of new challenges, including the roll out of Universal Credit in December 2017 which is likely to have a considerable impact on the ability of Housing Benefit recipients to pay their rent, and the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2018 which the Government is conservatively predicting will bring a 26% increase in homelessness casework.

Policy Context

- 3.7 The Housing Act 1996 sets out a Local Authority's responsibilities in respect of homeless households who approach the Local Authority for assistance. Where certain criteria are met the local authority is required to provide interim or temporary accommodation for an applicant.
- 3.8 A 'main homelessness duty' is owed where the authority is satisfied that the applicant is eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and falls within a specified priority need group. Such statutorily homeless households are referred to as 'acceptances'. Where a main duty is owed, the authority must ensure that suitable accommodation is available for the applicant and his or her household. The Local Authority is required to ensure that temporary accommodation remains available for occupation until the duty can be ended through an offer of suitable settled accommodation.
- 3.9 The Localism Act enabled Local Authorities to end the continuing duty to provide temporary accommodation through a suitable offer of private rented accommodation or 'Private Rented Sector Offer' - prior to this the duty could only be discharged through a suitable offer of permanent social housing through the Housing Register.
- 3.10 In Reading the supply of social housing through re-lets of existing housing stock and new build homes is far short of the need arising from homeless households alone - so access to suitable private rented sector accommodation is critical to meet need, to reduce the use of B&B accommodation, and to prevent 'silting up' of limited temporary accommodation.
- 3.11 In July 2016 members approved the implementation of the Private Rented Sector Offer (PRSO) Policy, which allows Reading Borough Council to formally offer private rented accommodation to residents accepted as homeless, providing greater flexibility in meeting housing needs.
- 3.12 Households whose need is met in this way benefit from certain legal protections, including:
- The tenancy must be a minimum term of 12 months and

- Accommodation must meet required nationally set standards (under the 'Suitability of Accommodation Order') and the property has to be checked for suitability.
 - A guarantee that the Council will find them suitable accommodation, without the need for the household to reapply as homeless, should the household becomes homeless within 2 years of the offer (Reapplication Duty).
- 3.13 The Council provides the option of a PRSO for accepted homeless households but has two local stipulations in place. A private rented sector offer can only be made if:
- the household has been accepted as homeless for at least 3 months and
 - the offer of accommodation is made within the borough through the Council's Rent Guarantee Scheme (RGS)
- 3.14 In addition to proposed changes in policy relating to the ending of the main homeless duty, this report also includes the introduction of policy concerning the sourcing and allocation of interim and/or temporary accommodation.

4. CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 As described within Policy Context, where an individual approaches the Council for homelessness assistance and the Council finds after investigation that the full housing duty is owed, there are two ways in which the Council may end this duty with an offer of suitable accommodation. This may either be through a PRSO or an offer of social housing via the Housing Register.
- 4.2 One year on from the successful implementation of the PRSO policy, 51 households have received an offer of private rented accommodation and 49 are still in place. One of the two other tenants chose to move and the other abandoned their property without leaving a forwarding address.
- 4.3 However, experience over the last year has brought to light some anomalies which had not been intended as a result of the local requirements which were agreed, in that a household has to:
- be accepted as homeless, and potentially remain in Bed and Breakfast, for at least 3 months before they can receive a PRSO and
 - if they find or are assisted to find private sector accommodation outside of the RGS it is not considered to be a PRSO.
- 4.4 A number of families have been proactive in finding their own private rented accommodation or have been assisted to do so. In order to reduce both numbers of families in B&B and the length of stay in B&B, the Council has invested in additional staff to work intensively with homeless households to support them to secure suitable accommodation.
- 4.5 Where a household chooses to move into a private rented sector property secured outside of the RGS or within 3 months of a homelessness duty being accepted, they are therefore not currently afforded the protections listed above as required by the legislation.
- 4.6 These stipulations were intended to give applicants time and opportunity to access social housing prior to being offered a private sector property and to alleviate concerns about the suitability of offers of private sector accommodation made. However, in reality they limit the help that can be provided to households for this period, including families living in B&B accommodation. The policy restricts the Council from using all available resources in supporting them into more suitable accommodation for at least 12 weeks after a full housing duty has been accepted.

- 4.7 In practice, the limited supply of supply of social housing means that it is extremely unlikely that a household would be able to bid successfully for social housing in the initial 3 month period. Further, the authority has an obligation to minimise the length of time that a household spends in B&B.
- 4.8 Legislation already requires that accommodation offered under a PRSO has to be of a quality and standard which is specified in some detail, as noted above (under the Suitability of Accommodation Order 2012). Currently the Council inspects all property accepted onto the RGS scheme but will inspect all PRSO accommodation to ensure suitability. From April 2018 it will be a requirement of the new Homelessness Reduction Act that all properties offered to homeless applicants, whether as a PRSO or as a prevention option, will be required to meet the necessary standards laid out in the Suitability of Accommodation Order and will require vetting.
- 4.9 Lastly, the Council has a range of applicants who may have no preference about remaining in the borough, cannot remain within Reading or have very limited local connection to the area. It is not unusual for people to approach the Housing Advice service wishing to live in another area; this may be for a range of reasons including affordability of accommodation or to relocate to be closer to family. Within the last year the Housing Advice service has prevented homelessness for ten households by supporting them into social housing in other areas of the country through Homefinder UK. Whilst the number of people wishing to consider out of area property is not large the Council's Housing teams are not able to provide this help whilst providing the reassurance of the homeless re-application duty for those that are accepted as homeless.
- 4.10 Further, Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates in Reading are making the private sector market less affordable to Reading residents and therefore it is becoming increasingly difficult to procure affordable accommodation in the borough to prevent homelessness. As such there may, by exception, be occasion when property is procured outside of Reading. In making assessments about location a range of factors will be considered including the proximity and accessibility to employment, caring responsibilities, medical facilities and other support, and education of the household as detailed in the policy appended.
- 4.11 Policy amendments are therefore proposed to allow the Council to better adapt to individual circumstances and needs, thus reducing the length of time households spend living in unsuitable B&B accommodation and to afford the reapplication duty protection to all accepted homeless households who find accommodation in the private sector.

5 OPTION PROPOSED

Proposal

- 5.1 To ensure that the policy is fair for all applicants and that it meets legislative requirements the following amendments to the PRSO policy are proposed:
- i. Remove the three month limit prior to making a PRSO and consider this option for all households from the point at which they are accepted as homeless.
 - ii. To consider all suitable properties to meet needs and discharge duty through a PRSO without the restriction to those procured through the Rent Guarantee Scheme, in line with the legislation, and require the local authority to:
 - o Check the property meets the suitability requirement (national standards) - all properties to be inspected prior to an offer being made
 - o Offer a minimum tenancy of 12 months

- Afford the household the Reapplication Duty
 - iii. Allow the use of a private rented sector offer outside of the borough boundaries where appropriate, ensuring suitability as per II.
- 5.2 A draft PRSO policy is provided in appendix 1. The table below shows the key differences between the current and proposed policy.

Table 1.

Policy changes proposed - summary	Current Policy	Proposed Policy
Are households given the option to consider a property through PRSO immediately after homelessness duty is accepted?	No	Yes
If the household find a private sector property within 3 months of being accepted as homeless are they afforded the Reapplication Duty?	No	Yes
Are households considered for all private rented sector properties that are available?	No	Yes
Are PRSO properties checked for suitability in line with homelessness legislation requirement?	Yes	Yes
Is the tenancy term for a minimum of 12 months?	Yes	Yes
If a household find or are assisted to find a suitable property outside the RGS are they afforded the Reapplication Duty	No	Yes

- 5.3 As is currently the case, households placed in B&B or temporary accommodation can continue to bid through the Housing Register for social housing whilst they are awaiting an allocation of permanent housing. Where the homelessness duty is ended via a suitable offer of private rented sector accommodation (a PRSO), then a household would have no priority on the Housing Register as they would be suitably housed.

Provision of Temporary Accommodation

- 5.4 In addition it is proposed that the Council implements two policies setting out its approach to the provision of temporary accommodation in Reading. These policies describe and define current priorities and process, and do not result in any change in practice. Full drafts of these policies are attached at appendix 2 and 3. An outline of the main principles of each policy is provided below.

Procurement of Temporary Accommodation

- 5.5 Wherever possible the Council aims to prevent homelessness through early intervention, targeted advice and support and the provision of alternative housing options. Where this approach does not succeed and/or homelessness cannot be avoided the Council may have a duty to provide Temporary Accommodation (TA). The policy sets out how the Council will ensure that sufficient TA is available for households for whom homelessness cannot be prevented where there are statutory duties owed to them.

- 5.6 This policy describes the use and demand for temporary accommodation and covers the following priorities for supporting the delivery of sufficient units of accommodation:
- To support reduction in the demand for temporary accommodation through the prevention of homelessness wherever possible.
 - To support the reduction in the use of paid nightly and B&B accommodation, especially those with shared facilities.
 - To procure sufficient suitable accommodation to meet anticipated demand each year. Where possible these units will be within the Reading Borough, however, there may be a requirement to source accommodation in other locations where supply of accommodation in the borough is not sufficient and the offer is suitable.
 - To ensure that units of accommodation procured provide value for money to the Council.
 - To increase supply of and access to affordable permanent accommodation, through RGS, Homes for Reading, use of Council stock, acquisitions and new build council homes, and increased development - thus reducing the need for temporary accommodation units.

Allocation of Temporary Accommodation

- 5.7 This policy sets out the rules by which the Council allocates available temporary accommodation to ensure the fair, transparent and consistent allocation of accommodation to homeless households.

6. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 6.1 These proposals will contribute to the following service priorities set out in the Council's Corporate Plan 2015-18:
- Safeguarding and protecting those that are most vulnerable; and
 - Providing homes for those in most need.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 7.1 In respect of changes to RBC's PRSO policy the relevant supplementary guidance on the homelessness changes in the Localism Act 2011 and on the homelessness (suitability of accommodation) (England) Order 2012 states that authorities should undertake to develop clear policies around the use of the power to discharge homelessness duties to the private sector. A new draft policy is appended for approval and adoption.
- 7.2 There is no requirement in legislation or in guidance to consult with other agencies or stakeholders on the introduction of such a policy. However, in line with good practice, the Council will distribute the PRSO policy to relevant stakeholders if adopted, and has drafted a Plain English guide for applicants - also appended
- 7.3 In respect of the Policies concerning the use of Temporary accommodation, the Supreme Court judgement (Nzolameso v Westminster City Council) concluded that local authorities should seek approval for the adoption of such a policy by democratically accountable members of the Council and ideally, make the policy publicly available. Once approved through committee, these policies will be published on Reading Borough Council's website.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

9. LEGAL

Provision of Temporary Accommodation

- 9.1 The Housing Act 1996, Part 7 (as amended) sets out the Council's statutory homelessness duties, including the duty to provide temporary accommodation for certain classes of people and in certain circumstances. The two main responsibilities for the provision of accommodation are:
- Where a local housing authority has reason to believe an applicant may be homeless, eligible for assistance, and have a priority need, it shall secure that accommodation is available for their occupation pending a decision as to the duty (if any) owed to them. This is known as the "interim duty to accommodate in cases of apparent priority need".
 - The provision of temporary accommodation also applies where the Council is satisfied that an applicant is homeless, eligible for assistance, has a priority need, and that the applicant did not become homeless intentionally. In these circumstances, unless the Council refers the application to another local housing authority, they shall secure that accommodation remains available for occupation by the applicant until the main housing duty can be ended.
- 9.2 In practice, accommodation provided to homeless households at any stage in investigations prior to acceptance of the main housing duty is usually referred to collectively as temporary accommodation.
- 9.3 In the Supreme Court Judgement *Nzolameso vs. Westminster City Council* 2015, concerning the use of temporary accommodation for homeless people, it was suggested that all Councils should have published policies setting out their approach to providing temporary accommodation for homeless people. Whilst this is not a legislative necessity, the judgement suggested it be a requirement for the adoption of two policies, one for procuring sufficient units of temporary accommodation to meet the anticipated demand from homeless people and a second describing how decisions are made when allocating units for homeless households, including in the event of a shortfall of accommodation within the borough boundaries.
- 9.4 The case concluded that each local authority should:
- Have and maintain a policy for procuring sufficient units of temporary accommodation to meet the anticipated demand from homeless people. The policy should reflect obligations under both the 1996 (Housing) Act and the Children Act 2004.
 - Have and maintain a policy for allocating these units to individual homeless households, which includes consideration of how decisions would be taken about placing people out of the local area in the event of a shortfall of suitable accommodation locally.

- Seek approval for the adoption of such a policy by democratically accountable members of the Council.
- Ideally, make the policy publicly available.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The approach proposed to manage homelessness should ensure the best use of the Council's resources in meeting its statutory duties.
- 10.2 Reducing B&B use and length of stay is a key priority for the Council to deliver the best outcomes for homeless families and to reduce expenditure in this area. Ambitious targets have therefore been set over a period of the next three years to reduce B&B usage with a savings target of over £800k over three years from 2017/18. The service is currently exceeding these targets.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 *'Homelessness Strategy 2015-2020 and Reducing the Use of Bed And Breakfast Accommodation'* to HNL Committee in November 2015.
- 11.2 *'Homelessness Strategy 2016 - 2021'* to HNL Committee in July 2016.
- 11.3 *'Homelessness: Update on Demand Pressure and Actions to Mitigate'* to HNL Committee in November 2016.
- 11.4 *'Meeting Housing Need for Households Affected by the Benefit Cap'* to HNL Committee in November 2016.

Private Sector Offer Policy for Homeless Households

1 Introduction and Context

The Housing Act 1996 sets out a Local Authority's responsibilities in respect of homeless households who approach the Local Authority for assistance. The legislation specifies that all Local Authorities have a duty to provide temporary accommodation to applicants who are homeless, eligible for assistance, in priority need and not intentionally homeless. Prior to the Localism Act, a Local Authority could only end the continuing duty to provide temporary accommodation at the point where:

- the household received a suitable offer of permanent social housing through the Housing Register or
- the household agreed to be re-housed into private rented sector housing and a suitable offer of accommodation was made.

The power now exists as a result of the Localism Act for a Local Authority to bring this duty to an end by a suitable offer of private rented accommodation or Private Rented Sector Offer (PRSO) ((s193(7AA)-(7AC) Housing Act 1996 as amended by s.148(5)-(7) Localism Act 2011).

From 9th November 2012, Local Authorities were able to bring the full housing duty to an end in this way and household consent for this was no longer required.

These changes apply only to new applicants approaching local authorities as homeless or threatened with homelessness after the commencement date of 9th November 2012.

Following enactment of the relevant parts of the Localism Act, anyone provided with accommodation in the private rented sector as final discharge of a homelessness duty is no longer considered to have a 'Reasonable Preference' for an allocation of permanent social housing through the Council's Housing Register by reason of homelessness.

This ends the significant link between Parts 6 and 7 of the Housing Act 1996 and means that the acceptance of the full homeless duty will not necessarily result in an offer of permanent social housing.

On the 9th November 2012, the Government introduced new guidance for Local Authorities covering homelessness and Suitability of Accommodation for private rented sector offers. Officers are required to have regard to this guidance when seeking to discharge the full homelessness duty into the private rented sector.

It is important to note that existing guidance on suitability contained in the Homelessness Code of Guidance 2002 continues to apply.

2 Policy Overview

This document relates to the policy and procedural arrangements for discharging the statutory homeless duties into the private rented sector following the enactment of the Localism Act. The document will be referred to as "the policy" and describes how the Council will enact the changes brought about by the Localism Act in all cases; however, the Council reserves the right to deviate from this policy in exceptional circumstances.

The policy operates in conjunction with the authority's existing Allocation Scheme and will be reviewed in parallel with any future proposed changes to that Allocation Scheme.

This document makes reference to the legal requirements and policies that must be adhered to for the purposes of making a Private Sector Offer. This document was drafted with regard to legislation including (but not limited to) the following:

- Housing Act 1996, Part VI and VII as amended
- Localism Act 2011
- Homelessness Act 2002
- The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012

This policy has regard to the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) guidance, the most recent of which being:

- Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England (June 2012)
- Providing social housing for local people Code of Guidance (December 2013)
- Supplementary Guidance on the Homelessness Changes 2012

The scheme has been developed with regard to Reading Borough Council's own Strategy and Policy, including:

- Homelessness Strategy 2015-2020
- Tenancy Strategy 2013
- Housing Allocations Scheme
- Temporary Accommodation Allocation Policy
- Temporary Accommodation Procurement Policy

3 Private Rented Sector Offer (PRSO)

Local Authorities have discretion as to whether to use the new legislation, however, where it is implemented Local Authorities are expected to develop clear policies on the use of the PRSO and to consider the individual circumstances of each household when deciding if to apply this option.

'A *private rented sector offer* is defined by section 193(7AC) as an offer of an assured shorthold tenancy made by a private landlord to an applicant in relation to any accommodation which:

- (a) has been made available for the applicant's occupation by arrangements made by the local authority with a private landlord or
- (b) is made with the approval of the authority, in pursuance of arrangements made by the authority with the landlord with a view to bringing the section 193(2) duty to an end, and
- (c) is a fixed term Assured Shorthold Tenancy for a period of at least 12 months.'

Officers must comply with The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012 (which sets out a required property standard and guidelines for use of private sector accommodation) and supporting guidance laid out in the Supplementary Guidance on the Homelessness Changes 2012 when considering this option.

*Supplementary Guidance on the homelessness changes in the Localism Act 2011 and on the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012

4 The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012

This Order requires Local Authorities to take into account several aspects when determining suitability of accommodation, including proximity to employment, education, support or caring responsibilities. In addition it lays out guidelines for the standard of the property, including physical condition, compliance with health and safety regulation and landlord behaviour, supporting Council drivers to strengthen the overall quality of accommodation within the private rented sector in Reading.

The main requirements of the order:

- Applicants retain the right to request an independent review of the suitability of the accommodation under homeless legislation and a right to appeal to the County Court on a point of law.
- Applicants must be informed in writing as to the consequences of refusing an acceptance of an offer, their right to review the suitability of the accommodation and of the re-application duty owed to them (see below).
- The term of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy must be for at least 12 months.
- Reapplication Duty - The legislation determines that if an applicant is housed in a private rented property and is subsequently given notice to leave by their private landlord within two years of the offer being accepted, the Council's duty to secure suitable accommodation is revived.
- If an applicant becomes unintentionally homeless within two years of the tenancy start date, the 'Reapplication Duty' applies. This is regardless of their Priority Need, although they must remain eligible and be homeless unintentionally. It provides more of a 'safety net' for such applicants for this two year period. This does not have to be a re-application to the same authority nor from the same property.
- In making decisions, local authorities shall have regard to the prevailing housing supply and demand pressures in the local area. The existing requirement for local authorities, as far as reasonably practicable, to secure accommodation in their own district, remains, helping applicants to retain established links to schools, doctors, social workers, key services and support.
- Accommodation must be suitable. 'Suitability' in the Order is in two parts. The first concerns location, and the second relates to property condition and management. The detail of this is set out in this document. Affordability of accommodation must also be taken into account.

