

Thurrock - An ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future

## Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The meeting will be held at **7.00 pm** on **1 October 2019**

**Committee Room 1, Civic Offices, New Road, Grays, Essex, RM17 6SL**

### Membership:

Councillors Lynn Worrall (Chair), Chris Baker (Vice-Chair), Qaisar Abbas, Colin Churchman, Andrew Jefferies and Joycelyn Redsell

Lynn Mansfield, Housing Tenant Representative

### Substitutes:

Councillors Daniel Chukwu, Sara Muldowney, Terry Piccolo and Luke Spillman

### Agenda

Open to Public and Press

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<b>1 Apologies for Absence</b>	
<b>2 Minutes</b>	<b>5 - 12</b>
To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 18 June 2019.	
<b>3 Urgent Items</b>	
To receive additional items that the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency, in accordance with Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972.	
<b>4 Declaration of Interests</b>	
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**Queries regarding this Agenda or notification of apologies:**

Please contact Kenna Victoria Healey, Senior Democratic Services Officer by sending an email to [Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk)

Agenda published on: **23 September 2019**

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# DECLARING INTERESTS FLOWCHART – QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

Breaching those parts identified as a pecuniary interest is potentially a criminal offence

## Helpful Reminders for Members

- *Is your register of interests up to date?*
- *In particular have you declared to the Monitoring Officer all disclosable pecuniary interests?*
- *Have you checked the register to ensure that they have been recorded correctly?*

## When should you declare an interest *at a meeting*?

- **What matters are being discussed at the meeting?** (including Council, Cabinet, Committees, Subs, Joint Committees and Joint Subs); or
- If you are a Cabinet Member making decisions other than in Cabinet **what matter is before you for single member decision?**



Does the business to be transacted at the meeting

- relate to; or
- likely to affect

any of your registered interests and in particular any of your Disclosable Pecuniary Interests?

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests shall include your interests or those of:

- your spouse or civil partner's
- a person you are living with as husband/ wife
- a person you are living with as if you were civil partners

where you are aware that this other person has the interest.

A detailed description of a disclosable pecuniary interest is included in the Members Code of Conduct at Chapter 7 of the Constitution. **Please seek advice from the Monitoring Officer about disclosable pecuniary interests.**

**What is a Non-Pecuniary interest?** – this is an interest which is not pecuniary (as defined) but is nonetheless so significant that a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard to be so significant that it would materially impact upon your judgement of the public interest.

### Pecuniary

If the interest is not already in the register you must (unless the interest has been agreed by the Monitoring Officer to be sensitive) disclose the existence and nature of the interest to the meeting

If the Interest is not entered in the register and is not the subject of a pending notification you must within 28 days notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest for inclusion in the register

Unless you have received dispensation upon previous application from the Monitoring Officer, you must:

- Not participate or participate further in any discussion of the matter at a meeting;
- Not participate in any vote or further vote taken at the meeting; and
- leave the room while the item is being considered/voted upon

If you are a Cabinet Member you may make arrangements for the matter to be dealt with by a third person but take no further steps

### Non- pecuniary

Declare the nature and extent of your interest including enough detail to allow a member of the public to understand its nature



You may participate and vote in the usual way but you should seek advice on Predetermination and Bias from the Monitoring Officer.

## Our Vision and Priorities for Thurrock

An ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future.

1. **People** – a borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay
  - High quality, consistent and accessible public services which are right first time
  - Build on our partnerships with statutory, community, voluntary and faith groups to work together to improve health and wellbeing
  - Communities are empowered to make choices and be safer and stronger together
  
2. **Place** – a heritage-rich borough which is ambitious for its future
  - Roads, houses and public spaces that connect people and places
  - Clean environments that everyone has reason to take pride in
  - Fewer public buildings with better services
  
3. **Prosperity** – a borough which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations
  - Attractive opportunities for businesses and investors to enhance the local economy
  - Vocational and academic education, skills and job opportunities for all
  - Commercial, entrepreneurial and connected public services

