Business case for the establishment of the role of a Housing I.T. Systems Team Lead and 2 x Housing I.T. Systems Officers

1. **Background**

The current Housing Management I.T. system is now over 20 years old. This system provides modules in relation to repairs and maintenance, rent accounting and arrears, tenancy and void management. It is used by up to 130 members of staff across Landlord Services, Payment and Collections, Council Tax (billing) and Customer Access.

In order to provide a suitable and efficient service to all our customers (tenants, contractors, local residents etc) this will best be achieved using one integrated system which contains all necessary data (property, rent, tenancy, finance, contractor etc) and which can be accessed easily by all staff whether office based, working remotely or based out and about in the city.

Working with Strata Service Solutions and following budgetary approval from Members the decision has been taken to replace Capita (the current system) with OPENHousing. This new system will:

- Provide a new comprehensive more integrated software system
- Improve the functionality of the system
- Assist staff to access and update data more speedily
- Allow greater flexible mobile working with good remote access.
- Be able to hold all data centrally (currently held on a number of different systems)
- Link to a number of functionalities (reducing inputting and updating of data).
- Reduce the amount of paperwork required,
- Give a provision of a tenants and contractors portal so that tenants can easily amend personal data, request and book repairs etc, and contractors can book appointments, submit invoices etc.
- Provide the ability to easily integrate the information stored to run reports and performance information
- Allow staff to have access to all areas of the system (To maintain confidentiality and data security access levels can be set to allow only certain staff to have access to certain levels of data.).
- Give the ability to store full data on each property and each tenant, and to access this information either via property or tenant screens.
- Include modules for monitoring Right to Buy, Leasehold management and tenant participation activities – none of which we currently have.

Housing, working with Strata Service Solutions has identified and procured the new system at a costs of £269,378. The current timetable for implementation has been agreed with Capita who are providing the system. Given the costs involved and the benefits the system can bring it is considered necessary to bring in additional resources on to the establishment to ensure we get the best functionality, ensure its effective introduction and continue to maintain and update/ improve the system going forward.

Considerations:

Increased staffing costs

It is estimated and agreed by all parties that the introduction of such a wide ranging system will take between 12 and 18 months with an anticipated start towards the end of 2017.

Looking at how other organisations have approached the introduction/implementation stages we wish to set up a project team, dedicated to this work, which would be overseen by an implementation project board.

Implementation Project Board to consist of:

- Senior representative from the supplier
- Senior housing representative (Director)
- Senior manager from Strata Service Solutions

An integration/service support team will be put in place to work with the supplier to ensure the new system is installed to suit our requirements. This should be in place pre-implementation to allow for effective planning and setting up of systems for the project and system.

Learning from how other housing authorities have found the implementation process (in particular East Devon District Council (EDDC)), it is envisaged that we will require approximately 3 full time officers (one System team leader and two system officers) to undertake the implementation and 2 full time officers to move forward post implementation to provide support and development for the system on an ongoing basis.

The role of this new team post implementation will include training staff on the system; implementing system updates; keeping up to date with best practice use of the system; liaison with each housing team to ensure system is used to the best of its ability and bring in any modifications which may be required from time to time.

It is envisaged that this team post implementation will fulfil a more strategic role within housing, seeking and introducing more efficient processes within the management system assisting the department meet service priorities and improve performance.

During implementation the team will be led by a Project Manager from ICT. It will from time to time require support from other officers within housing with specialist knowledge of their particular area of the service.   These officers will be seconded into the team as and when required and some back filling of posts may be needed in the short term.

For the purposes of assessing the ongoing costs of the system we have allowed for 3 new housing staff – one System Team Leader (at Grade 10) and two System Officers (at Grade 7). This will be subject to job evaluation. These would be recruited on a 23 month fixed term contract for the implementation process.

The introduction of the new system should lead to some ongoing savings in staff time, due to the ability for mobile officers to access and update the system whilst out on site, and for some tenants' queries to be answered by one staff member rather than requiring them to be

passed to several members of staff, or by tenants self-serving via the new online tenant portal.

There have been discussions with EDDC about sharing system support officers in particular the costs of the team lead. At this point EDDC were not willing to enter into such an agreement but were happy to reconsider the position once we had completed the implementation stage.