5 Reading Guidelines

Reading Borough Council will consider a private sector offer for all homeless households, subject to availability of suitable provision.

In considering whether an offer of accommodation is suitable officers will take into account the guidance listed in the Suitability sections of this document.

A person provided with accommodation in the private rented sector as final discharge of a homelessness duty will have no 'reasonable preference' for an allocation of permanent housing by reason of homelessness. Where an offer is refused, the main homelessness duty will cease, the authority will have no duty to provide further accommodation.

As the availability of private rented accommodation can fluctuate, it is likely that households who require temporary accommodation or bed and breakfast on becoming homeless may remain there whilst private rented accommodation is sourced. During this time the household will retain reasonable preference on the Housing Register that homeless households are entitled to. Whilst they remain in temporary housing they can continue to bid for permanent social housing through Homechoice, the Council's Choice-Based Lettings system for its housing stock.

Ending the duty

For any applicant that has made a Homeless Application after November 9th and is owed a full duty, that duty will remain until either the authority arranges for a private landlord to make an offer of an assured shorthold tenancy in the private rented sector for a period of at least 12 months ("a private rented sector offer"), or one of the following actions or events occur which by law will also bring the duty to an end. These are:

- If the applicant accepts an offer of settled accommodation from the Council (in accordance with Part VI of the Housing Act 1996).
- If the applicant refuses an offer of suitable temporary accommodation or a social housing tenancy offered under the Council's Allocation scheme which the authority is satisfied is suitable for their needs, and the authority informs the applicant that it regards itself as having discharged its duty under Section 193 of the Housing Act 1996.
- If the applicant becomes intentionally homeless from the suitable accommodation made available for his/her occupation.
- If the applicant ceases to be eligible for assistance due to their immigration status.
- If the applicant otherwise voluntarily ceases to occupy as their only or principal home, the accommodation made available to them to meet the full housing duty.

6 Appropriate Offer

Where a Housing Advice Officer considers that a 'Private Sector Offer' (PRSO) is appropriate to the needs of the applicant, and if suitable accommodation can be secured, then such an offer will routinely be made. In order to make this decision, officers need to take into account the individual needs of the household.

A suitable offer will only be made where the Council have fully considered:

- The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012 and specifically all the statutory requirements in Part 1 which cover the suitability of the location of accommodation and Part 2 which sets out the circumstances in which accommodation is not to be regarded as suitable for a person.
- That the property is suitable in relation to existing suitability requirements that relate to space and arrangement, as defined by Part 7 of the Housing Act (as amended 2002).
- Any other subjective matters and issues that relate to an applicant's circumstances and that of any other household members obtained by the Council from our investigation of the application.
- That the accommodation is affordable having fully considered the cost of the rent and any other expenditure relating to the property compared to the income available to the household. Specifically the essential outgoings which are needed to feed and clothe the household; heat the property, plus any other expenditure that we are satisfied is essential to meet the ordinary necessities of life, plus all other reasonable living expenses. If the type of accommodation required is considered to be unaffordable then such an offer will be inappropriate. Officers should also have regard to Housing Benefit/Local Housing Allowance rates and the Benefit Cap that could be applied to the household. Specific attention should

be applied to affordability assessments for single persons under 35 years of age - as the single room rent could apply. In addition the overall cap on benefits may also make a PRSO inappropriate on the grounds of cost, for larger families.

- All existing legislation, statutory guidance and case law relating to making suitable offers of accommodation and specifically paragraphs 17.40 and 17.41 of the Homelessness Code of Guidance.

In addition, when considering the individual circumstances of each household, in deciding whether to make a PRSO, officers will consider all factors specifically the following:

- If the applicant is vulnerable, requires supported accommodation and is considered unlikely to be able to adequately sustain a private rented tenancy then such an offer will be inappropriate.
- If the applicant or a member of their household requires significant disabled adaptations to make a property suitable then such an offer may be inappropriate.

7 The Property

The minimum term of tenancy for a PRSO is a fixed term AST of 12 months; however the Council will attempt to secure two year agreements with landlords where possible.

The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012 consists of two parts. The first deals with location of accommodation and applies to all accommodation secured under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (including temporary accommodation). The second applies to the suitability of a property for the purposes of a private sector offer.

7a Location of the Property

Reading Borough Council will usually seek to offer private sector accommodation within the borough, except:

- When it considers it beneficial to move an applicant/household out of area, for example, to reduce the risk of domestic violence, other violence, or harassment; or to assist persons in breaking away from detrimental situations, were desired, or
- When the applicant wishes/consents to move away from Reading, or
- When a person has very limited connection to Reading (for example, those who already have support services in another area which they wish to continue to access).

The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates in Reading are making the private sector market less affordable to Reading residents and therefore it is becoming increasingly difficult to procure affordable accommodation in the borough to prevent homelessness. As such there may be occasion when property is procured outside of Reading. The circumstances of each case will be carefully considered. Where suitable accommodation is not available within Reading, in exceptional circumstances private sector offers will be made in the next nearest location. Ideally, this will be in an adjoining borough, but may be in towns beyond that which have reasonable facilities and transport links.

In making assessments about location the following factors will be considered:

- i) The significance of any disruption caused by the location from employment, caring responsibilities, or education of the household.

In determining whether a location is suitable, Reading Borough Council will consider:

If the applicant (or partner) is in permanent employment in Reading then the location must be within a reasonable travel to work area of that employment, and have transport links frequent and affordable enough to enable this. For employment in Reading, this area will include the entire Reading borough, but could be determined to be further, given the high level of commuting into Reading.

If the applicant is verified as the carer for another person then the location will need to be of sufficient proximity to enable this, which may require the reasonable use of public transport.

If any members of the household are proven to be undertaking vital examinations at school age, then they should not be required to change schools.

ii) - The proximity & accessibility to medical facilities & other support which are used by, or essential to the well-being of, the household.

If the applicant or any member of the household requires *specialist* medical treatment or support, which can only be provided in Reading, then the location will need to be of sufficient proximity to enable this, although this may require public transport.

Reading Borough Council will also have regard to *other* medical treatment or support required by the applicant or any member of the household, and where health professionals consider that it will be disruptive or detrimental to change provider or location.

iii) - The proximity & accessibility to local services, amenities & transport

Regardless of location, Reading Borough Council will seek to offer accommodation that is reasonably accessible to local services and amenities, especially for persons on low incomes and those which rely on public transport.

7b Suitability of Accommodation and Property Management

i) - Physical Condition of Property

Reading Borough Council will only offer property of a reasonable physical condition and will physically inspect all accommodation before it is offered.

Inspections are documented to record condition of the property and video inventories are taken to ensure consistent quality. They will be undertaken by Housing Needs staff, but where Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) category 1 or 2 hazards are suspected, advice will be sought from Environmental Health and a further inspection by qualified HHSRS assessors may take place.

See appendix 1 for further examples of Property Standards and Appendix 4 for requirements specific to Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), excluding HMOs which are required to be licensed.

ii) - Health and Safety

Electrical Equipment - The physical inspection of the property will seek to identify any broken fittings or obvious electrical defects, such as loose wiring, or electrical faults.

Fire Safety - The physical inspection of the property will check that it is fire safe. Working smoke detectors must be provided in all accommodation. Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) require additional fire safety provisions as set out in RGS guidance (See Appendix 2) where the property is not subject to an HMO License. If required, expert assistance will be sought from Environmental Health.

All furniture and furnishings supplied by the Landlord must also be shown to comply with the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire Safety) Regulations 1988 (as amended).

Gas Safety - If the property has an active gas supply (for heating or cooking) then the property must have the following:

- a valid Gas Safety Certificate (if applicable).
- a Carbon Monoxide Tester/Alarm

Energy Performance - All landlords/ agents will be asked to supply a valid EPC Certificate for the property.

iii) - Houses of Multiple Occupation

Environmental Health will be contacted to ensure that all HMOs are compliant with regulations and local policy. (See Appendix 2)

iv) - Landlord Behaviour

Housing Needs works closely with the Private Sector and already have a portfolio of reliable Landlords. Environmental Health will be contacted to check that any landlord or agent used is not deemed a 'fit and proper' landlord from their records.

v) - Housing Management

Reading Borough Council will recommend that landlords use a template Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST). Where this is not used, Officers will ensure that an acceptable, written AST is used, clearly setting out the obligations of the landlord and the tenant(s), rent and charges, which is free from any unfair or unreasonable terms.

8 Communication of the Policy

A copy of the policy will be available to applicants via the Council's website.

The key messages that will be communicated to applicants and stakeholders are:

- a. Reading Borough Council intends to fully discharge the full housing duty by way of a 'private rented sector offer' made using the power granted to it under the Localism Act 2011.
- b. For all cases subject to a Part 7 Homeless Application from the 9th November 2012 (where that application has resulted in a full housing duty being owed) the presumption will be that the authority will consider discharging that duty by means of a PRSO.
- c. This is not a blanket application of the power. A decision will be taken after a full consideration of household's individual circumstances and the facts that apply to that case.
- d. Where a suitable PRSO offer is made the full homeless duty will be discharged and applicants will no longer have 'reasonable preference' for an allocation of permanent housing by reason of homelessness.
- e. The Council anticipates that a proportion of households owed the full duty will have that duty ended with a PRSO offer.

Appendix 1

Property Standard Checks

- Meet decent standards of Health & Safety.
- Have a secure banister rails on stairs without large gaps between railings.
- Have a valid Gas Safety Certificate (if applicable).
- Have a Carbon Monoxide Tester/Alarm in the room in which the boiler is located.
- Have safety glass in doors or windows where glass is at a low level.
- Have a minimum of two smoke alarms - in a house there must be one at the top and one at the bottom of the stairs. In a flat there must be one in the hallway and a heat detector in the kitchen.
- Have adequate heating and hot water facilities.
 - We do not take on properties without fixed heating
 - Some older properties with Storage Heaters and NO double glazing or insulation may not meet HHSRS standards
 - Storage Heaters should ideally have a fan element - so that heat can always be obtained at the touch of a button rather than waiting for the storage cells to charge up overnight.
- Have adequate extraction in the kitchen and bathroom - this can be either an extractor fan or openable window.
- Have independent utility meters with any thermostats controllable from inside the property. (Rooms in shared houses may share these facilities).
- Have sufficient electrical sockets in working order
 - Electrical installations (sockets, light fittings, visible wiring) should be visually safe
 - All sockets must be secured to the wall and socket plates intact
 - Overhead lights should not have dangling wires
 - There should be no exposed wiring visible
- Have a Fire Safety Label attached to any soft furniture (mattresses, upholstered chairs, sofas etc.) supplied.
 - If furnishings do not have a label, but the landlord can prove that they were manufactured after 1988 (by means of a receipt) then they can remain in the property
- Not have any polystyrene ceiling tiles in a kitchen or living areas which are open to kitchens.
- Have openable windows with locks and limiters where appropriate.
- Have adequate floor coverings.
- Not have any damp or mould evident.

Appendix 2 - Minimum property standards for HMOs which are not required to have an HMO license:

Fire safety

- Fire door to the kitchen
- Hard wired heat detector in the kitchen (with battery back up) linked to mains wired (battery back-up) smoke detection in the communal hallways and landings.
- Fire blanket in kitchen
- Powder fire extinguisher in kitchen
- Bedroom doors to be of solid construction
- All hallways should be free from obstruction, with trip free flooring
- The final exit door should be capable of being opened without the need for a key. A thumb turn mortise lock or similar should be
- A fire risk assessment must be carried out by the responsible person. The person completing the assessment must be competent to do so.
- Soft furniture (mattresses and sofas) should have a fire safety label attached.
- Walls and ceilings should be free from any significant cracks or damage to plaster work.
- Polystyrene tiles should not be present.

Electrical Safety/Supply

- Provide a current electrical safety certificate. These are required to be obtained every 5 years for HMOs.
- Provide at least 2 13 amp electric sockets in the kitchen in addition to those needed to be used for major appliances.

Facilities/Amenities

- A cooking appliance with four rings or burners, oven and grill (or equivalent) should be supplied. In a shared kitchen, there should be one appliance for every 3 persons. Where 3-6 occupants are using the kitchen, it may be acceptable to provide a microwave but it is not acceptable to provide a microwave as the only appliance for cooking.
- Adequate worktop and refrigeration space needs to be provided.
- Adequate washing facilities to be provided - for 4 or fewer there should be a bath or shower, wash hand basin and WC with enough space to clean and dry.
- Adequate refuse storage and collection facilities.

Safety

- Ensure staircase handrails are secure
- Carbon monoxide detectors should be fitted in accordance with manufacturers installation instructions.
- All windows to be lockable and openable.

Utilities

- Utilities to be either communal in the landlords name (and a monthly payment charged to each tenant) or separate meters to be installed in each letting.

Heating, ventilation and insulation

- Provide fixed heating in each letting, adequate ventilation and insulation to reduce the risk of condensation and damp.

When procuring any property the HHSRS 29 Hazards should be considered. If there is a significant risk of these occurring or evidence of any of these already existing on inspection of the property, advice should be sought from the RGS Procurement Team Leader.

A fire safety risk assessment is required to be carried out by a competent person who is in control of the property - so either the property owner or the Lettings agent. An example of the form that could be used for this:

Example form for recording significant findings
Risk Assessment - Record of significant findings
Risk assessment for
Building:

Location: Assessment undertaken by

Date:

Completed by:

Signature:

Sheet number Floor/area: Use:

Step 1 - Identify fire hazards

Sources of ignition

 Sources of fuel

 Sources of oxygen

Step 2 - People at risk

Step 3 - Evaluate, remove, reduce and protect from risk

(3.1) Evaluate the risk of the fire occurring

(3.2) Evaluate the risk to people from a fire starting in the premises

(3.3) Remove and reduce the hazards that may cause a fire

(3.4) Remove and reduce the risks to people from a fire

Assessment review

Assessment/review date

 Completed by

 Signature

Review outcome (where substantial changes have occurred a new record sheet should be used)

Appendix 3 - Landlord's Code of Conduct

Creating the Tenancy

- 1) The tenancy agreement will contain the Landlord's contact address in the UK for the service of notices.
- 2) The landlord will make every effort to assist the tenant with the understanding of their tenancy agreement, referring them if necessary to an independent body for further advice.
- 3) The landlord will inform the tenant in writing of any additional charges, utility bills, ground rent or maintenance charges that the tenant will be required to pay during the tenancy, stating where possible the amounts for each and the frequency and method of payment.
- 4) The landlord will provide the tenant, at the beginning of the tenancy, with a telephone number or other means of contacting the landlord or their agent in an emergency; in particular when the landlord is absent.

Maintaining the Tenancy

- 5) The Landlord will abide by relevant landlord/tenant law, including racial equality and disability legislation, in the management of their lettings businesses.
 - Tenants will be treated with appropriate courtesy and respect and will not be deliberately misled.
 - The landlord will act in a fair, honest and reasonable way in all their dealings with the tenant and will not, as far as is reasonable, disclose personal tenant information to other parties without their consent.
 - The landlord will inform the tenant of any change of manager or landlord contact details.
 - All disrepair in the property for which the landlord is responsible will be attended to promptly, with minimum disturbance to the tenant. Wherever possible urgent repairs will be dealt with within 3 working days and less urgent repairs as soon as practicable.
 - The landlord will respect the tenant's rights to peaceful and quiet enjoyment of the property and will, emergencies excepted, ensure the tenant is given reasonable notice of at least 24 hours when access to the property is required by the landlord or agent.
 - The landlord will provide the tenant with accommodation that complies with legal requirements relating to the fitness of accommodation (including, but not limited to, the provision of furniture, gas and electrical supply and appliances and their service/maintenance and repair and local authority occupancy standards - see other sections of the Landlord Pack for details).
- 6) The landlord will ensure that suitable insurance cover for the fabric and contents of the property is obtained.
- 7) The landlord will keep clear and informative rent accounts for each tenant, showing details and dates of rent due, rent paid and the balance.

Ending the Tenancy

- 8) Before proceedings are commenced, the tenant will be notified of any breach of the tenancy agreement that is to be used as a basis for legal proceedings against the tenant.
- 9) The landlord will not refuse a tenant a reference for the purposes of securing a new tenancy, without good cause.

Appendix 4 - Landlords whose property may not be considered for a PRSO

Landlords and agents may not be used where: -

- There is a history of illegal eviction or other illegal practices with any former or current tenants, or where there is an ongoing court case regarding the same
- The landlord or agent owes Reading Borough Council money
- There is a history of non-compliance with any Reading Borough Council department, particularly including Environmental Health, Planning and Planning Enforcement and Building Control
- There is a history of inappropriate treatment of tenants or Reading Borough Council staff
- The landlord has been prosecuted for a criminal offence arising from their conduct.
- The landlord has defrauded the local authority.

Reading Borough Council
Temporary Accommodation Procurement Policy
October 2017

1. Overview

This document sets out the Council's policy for the procurement of suitable properties for use as temporary accommodation for households towards whom a duty to secure accommodation has been accepted or who have been accepted as requiring assistance under the Housing Act 1996.

This document should be read in conjunction with the Reading Borough Council's (RBC) Temporary Accommodation Allocation Policy.

Wherever possible the Council aims to prevent homelessness through early intervention, targeted advice and support and the provision of alternative housing options. Where this approach does not succeed and or homelessness cannot be avoided the Council may have a duty to provide Temporary Accommodation (TA). This document sets out how the Council will ensure that sufficient TA is available for households for who homelessness cannot be prevented where there are statutory duties owed to them.

The Council does not own sufficient units of temporary accommodation within its stock to meet current levels of need. As a result the Council relies on a range of accommodation to meet its obligations to provide TA to homeless households. This policy is intended to ensure that sufficient numbers of suitable properties are obtained for the anticipated demand for TA in the ensuing two years. The policy, and associated demand projections, will be reviewed every year.

2. Legal position

The Housing Act 1996, Part 7 (as amended) sets out the Council's statutory homelessness duties, including the duty to provide temporary accommodation for certain classes of people and in certain circumstances.

Section 188 of the Act requires that where the local housing authority has reason to believe an applicant may be homeless, eligible for assistance, and have a priority need, it shall secure that accommodation is available for their occupation pending a decision as to the duty (if any) owed to them. This is known as the "interim duty to accommodate in cases of apparent priority need".

Section 193 of the Act also relates to the provision of temporary accommodation and applies where the Council is satisfied that an applicant is homeless, eligible for assistance, has a priority need, and that the applicant did not become homeless intentionally. In these circumstances, unless the Council refers the application to another local housing authority, they shall secure that accommodation remains available for occupation by the applicant until the main housing duty can be ended.

Reading Borough Council has the following options available to end the main homelessness duty to households in TA:

- A Private Rented Sector Offer (PRSO) in line with the Council's policy and national standards.
- An offer of permanent accommodation under Part 6 of the Housing Act through Reading Borough Council's Choice Based Lettings (CBL), in line with RBC's Allocations Scheme.

The Supreme Court Judgement *Nzolameso v Westminster City Council*, concerning the use of temporary accommodation for homeless people, set out the requirement of the adoption of a policy for procuring sufficient units of temporary accommodation to meet the anticipated demand from homeless people. The policy should reflect obligations under both the 1996 (Housing) Act and the Children Act 2004.