## Minutes of the Meeting of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 18 June 2019 at 7.00 pm

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- Present:** Councillors Lynn Worrall (Chair), Chris Baker (Vice-Chair), Qaisar Abbas, Andrew Jefferies and Joycelyn Redsell  
Lynn Mansfield, Tenant Representative
- Apologies:** Councillors Colin Churchman
- In attendance:** Councillor Bukky Okunade, Chair of Children Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
Councillor Jennifer Smith, Vice-Chair of Children Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health  
Carol Hinvest, Assistant Director of Housing  
Detlev Munster, Assistant Director of Property and Development  
Lorrita Johnson, Housing Solutions Manager  
Chris Seman, Investment Planning & Performance Analyst  
Kenna-Victoria Healey, Senior Democratic Services Officer
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Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

### **1. Minutes**

The minutes of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 5 February 2019 were approved as a correct record.

### **2. Urgent Items**

There were no items of urgent business.

### **3. Declaration of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **4. Homeless Hostels, Housing First and Crisis Intervention**

The Housing Solutions Manager presented the report to Members outlining the Council currently commissioned the three individual contracts aimed at supporting homeless households, identifying rough sleepers and providing initial advice to prevent homelessness within the borough, all of which were due to expire in March 2020. The Projects were the Homeless Hostels and Crisis Intervention Service, Housing First Project and the Rough Sleepers Outreach Service.

Members were further advised that the report sought permission to go out to tender to bring all of the services under one procurement process, with a view to a new contract starting in April 2020.

It was queried by Councillor Okunade, Chair of Children Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee as to whether the Housing offered to young people after care was adequate to meet their needs. She continued to ask if all services were being supplied by one provider, why were all three were commissioned differently. It was explained the services were commissioned at different times and with them all coming to an end at the same time, this was the best way to go out to tender for one contract for all services. Members were assured that Officers felt the service was adequate, with monthly meeting were taking place with the provider and it was felt support offered to young people was more detailed and checked by Officers within Children's Services.

The Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health mentioned in addition, a building comprising of 10 rooms at Brooke House, had been purchased and was currently being refurbished ready to assist with tenancy support.

During discussions Members were informed that only 16/17 year olds lived in housing offered to young people and that they had support from support workers 24 hours a day. The aim was to encourage independence within young people.

Councillor Redsell queried as to process the Council had with regards to homeless Servicemen and women within the Borough. Officers commented that the Rough Sleepers Outreach Service, identified rough sleepers every night in the Borough, of which there were 9 rough sleepers identified, none of which Soldiers. It was commented that the Veterans Charter was built into the Housing Policy and priority housing as given to ex-servicemen and women.

The Chair of the Committee welcomed the report and the enquired as how Officers were to monitor the contracts merging into one. The Housing Solutions Manager explained that quarterly review meetings with the provider were in place and should it be necessary these could be amended to monthly, meaning if any risks were identified they could be dealt with quickly.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted and commented on the proposed service model for homeless support and crisis intervention prior to the report being submitted to Cabinet.**

**5. Housing Performance 2018/2019**

The Assistant Director of Housing introduced the report highlighting that 2018/2019 ended with a strong performance for the Housing service. Despite

some challenges, rent collection remained strong and had been consistently above the profiled target throughout the 2018/19 financial year. The year-end outturn was 98.8% which was an improvement of 0.3% in comparison with 2017/2018.

She continued to inform the Committee the average time to re-let voids had improved significantly. During 2018/2019 it took an average of 26.64 calendar days to re-let a void property which was an improvement of 4 days in comparison with 2017/2018. This continued improvement in relation to void re-let time demonstrates the collaboration between the teams within Housing responsible for the performance of this indicator, partnership working with repairs contractors and improved internal processes.