Therefore we are looking to recruit to the posts on a fixed term basis (23 months) and then revisit this option as it will allow for a reduction of staffing costs for both Authorities and will be able to share good practise with flexible working across both teams during busy periods. It also allows for us to consider whether different skilled officers would be required for implementation in comparison to ongoing improvements and training.

The estimated increased staff costs per year would be as follows

1 FTE at Grade 10 (subject to JE)

Salary	£32,486
On-costs	£8,316
Total	**£40,802**

2 x FTE at Grade 7 (subject to JE)

Salary	£46,796
On-costs	£11,980
Total	**£58,776**

Total £99,578

The Housing I.T. System Team Lead post will be supervised by the Service Lead Performance, Strategy and Resources.

The Housing I.T. System Team Lead will directly line manage the 2 x Housing I.T. Systems Officers.

As these are new posts there will be no staff placed at risk or risk of redundancy. It is anticipated that we would be looking for these new posts to have some understanding of the services a housing service provides and will therefore look to recruit potentially from internal resources if at all possible.

Increased hardware costs

There are no increased hardware costs associated with this proposal. The only additional costs the service may incur is if any new smartphones or tablets are required as the TotalMobile mobile working solution is rolled out within Housing likely in the second half of the implementation programme.

We will be required to purchase a license for each of the servers which will host the database. The SQL Server Standard Core All Language SA Pack MVL 2 License core License will costs £1,209.34 per annum (2 x £604.67).

Provision of a new telephone system

The council's legacy PABX analogue phone system will be replaced by digital Skype for Business telephony. This will be available to all users of the Global Desktop meaning staff can receive and make calls from wherever they are logged on. This change in telephony systems is already budgeted by each of the 3 partner councils. A proposed plan for rollout to Exeter City Council will be developed early into the new-year following learning from an initial pilot implementation for staff at Exmouth Town Hall during 2017.

2. Role of the System Administrators and Strata Service Solutions

As previously stated the current I.T. housing management system has been in place since 1997. During that time there have been a number of upgrades but these have been limited and not kept pace with our ways of working, changes in policy or government legislation or technology. This has in part been due to a lack of expertise within the housing team on such matters and an understanding of the roles of system officers in the housing team and that of Strata Service Solutions (and ECC I.T. before them)

Strata Service Solutions in terms of day to day systems support is primarily to provide, maintain, and support the technical infrastructure that the council's IT systems operate on. This includes, but is not limited, to aspects such as computer networking, servers, databases and software. Occasionally this support role extends into system administration duties, e.g. maintaining user access and permissions to a system, but typically this system admin role is best suited to residing within the relevant business unit.

Systems Administration such as the team being proposed typically covers aspects such as maintaining user access and permissions within the system, management of some system configuration and system parameters, creation and maintenance of system reports, and configuration of system processes e.g. workflow.

The nature of some aspects of work, e.g. maintenance of processes or reporting or upgrades, means there is typically a close relationship between the IT support analysts and the system admin group. The distinction between these two teams in simple terms is that tasks which can be performed through the front end use of the application are typically undertaken by the system administrators, whereas tasks needing to be performed on the underlying technical infrastructure, database or software are very much the domain of the IT service.

System administration is best situated within the business unit so they can day to day be responsive and accountable to business needs. There is also opportunity for the system administrator group to be an integral and driving force for process and improvement within the business unit.

Currently there is no focussed system admin capability within the Exeter Housing service. Base system admin duties such as user permissions and reporting for the Academy Housing system are dispersed across a couple of staff within the Housing service as an add-on to their core housing roles. Whilst this has been sufficient to keep the service operational it has not been successful in moving use of the system or the Housing service forward in line with modern demands for process, service, and technology efficiencies.

4. Conclusion

Implementation of the new housing management system, Capita OPENHousing, will require focussed resource for system configuration and process design drawing on expertise business and process knowledge from within the Housing service. This will be achieved through a partnership between the assigned Strata system analysts, the Housing system

administrators, and system champions drawn at appropriate times from each of the operational teams within Housing.

The scale of the implementation, design, configuration, and testing of processes, will require focussed and dedicated attention from a core system administration group. This provides opportunity to review the current system administration capability within Housing, forming a focussed team for the implementation, and also to consider the role of the team as a driving force for change and improvement going forwards.