This policy meets the above requirement and refers to the sourcing of temporary accommodation provided prior to a final offer of accommodation. It should not to be considered in isolation and should be used in conjunction with the TA Allocation Policy, Homelessness Strategy, PRSO Policy and RBC Allocations Scheme.

3. Relevant Legislation and Policy

In developing this policy Reading Borough Council has had regard to the following:

- Part VI Housing Act 1996 Part VI
- Part VII Housing Act 1996, as amended by Homelessness Act 2002
- The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation)(England) Order 2003
- Localism Act 2011
- Reading Borough Council's Allocations Scheme
- Reading Borough Council's PRSO Policy
- Reading Borough Council's Homelessness Strategy 2015-2020
- Equality Act 2010
- Supplementary Guidance on the homelessness changes in the Localism Act 2011
- The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation)(England) Order 2012
- The Homelessness Code of Guidance 2006

4. Principles

Reading Borough Council considers a number of principles important to managing the procurement of Temporary Accommodation:

- To support reduction in the use of temporary accommodation through the prevention of homelessness wherever possible and through a range of measures.
- To procure sufficient suitable accommodation to meet anticipated demand each year. Where possible these units will be within the Reading Borough, however there may be a requirement to source accommodation in other locations where supply of accommodation in the borough is not sufficient.
- To support the reduction in the use of paid nightly, shared facilities B&B accommodation and to no more than 6 weeks for any household.
- To ensure that units of accommodation procured provide value for money to the Council.
- To increase the supply of permanent accommodation, through the Council's Rent Guarantee Scheme (RGS), Homes for Reading Ltd (the Council's wholly owned housing company), efficient use of Council stock, acquiring property, directly developing new Council homes and enabling increased housing development - thus reducing the need for temporary accommodation units.

5. Current Temporary Accommodation Provision

The Council uses a range of supply to meet demand for temporary accommodation. As at the beginning October 2017 there was 250 households in temporary housing, broken down as follows:

RBC Owned Temporary Accommodation (self-contained)

RBC provides the majority of its temporary accommodation through self-contained units of accommodation owned by the Council. RBC undertook to increase the supply of temporary accommodation in 2013 by re-modelling former hostel accommodation to provide modern, self-contained units. 16 units were opened in March 2014 and a further 17 units in June/July 2015. This is in addition to an existing block of temporary accommodation providing 51 self-contained flats, which equates to 85 units in total as at October 2017.

Permanent as Temporary (PAT)

The Council also classifies certain permanent accommodation on an ad-hoc basis to use as temporary accommodation (PAT). This will usually be to meet the specific needs of an individual household. At the current time the Council uses approximately 42 properties for this purpose.

In late 2015/early 2016 an additional 45 properties on the Dee Park estate which have been vacated as part of the regeneration project were made fit and brought back into use as temporary accommodation prior to their demolition, due in phase 3 of the Dee Park regeneration, anticipated in 2019.

Nightly Paid Accommodation (bed and breakfast (B&B), shared and self-contained).

Whilst bed and breakfast accommodation is considered to be unsuitable for households for long periods of time, unfortunately the Council remains reliant on this type of accommodation for emergency placements and due to the high levels of demand it is not unusual for households to be accommodated in B&B for longer than 6 weeks. The Housing department has been working to ensure that where B&B accommodation is utilised, it is of a decent standard whilst remaining value for money. The Council aims to minimise the use of B&B accommodation to emergency situations, for no longer than 6 weeks. As at the beginning of October 2017 there were 88 households living in B&B - a significant reduction from 144 at the start of the financial year reflecting a clear and driving priority to prevent homelessness, reduce demand and appropriately meet needs.

Supported Accommodation for Single People

The Council commissions a number of supported accommodation providers to supply refuge for survivors of domestic abuse and supported accommodation for single people. Where appropriate this accommodation may be used as temporary accommodation.

6. Anticipated Demand for Temporary Accommodation

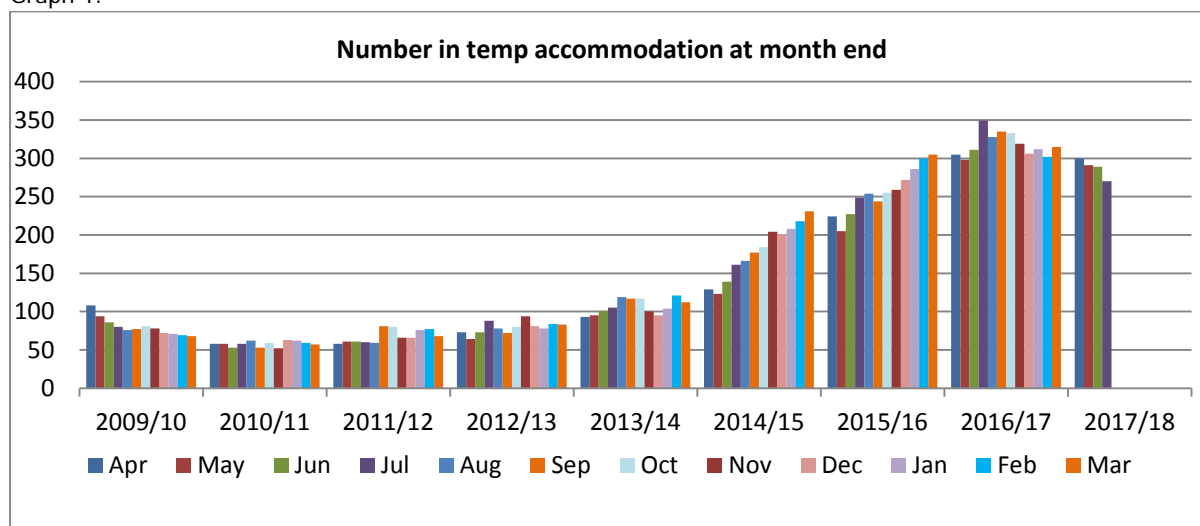
Anticipating the amount of required temporary accommodation is complex and dependant on a number of different factors, including variations in homelessness demand, the success of preventative work, fluctuations in the housing market and the supply of move on options, changes to the level of supply of permanent accommodation and changes to national legislation and policy.

The Council aims to prevent households from having to move into emergency or temporary accommodation wherever possible. Within recent years various activities have been employed to support this, including, increasing the supply of affordable permanent and temporary accommodation, development of a Rent Guarantee Scheme to attract the help of private sector landlords and increased investment in staff to carry out specialist welfare reform casework.

In June 2017 the Housing Department implemented a project team to provide intensive support to help people living in temporary accommodation to find alternative accommodation. This may include sourcing accommodation, arranging viewings, providing financial assistance and, in some cases, helping people to look for alternative affordable accommodation outside of Reading.

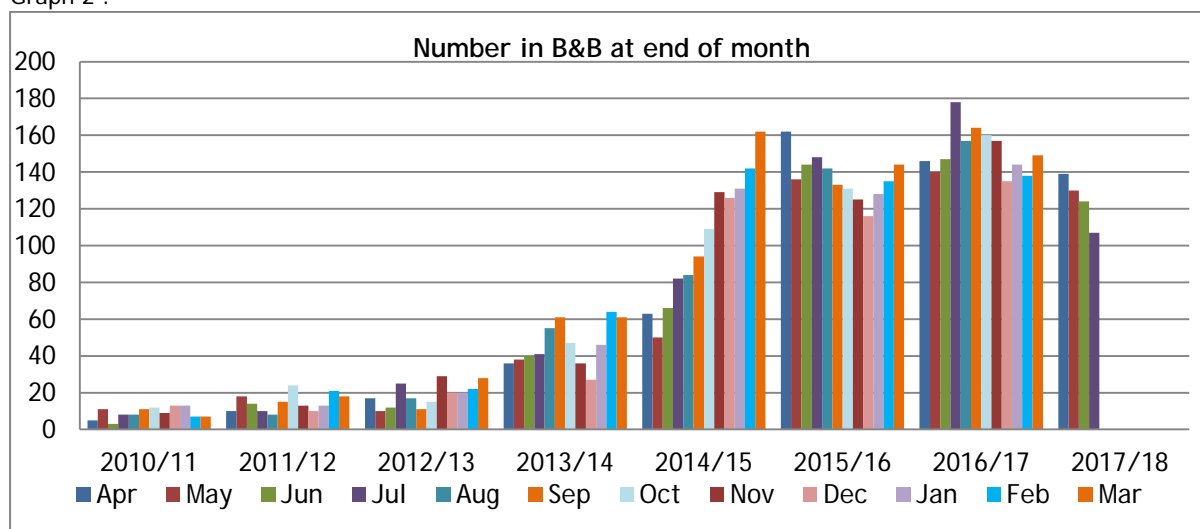
All of these measures, in addition to the introduction of the PRSO in May 2016, have supported the reduction in the use of temporary accommodation. As at the beginning October there were 250 households accommodated in temporary accommodation from a peak in July 2016 of 350 households, mainly due to a reduction in the number of placements.

Graph 1:



In line with the overall reduction in temporary accommodation since July 2016, the use of B&B has reduced by approximately 900 households to October 2017.

Graph 2 :



Assuming that the level of supply of move on or permanent accommodation remains static, anticipated numbers in temporary accommodation are given below for 3 different models of demand, based on different temporal trends.

Table 1: Predicted end of year numbers in temporary accommodation based on an average of 34 monthly homelessness acceptances, reflecting average demand of the preceding financial year (16/17).

Year	17/18	18/19
Number of households in temporary accommodation at end of year	266 (65 in B&B)	301 (100 in B&B)

Table 2: Predicted end of year in temporary accommodation based on an average of 32 monthly homelessness acceptances, reflecting the average demand of the preceding calendar year (August 16 - July 17).

Year	17/18	18/19
Number of households in temporary accommodation at end of year	255 (55 in B&B)	269 (69 in B&B)

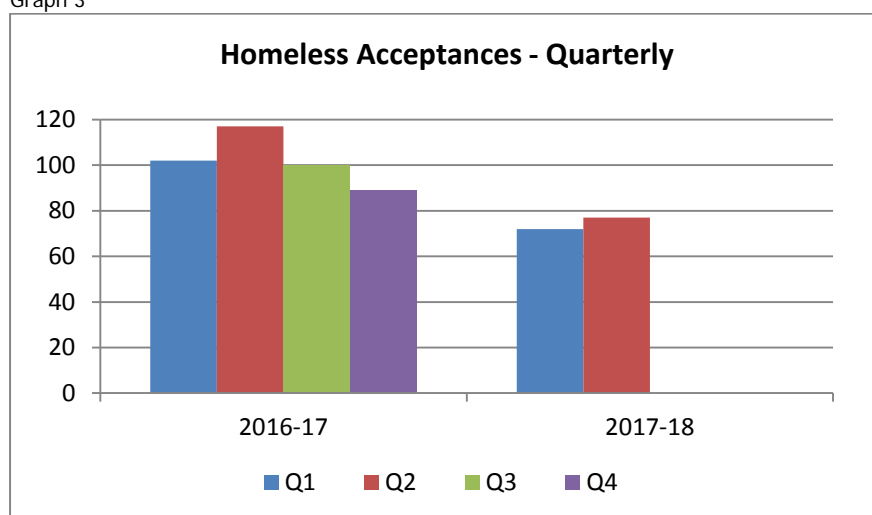
Table 3: Predicted end of year in temporary accommodation based on an average of 27 monthly homelessness acceptances, reflecting the average demand of the preceding 6 months (Jan 17 - July 17).

Year	17/18	18/19
Number of households in temporary accommodation at end of year	230 (30 in B&B)	190 (-10 in B&B)*

**modelling is theoretical and some level of B&B use is likely to continue due to the need to make emergency placements whilst sourcing alternatives.*

Based on recent trends in homelessness acceptances in Reading, demand has reduced (see Graph 3 below). On this basis Tables 2 and 3 could be considered as more accurate predictions.

Graph 3



However, forecasting with precision is difficult due to the unpredictable changing nature of homelessness demand and supply. There are a range of complex influencing factors that are not included in the above models; some of the known challenges are explored below.

Universal Credit - The implementation of Universal Credit in Reading in December 2017 is likely to have an impact on demand for homeless accommodation due to rising arrears and associated evictions, coupled with increased difficulty for those on benefit accessing private rented accommodation. At this stage it is difficult to provide accurate predictions, however, there is an expectation that this will add pressure and increase demand.

Changes in legislation - The introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2018 is also anticipated to place additional demand on the service, the Government currently predicts a 26% increase in casework for local authority housing departments, however it is unclear at this stage how this will be reflected in future accommodation requirements.

Fluctuations in the Private Rented Market - Supply of affordable accommodation through the private sector remains unpredictable. Reduction in available affordable PRS accommodation has a twofold impact on homelessness and subsequent use of temporary accommodation. It creates additional demand for affordable housing from households on low incomes and risks increasing homelessness through evictions. It has an impact on the Council's ability to source suitable accommodation to either a) prevent homelessness for households who are already struggling financially or b) provide households accommodation through a PRSO.

Loss of Units through Regeneration - In addition the use of units as temporary accommodation on the Dee Park estate which are due to be demolished as part of the Council's regeneration will reduce capacity (anticipated circa 2019).

Use of Bed and Breakfast

The Council is committed to reducing the use of B&B. Wherever possible the Council uses self-contained bed and breakfast and has a commitment to reducing the numbers of households placed in shared facility accommodation and lengths of stay. Over recent years the Council has seen an over reliance on B&B due to rapid increases in demand for temporary accommodation leading to the use of easily sourced B&B. Based on the projections above and anticipated supply, the Council is forecasting a decrease in the numbers in B&B by April 2018 to approximately 50 households.

7. Future Supply of Temporary Accommodation

Due to the complex nature of homelessness demand it is important to be flexible in the range of accommodation responses to allow the Council the ability to meet need during periods of unpredictable fluctuation. The Council plans to use a range of mechanisms for meeting this demand, both in increasing supply of temporary accommodation, increasing access to the private rented sector and developing new build Council homes.

An increase in supply of temporary accommodation

The Council is increasing the supply of temporary accommodation units in a number of ways:

- Purchasing suitable properties from the open market to be let as temporary accommodation. Financed through the use of Right to Buy receipts to subsidise 30% of purchase value and borrowing. Properties to be let at 90% Local Housing Allowance (LHA).
- The Council is reviewing opportunities to provide new temporary accommodation on Council-owned land. Currently there are two projects in development:
 - Delivery of 28 new units of modular construction temporary accommodation units that the Council is developing at Lowfield Rd - due to be completed and let in January 2018 (at 90% LHA).
 - Delivery of 34 units of accommodation at North Street due in 2021 and as above to be let at 90% LHA levels.
- Continued use of permanent stock as temporary accommodation. As a Council that has retained its own housing stock Reading can be flexible in the use of permanent housing. Used in moderation, this approach is considered to be prudent for managing future fluctuations in demand as the use of these properties has little lead in time and no associated cost.
- Use of Void properties in regeneration projects. The Council will consider using any property that is due to be demolished as part of a regeneration project as temporary accommodation, until phased works are ready to be initiated.

- Bed and Breakfast - The Council aims to minimise the use of B&B accommodation to emergency situations and ensure that households spend no longer than 6 weeks in accommodation of this type that has shared facilities. The Council aims to establish a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) of providers that will ensure continuity of supply and the provision of good quality properties. It is intended that this will be in place at the beginning of 2018 and will aim to provide self-contained accommodation where possible.

Increase the supply of private rented accommodation

- Increase the potential pool of properties that can be used as a Private Rented Sector Offer by removing restrictions within the PRSO policy which limits the properties that can be used to house homeless people.
- Increasing the supply of, and access to, affordable accommodation through the Council's wholly owned housing company, Homes for Reading. A proportion of properties to be let at sub-market rents to homeless households - cross-subsidised by market rental lets.
- Working with partners to support the delivery of additional units of private rented accommodation by charitable or philanthropic organisations. To be let at LHA.

8. Monitor and Review of Supply and Demand

RBC considers effective regular monitoring of supply and demand as essential to ensuring that the Council is able to meet the needs of homeless households.

Monitoring allows for reforecasting need, planning of required activity and refocusing activity.

Monitoring is carried out through the following mechanisms:

- Detailed activity and performance reports/dashboards are produced monthly with weekly headline data - reviewed by managers through to Head of Service;
- Monthly strategic finance meeting, chaired by housing head of service which considers cost of temporary accommodation and B&B and carries out budget forecasting;
- Monitoring reports to senior management teams;
- A Strategic Housing Group reviews demand on a regular basis informed by activity and supply data.

Appendix 1

2015 Judgement of the Supreme Court - *Nzolameso v Westminster City Council*.

The case was concerned with the practice of London Boroughs where homelessness duties are being met through sourcing accommodation outside the local area. Frequently these placements are made some considerable distance from the respective boroughs. This is not a significant issue for Reading, however, the resulting judgement suggested that all Councils should have published policies setting out their approach to providing temporary accommodation for homeless people.

The case concluded that each local authority should:

- i. Have and maintain a policy for procuring sufficient units of temporary accommodation to meet the anticipated demand from homeless people. The policy should reflect obligations under both the 1996 (Housing) Act and the Children Act 2004.
- ii. Have and maintain a policy for allocating these units to individual homeless households, which includes consideration of how decisions would be taken about placing people out of the local area in the event of a shortfall of suitable accommodation locally.
- iii. Seek approval for the adoption of such a policy by democratically accountable members of the Council.
- iv. Ideally, make the policy publicly available.

Reading Borough Council
Temporary Accommodation Allocation Policy
(Including allocation to private rented sector accommodation)
October 2017

1 Overview

Reading Borough Council aims to reduce the use of temporary accommodation through the prevention of homelessness wherever possible. Homelessness prevention became a priority for local authorities following the implementation of the 2002 Homelessness Act. This is achieved through a range of measures including early intervention and case work with households. There are various tools available to Reading Borough Council to prevent families from requiring emergency or temporary accommodation by enabling them to resolve their own housing need. This work includes negotiation, financial assistance, support and referrals to appropriate agencies.

Reading Borough Council will allocate temporary accommodation to households who approach as homeless as a way of discharging its responsibilities. Accommodation provided prior to the acceptance of a homelessness duty is referred to as interim accommodation; that which is provided after a full duty decision is made is referred to as temporary accommodation.

Reading Borough Council will satisfy its duty to provide interim or temporary accommodation using a number of different accommodations as follows:

- Temporary accommodation: purpose-built property owned by Reading Borough Council
- PAT: Permanent accommodation owned by Reading Borough Council being used as temporary accommodation
- Some households may be able to remain in the accommodation they are being made homeless from, albeit unsuitable for their needs, to prevent the disruption to the household. This is agreed with the Housing Advice Team.
- Nightly paid accommodation (also referred to as Bed and Breakfast). Accommodation not owned by Reading Borough Council and may be shared facility of self-contained

This policy is intended to provide clarity and ensure equity in relation to the allocation of temporary accommodation, recognising the importance of moving households to more permanent accommodation and therefore resolving their housing need as soon as possible.