Members discussed the tenant satisfaction rating, with many stating that it wasn't good enough, as it meant that at least a third of tenants were unhappy. Officers commented that the surveys were undertaken independently and were part of high benchmarking with 5 points including Fair, Good and Excellent. The Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health mentioned that if the rating included Good, Excellent and Fair the Council would be receiving outcomes of 90% plus.

The Committee were advised by the Assistant Director of Housing the service had been working with the Communications Team to improve communication with residents, following the recent Tenants Conference, which was now to become an annual event. Officers continued to advise that an email newsletter was to be created and sent to residents, which would hopefully aid with improving feedback given by residents.

It was enquired as to how residents were chosen to undertake the Council's survey. The Investment Planning and Performance Analyst explained that 10% of 2500 repairs were chosen at random and the survey carried out was independent of the Council and the figures could be used in benchmarking exercises. Members were further advised that the wording of the questions were clear and residents were asked why they rated the way they did.

The Tenant Housing Representative questioned as to whether the Transforming Homes Scheme covered when someone left a property and someone new moved in. It was confirmed if at the time the tenant had refused to allow the Council to inspect the property, then it would be inspected when it was void and if any repairs were necessary they would be carried out to a letting standard.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Housing Overview and Scrutiny noted and commented on the report.**

**6. Exploration of Selective Licensing of Private Rented Accommodation**

The report was outlined by the Assistant Director of Housing who explained Selective Licensing was introduced in the Housing Act 2004, to tackle a variety of problems Local Authorities experienced in their local housing market, such as, significant and persistent problems of anti-social behaviour, poor property conditions, low housing demand, high levels of crime.

She continued to explain Local Authorities had the power to introduce Selective Licensing with Secretary of State approval for any scheme covering more than 20% of their geographical area or affecting more than 20% of private rented homes in the local authority area. The business case for Selective Licensing was required to be evidence led and all applications were considered on a case by case basis.

Members remarked they welcomed the report; however it was commented only if a resident reported a HMO that the Council would be made aware of them. The Assistant Director of Housing notified the Committee that Officers were looking into promoting the service. It was mentioned that a press release had been signed off to work with the private sector and landlords.

During discussions it was confirmed that the Council had enforcement powers and did use them if required too. It was further confirmed that if landlords did not comply with the statutory grounds then their licence would be revoked.

The Chair of Committee enquired as to the licence fees being in the region of £500 to £600, given that the Council had in the region of 14,000 properties in the Borough which could require a licence, as this would bring in high revenue to the Council. The Assistant Director of Housing explained that the fees hadn't yet been agreed and fees were over a 5 year period with half being paid at the application stage.

**RESOLVED that the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee:**

- 1. Noted and comment on the exploration of a Selective Licensing scheme covering all or certain parts of the borough;**
- 2. Noted that a business case will be produced to support selective licensing areas of high levels of private rented accommodation;**
- 3. Noted the approval steps for a Selective Licensing designation as set out in paragraph 5 and;**
- 4. Noted and comment on the public consultation exercise to gather views and representation about the proposed scheme.**

**7. New Council HRA Home Building Programme**

The Assistant Director of Property and Development presented the report in doing so, he informed Members Cabinet approved the preparation for the delivery of up to 500 new Council homes for Thurrock residents over the next

5 to 10 years through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). Cabinet also agreed to refer decision to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee for its consideration and advice on ensuring the successful delivery of the new Homes Delivery Programme. He continued to advise the Committee each approach and project would require different governance and approval arrangements whilst following similar project management disciplines.

Members were then informed that the first phase of 200 homes had been proposed and sites would need to be quickly identified and assessed so that the programme could commence in a timely manner.

Councillor Baker questioned as to where the 500 new homes were to be built. The Assistant Director of Property and Development stated there were a variety of methods to be used to identify possible sites, however as yet there was no distinctive list.

The Chair of the Committee queried that there was no distinctive list, when the report stated the Council had undertaken a significant review of its estate through Retain, Release, and Reuse programme. She continued that she welcomed new housing and homes in the Borough; however she felt that the process should include consultations with Ward Councillors, the Portfolio Holder and residents, before the Committee were asked to endorse the program.