This policy will set out the factors that Reading Borough Council will have regard to when allocating a household to interim or temporary accommodation and how Reading Borough Council will make decisions on its allocation. This policy addresses the allocation and use of accommodation until the point at which Reading Borough Council are able to end the duty (see section 7) by way of permanent allocation of a property via a Part VI allocation or a Private Rented Sector Offer. The allocation of permanent accommodation to those who are homeless does not sit in the requirements under Part VI of the Housing Act 1996, however, there are responsibilities on Reading Borough Council under Part VII of the act..

In writing this policy Reading Borough Council has had regard to the following:

- Part VI Housing Act 1996 Part VI
- Part VII Housing Act 1996, as amended by Homelessness Act 2002
- The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation)(England) Order 2003
- Localism Act 2011
- Reading Borough Council Allocations Scheme
- Reading Borough Council PRSO Policy
- Equality Act 2010
- Supplementary Guidance on the homelessness changes in the Localism Act 2011
- The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation)(England) Order 2012
- The Homelessness Code of Guidance 2006

2 Legislation

The Housing Act 1996 provides that local housing authorities shall or may provide accommodation to persons who have applied for housing assistance as homeless persons or persons threatened with homelessness in the circumstances described below:

- Whilst enquiries are being made in respect of the application, provided the Authority has reason to believe that the applicant is eligible, in priority need and homeless (s.188);
- At the Authority's discretion pending a review and/or pending determination of an appeal to the County Court in respect of a review decision (ss.188(4), 195(8) and 204(2)) or pursuant to an order of the Court made for the period pending the hearing of the appeal (s.204A);
- While enquiries are being made and the above has been satisfied, the duty to accommodate is under section 188, which is interim accommodation;
- When the Authority has accepted that an applicant is owed the main homelessness duty and accommodation is provided under section 193: temporary accommodation.

S.I 2003 No. 3326 The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) (Order 2003) came into effect on 1st April 2004 and applies to applicants with family commitments. It restricts the circumstances in which bed and breakfast accommodation can be provided as suitable accommodation.

Reading Borough Council aims to only use bed and breakfast (paid nightly) accommodation in order to satisfy its responsibility to provide interim accommodation and this type of accommodation will therefore be allocated to those presenting as homeless if no other accommodation is available. All households will have the right to formally request a review of the suitability of any accommodation provided to them, under Section 202 of the 1996 Housing Act as amended. This must be carried out by an Officer senior to the Officer who made the decision to allocate and must be responded to within 8 weeks of the request. Requests to review the suitability of accommodation offered will be treated as a priority and should the accommodation be found to be unsuitable a further offer of interim or emergency accommodation will be offered at the earliest possible opportunity.

3 Suitability Guidance

The following is guidance to local authorities for the use of interim and temporary accommodation, primarily bed and breakfast accommodation. Reading Borough Council will have regard to this guidance when allocating any form of interim or temporary accommodation, with the exception of the space standards which only apply to bed and breakfast.

- Location of accommodation
 - Access to facilities, such as public transport and shops
 - Consideration of location in relation to place of work
 - Consideration of maintaining links with schools, doctors, social workers, and other key services essential to the well-being of the household
 - Guidance recommends that the local authority considers the disruption to education, specifically for children who are undertaking essential exams
- Medical Needs
 - Access to specialised medical treatments
 - Access to the accommodation, such as mobility
 - Medical conditions which would make it unreasonable to share facilities
- Social Consideration
 - Risks of violence
 - Access to essential support

- MAPPA related information
- HHSRS rating
 - Hazards such as stairs/overcrowding – this will be assessed based on the needs of each household
- Affordability
 - Having regard to the households income, access to benefits and other prescribed debts and reasonable living expenses, including travel to workplace and schools
- Space Standards - *for bed and breakfast only - see appendix 1*
Space Standards for other forms of accommodation - *see appendix 2*

The guidance advises that families should spend no longer than 6 weeks in bed and breakfast accommodation and if they stay longer than this, the local authority will need to demonstrate that there are no alternative options available on a daily basis.

The accommodation must be suitable and available for occupation by the applicant together with any other person who normally resides with him as a member of his family or any other person who might reasonably be expected to reside with him.

The Secretary of State recommends that applicants are given the chance to view accommodation before being required to decide whether they accept or refuse an offer, and before being required to sign any written agreement relating to the accommodation (e.g. a tenancy agreement). Under s.202 (1A), an applicant who is offered accommodation can request a review of its suitability whether or not he or she has accepted the offer. Due to the urgent nature of some placements and the need to resolve housing situations it is not always possible to offer viewings.

Annual inspections of bed and breakfast accommodation used by Reading Borough are carried out by the Environmental Health Team and regular checks are completed by the Housing Advice Team. Any issues raised by these inspections/checks will be discussed with the proprietors and further checks will be carried out to ensure that issues have been addressed - or where necessary the authority will cease to use the provision.

4 Allocation to bed and breakfast accommodation

Bed and breakfast accommodation will not be used to accommodate 16 and 17 year olds. Placements for this group will be sourced in conjunction with Children’s Services Commissioning and the process is covered in the relevant protocol.

4.1 Placements

Reading Borough Council aims to only use B&B as interim accommodation in emergency situations.

When allocating bed and breakfast to a household, Reading Borough Council will have regard to guidance detailed in section 3.

Decisions on placements will also take into account information pertaining to the risk or vulnerability of other residents of potential shared accommodation

Reading Borough Council will refer homeless households for floating support if a need for this is identified.

4.2 Out of Area

Out of area allocation of bed and breakfast will occur if there are no suitable vacancies within the borough at the time interim accommodation is required, or a placement is required out of the area for an applicant’s safety. Reading Borough Council will have regard to the suitability guidance in

relation to this and will monitor the vacancies in establishments within the borough in order to relocate households as soon as possible if required.

Under section 208 Reading Borough Council must provide details of any families being placed in another area to that local authority, including details of any risks.

In the event that emergency accommodation has to be secured out of the borough, Reading Borough Council will clearly detail why accommodation in the borough has not been secured so that the applicant understands the reasons for the offer. Reading Borough Council will have regard to the following if a property is secured out of the area:

- the distance the property is from Reading and any disruption to support/employment
- the welfare of any children in the household, most important being access to schooling

Reading Borough Council will consider suitable vacancies with bed and breakfast providers in the borough on a daily basis and make offers of those currently placed out of the area having regard to:

- length of time spent in bed and breakfast out of the area, considering those who have been placed the longest
- personal circumstances, such as their need to remain out of the area for safety reasons
- the size of the household and the size of the vacancy being considered
- the social situation of household, such as access to schools, employments, support and general wellbeing

4.3 Facilities in bed and breakfast

Where possible, Reading Borough Council will ensure that there are cooking facilities for the households use in bed and breakfast provided. Reading Borough Council cannot guarantee that all placements will have access to full cooking facilities, however, in cases where this is not possible Reading Borough Council may negotiate with a proprietor for the household to have some appliances in their room for their use. Any equipment provided in the bed and breakfast will require PAT testing (Portable Appliance Testing) to ensure its safety. As a minimum, Reading Borough Council will ensure access to a fridge. Food stuffs for breakfast must be provided by the proprietor in each establishment for the households to use/prepare.

4.4 Ending Interim Accommodation

Once a section 184 decision is made the following actions will take place:

- if the main housing duty is accepted this accommodation will become temporary accommodation and Reading Borough Council will continue to work with the household to facilitate a move to more appropriate accommodation; or
- if an adverse decision is made and Reading Borough Council has no duty to provide accommodation, any interim accommodation provided will end, giving reasonable notice. The notice period will depend on the reasons for the adverse decision and will be assessed on a case by case basis, the following being guidance:
 - if not homeless - this accommodation will end with immediate effect
 - if non-priority, intentionally homeless or not eligible for a single applicant - between 7 and 14 days' notice will be provided depending on the circumstances of the applicant
 - if intentionally homeless or not eligible for a family - between 14 and 28 days' notice will be provided depending on the circumstances of the applicant
 - if no local connection - the provision of interim accommodation will continue until the local authority to which a referral has been made takes over the responsibility

If an adverse decision is made, with the exception of no local connection and not homeless, and the household includes dependent children, a referral to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (Children's Services) will be made in all cases. Single applicants will be referred to a support agency, where appropriate, which may include the Adult Social Care teams.

If an adverse decision is made the household has the right to request a review of this decision, as detailed in section 9.

4.5 Monitoring

RBC carries out robust monitoring of all B&B placements to:

- ensure accuracy and currency of individual placements
- ensure consideration of all options and swift move on
- ensure financial accuracy
- support understanding of trends of demand, and strategic and financial forecasting

This monitoring is carried out through a number of mechanisms, including:

- Manager sign off for all B&B placements to ensure accuracy of placements and to agree a move on plan for the household
- Weekly spreadsheets of all placements are produced and reconciled against financial records and rent account information
- Detailed activity and performance reports/dashboards are produced monthly with weekly headline data - reviewed by managers through to Head of Service;
- Monthly strategic finance meeting, chaired by housing head of service which considers cost of temporary accommodation and B&B and carries out budget forecasting;

Reading Borough Council will review the needs of the households being placed into bed and breakfast accommodation to consider if it remains suitable. Reading Borough Council will expect the household to raise suitability concerns as and when a situation needs to be reviewed, see section 9.

4.6 Move on from bed and breakfast

Move on plans are produced and monitored for all those in B&B and there is focused case work carried out to explore all alternative options.

Move on from bed and breakfast accommodation will be as follows:

- to temporary accommodation - see section 5
- to private rented accommodation - see section 7
- to a PAT property - see section 6
- to permanent accommodation via Part VI of the 1996 Housing Act, and allocation of social housing
- to an offer of social housing in another borough via Homefinder UK

Households moving to temporary accommodation or PAT accommodation from bed and breakfast will be expected to move within 24 hours' notice.

5 Allocation of Temporary Accommodation

When a vacancy of temporary accommodation arises, the Voids and Lettings Team will alert the Housing Advice Team at the earliest opportunity, providing details of the property attributes, including the size of the accommodation and the floor it is located on. The Housing Advice Team

will assess which household will be allocated this accommodation, having regard to the suitability of the accommodation guidance set out in section 3 and the standards set out in the 1985 Housing Act, sections 325 and 326, see appendix 2. The decision to allocate this accommodation will take into account the following:

- consideration of those in bed and breakfast accommodation in order of their placement, those who have been residing in bed and breakfast for the longest period first
- those who are homeless and require, or are already in, accommodation but bed and breakfast is not a suitable option including/primarily due to medical reasons
- an assessment of the size of the household in relation to the vacancy, and any mobility issues - see appendix 2
- whether the property available has specific adaptations (such as wheelchair accessible)
- the household's current position on the shortlists and whether they are likely to be housed permanently soon to avoid additional moves within a short space of time

An information regarding risk to or from the household will be shared with the Temporary Accommodation Officer.

The Housing Advice Team will make contact with the household identified and provide them with the information regarding the property, including sign up date and location, information requested, timescales during which they are expected to move, gas reconnection date and reconfirm that the property will not be furnished. Households will be expected to be present at the property for the gas reconnection to take place, which may not be the same day that the keys are collected, and will be advised of the appointment slot in advance.

If a household feels that the accommodation provided is not suitable they are expected to raise this concern with Reading Borough Council and a review of its suitability will be carried out, as detailed in section 9.

Temporary accommodation will not be furnished and households will be made aware of this when they initially approach as homeless and again when the sign up is being booked. Support will be offered to those who require assistance with this.

Move on from temporary accommodation will be as follows:

- to private rented accommodation - see section 7
- To permanent accommodation via Part VI of the 1996 Housing Act, and allocation of social housing
- to an offer of social housing in another borough via Homefinder UK

6 Allocation of PAT Accommodation

From time to time Reading Borough Council will use permanent accommodation to meet the needs of homeless households. This may be for a range of reasons and will be determined on a case by case basis taking into account the following:

- Need/demand
- Size of household - see appendix 2
- Adaptations
- The need to relet the accommodation
- Household specific factors, such as medical need

PAT accommodation will be identified where there is a need for specific accommodation that cannot be satisfied in the temporary accommodation stock. Households who are unsuitable for bed

and breakfast accommodation (including those who are unsuitable due to household size) or who have health issues which would also make temporary accommodation unsuitable may be offered a PAT property.

When allocating to a PAT property Reading Borough Council will have regard to the guidance as set out in section 3.

When a property being used as a PAT becomes available, and there is a further need for this accommodation to satisfy the statutory homeless duty, it is allocated again as temporary accommodation and the temporary accommodation section will apply; see section 5.

If a household feels that the accommodation provided is not suitable they are expected to raise this concern with Reading Borough Council and a review of its suitability will be carried out, as detailed in section 9.

PAT properties will not be furnished and households will be made aware of this when they initially approach as homeless and again when the sign up is being booked. Support will be offered to those who require assistance with securing a furniture package working with voluntary sector agencies.

If a PAT property is allocated to a household, and is considered suitable for them as permanent accommodation in line with the Allocations Scheme (a part VI offer), following a period of no less than 3 months this property may be offered to them as their permanent accommodation which will end the homeless duty to that household. The property will need to be of a suitable size as set out in the space standards in the Allocations Scheme and there must be no issues regarding payment of rent or anti-social behaviour. The decision to offer a PAT property as permanent accommodation will be made by the Assistant Housing Needs Manager.

Move on from a PAT property will be as follows:

- to private rented accommodation - see 7
- To permanent accommodation via Part VI of the 1996 Housing Act, and allocation of social housing, which could include the PAT property they are residing in
- to an offer of social housing in another borough via Homefinder UK

7 Move on from all temporary accommodation

If Reading Borough Council have been unable to prevent homelessness and homeless households have been placed in any kind of temporary accommodation, there are a number of ways in which households may move on from the accommodation provided. Section 14.17 of the code of guidance sets out the ways in which a local authority can end its homeless duty to a household and these include:

- Permanent social housing secured via Homechoice at Reading - Part 6 offer
- Refusing or leaving accommodation provided either voluntarily, being asked to leave, or a change in status
- Private rented accommodation- Private Rented Sector Offer

Like most local authorities Reading Borough Council have had to consider other housing options to tackle the level of homelessness in the borough and to assist with prevention of homelessness and move on from any form of emergency or temporary accommodation offered. See other housing options section 8.

7.1 Part 6 offer

The statutory homeless duty will end if:

- the applicant accepts an offer of accommodation under Part 6 (an allocation of permanent social housing)
- the applicant accepts an offer of an assured tenancy (other than an assured shorthold tenancy) from a private landlord (s.193(6)(cc): this could include an offer of an assured tenancy made by a registered social landlord;
- the applicant refuses a final offer of accommodation under Part 6 (an allocation of long term social housing)

The above reasons for ending a homelessness duty are facilitated via the Allocations Scheme. All homeless households will be expected to apply to join the Housing Register and participate in the Choice Based Lettings Scheme. Any permanent accommodation will be allocated as per the Allocations Scheme. Once an offer of permanent accommodation is made the main homelessness duty will end to that household. Households have the right to request a review of the suitability of accommodation offered, see section 9.

7.2 Refusing or leaving accommodation provided either voluntarily, being asked to leave, or a change in status

The statutory homeless duty will end if:

- the applicant refuses an offer of accommodation to discharge the duty (offer of interim or temporary accommodation) which the housing authority is satisfied is suitable for the applicant;
- the applicant ceases to be eligible for assistance as defined in s.185 of the 1996 Act;
- the applicant becomes homeless intentionally from accommodation made available to him or her under s.193 or s.195;
- the applicant otherwise voluntarily ceases to occupy as his or her principle home accommodation made available under s.193 or s.195.

If a household refuses any offer of temporary accommodation, including bed and breakfast accommodation, and Reading Borough Council has accepted that they owe the household the main homelessness duty, this duty will end. Reading Borough Council will make the household fully aware of the consequences of refusing the accommodation and also the household's ability to request a review of the suitability of the accommodation offered. The household will be encouraged to move in to the accommodation while any review of suitability is being carried out.

If a household refuses an offer of suitable interim accommodation the duty to provide this form of accommodation will be considered as ended and no further offer may be made. The consequences of not accepting the accommodation will be explained in full along with the ability for the household to request a review of its suitability once they are moved in.

If a household is evicted from any temporary accommodation, including bed and breakfast accommodation, for rent arrears or anti-social behaviour the main homelessness duty to that household will end and no further accommodation will be provided. In these situations, prior to the eviction taking place, the consequences of the household's actions will be fully explained and every opportunity given to rectify the behaviour.

7.3 Private Rented Sector Offer

- Under section 193(7AA)3 (duties to persons with priority need and who are not homeless intentionally) a local authority shall cease to be subject to the main homelessness duty, if the applicant, having been informed of the matters mentioned in section 193(7AB), accepts or refuses a private rented sector offer.

The Localism Act 2011 gave local authorities the power to end the main homelessness duty to a household via an offer of accommodation in the private rented sector, known as a Private Rented Sector Offer (PRSO). Reading Borough Council has a policy for PRSO which sets out how it will use PRSO to discharge the main homelessness duty. Please see the PRSO policy for more information.

The main principles of a PRSO, as an overview of the PRSO policy are as follows:

- It is a power not a duty
- The tenancy must be for a minimum period of 12 months
- Any property must be suitable and affordable
- If households becomes homeless through no fault of their own they will be eligible for the reapplication duty regardless of whether they still have a priority need

When a private rented sector becomes available the Housing Advice Team will consider the suitability of this accommodation for a household in line with the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012. The decision regarding which household will be offered this accommodation will involve consideration of:

- Households in bed and breakfast accommodation in order of their placement, with those who have been residing in bed and breakfast for the longest period first
- Households who are homeless and require accommodation but bed and breakfast is not a suitable option
- an assessment of the size of households requiring accommodation in relation to the vacancy, and any mobility issues
- Households who are residing in temporary accommodation which will no longer remain in Reading Borough Councils stock

There will be situations when it is not considered reasonable to offer PRSO to a household and primarily this will be for those who require the security of social housing. An assessment of who requires social housing will be made by the Housing Advice Team and on an individual basis, and may include those who have experienced a high volume of moves while being in care, or those who require adaptations to a property. This is not an exhaustive list and this decision will be at Reading Borough Councils discretion.

Any PRSO will be deemed suitable and a refusal of this accommodation will result in the main homelessness duty ending. This includes refusal to participate in viewing the accommodation. As with any other accommodation, the household will have the right to review the suitability of this offer and will be encouraged to move into the offered property while a review is being carried out.

8 Other housing options

8.1 Homefinder

Reading Borough Council will provide information to applicants in respect of out of area moves to social housing via Homefinder UK as an alternative option. Homefinder UK advertise low demand or hard to let social housing properties in other boroughs. This will provide applicants with the opportunity to secure social housing, with further options to move to alternative social housing via mutual exchange. This will not be promoted as the only option for households. Should an applicant wish to relocate and to make use of this service, and subsequently accepts an offer of accommodation this will also be a way in which the homeless duty will be brought to an end. This will not be considered a Part 6 offer from Reading Borough Council, but an offer of an Assured Tenancy from another landlord or Registered Provider. Applicants will retain the right to review the suitability of this accommodation.

8.2 Homeless Assistance Payments

Homeless Assistance Payments can be used to secure accommodation to move on from bed and breakfast or to prevent someone from becoming homeless, and can be paid in 3 different ways as follows:

- Prevention Fund: to be used in order to prevent homelessness - any amount will be repaid by regular affordable payments over an agreed period of time.
- Moving Payment: to be used for deposits and fees where a full homelessness duty has been accepted and the household finds their own accommodation to move on from bed and breakfast - any amount will be repaid by regular affordable payments over an agreed period of time.
- Rent Top-Up: a one-off payment to top up the rent either to prevent homelessness or for those where a full homelessness duty has been accepted. It is not expected that this money is repaid. The household will be provided support to maximise their income during the period of the rent top up and the affordability of the accommodation will be reviewed following the period the top-up has been paid for to ensure that this property is affordable to the household on an ongoing basis.

8.3 Access Panel

The Access Panel is the referral mechanism for Reading Borough Council's Homelessness Pathway which provides supported accommodation for homeless individuals and couples. The Panel discusses the individuals who have been referred, and informs decisions that Reading Borough Council makes around prioritisation for vacancies within the Homelessness Pathway. It comprises of a group of professionals from Reading Borough Council, commissioned services and other relevant sector services. Referral to the Access Panel is via a Common Assessment Form (CAF), normally completed by the professional who has the most information regarding the applicant being referred. While they are on the Homelessness Pathway, applicants are expected to engage with the support provided. Reading Borough Council are able to end the duty to this accommodation as it is expected that where individuals sustain this accommodation it will be available to them for a period of up to 2 years. It is anticipated that whilst living in property acquired via the Homelessness Pathway, individuals are engaged in support to move on in a planned way to access longer term accommodation where they will be able to live independently with little or no support and succeed in any future tenancy.

8.4 YMCA

The YMCA can be considered for single applicants and mothers aged between 16 and 25. This is supported accommodation for young people. There is an expectation that any applicant referred to the YMCA will participate in the support provided. This accommodation can be secured via a direct referral to the YMCA and will be considered with information from the Common Assessment Form. Reading Borough Council are able to end the duty to this accommodation as it is expected that if successful this accommodation will be available for a period of 2 years and a move on plan will be agreed for when this accommodation comes to an end. It is assumed that by the end of the 2 years the applicant will be able to live independently with little or no support required and will succeed in any future tenancy.

8.5 Refuge

Where there is a risk of harm as a result of domestic abuse, Housing Advice Officers will be expected to explore the option of refuge accommodation, either within the borough or in another area. This can be done by a direct referral to refuge organisations. The benefit of this accommodation is the offer of support to households to live safely and also to resettle in an area

where they feel safe. This accommodation can be treated as emergency and/or temporary accommodation for the purposes of discharging the duty to accommodate.

8.6 Rent Guarantee Scheme

In some situation Reading Borough Council may want to consider supporting a household who has found their own accommodation via the Rent Guarantee Scheme. This will be agreed by the RGS Team and should be discussed with any case where a household has sourced their own private rented accommodation and where a guarantee to the landlord would help to secure the property.

9 Reviews of suitability

A household can request a review (section 202) regarding the following decisions:

- the suitability of the accommodation offered, being interim, temporary, permanent or a PRSO
- the ending of their homelessness duty by any means set out in section 7.

The request must be made within 21 days of the original decision and preferably in writing, however Reading Borough Council will consider any challenge or information suggesting that the accommodation offered is unsuitable as a request for a review. In these situations the Assistant Housing Needs Manager will be alerted and the duty to review the decision will be triggered.

Reading Borough Council has 8 weeks from the date of the request to carry out a review, however in situations where the accommodation offered is having a significant impact on the household, the review decision will be made at the earliest opportunity.

Applicants will be encouraged to move into, or remain in occupation of, the accommodation provided while the review is being carried out.

If the household has chosen to move into the property offered and requests a review of the suitability of that accommodation, and the original decision is upheld, then they will be required to remain in the property as it will be deemed to be suitable. No further offers of accommodation will be made. If the household refuses this offer of accommodation Reading Borough Council will end the main homelessness duty, as per section 7.

If the original decision is not upheld, the property will be deemed not to be suitable and further accommodation will be sourced for the household at the earliest opportunity. In the meantime they will be expected to remain in the property.

Appendix 1: Suitability guidance for bed and breakfast accommodation

Room sizes where cooking facilities provided in a separate room/kitchen:

Floor Area of Room / Maximum No of Persons:

- Less than 70 sq. ft. (6.5 m²) Nil persons
- Not less than 70 sq. ft. (6.5 m²) 1 person
- Not less than 110 sq. ft. (10.2 m²) 2 persons
- Not less than 160 sq. ft. (14.9 m²) 3 persons
- Not less than 210 sq. ft. (19.6 m²) 4 persons
- Not less than 260 sq. ft. (24.2 m²) 5 persons

Room sizes where cooking facilities provided within the room:

Floor Area of Room / Maximum No of Persons

- Less than 110 sq. ft. (10.2 m²) Nil persons
- Not less than 110 sq. ft. (10.2 m²) 1 person
- Not less than 150 sq. ft. (13.9 m²) 2 persons
- Not less than 200 sq. ft. (18.6 m²) 3 persons
- Not less than 250 sq. ft. (23.2 m²) 4 persons
- Not less than 300 sq. ft. (27.9 m²) 5 persons

In no case should a room be occupied by more than 5 persons. The standard is to be applied irrespective of the age of the occupants. The sharing of rooms in bed and breakfast accommodation is not desirable, but it is accepted that where accommodation is not self-contained families may find it preferable to share.

All rooms must have a minimum floor to ceiling height of at least 7 feet (2.14 metres) over not less than 75% of the room area. Any floor area where the ceiling height is less than 5 feet (1.53 metres) should be disregarded.

Separate kitchens, bathrooms, toilets, shower rooms, communal rooms and en-suite rooms are deemed unsuitable for sleeping accommodation.

Appendix 2: Room and Space Standards in temporary accommodation

Housing Act 1985 sections 325 and 326 sets out the room and space standards for temporary accommodation.

A child under the age of 1 is not included in the calculation and a child under the age of 10 counts as $\frac{1}{2}$ a person. Rooms that can be included in this calculation include living rooms and bedrooms.

Room Standard:

<i>Number of rooms</i>	<i>Number of persons</i>
1	2
2	3
3	5
4	7½
5 or more	2 for each room

Space Standard:

<i>Floor area of room</i>	<i>Number of persons</i>
110 sq. ft. or more	2
90 sq. ft. or more but less than 110 sq. ft.	1½
70 sq. ft. or more but less than 90 sq. ft.	1
50 sq. ft. or more but less than 70 sq. ft.	½

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY ELECTORAL REGISTRATION OFFICER AND RETURNING OFFICER

TO:	POLICY COMMITTEE		
DATE:	27 NOVEMBER 2017	AGENDA ITEM:	10
TITLE:	ELECTORAL REGISTRATION AND ELECTIONS - UPDATE		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	CLLR LOVELOCK	PORTFOLIO:	LEADERSHIP
SERVICE:	ELECTORAL SERVICES	WARDS:	BOROUGH-WIDE
LEAD OFFICER:	CHRISTOPHER BROOKS CLAIRE WOODFORD	TEL:	0118 937 2602 / 72602 0118 937 2284 / 72284
JOB TITLE:	HEAD OF LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES ELECTORAL SERVICES MANAGER	E-MAIL:	Chris.brooks@reading.gov.uk Claire.woodford@reading.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY OF REPORT

- 1.1 Further to Minute 56 of the Policy Committee of 30 November 2015, this report reviews the UK Parliamentary Election held on 8 June 2017, and provides an update on the annual electoral registration canvass which is currently underway, and which will produce the register for 2018 on 1 December 2017.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the position be noted.

3. POLICY CONTENT

- 3.1 This is the fourteenth report reviewing the election process.

4. UK PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION - 8 JUNE 2017

4.1 General

- 4.1.1 The UK Parliamentary Elections were held on Thursday 8 June 2017.

- 4.1.2 The UK Parliamentary Elections were held in two constituencies, Reading East and Reading West. The constituencies covered all 16 Reading wards, together with three Wokingham wards in Reading East and six West Berkshire wards in Reading West.

- 4.1.3 The Prime Minister announced her intention to ask Parliament to approve a General Election on 18 April 2017. The UK Parliament was dissolved on Wednesday 3 May 2017. Writs in respect of Reading East and Reading West constituencies were received on Thursday 4 May 2017. The Notices for the UK Parliamentary Elections in both constituencies were published following receipt of the Writs later on the same day, Thursday 4 May 2017.

- 4.1.4 The deadline for the delivery of nomination papers for the UK Parliamentary Elections was 16.00 on Thursday 11 May 2017.
- 4.1.5 The last day for new or changed registrations was midnight on Monday 22 May 2017; for new or changed applications for new postal votes, the deadline was 17.00 on Tuesday 23 May 2017 (day -11).
- 4.1.6 Postal ballot packs were issued on 19 May 2017 and a second issue went out on 30 May 2017.
- 4.1.7 Poll cards were issued on or around 4 May 2017 (1st despatch) and Poll cards were despatched to empty properties on 12 May in order to allow electors reasonable time to contact the Electoral Services team to make late requests for postal votes by 23 May 2017. Postal poll cards were issued to people with postal votes. The 2nd despatch of Poll cards was issued on 31st May 2017.

4.2 Turnout

4.2.1 The UK Parliamentary total eligible electorate was:

Reading East:	75,522
Reading West:	74,518

4.2.2 The UK Parliamentary Election total turnout was:

Reading East:	55,395
Reading West:	51,920

4.2.3 The percentage turnout totals were therefore, as follows:

Reading East:	73.35%	(69.21% in 2015)
Reading West:	69.67%	(66.87% in 2015)

4.3 Postal Votes

4.3.1 For the 2017 Elections, a total of 27,262 postal votes were issued, as follows:

Reading East:	14,008 postal votes
Reading West:	13,254 postal votes

4.3.2 A total of 23,027 postal votes were received and put forward for verification:

Reading East:	11,909 (85.0%)	(82.8% in 2015)
Reading West:	11,118 (83.8%)	(81.9% in 2015)

4.3.3 Table 1 breaks down the take-up of postal votes by constituencies in respect of the UK Parliamentary Election.

Table 1

Constituency	Eligible Electorate	PVs issued 2017	%	PVs received	% of no. issued	% of total electorate	Total rejected	% of no. received
Reading East	75,522	14,008	18.5	11,909	85.01	15.77	307	2.19
Reading West	74,518	13,254	17.7	11,118	83.88	14.92	294	2.22
TOTAL		27,262		23,027				

4.3.4 The Electoral Administration Act 2007, accompanying regulations, and updates, include provision for the receipt and opening of postal vote ballot packs. Sections 10ZC and 10ZD of the Representation of the People Act 1983 also include IER postal vote guidance. Any new applicant for a postal vote must be registered individually in order for their application to be determined and accepted.

4.3.5 The postal vote packs are opened, the contents checked to ensure ballot paper(s) and the completed postal vote statement are included in each and every pack, and then 100% of postal vote statements are submitted for verification by electronic scanning. The personal identifiers for individual postal voters held on the Council’s electoral database are compared. Four checks are made:

- To confirm the signature and date of birth have been completed
- To confirm that the date of birth is the same
- To confirm that the signature is the same
- To match the barcode on the postal vote statement with the database address record.

4.3.6 We scanned 100% of all postal votes received, through the establishment of a scanning hub at Floor 4, 2 - 4 Darwin Close, staffed by 2 Northgate and 5 Council staff on every scanning day. On Polling Day a reduced number of staff was made available to open and verify postal votes.

4.3.7 As a result of this exercise, and as shown in Table 1 above, a total of 307 Reading East UK Parliamentary postal statements were rejected, and a total of 294 Reading West UK Parliamentary postal statements were rejected. The rejected ballot papers did not go forward to the Verifications and Counts.

4.3.8 Incomplete packs were subject to the “orphaned ballot paper” check, whereby a statement/ballot paper without a ballot paper/statement were checked electronically in order to match them for verification, and paired up where possible.

4.3.9 Tables 2 below gives a detailed breakdown of reasons for rejection of postal votes after submission for verification by scanning, in respect of the UK Parliamentary Election:

Table 2 - UK Parliamentary Election 2017 (Breakdown by Ward)

UK Parliamentary Elections - Reason	Reading East	Reading West
Signature		
▪ <i>No signature</i>	16	21
▪ <i>Unmatched</i>	96	111
Date of Birth		
▪ <i>No DoB</i>	0	0

▪ <i>Unmatched</i>	108	91
Signature and Date of Birth		
▪ <i>No signature and no DoB</i>	22	18
▪ <i>One mismatched</i>	0	0
▪ <i>Both mismatched</i>	31	15
Postal Vote Statement		
▪ <i>No Statement</i>	7	10
Ballot Paper		
▪ <i>Not returned</i>	27	28
TOTAL	307	294

4.3.10 I was responsible, as Returning Officer, for the quality checks of the postal vote issues which were undertaken by me and one of my DROs. The quality checks demonstrated that the postal vote packs were accurately printed and of good quality, before being issued. Also, as Returning Officer, I checked each of the unmatched or invalid returns, in the postal vote hub. In this task I was supported by a Deputy Returning Officer, who has previously held the role of Returning Officer at past elections. The postal vote opening process was open to Candidates and Agents to attend.

4.3.11 Having undertaken these tasks, it is my view that there was no evidence of systematic fraud in the issued and returned postal votes. In the majority of cases, the rejections seemed to reflect confusion by the voter in completing the statement.

4.3.12 Following the election, as per previous elections, Electoral Services wrote to the postal voters whose postal votes had been rejected. This was to inform them that their vote was not included in the Electoral Counts and to request their personal indicators again to ensure that those held were correct. In 2017 (to date), no complaints have been received.

4.4 Polling Stations

4.4.1 On polling day, 110 polling stations were opened, across Reading East and Reading West boundaries, including Reading Borough wards that were located in Reading East and Reading West constituencies. In Reading Borough there were 75 polling stations, in 50 polling places (some of which had more than one polling station). Of the 50 polling places in the Borough, 24 were schools.

4.4.2 Reading East constituency had a total of 56 Polling Stations, based within the following wards:

Reading Borough Wards, Reading East:

Abbey
Caversham
Church
Katesgrove
Mapledurham
Park2Peppard
Redlands
Thames

Wokingham Borough Wards, Reading East:

Bulmershe & Whitegates
Loddon
South Lake

- 4.4.3 Reading West constituency had a total of 54 Polling Stations, based within the following wards:

Reading Borough Wards, Reading West:

Battle
Kentwood
Minster
Norcot
Southcote
Tilehurst
Whitley

West Berkshire District Wards, Reading West:

Calcot
Pangbourne
Purley-on-Thames
Theale
Westwood
Birch Copse

- 4.4.4 All polling stations within Reading East and Reading West boundaries had been confirmed as accessible and suitable for purpose. All polling stations were open from 7.00am to 10.00pm. The next review of polling stations is due to take place in early 2018.

- 4.4.5 We used two new polling places, housing three polling stations as follows:

- Battle A - Polling Place moved from Cranbury College to the Emmanuel Methodist Church, Oxford Road (two polling stations). This arrangement worked and will continue.
- Caversham MB - Polling Place moved from Amersham Road Youth & Community Centre to adjacent Caversham Children's Centre, due to building works at the former. This arrangement worked, due to the good will of the Children's Centre, staff and users, but was not ideal and the polling place will return to the refurbished Community Centre, now called The Weller Centre, for future elections.

4.5 Access

- 4.5.1 The Electoral Commission works closely with Mencap in the build up to the registration deadline and on polling day. They jointly designed a voting factsheet which was placed both on the Electoral Commission and Mencap websites and was circulated to all partners via their fortnightly Bulletin.

- 4.5.2 Reading polling station staff were made aware of dealing with all people attending the polling station in order to vote. During their training briefings, polling staff were made aware of the importance of:
- Setting up a polling station for complete accessibility for all.
 - Attending a voter who is visually impaired. Every Presiding Officer in their ballot box has a tool to enable a visually impaired elector to vote in privacy.
 - Awareness of special needs of any voter, including any companion attending with the voter with special needs.
- 4.5.3 In addition, an Elections Officer also works with the Shared Lives Scheme, which facilitates placements in non-professional carers own homes for vulnerable adults. The primary service user group is for adults with learning disabilities. Electoral information is actively made available for carers and service users, as carers are expected to advocate for their service users. Elections Officers were available on the elections phone lines for the duration of Polling Day in order to give support to any Presiding Officers calling in if they had any questions about supporting people with a learning difficulty to vote.
- 4.5.4 Although time was restricted, due to the short notice of the snap election, an Elections Officer was able to contact key partners, including local Community Centres, Libraries, Leisure Centres, ACRE & RCLC, and provided them with Electoral Commission information.
- 4.5.5 Reading Borough Council utilises the Handbook for Polling Station Staff supplied by the Electoral Commission which includes guidance and instruction in respect of people with disabilities. These handbooks are distributed to all Presiding Officers in advance of all elections at training and are included in their ballot boxes for use on Polling Day.

4.6 The Count and Ballot Box Receipt

- 4.6.1 As at previous elections, the Verification and Count for both constituencies were held at Rivermead Sports Centre. The Reading East count was held in the Bowls Hall; the Reading West count in the Sports Hall.
- 4.6.2 It should be noted that Rivermead had an existing and significant booking for Thursday 8 June 2017, which finished at 17.00. The staff at Rivermead, and Council staff, therefore had a restricted time slot in which to get the venue ready for the count by 22.00. This was a challenge to which both rose, and for which I am very grateful. It was identified as a serious potential risk in the election planning process, and was a matter of personal concern to me on election day.
- 4.6.3 The receipt of ballot boxes, at close of poll, was held in the Thames Suite of the Rivermead Leisure Centre. The success of the Verifications and Counts seriously depended upon the correct number of ballot boxes being received from the respective wards. Six receiving teams of two people each, in addition to the Electoral Services Manager and the Deputy Electoral Services Manager, using their ballot box number matrix to double check ballot boxes received as the Ballot Box Receipt progressed. This tightly-run exercise ensured that all ballot boxes were received safely. In addition, a team assisted Presiding Officers with boxes with their returned items. The Head Floor Controllers in the Count Halls were responsible for ensuring that the received ballot boxes were set next to the correct relevant Ward Count Tables. This controlled system worked excellently.

- 4.6.4 The last ballot box was received at 23.11pm, ie only 71 minutes after close of poll. This was a significant improvement on the 2015 general election, when the last ballot box was not received until 23.46pm.
- 4.6.5 There were 12 Count Tables in Reading East and 13 in Reading West. Sealed postal vote ballot boxes were brought to the Ward Count Tables in advance of the Verifications. These contained all postal ballot papers received up to and including the morning of polling day, where the postal ballot packs had been opened and scanned in advance, and the ballot papers put into sealed ballot boxes by constituency and date of receipt
- 4.6.6 During polling day, and at close of poll, a further 2,817 postal ballot packs (10.3% of the total issued, 12.2% of the total returned) were received from the Royal Mail, collected from polling stations, handed in at the Civic Offices, or handed in at polling stations and brought to the count by Presiding Officers. These all had to be opened, scanned and verified before the postal ballot papers could be returned to the count in sealed ballot boxes by constituency for verification and counting.