During discussions Members commented they felt the programme was ambitious and that if it was an individual developer and not the Council then the sites would not be known to Members until the Planning application stage, where any objections could be heard. It was mentioned that some Members had concerns that if consulting with residents and other Councillors before the initial process had begun, could slow down the overall development.

It was commented that it was important to have Members and residents on the journey of the development, with Officers using the Your Place, Your Voice consultation to assist with looking at recommended sites in more detail. It was further stated that residents would get the opportunity to speak at the planning application state.

The Chair of the Committee enquired if it was possible to consult on the first 200 homes and to report back to the Committee at their October meeting. She further asked if Officers had thought about infrastructure within the development, such as the impact on Schools or Doctors.

The Assistant Director of Property and Development explained the planning process would look at all of the concerns raised by Members. He continued by stating the development was still in the early days and that sites had not yet been selected, even for the first 200 homes.

Following discussions between Members of amending recommendation 1.1, the Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health suggested the recommendation read:

*That Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorse the delivery of a New Homes Delivery Programme, including the consultation detailed at points 5.3 of the report*

The Committee agreed this wording.

**RESOLVED that Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee:**

- 1. Endorse the delivery of a New Homes Delivery Programme, including the consultation detailed at points 5.3 of the report.**
- 2. Endorse the delivery arrangements in place to ensure the successful delivery of a new Council Homes Programme through the HRA.**
- 3. Update the work programme to receive regular updates on the new Council Homes Programme to assist in its successful delivery.**

**8. Housing Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2019/2020**

The Committee discussed the work programme for the up and coming year. The Chair of the Committee encouraged Members to think of items they would like to have presented by Officers and to contact either herself or Democratic Services.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1. That the following reports be included on the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2019/2020:**
  - Update Report - New Council HRA Home Building Programme – December 2019**
  - Tenant Satisfaction Survey - October or December 2019**

**The meeting finished at 8.55 pm**

Approved as a true and correct record

**CHAIR**

**DATE**

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact**

Democratic Services at [Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk)

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<b>1 October 2019</b>		<b>ITEM: 5</b>
<b>Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>		
<b>Housing Solutions Customer Excellence Programme- External Review Findings</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> N/A	
<b>Report of:</b> Lorrita Johnson, Housing Solutions Manager		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Carol Hinvest, Assistant Director of Housing		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health and Interim Director of Children's Services		
<b>This report is</b> Public		

## Executive Summary

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA17) implemented on 3 April 2018, originated as a private member's bill tabled by Bob Blackman MP. The legislation is based on changes made to the Welsh homelessness legislation in 2016 and was fully endorsed by government during its passage.

The Act has brought about notable changes to the delivery of homeless services across England. The requirement to provide services to everyone who is 'eligible' and 'homeless', regardless of 'priority need' and 'intentional homelessness' has resulted in more people being provided with assistance.

In considering a further service redesign, the Housing Solutions Service has undertaken a programme of customer service improvement during 2018-19. The service also commissioned the National Practitioner Support Service (NPSS) and Shelter to conduct a full review of the service focusing on key areas which impacts on the customer experience.

The main aim of the review was to seek an external view on how Thurrock is performing against the new legislative functions introduced by the HRA 17 and how well the service is working with residents and partners in making the correct decisions and providing the right advice in line with the law on homelessness.

The NPSS review was undertaken in July 2019 with Shelter conducting a File review in March 2019 and Mystery Shopping in June-July 2019.

In April 2013, the National Practitioner Support Service (NPSS) was established to support local authorities to meet the 10 Local Challenges set out in the 'Making

every contact count' report, which had been published the previous year by the Ministerial Working Group on Homelessness.

The detailed findings and common themes from both reviews are illustrated in further sections of this report. However, as shown in the below tables, overall both reviews scored the service a score of 'Fair to Good'. This is consistent with the performance rates of other local authorities since the introduction of the HRA 2017 and provides a positive endorsement of the service albeit with significant recommendations in some areas to improve the service delivery. The NPSS have to date undertaken 5 reviews of Local Authorities homeless services. Prior to the implementation of the HRA 17, the 'pass' mark was 60%.

Since the new legislation has been implemented, no Local Authority has reached this threshold.

The table below shows the ratings achieved by authorities thus far.

Authorities assessed	Rating
Local Authority 1	49%
Local Authority 2	45%
Local Authority 3	58%
Local Authority 4	42%
Local Authority 5	56%

Thurrock achieved an overall score of 56% which is a high average in comparison with the authorities reviewed. It is noted that this is reflective of the challenges the HRA 17 has presented for Local Authorities. Undertaking a review offers Thurrock, the opportunity for an objective assessment of the effectiveness of the services and the opportunity to improve and learn from peers as we seek to improve service delivery.

Shelter reported that the service is set up to provide access to basic advice and information to anyone whether or not they were within 56 days of homelessness and whether or not they were the sort of person who might not be in priority need or who might be intentionally homeless. The Homelessness Code of Guidance encourages such flexibility.

Activity Area- Mystery Shopping & File Assessment	Performance 2019	
	%	Rating
<b>Email</b>	48%	<b>Fair</b>
<b>Telephone</b>	68%	<b>Good</b>
<b>Face to Face</b>	65%	<b>Fair- Good</b>
<b>File Assessment</b>	65%	<b>Fair-Good</b>
<b>Overall</b>	60%	<b>Fair</b>

Essentially, the overall results from Shelter's mystery shopping and File assessment suggests that there isn't a 'gatekeeping' practice. This means there were no barriers to access the service for advice and the authority has some positive areas in its

current service offer. In addition, Shelter's analysis of the results for each area indicate that the Service is currently performing at Fair to Good rating level. This report provides a summary of the actions undertaken by the service in implementing the HRA 17, the findings of the reviews and next steps of actions which will be delivered through a continuous improvement plan.

## **1. Recommendation(s)**

### **1.1 That the Committee comment on the information provided on the implementation of the Act and take note of the findings of the reviews and the continued work of the Housing Solutions Service to meet the service demands whilst providing an excellent service to applicants.**

## **2. Background – Changes introduced by HRA 17**

- 2.1 The previous homelessness legislation provided an important safety net for vulnerable households, but it required local housing authorities to intervene only at crisis point, often too late to prevent an expensive homelessness crisis. This led to two significant issues:
- 2.2 Households who did not have a priority need (i.e. do not have dependent children or who are not considered 'vulnerable' but who may still have complex needs) often did not receive the support they needed to secure accommodation;
- 2.3 Studies found that the structure of the legislation meant local authorities did not always intervene as early as possible.
- 2.4 The HRA 2017 made significant changes to the homelessness legislation contained in Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 ("the 1996 Act"), by placing new duties on local housing authorities to intervene earlier and prevent a homelessness crisis for all households.
- 2.5 The newly created 'prevention' and 'relief' duties requires authorities to take 'reasonable steps' to help to secure accommodation for 6 months for eligible homeless applicants accepted by the Council as being threatened with homelessness. Essentially, anyone owed the new prevention or relief duty requires 'reasonable steps' to be undertaken to help them avoid becoming homeless or relieve their homelessness.
- 2.6 Applicants assessed as having 'priority need' must also be provided with temporary accommodation whilst steps are undertaken to secure future longer term accommodation.
- 2.7 HRA 17 also extends the definition of those considered 'threatened' with homelessness to include people likely to lose their home from 28 days to 56 days. This includes those served with a valid Section 21 notice by a landlord notifying the tenant that possession of the private sector property is required.