4.7 Verification and the Counts

- 4.7.1 The first stage in any count is to verify the number of ballot papers in each ballot box, against the total recorded on the ballot paper account for the polling station. Overnight on 8-9 June 2017 we were verifying the ballot papers for two elections, from 22.01 onwards on Thursday, 8 June 2017:
- Reading East UK Parliamentary - Reading Borough, Reading East Wards and Wokingham Council, Reading East Wards
 - Reading West UK Parliamentary - Reading Borough, Reading West Wards and West Berkshire Council, Reading West Wards
- 4.7.2 Verification commenced at 22.01 on Thursday, 8 June 2017.
- 4.7.3 As in previous elections, the verification and count were organised as a series of mini-counts, with count tables based on wards. However, the postal ballot papers were not returned or sorted by ward, and were put into ballot boxes and introduced to count tables based on date of receipt across the constituency. Therefore it is not possible to give an accurate breakdown of voting by ward.
- 4.7.4 Each count moved on to counting by candidate within two hours, as required by the Electoral Commission. Reading West commenced the Count at 00.16 and Reading East at 23.58.
- 4.7.5 The UK Parliamentary Election Counts were completed by 03.33 (Reading West) and 04.08 (Reading East) on Friday, 9 June 2017.
- 4.7.6 Whilst the Electoral Commission has yet to inform Reading Borough Council that the Electoral Services Team met all of its Electoral Commission Performance Standards in administering the 2017 elections, I am satisfied that the timings of the declarations of results in both Count Halls ensured as speedy and as thorough Verifications and Counts as possible, also given the added complications of:
- snap election;
 - cross-boundary polling stations;
 - cross-boundary postal votes;

- the tiredness but efficiency of staff;

4.7.7 Under normal circumstances, detailed and thorough project planning and preparation is undertaken from as early as 12 months in advance of an election. Despite the short notice of the snap election in June 2017, site visits to the Count Centre were made as soon as possible and IT requirements and specifications were discussed with Northgate IT. Count Spreadsheets were designed and competently used by the Top Tables, ensuring accurate results. Count Table Folders and Top Table Folders were prepared immediately following Nominations week, once candidates' names had been confirmed. Additional halls, tables, chairs, crash barriers, storage rooms, security, refreshments, microphones, stationery, counting staff and floor plans were also arranged within the exceptionally short timescales.

4.8 Election Debriefs - IER Registration of new Electors and new Postal Voters

4.8.1 The Electoral Services Team continues to face the challenges that IER brings. Previous debrief reports, produced by the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA), have stated that:

“Electoral administrators continue to deliver elections within an increasingly complex and challenging environment even when the odds are stacked against them”.

This was even more pertinent regarding the snap election held on 8 June 2017. Electoral administrators and suppliers were completely stretched from the moment the election was announced on the 18th April 2017, right up to polling day. Whereas the usual preparation period for a parliamentary election can be as much as 12 months leading up to polling day, electoral teams and suppliers had only just over 7 weeks to prepare for the snap election, with issues such as structures, processes, available resources and people delivering electoral registration and elections all to be taken into account.

4.8.2 I agree that the run-up to an election is now much more complex in order to meet the IER legislation. In the past, for example, it was routine for the Electoral Services team to move from registration activity to election activity after polling day - 6, (31 May 2017), that is, once the register is confirmed and can be printed for use at Polling Stations. The more complex method of registering to vote under the IER system has meant that anyone who submitted a registration application, either online or by returning a completed registration form, on the last day to register (22 May 2017) had to remain off of the register until their details had been matched with the Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) database, through the national IER-DS computer link, before that applicant's details could officially be placed on the electoral register.

4.8.3 In turn, this meant that anyone with a postal vote application, in such circumstances, would not be entitled to a postal vote until they had been registered and until the statutory 5 day determination period had passed. Their postal ballot paper pack could not be posted out therefore until on or after 31 May (polling day - 6), in case any objections were received during the determination period. As a result, this had implications for electors going on holiday, or overseas electors who had registered on the last day but requested their postal vote to be sent abroad. This meant that in some cases there were only six days for the postal vote pack to be posted out abroad, completed and returned in order for it to be counted.

4.8.4 This is a national challenge. The same AEA debrief report has also acknowledged that:

“The processing of checking IER documentary evidence and the attestation process up until day - 6 had significant staff resource implications at a time when at previous elections those staff would have moved off registration to prepare for the elections after day -12.”

- 4.8.5 One of the practical implications, experienced at the 2017 Elections, as at previous elections, was that we had to delay the printing of the Polling Station Registers so that the hard copy registers were as up-to-date as possible when collected by the Presiding Officers. However, new electors were being added to the Registers after this, right up to Polling day, as DWP confirmation of individual electors was received. This required further registration updates after the printing of the Polling Station registers, which had to be securely emailed to the Presiding Officers, showing qualifying electors’ names, addresses and poll numbers on them, in spreadsheet format, so that the newly registered electors would be enabled to vote in the 2017 Elections. The registration administration continued up to and during Polling Day, when it became necessary to phone the Presiding Officers if a new name needed to be added/deleted/amended to the register. Electors qualifying for a postal vote at this late stage had to have their entry on the Polling Station register noted that they were absent voters, not polling station voters.
- 4.8.6 In practice, this meant that any new postal vote application forms received and processed on or by the deadline date of 23 May 2017, (a date that is both 5 working days before the date of determination and the deadline for receipt of completed postal vote application forms, known as polling day -11) in respect of newly registered electors, or electors awaiting a positive match from the IER-DS database, did not have a postal vote pack automatically printed for them by Electoral Reform Services (ERS), our printers.
- 4.8.7 Once a person who had applied to register and to vote by post had confirmation from synchronisation with the IER - DS database that they could be registered under IER, and could therefore receive a postal vote, the Electoral Services Team were then obliged to make up a postal vote pack for them from blank stationery and then be responsible for ensuring that the postal vote pack could be delivered on time to the elector.
- 4.8.8 The activities described in the above three paragraphs were introduced as a direct result of the introduction of IER in 2014. They required the adoption of additional resource- and time-consuming administrative procedures to keep on top of them. They also generated an increased number of enquiries and complaints from electors who did not understand, or appreciate, that the Council was prevented by the IER Regulations from processing their new registration or postal vote applications to a quicker timescale (as would have been the case in previous years).
- 4.8.9 As a consequence, the Electoral Services Team successfully arranged, and fully staffed in advance, a total of four Electoral Services Teams, in addition to the postal vote opening team and the postal vote hub:
- *The IER Registration Team* - [dealing with] processing and approving registration applications received before deadline but not yet matched under IER. This continued up to and including Polling Day. In total, since the announcement of the election on 18 April 2017 and the registration deadline on 22 May 2017, Reading Electoral Services Team received, scanned and processed a total of 15,568 changes in registration, of which 5,606 were new registration applications. Approximately half of these were received in the last week before the final deadline. Processing by

matching with the IER-DS database continued until Polling Day. In addition, a total of 501 new postal vote application forms were received, scanned and processed actually on the Registration and Postal deadline days of 22nd and 23rd May 2017. Again, further processing of postal votes continued up to and during Polling Day, with the last postal vote packs being delivered by hand at 20.00 on Polling Day.

- *The Postal Vote Pack Creation and Delivery Team* - based both in the Civic Offices Reception booth and at Darwin Close. These teams worked closely together and created and delivered postal vote packs once the determination date had passed, and once new registrations were confirmed, then delivered them by hand to Reading addresses. They also undertook these tasks in respect of lost and spoiled replacement postal votes. This required queueing in the Post Office for stamps for the overseas electors' postal votes so that they could receive them in good time. They continually procured postal stamps and attended Post Offices in order to continue to send local postal vote packs. As Polling Day approached, these teams got into cars and delivered postal vote packs around Reading.
- *The Election Preparation Team* - based at 2-4 Darwin Close. They prepared the ballot box documents and met and advised the Presiding Officers when they collected their ballot boxes. They prepared Ballot Box Receipt briefing notes, check lists and signs, Verification and Count Trays and Folders, Top Table Folders, Polling Station Inspector documents, Head Floor Controller and Floor Controller instructions, and Count Supervisor instructions. They received and distributed ballot papers and Corresponding Numbers Lists to Reading Borough, Wokingham (Reading East) and West Berkshire (Reading West).
- *The Emergency Proxy Application Team* - based at Floor 2, 2-4 Darwin Close. One of my DRO's kindly supported this function, allowing legitimate approval of any claims. A total of 18 emergency proxy votes were allowed for Reading East and 11 for Reading West for the 2017 Elections.

4.8.10 In addition, a Deputy Returning Officer (DRO) worked with the above teams to respond to complaints received which the Electoral Services Team passed on to me for resolution. In total, I responded directly to 10 complaints about this year's election process, a surprisingly small number given the complexities of IER described above. I believe that this reflects the thorough and efficient project planning and operational methods employed by the Electoral Services Teams.

4.9 Cross-boundary Issues

4.9.1 In running the Parliamentary elections in Reading East and Reading West, the Council had to work with the Electoral Services in Wokingham and West Berkshire. This was a common pattern across the country. The AEA debriefing report stated that:

"Parliamentary elections bring with them cross-boundary issues because a large number of parliamentary constituencies cross over local authority boundaries. The impact of cross boundaries includes the giving and taking in of electors from other local authority areas which can have implications for the administration of the elections, such as software systems, poll cards, postal votes, ballot papers, polling station staff appointments and training, delivery of ballot boxes and the count. Combined polls also add to the complexity of dealing with cross-boundary issues. EROs and ROs agree and adopt a contract or some form of memorandum

of understanding in relation to the administration of cross-boundary elections and work closely together in partnership.”

4.9.2 Reading liaised closely with Wokingham and West Berkshire. We attended a meeting at Wokingham, with Berkshire colleagues, in advance of the elections to identify possible issues. Post-election, a de-briefing session has taken place, hosted by Wokingham Borough Council, with Berkshire colleagues, to identify future improvements, such as:

(1) The transfer of postal vote elector data between authorities.

All three authorities now use the same software system - Xpress. However, despite receiving assurances from the software company that the data could be transferred electronically with ease, in the 2015 election, this did not happen in practice, and we had to revert to the employment of data USBs. In 2017, we still experienced this problem, but had anticipated and therefore prepared for this. The impact was to delay the scanning of returned postal vote packs from Wokingham and West Berkshire postal voters, but due to planning, a delay did not occur in 2017.

(2) Staffing of Polling stations

At previous general elections, Wokingham and West Berkshire have taken responsibility for engaging the staff in the polling stations in their wards. West Berkshire continued to do this, but Wokingham did not. Reading therefore had to recruit staff to cover polling stations in the Wokingham wards in Reading East at short notice.

4.10 Ballot Box Receipt leading into the Verifications and Counts

4.10.1 The professionally focussed and detailed project planning in advance of Ballot Box Receipt meant that all ballot boxes were accounted for and all relevant documents collected. Specialist staff were used to move ballot boxes, on receipt, to the correct Ward Count Tables in the Count Halls as quickly as possible.

4.10.2 The use of experienced Head Controllers and Floor Controllers helped the proceedings progress smoothly. The two Top Tables staffed by experienced Auditors and Accountants meant that no re-counts were necessary and the results were accurate.

4.10.3 Reading successfully used its ‘mini-count’ system again this year. The Verification and Count exercises are divided down into smaller parts by count table, thus allowing the control table to audit and double check the totals of ballot papers by count table as the Verifications and Counts progress.

4.10.4 A de-brief meeting took place on 18th September 2017, with myself, one of my Deputy ROs and the Electoral Services Team, including staff members responsible for Postal Votes opening and scanning hubs. Future operational improvements were identified and discussed.

4.11 Staffing

4.11.1 For the June 2017 elections, the Elections and Electoral Services team had a permanent and temporary total establishment of 3.49 Full-time Equivalent staff plus up to 7 casual “as and when” staff.

4.11.2 Approximately 900 jobs were successfully staffed by the Electoral Services Team, who had to commence the 2017 election staffing project as soon as the election was

announced on 18th April 2017. The usual number of jobs for one local election is normally 500, so filling this much higher number of jobs had been a complex and long-term task, especially in view of the short notice and the added pressure of having to find a significantly higher number of polling staff, but was successfully implemented.

4.11.3 The postal vote project was run in two parts. The opening of the postal vote statements and ballot papers project was run by two Legal Executives. The postal vote statement scanning verification project was run by a Senior Legal Executive with support from the Northgate IT Department and one Deputy Returning Officer. I was responsible for the final adjudication on postal vote statements.

4.11.4 I noted at the Electoral Services Debrief, held on 18 September 2017, that staff had performed highly successfully in very difficult and hectic circumstances. It was also noted that staff were generally tired during the Election period and especially once they had arrived at the Polling Day Verifications and Counts.

4.11.5 On Polling Day, Reading engaged a total of 110 Presiding Officers working across Reading East and Reading West constituencies, broken down as follows:

Reading East within Reading Borough:	42
Reading West within Reading Borough:	33
Reading East within Wokingham Council boundaries:	14
Reading West within West Berkshire boundaries:	21

The number of poll clerks employed was as follows:

Reading East within Reading Borough boundaries:	85
Reading West within Reading Borough boundaries:	69
Reading East within Wokingham boundaries:	23
Reading West within West Berkshire boundaries:	41

West Berkshire Council engaged their own polling staff for stations within their boundary. As mentioned in 4.9.2 above, this year Wokingham did not.

4.11.6 We engaged a total of 32 staff to open postal votes, at 12 sessions (with a maximum of 15 staff at each session). We had 5 staff plus 2 IT staff at 11 postal vote verification sessions. We had approximately 160 staff involved in the UK Parliamentary Verifications and Counts, in various activities, together with Promotions and Rivermead staff. Please note - many of the staff involved in different processes were the same people.

4.11.7 I ran 6 training sessions for polling staff, and 1 for count staff. All people were paid for attending, and turnout was good. I chaired the training for the Top Table staff and Polling Station Inspectors. An experienced Presiding Officer ran a mop-up training session for polling station staff who could not attend other events.

4.12 Fraud

4.12.1 Concerns about fraud, in particular with postal votes, were an issue in some elections in the years following the introduction of postal voting on demand, over 10 years ago. This

year, as in recent years, there were no issues in relation to fraud, either perceived or actual.

4.13 Website

4.13.1 The website uploads were received and uploaded successfully by the Web and Promotions team. It worked well, with Notices of Election and Persons Nominated etc. plus declared results being published to deadline.

4.14 Agents

4.14.1 I held a meeting with Agents before the start of the election period, to explain how I would be running the elections. The efficient planning of documents for the Agents' meeting well in advance worked well and this process will be used again in 2018.

4.14.2 Full Registers were made available at the Agents Meeting prior to the receipt of Nominations forms.

4.15 Poll Cards

4.15.1 A two-team of two process for poll-card proof-reading worked very well in 2017 and will be used again in 2018.

4.15.2 Poll cards were issued in early May 2017. Reading Borough Council issued its own poll cards and the cross-boundary authorities issued their own poll cards.

4.16 Nominations Processes

4.16.1 Electoral Services continued good practice by allocating a team to input and check Nominations and an additional team to meet with Agents and liaise between the Inputting Team and Agents. Two DROs in addition to myself checked and proof-read all Nominations, ensuring the correct documentation and complete forms were received in respect of each set of Nomination papers. Again, Reading was successful with its Nominations processes and procedures.

4.17 Ballot Paper Proof Reading

4.17.1 The now established three team system of proof-reading ballot papers worked excellently with the DRO approval and my final approval as Returning Officer being achieved in situ, at Darwin Close.

4.17.2 Reading's party emblems were correct on the ballot papers we submitted to our printers, as they were the most up-to-date emblems uploaded to the Electoral Commission website, thanks to the Reading Nominations Inputting Team. Reading directly accessed the party emblems from the Electoral Commission website for Reading's ballot papers.

4.18 Telephone Contact and the Call Centre

4.18.1 The telephone call statistics were fully monitored. The following were worth noting:

- 344 calls were received directly by the Call Centre on Polling Day, with constant support of the Electoral Services Team, who answered calls all day until 22.00, close of poll.

- 99% of the calls were answered within the Council wide service level of 60 seconds.
- The majority of calls were received between 09.00 and 19.00.

4.18.2 The Electoral Services Team fully staffed their telephones from 06.00 until 22.00 on Polling Day, and team members were continually available on their mobile phones during the Verifications and Count. In the run-up to Polling Day, one additional agent in situ in the Electoral Services Team alleviated the constant pressure of working on IER registration and taking telephone calls at the same time.

4.18.3 It was acknowledged at the Electoral Services Debrief that the Call Centre and Electoral Services Teams did an excellent job answering calls. Calls were also answered directly by the Polling Station Inspectors and the Electoral Services Teams at the Civic and Count venues.

5. 2018 ELECTIONS

5.1 Local Borough Elections - 3 May 2018

5.1.1 The next Local Borough Elections are due to be held on 3 May 2018 and will include 15 of Reading's wards. There will be no Local Election in Mapledurham. The Local Borough Elections will be run as usual with the "first past the post" being the candidate who is elected, per Ward.

5.1.2 The Electoral Commission, in a previous Election Debrief report, stated that Polling stations in England, Scotland and Wales will be required to provide proof of voters' identity before being issued with a ballot paper and allowed to vote, as has been required in Northern Ireland since 2002. The Electoral Commission is continuing to develop detailed proposals and costings for implementing an identification scheme in time for the May 2019 elections.

6. 2017 REGISTRATION PROCESS - 2018 REGISTER

6.1 2018 Annual Canvass

6.1.1 The 2018 annual electoral registration canvass started on 14 July 2017, and will run until 22 November 2017. Household Enquiry Forms (HEFs) were sent out to 71,892 households in Reading, landing on doormats on or around 18 July 2017. These were followed up with two reminders, the first sent by post in August 2017, and the second delivered by door-to-door canvassers. If no response to HEF's are received at 31 October 2017, a further and final reminder HEF will be sent for completion. Any additional or new residents noted on a completed HEF form will be sent an Invitation to Register (ITR) letter (which is the registration form). Two reminders for non-responses to ITRs will be sent. Door-to-door Canvassers will deliver the 3rd reminder ITR. If no response to the third ITR a requirement to register final letter will be sent. At all points in the canvass, people will be encouraged to register on-line.

6.1.2 The new (2018) register will be published on 1 December 2017.

6.1.3 At the time of writing - week 17, ending 10 November 2017 - the canvass had had responses from 58,934 households, or 81.80%.

6.1.4 I shall submit a more detailed report on the outcome of the 2017 annual canvass to your meeting in February 2018.

6.2 Household Notification Letters

- 6.2.1 The Electoral Commission have identified sending a letter to all households listing who was registered to vote at that particular address as a key activity which could contribute to helping Returning Officers ensure that their registers were as accurate and complete as possible ahead of future elections. This 'household notification letter' (HNL) shows who is registered to vote at that address and prompts anyone who is not yet registered to do so. For obvious reasons, this activity did not take place ahead of the snap parliamentary election. This activity is scheduled for February 2018, in preparation for the Local Borough elections in May 2018.

7. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

2015 Debrief reports from the Electoral Commission, the Association of Electoral Administrators and Reading Borough Council Electoral Services.

IER Further information

Electors are steered towards the register on line option and business cards to this effect are distributed (www.gov.uk/register-to-vote). If they would like to know more about the changes to the electoral registration system they are encouraged to visit the 'Your Vote Matters' on the 'Gov' website.

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL
REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

TO:	POLICY COMMITTEE		
DATE:	27 NOVEMBER 2017	AGENDA ITEM:	11
TITLE:	BUSINESS RATES BERKSHIRE PILOT & POOL		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR LOVELOCK	PORTFOLIO:	LEADERSHIP
SERVICE:	FINANCE	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
LEAD OFFICER:	ALAN CROSS	TEL:	0118 9372058
	HEAD OF FINANCE	E-MAIL:	Alan.Cross@reading.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report asks the committee to endorse the joint Berkshire Pilot Bid for 100% Business Rates Pooling. A successful bid is forecast to bring additional resources to the Council and generally to the Berkshire area in 2018/19.
- 1.2 The Committee is also asked to approve Reading being part of a Berkshire Business Rates Pool as part of the pilot, and authorise the Director of Finance to take decisions about whether to pool in other circumstances and agree the arrangements for the pool with the pool partners after consultation with the Leader and Chair of Audit & Governance Committee.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That Policy Committee endorses the joint Berkshire Pilot Bid for 100% Business Rates Pooling and agree to be part of the linked Berkshire Business Rates Pool and authorise the Director of Finance to take decisions about whether to pool in other circumstances and agree the arrangements for the pool with the pool partners after consultation with the Leader of the Council and Chair of Audit & Governance Committee (in all future circumstances where we propose joining a business rates pool, subject to reporting to the next available Policy Committee).

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The main relevant Policy is that linked to ensuring financial stability of the Council. A successful business rates pilot bid is forecast to generate additional resources in 2018/19.

4. THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 Early in 2017 Berkshire Leaders wrote to DCLG asking for a Berkshire pilot following the introduction of 100% business rates pilots in 2017/18 and a Government announcement that there were likely to be additional pilots from 2018/19. A letter of support from then Berkshire MPs was also sent. The response the Secretary of State to MPS said "My department will shortly publish more information on the process and

criteria for authorities that are interested in applying to become a pilot. I look forward to your application"

4.2 The General Election and its aftermath delayed that publication until the end of September, with bids then being invited for a 2018/19 year only pilot by Friday 27 October. Pilots were required to "help explore options ... for the design of future local government finance reforms" and the prospectus clearly states that the Government "expects some retained income from growth to be invested to encourage further growth across the area".

4.3 Other key requirements of pilots included

- (i) Pilot areas need to operate as a business rates pool (and have to indicate whether they wish to pool if the pilot bid is not successful)
- (ii) Pilots were initially asked to indicate whether they were willing to proceed without a "no detriment" clause (as all 2017/18 pilots had benefitted from this, so those pilot are "risk free"). Two days before the bid deadline, the Government withdrew this requirement.
- (iii) Successful pilots have a pool safety net at 97% of (pool) baseline, rather than the 92.5% of individual authority baseline
- (iv) Pilots have to forego revenue support grant (RSG), (but this is adjusted for in the tariff calculation on a pound for pound basis)
- (v) Pilots do not pay a levy on growth above baseline

4.4 Berkshire Response

Chief Finance Officers of the Berkshire unitaries enlisted the help of the LEP and a nationally recognised consultancy working in LA grant distribution issues to help consider the merits of, and develop a Berkshire bid. The LEP provided the information in the draft bid around local growth priorities to generate more growth and the consultants the financial modelling and general advice about the bid.

4.5 What happens if our bid is successful?

Currently, 50% of the rates we collect goes to government as their basic share, 1% to the Fire authority, and from the 49% retained share all Berkshire authorities pay a tariff that is up to 24%, so for example in Reading's case we only retain 25% of collected rates at baseline levels. We, and some of the other Berkshire authorities also receive some (much reduced in recent years) RSG. At the year end there is calculation that compares the actual rates received to a government baseline level, and all authorities pay a levy on the growth that results in the above effective split. As a consequence, Reading loses half its growth above baseline to the levy.

4.6 Pilots will see their tariff adjusted by the Government's 50% share less any RSG they receive on a pound for pound basis, so whilst the "retained share" will rise from 49% to 99%, on a cash basis the tariff will also rise by the baseline amount. However, all Berkshire authorities actually collect more than the baseline amount, so by piloting the County area will retain

- (i) All the growth in the Government's 50% share above baseline (without a pilot), and
- (ii) pilots will not have to pay the year end levy calculation

Our consultant estimated that over the six Berkshire authorities the sum of the amounts in 2018/19 is estimated at up to £35m. However they also advised that a significant proportion of this gain should be used to generate local growth and therefore the bid proposed that 70% is set aside for that purpose. The strategic pot so

created will be run by the LEP who have identified the Reading-Wokingham MRT as one of two priorities for investment, the Slough Transit Network being the other.

4.7 What are the risks and what else happens?

The bid also says that everyone will be protected at the same level they would get if there were not a pilot. After that the 30% LA share (above what we could get without a pilot) would be initially be shared equally until everyone gets £1m, then shares are essentially pro rata gains. The intention and expectation is that if everyone's gain is above £1m, we keep our individual gains less the 70% LEP share. On the basis of the calculations in the bid, Reading's additional retained share should be just over £2m in 2018/19, which will help reduce the budget gap in that year.

4.8 As indicated above, Government originally asked if pilots would proceed without a "no detriment clause". Our consultant modelled the impact of a single authority losing a lot of rates so the whole pilot lost and losses of 20-40% were needed, significantly higher than anyone in Berkshire has ever experienced, or can reasonably conceive doing, so the risk is considered to be very low. All but one Berkshire authority (including Reading) are currently significantly above baseline, and have a very low risk of falling below baseline. The authority that is not in this position does not pose a significant risk to the overall position.

4.9 How is Government going to judge the bids it gets and when will we hear?

Approximately 20 bids have been submitted, and other than the criteria mentioned above we do not know how government will decide. However, we know that Civil Servants recognise that there was a cost to Government, and the considerations are understood to be linked to the Chancellor's budget and that subsequent Local Government Finance Settlement. We expect the announcements no later than when that is published in December.

4.10 Why is this Approval being sought now?

Given the tight timescale to develop and submit proposals, no other authority had the chance to have the proposal formally approved through a Cabinet/Committee/Council process. The bid stated that "each of the Berkshire authorities will make their own arrangements for approving the decision to apply for 100% pilot status in 2018-19 as soon as practicable".

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 A pilot will primarily contribute to the aim of remaining financially sustainable to deliver these service priorities. However, as indicated above it will also provide infrastructure to support the economy. The additional resources will contribute indirectly to other aims too.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

6.2 *Not applicable to the submission of this proposal*

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.1 *Not directly applicable to the submission of this proposal*

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 *Business Rate Pilots are being proposed under existing legislation, as the Government is not currently planning to introduce new legislation.*

9. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 *As indicated above*

10. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

10.1 *Bidding prospectus from DCLG*

10.2 Berkshire Pilot Bid of 27/10/17

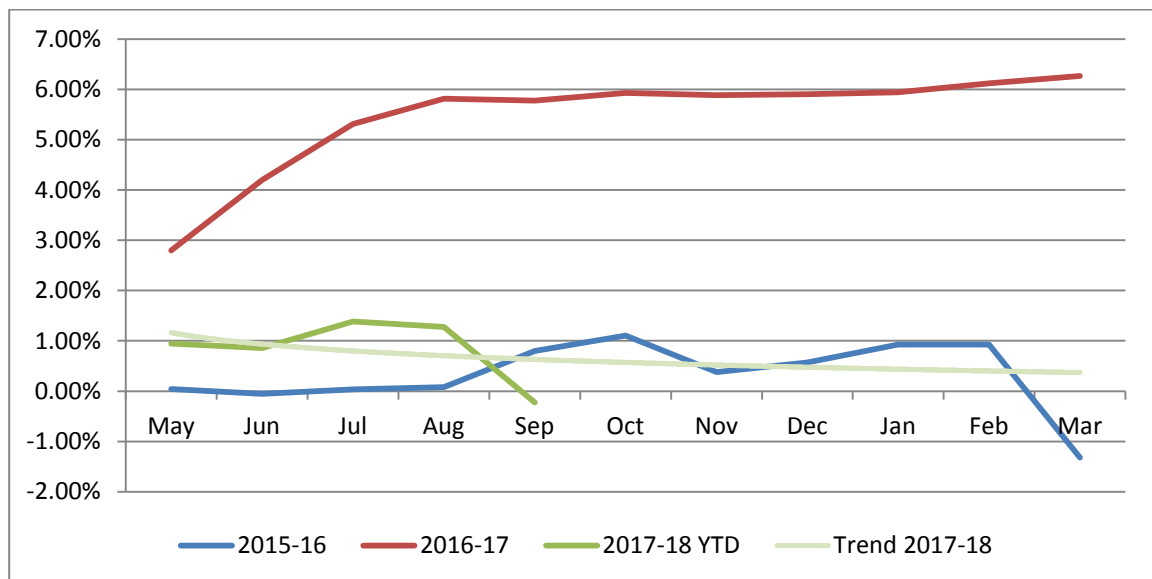
READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

TO:	POLICY COMMITTEE		
DATE:	27 NOVEMBER 2017	AGENDA ITEM:	12
TITLE:	BUDGET MONITORING 2017/18		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLORS	PORTFOLIO:	FINANCE
SERVICE:	LOVELOCK/ PAGE	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
	FINANCIAL		
LEAD OFFICER:	PETER LEWIS	TEL:	01189372058 (x72058)
JOB TITLE:	STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF FINANCE	E-MAIL:	Peter.Lewis@reading.gov.uk

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report sets out the projected Council revenue budget outturn position for 2017/18 based on actual, committed and projected expenditure for the Council as at the end of September 2017. It also contains information on the capital programme, capital receipts and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).
- 1.2 It is projected that, due to a variety of reasons, the revenue budget will be underspent by £0.3m as at the year end, without using the remaining contingency of £1.6m set aside to manage unexpected pressures and savings shortfalls. There remain some serious concerns. In particular,
- 1.2.1 the total of negative variances is £8.4m, which includes some projection of further pressures on care places through to the year-end;
- 1.2.2 many of the positive variances and mitigations are not ongoing, so will not provide relief for any of the negative variances that are ongoing into 2018/19 and beyond. This produces a pressure in 2018/19 of £6.4m at this stage, some of which is a projection of growth in children's social care demand into that year. This pressure will need to be dealt with in the budget setting process for 2018/19;
- 1.3 These circumstances combined led to service directors identifying immediate steps to reduce spending in 2017/18. Further strong management is required in order to prevent further overspending.
- 1.4 In considering this matter, it is helpful to consider the trends of previous years. The following graph shows the percentage variance to budget for the whole Council for the last two financial years and for the year-to-date with a trend line to the end of the year.



1.5 2015/16 saw a fairly flat line through the year and then an eventual underspend, whereas in 2016/17 there was a rapidly escalating and significant overspend that remained to the year end. The projection for 2017/18 is of a much lesser quantum, but the trend, particularly in children's social care, is very concerning.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

2.1. Policy Committee to note that based on the position at the end of September 2017, budget monitoring forecasts that the budget will be underspent by £0.3m, without using the remaining contingency of £1.6m.

2.2. Policy Committee to note that additional proposals have been identified in order to reduce the projected spend in 2017/18.

3 BUDGET MONITORING

3.1 The results of the Directorate budget monitoring exercises are summarised below. The projected impact into 2018/19 is also illustrated (note: children's services have also projected an ongoing increase in demand into 2018/19)

	Negative Variances £'000s	Positive Variances £'000s	Remedial Action £'000s	Net Variation £'000s	% variance budget	Savings Delivered 2017/18 ²	18/19 impact £000
Environment & Neighbourhood Services	1,465	-2,258	-560	-1,353	-4.7%	-5,903	876 (see*1)
Childrens, Education & Early Help Services/	3,190	-100	-400	2,690	6.8%	-1,868	3,800
Adults Care and Health Services inc. Public Health	2,162	-542	-1,441	179	0.5%	-3,267	1,767
Corporate Support Services	1,619	-1,396	-496	-273	-2.1%	-2,311	-37
Directorate Sub total	8,436	-4,296	-2,897	1,243		-13,349	6,406
Treasury		-250		-250			
Corporate Budgets		-1,280		-1,280			
Total	8,436	-5,826	-2,897	-287		-13,349	6,406

*1 The £876k 18/19 impact for DENS includes £284k for a 17/18 saving now re-profiled to 19/20

² Total of savings classified as blue, green and amber which are delivered on track to be delivered. The whole savings programme for 2017/18 is currently £14,619K.

3.2 Environment & Neighbourhood Services

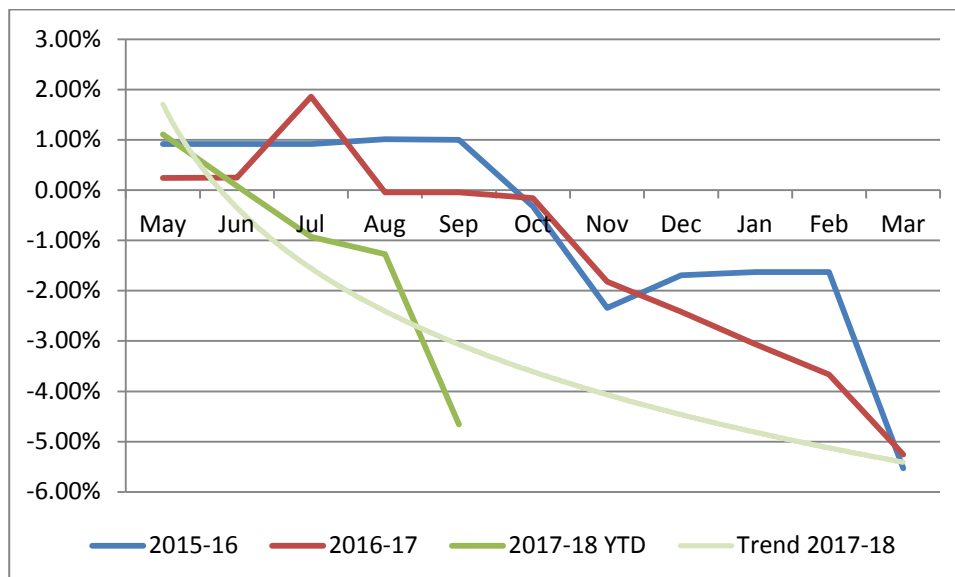
Based on the information currently available, the directorate is reporting a net positive variance against budget of £853k. However, this is the consequence of a much more significant range of variances across a range of budgets including increased costs of £0.6m, reduced income of £0.3m and as yet unrealised savings of £0.6m. The £0.5m change from last month's reported figure is, in part, due to an agreed re-profiling of savings leading to £0.5m of the contingency to be used to offset these savings during the 17-18 financial year. Whilst this improves the DENS position the impact on the overall corporate position is net nil.

The gross projected overspend, before mitigations; in DENS is £1.5m. £1.1m of this arises in Transport & Streetcare (T&S), where half the adverse variances arises from unrealised savings, notably a delay in the fleet management saving (£143k), and the off street car parking saving (£175k). T&S also has increased costs, such as a one-off purchase of car parking equipment (£130k), and in some areas reduced enforcement income (£100k) in comparison to budget. Planning, Development & Regulatory Services are

predicting an adverse variance of £0.20m with the majority of this pressure being due to external legal costs in relation to a noise nuisance case. A one-off pressure of £0.1m relating to recent office moves has been identified but will be funded through the change fund as part of the transformation programme; therefore this has not been included as a pressure for the purpose of this report. Economic & Cultural Development (ECD) are also predicting an adverse variance (£0.2m), relating to reduced income in comparison to budget across a range of service areas.

These overspends are compensated by £2.3m of positive variances. Of this, £1.1m is increased income, most of which arises in T&SC, and include £0.4m additional on street car parking income and £0.36m additional income from green waste.

£1.2m arises from reduced costs in T&SC, ECD & Housing & Neighbourhood Services (H&NS), notably for T&SC £0.4m across the park & ride contract & concessionary fares and £0.5 for H&NS. Within H&NS bed and breakfast use has reduced from 144 rooms in March to 86 rooms in use at the end of September, reflecting needs presenting and a concerted effort to prevent homelessness; increase supply and access to affordable housing; intensive casework with individual households; and effective market management/cost control. With better than anticipated first quarter performance alongside the Lowfield Road temporary accommodation development due to come online at the beginning of 2018, the service is aiming to finish the 2017-18 financial year with no more than a total of 50 occupied rooms. This would lead to an underspend of approximately £0.48m. The chart below shows the current and previous years' trends in budget monitoring.



3.3 Children, Education & Early Help Services

The Directorate is currently reporting a negative variance of £3.09m for the year, which represents 7.85% of the annual budget. This negative variance is largely attributable to the increased complexity of the looked after children

(LAC) population amounting to £2.92m variance. The use of residential placements has increased significantly during the year.

There has been a change in profile of the LAC population as a result of increased risk in the criminal exploitation of vulnerable children, which falls under the category of (Child Sexual Exploitation) CSE County Lines. CSE County Lines (i.e. cross-boundary) is evidenced through drugs, violence, gangs, safeguarding, criminal and sexual exploitation, modern day slavery and missing persons. The Directorate has been operating within the Home Office guidelines for CSE County Lines, with a link attached below, for a greater understanding of the issues.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/626770/63505_HO_Child_exploitation_FINAL_web_2_.pdf

In addition to this, the issue of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and Forced Marriage are on the increase, with a recent example of the Service having to manage the removal of a young person who was a flight risk. There has also been an increase in the number of young people at risk from Honour Based Violence.