- 2.8 The Act also specifies the need for enhanced advisory services. The Housing Act 1996 stipulates that local authorities must ensure advice and information around homelessness and preventing homelessness is available free of charge to everyone in their district. The new Act requires a more robust and targeted approach to advisory services with the need to provide information and advice on:
- Preventing homelessness;
  - Securing accommodation if homeless;
  - The rights of people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness and; any other support (provided by the local authority or any other local organisations) that is available for people who are homeless or likely to become homeless as well as how to access that help.
- 2.9 HRA 17 stipulates that the support offered to eligible applicants is to be more robust than previously required. Once a local authority is satisfied that someone is homeless / threatened with homelessness and eligible for assistance an assessment should be carried out which includes;
- The circumstances that have caused homelessness / potential homelessness;
  - The housing and other support needs of the applicant and their household;
  - A personalised plan, setting out steps for the applicant and the Council to take to ensure accommodation is secured and/or retained.
- 2.10 An applicant's assessment and plan must be kept under review and updated as necessary, until the local authority has determined that no further duty is owed. This has resulted in an extended casework and caseload with officers holding cases for months at a time.
- 2.11 In addition, a new provision places a requirement on all applicants to cooperate with the Council's attempts to prevent or relieve their homelessness. If the Council considers that an applicant has deliberately or unreasonably refused to cooperate or take steps agreed as part of their assessment plan, a notice can be served to the individual informing them of the Council's decision, the consequences of it (e.g. ending of prevention /relief duty) and their right to request a review. This notice can only be served if a warning has been given to the applicant beforehand and a reasonable time period has elapsed since the warning was given. To date the Council has only served one such notice.
- 2.12 The Housing Act 1996 ("the 1996 Act"), gives applicants the right to request a review of any decision made by the local authority. In addition to these the current legislation also includes:
- Steps set out in assessment plans;
  - Giving notice to withdraw prevention or relief duties;
  - Suitability of accommodation offered.

- 2.13 Under the HRA 17, “specified public authorities” e.g. NHS services, probation and others are required to refer details of people who they consider being homeless or threatened with homelessness to their local authority (if the person agrees to the notification being made). The local authority will in turn need to make contact with this individual for assessment.
- 2.14 The main cause of homelessness in Thurrock is increasingly becoming the end of private rented tenancies which mirrors the national trend. This indicates that affordability is a significant issue as these householders are unable to find alternative housing without assistance (the previous main cause of homelessness was parental eviction).
- 2.15 The increase in demand, and the wider changes that the implementation of the HRA 17 has brought about, necessitates a rethink of the previous service delivery model to ensure there are sufficiently skilled front line resources and housing options to support the homelessness prevention agenda.
- 2.16 Thurrock has made good progress in preparing and implementing the changes required by HRA 17. The service re-modelling initially led to the removal the Housing Employment and Education (HED) self-referral system, directing customers to contact the service via a face to face and telephone triage system coupled with an enhanced suite of information updated on the website for customers.
- 2.17 There has been significant work to strengthen existing partnerships which is crucial for cohesive work towards the prevention agenda. Training and staff development has been a core part of the implementation plan and remains integral part of the service delivery strategy. This is also in recognition of the fact that staff need to be equipped to deal with the intense level of support required for some homeless and rough sleepers to engage with relevant support services.
- 2.18 There is a requirement for authorities to update their Homelessness Prevention Strategies, Thurrock are currently in the process of consulting with key individuals, partners and stakeholders. There is a paper on this elsewhere on the agenda. The new strategy will be live from March 2020 and be in place for 5 years.
- 2.19 The service has seen an increase of 15% in the number of new homelessness applications, whilst this is not a significant number, in the context of the additional work required, this has resulted in an increase in caseloads ranging from 60-70 per officer where previously it was 30-40.
- 2.20 Furthermore the number of applicants in temporary accommodation continues to rise at the same time as the average length of stay is also increasing as staff spend a longer period to exhaust all reasonable steps to relieve homelessness.