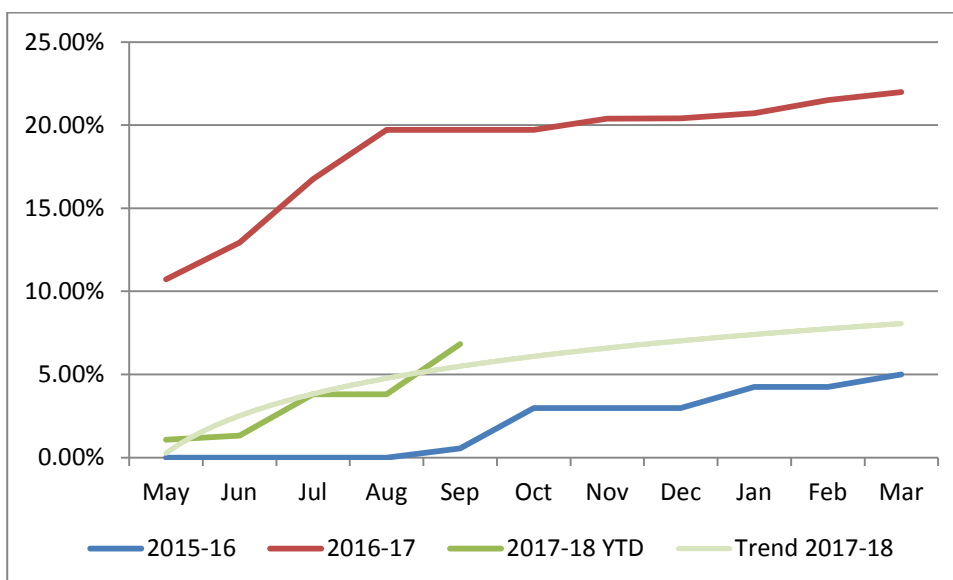
The increase in the sex offences within the LAC population has resulted in 2 young people, aged 13 and 14 to be placed in residential provision as an alternative to a Secure Training Centre. The typical difference in weekly cost between these types of provision is approximately £3,200, an average IFA placement costs £800 per week compared to average Residential placements costs of £4,000 per week.

The outturn projection of £2.92m overspend includes a future demand prediction of £800k where placement types will change to a residential to ensure the above Home Office guidelines are adhered to. This has an impact on the pressure for 2018/19, which is calculated as £3.8m. This includes an estimate of £1.2m for anticipated demographic changes in 2018/19.

In addition to the LAC negative variance, the Directorate is also facing a £270k pressure for home to school transport for SEN pupils. In September there has been an increase in Reading pupils being placed at The Avenue School, which has increased the demand for SEN home to school transport.

The above negative is offset by a positive variance of £100k from the early implementation of the Business Admin restructure required by 1st April 2018 to achieve the proposed savings for 2018/19.

The paragraphs above describe the impact for the General Fund Services, however the Directorate is also currently anticipating an in year deficit of £2.5m relating to the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). This will increase the deficit of the DSG to £3.9m which will be carried forward into 2018/19. The implementation of a new SEN strategy is intended to reduce the burden on the SEN budget when the new School Funding Formula is introduced in 2018/19.



3.4 Adult Care & Health Services

Largely due to pressures on care placements in Learning Disabilities and Mental Health, a gross overspend of £2.162m is projected for DACHS, after savings of £0.520m forecast, though not yet delivered, have been taken into account. The most significant pressures are in Learning Disability Services £1.3m and Mental Health £0.5m and occurs across all types of service provision, although particularly in residential and community services.

For the Learning Disabilities Service, the overspend is due to an additional £0.638m on residential placements because the average cost of placements are £48 per week per client higher than budgeted and client numbers are around 8 more than the budget. There is also a £0.649m overspend on Community Services which is related to the clients and demography but is difficult to assign to exact client numbers. The forecast includes a contingency for transition costs still to come through before the end of the year of £0.250m.

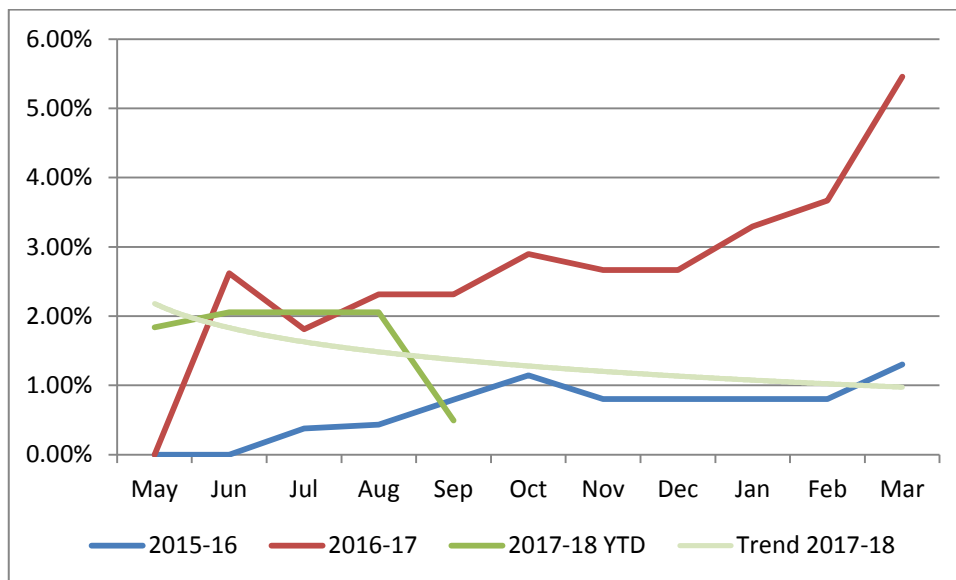
The adverse variance on Mental Health Services breaks down as £0.112m on placements in nursing homes due to an additional 3 clients being placed over the budgeted number of clients, £0.347m on residential placements based on an additional 9 clients over budget and an overspend of £37K on Community Services.

So far the Directorate has identified £1.373m of positive variances and remedial action to reduce the gross overspend. The main remedial actions identified to reduce the deficit have included reworking the use of elements of the Public Health grant (£0.365m), keeping inflation awards to a minimum with providers (£0.250m) and trying to find savings from either reworking service delivery or holding vacancies (£0.600m). Better contract management should yield additional Continuing Health Care (CHC) funding, although most of this is expected to be historical and will be one-off. The Directorate has also retained housing benefit funding of £0.121m to reduce pressure on extra care and proposes capitalising costs of implementing new computer systems and software (£0.056m),. The remaining pressure after

remedial action is £0.789m, which is an increase of £0.039m on the position reported in August. As most of the remedial action is one-off it is forecast that the pressure on 2018/19 budgets currently stands at £1.767m.

Further remedial actions are still being sought but it is not currently expected that these will reduce the overall forecast position back to budget by the year end. It should also be noted that £0.300m of savings remain amber/red and are at risk of not being delivered. These are within the project for reviewing and right-sizing packages. Further work is ongoing to confirm the expected savings from these plans and to cover any shortfall by increasing savings within the other transformation projects and reviewing the resources available to review packages.

In addition issues have been identified with the links between the Mosaic and Fusion systems which could potentially impact on care payments forecasts. This is currently under review and could result in further spend pressure, subject to the outcome of these investigations.



3.5 Corporate Support Services

The directorate is currently reporting a £127k overspend against a £13.1m budget; however there are large variances underlying this position which are detailed below.

The most significant variance sits within the Childcare Lawyers service; this is a Berkshire wide joint arrangement operated by Reading Borough Council. Increased caseloads and duration of cases due to their complexity means the team is employing interims and agency staff over and above establishment at an additional cost of £976K. These costs are recharged to the other five Berkshire LA's, including administration fees, causing a positive variance on income which offsets the negative variance on costs. The RBC element of the Joint Arrangement is currently expected to be in line with the budget.

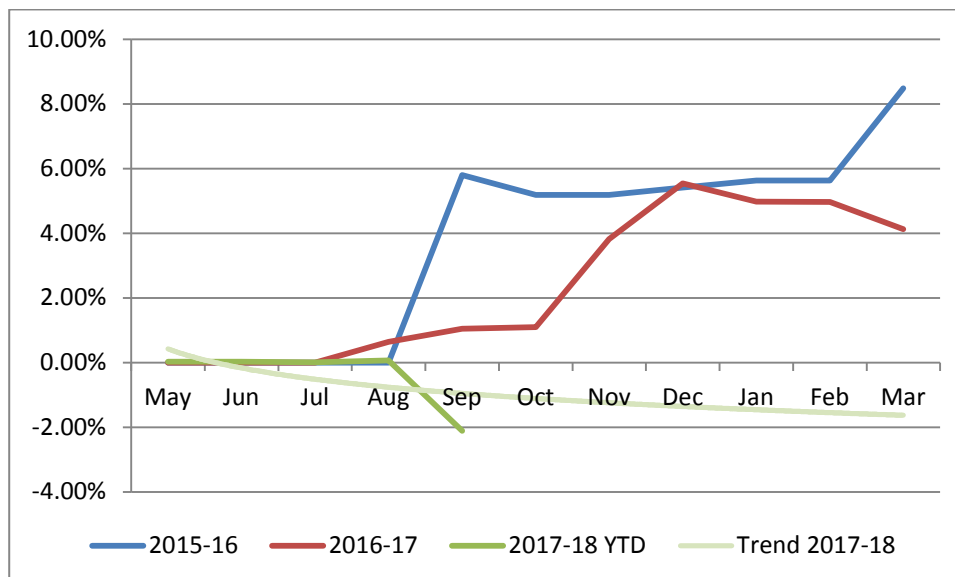
The digitisation saving that is currently held within the Corporate budget is being shown as a pressure (£155K) whilst more detailed work is ongoing to

identify how this saving will be achieved. In order to deliver this saving CMT have recently agreed to give targets to each of the directorates to work towards digitisation.

The Finance & Accountancy Team are currently undergoing a period of transformation with a new structure expected to be in place by the start of 2018/19. As part of the future for Finance, it is essential that the underlying processes and practices for preparing the 2017/18 accounts are improved to ensure that the accounts closure for 2017/18 can be achieved on time. A Chief Accountant has been recruited to start at the beginning of January to provide technical accounting leadership. During this period of transformation for Finance & Accountancy, additional interim staff have been brought in to cover vacant posts and provide stability to the team at an additional cost of £248K. It is also anticipated that there will be additional external audit fees of around £100K arising from the additional work that EY have carried out on the audit of 2016/17 accounts. Some of these additional costs will lead to long-term improvements in Finance, and organisational savings so could be considered for funding from the change fund in due course.

The overspends in the directorate are mitigated by vacancies being held in the Policy and Voluntary Sector Team and in the Learning and Workforce Development Team (£104K). There is also a non-recurrent saving (£180K) on the elections budget for 2017/18 as it is a fallow year.

The vacancies in the Policy and Voluntary Sector have been put forward as ongoing positive variances into 2018/19. The net position for Corporate Support Services is a £37K positive variance going into the next financial year.



3.6 Contingency

A contingency of £7.7m was built into the 2017/18 budget of which it was agreed at Policy Committee in July 2017 that £5.378m would be used to remove undeliverable savings leaving a contingency of £2.3m for this

financial year. A further £695K has been used in since July to reprofile savings to future years.

	£'000s
Opening Position 1/4/2017	7,700
Savings removed July Policy Committee	(5,378)
Savings reprofiled July CMT	(121)
Savings reprofiled Aug CMT	(40)
Savings reprofiled Sep CMT	(534)
Remaining Balance at 30/9/2017	<u>1,627</u>

Since last month, two savings in DENS have been re-profiled from 2017/18 to future years: £250K has been moved across 2018/19 and 2019/20 relating to business development and £284K has been moved to 2019/20 relating to the refuse collection saving.

4. TREASURY MANAGEMENT & CORPORATE BUDGETS

- 4.1 The review of the capital financing budget has identified a further underspend taking account of the cashflow to date and prospects for the rest of 2017/18, but in order to help meet the extra costs of the Finance function, it is requested a £150k in-year budget virement is done, so the budget that was £10m continues to forecast a £250k underspend. There remain some uncertain factors impacting the budget, though these have reduced over the course of the month.

Other Corporate budgets have been reviewed, notably the contingent budgets to help fund the Council's share of the Berkshire Pension Fund deficit, most of which is financed by the pensions on-cost on pay. The latest forecast is that very little of the budget should be needed this year with an expected £400k underspend. (The forward year impact of this has also been reviewed and is being built into the budget build and next MTFS update). Furthermore £80K of the Living Wage "top up" contingency budget is not needed in 2017/18, as the costs were covered in the original budget build.

Additionally, it is estimated that across the Council £200K can be released from budgets this year due to the Christmas leave offer being made to staff. Recent review of transformation costs has shown the revenue change fund will be underspent by £400K this year and a further projection of capital receipts and their uses will enable £200k to be used to repay debt and hence reduce the MRP payment by the same amount.

5. FORECAST GENERAL FUND BALANCE

- 5.1 Based upon the draft accounts for 2016/17, the General Fund Balance at the end of 2016/17 was £5.2m. As indicated in the table above, assuming remedial action highlighted is carried out, there is a forecast overspend on service revenue budgets of £1.2m.
- 5.2 The pressure on service directorate budgets is offset by a slightly favourable position on treasury and other corporate budgets (see para 4.1), so there is an overall underspend of £0.3m forecast. Officers must therefore continue

to manage tightly spending throughout the remainder of the year to avoid any overspend.

6. CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2017/18

6.1 To the end of September £13.147m of the original c.£121m programme had been spent and it should be noted that capital spending is usually weighted to the latter part of the year. Officers are reviewing the whole programme and the total spend for 2017/18 is now likely to reduce from c£121m to c£99m (including the assumption we will buy a £30m investment property before the financial year end) as some projects have been pushed back into 2018/19.

7. Capital Receipts

7.1 The financial strategy depends on successfully obtaining capital receipts to fund the transformation programme and the equal pay settlements. In summary, an estimated £14m is required in 2017/18 for equal pay; £3.2m for the change fund; £1m for redundancy costs and £2m for debt reduction / an MRP contribution. This implies a requirement of £20.2m capital receipts.

7.2 There have been no additional receipts since the last update. Final completion on the Island Road transaction is now forecast to be in January 2018. Negotiations are ongoing on Amethyst Lane.

	2017/18	HRA (not 1-1) 17/18	Total 2017-18	2018/19
Planned	£12.3m	N/A	£12.3m	£2.5m
16/17 b/f	£6.6m	£5.5m	£12.1m	N/A
Of which delivered	£1.4m	£0.2m	£1.6m	£0.0m
Expected shortly*	£10.4m	N/A	£6.3m	£0.0m
Total Available			£20.0m	
Additional Required	£ 0.5m	N/A	£0.2m	£0.0m

8. HRA

8.1 An analysis of the current expected outturn of operational budgets (for repairs and management costs) projects an under spend of £50k. This is due to a number of minor variances across the HRA supplies and services and premises cost budgets.

8.2 A half year review of the likely HRA capital financing position for 2017/18 has identified those costs should be around £10.1m, which represents a £500k underspend. The current projection for rent income suggests that actual income should be at least £300k better than budget, amongst other reasons because of continuing good control of rent arrears.

9. RISK ASSESSMENT

9.1 There are risks associated with delivering the Council's budget and this was subject to an overall budget risk assessment. At the current time those risks are being reviewed as part of budget monitoring and can be classed as follows:






- High use of agency staffing & consultants;
- Pressures on pay costs in some areas to recruit staff or maintain services;
- In year reductions in grant;
- Demand for adult social care;
- Significant additional demand (and change in caseload mix) for children's social care;
- Increased requirement for childcare solicitors linked to activity on the above;

- Homelessness, and the risk of a need for additional bed & breakfast accommodation;
- Demand for special education needs services;
- Housing Benefit Subsidy does not fully meet the cost of benefit paid

10. BUDGET SAVINGS RAG STATUS

10.1 The RAG status of savings and income¹ generation proposals included in the 2017/18 budget are subject to a monthly review. The expanded RAG status in terms of progress is summarised below:

Financial RAG

-  = 100% of savings delivered, and verified by Finance (Directorate/Programme Accountant)
-  = On track to deliver 100% of savings target
-  = Up to 10% at risk, however corrective action in place to deliver 100%
-  = Above 10% of savings at risk, or plans not yet developed and approved, or resource issues
-  = Removal of Savings

1

	August Position		September Position	
	£000	%	£000	%
Blue (fully delivered)	6,080	40.1%	7,261	49.7%
Green (on track)	3,989	26.3%	3,318	22.7%
Amber (<10% off track)	2,770	18.3%	2,770	18.9%
Red (>10% off track)	2,314	15.3%	1,270	8.7%
Grey (undeliverable)	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Total	15,153	100.0	14,619	100.0

- 10.2 The RAG status of budget savings supplements the analysis in budget monitoring above, and the red risks do not represent additional pressures to those shown above.
- 10.3 An exception report for £534K relating to re-phasing of two savings in DENS (as detailed above in s3.6) was agreed by Corporate Programme Delivery Group in September and budget has been moved from the contingency to offset this change.

11. COUNCIL TAX & BUSINESS RATE INCOME

- 11.1 We have set targets for tax collection, and the end of September 2017 position is:

Council Tax	2017/18 £000	Previous Year's Arrears £000	Total £000
Target	52,356	1,190	53,546
Actual	51,910	1,232	53,142
Variance	(446) under	42 over	(404) under

- 11.2 For 2017/18 as a whole the minimum target for Council Tax is 96.5%, (2016/17 collection rate 96.8%). At the end of September 2017, collection for the year was 55.64% compared to a target of 56.12%, and collection is slightly behind 2016/17 (56.14% by end of September 2016). A backlog was recently identified in the billing department, which has had a direct impact on collection as customers will not be in receipt of the correct bill in order to make payment. Resources have been redirected within the teams and have already reduced the backlog by 1500 items within 2 weeks. It is believed that this effort will assist in improving collection as the initial focus has been on income generating work items (opposed to discounts/exemptions, which simply reduce the overall debit owing). We are yet to analyse the impact of the increase of contributions from CTS customers.

- 11.3 Business Rates Income to the end of September 2017

Business Rates	2017/18 £000	2017/18 %
Target	70,448	54.00%
Actual	70,497	52.57%
Variance	49 over	1.32% under

The target for 2017/18 as a whole is 98.50%. By comparison, at the end of September 2016, 52.98% of rates had been collected.

12. OUTSTANDING GENERAL DEBTS

- 12.1 The Council's outstanding debt total as at 31 August 2017 stands at £5.678m in comparison to the 31st March figure of £4.280m. This shows an increase of £1.398m, and we note that £3.618m of the balance as at 30 September 2017 is greater than 151 days old. Part of the explanation is that in August the Council raised 5 invoices to neighbouring authorities and the NHS equating to £2.9m. These will be paid in full but can take a couple of months to go through their systems. In addition there are a further 7 invoices outstanding in excess of £100k each (total £1m) owing from NHS and other authorities, which will also be paid in due course. At least £1m (some of which is accounted for in the previous sentence - NHS) of the over 151 days old debt is owed from just 25 customers, predominantly accounts of deceased persons where we are waiting for sale of property, and NHS accounts (the NHS owes over £1.4m of the aged debt).

13. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 13.1 The delivery of the Council's actual within budget overall is essential to ensure the Council meets its strategic aims.

14. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 14.1 None arising directly from this report.

15. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 The Local Government Act 2003 places a duty on the Council's Section 151 Officer to advise on the robustness of the proposed budget and the adequacy of balances and reserves.
- 15.2 With regard to Budget Monitoring, the Act requires that the Authority must review its Budget "from time to time during the year", and also to take any action it deems necessary to deal with the situation arising from monitoring. Currently Budget Monitoring reports are submitted to Policy Committee regularly throughout the year and therefore we comply with this requirement.

16. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

16.1 The main financial implications are included in the report. The Council's constitution envisages remedial action is implemented when there are adverse budget variances.

17. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

17.1 None arising directly from the report. An Equality Impact Assessments was undertaken for the 2017/18 budget as a whole.

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 Budget Working & monitoring papers, save confidential/protected items.