### **3. Shelter and National Practitioner Support Services**

- 3.1 NPSS support Local Authorities and their partners to deliver early intervention and prevention focussed Housing Solutions Services. The credibility of the NPSS comes from the experience of the team; all of whom are practitioners on secondment from local authorities across the country and who remain embedded in local services.
- 3.2 Shelter is a voluntary organisation with over 52 years' experience of providing housing advice nationally and have staff with expertise in housing/ homelessness and specialist legal knowledge.
- 3.3 Shelter services are geared to work with local authorities on transforming the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of support services and/or housing options and homelessness assessment service delivery with a clear focus on value for money and good customer service.
- 3.4 Shelter services are provided by Quality Assurance Managers who work across Shelter's national network of advice, support and specialist projects, and or freelance experts that have been recruited for their specialist knowledge and practitioner experience.

#### 4. Shelter Review- Findings and Key Themes

4.1 A set of standards from Shelter's quality assurance framework were applied to each assessment area, based on statutory requirements, the Code of Guidance (updated in February 2019) and Shelter's policy and practice briefings. Section four contains a summary of findings for each standard assessed and a summary rating for the authority. Shelter conducted the following:

- Case file review: A total of 50 files covering advice only, prevention, relief and main duty cases were selected by Shelter and assessed by two auditors' onsite including a review of randomly selected files and cases which were the subject of enquiries from members. The files reviewed were cases completed during the first few months of HRA 17 implementation. The review focused on the quality and effectiveness of the authority's housing solutions service in meeting the new prevention and relief duties.
- Mystery shopping exercise: The mystery shopping exercise included face to face, email and phone contacts to the authority. This was conducted over a period of 6 weeks July 2019.

#### 5. Shelter File Assessment

**Table 1- Assessment Area Results**

Advice Only	Fair (61%)
Prevention	Good (69%)
Relief	Good (68%)
Main duty	Fair (60)

- 5.1 The authority's results indicate that staff have a reasonable grasp of the changes made by the HRA 17 and appreciate what is required in managing homelessness cases, in addition to the other duties, i.e. an assessment, a plan, a decision on whether the prevention and relief duties were owed. It is noted that much of the work is instructed by the processes and system requirements of Housing Jigsaw, the casework management system used by the service to record assessments and approaches.
- 5.2 As shown in the above table, a Good rating was achieved for cases where the final decision were Prevention or Relief and a rating of Fair for Advice only and Main Duty cases. Some cases achieved a range of Excellent/Good scores but some included Poor or Failing ratings and this is largely due to an inconsistent approach in the handling of cases.
- 5.3 Based on the evidence from the triage records, better scores were achieved for work undertaken at the initial triage stage, where the information gathered at the first point of contact were detailed and robust. After this initial work the homelessness assessment and follow up casework activity varied across the team with some cases showing lack of progress.
- 5.4 According to Shelter's feedback, this finding is not uncommon across authorities who report that whilst demand to the service has not necessarily increased, the workload volume and capacity of staff is being impacted.
- 5.5 **Areas of good service**
- Evidence of applicants having a named officer in all cases
  - Reasonable level of contact between officer and applicant including where appointments were missed.
  - A swift prevention approach when applied were highly effective
  - The service had an offer of Private Rented Sector rent deposit and advance rent payments.
  - Evidence of effective outcomes to relieve homelessness
  - Rough sleeper cases involving females offered help to find accommodation
  - The triage initial assessment notes were detailed and very helpful
  - Majority of cases had Personalised Housing Plans (PHP) on file
- 5.6 **Recommendations**
- During the Prevention and Relief stages of an application, missed opportunities to do effective prevention of homelessness resulted in

delayed resolution of homelessness. There was evidence that some staff lacked clarity around the Prevention and Relief duties.

- Some PHP's lacked the personalisation element, there need to be a consistent approach by all staff in completing PHPs.
- Evidence of lack of progression of casework following the initial assessment with regular updates from officers detailing any actions undertaken to meet the agreed outcomes in the personalised housing plan.
- Assessment to be composite with the support needs of all household members considered.
- When providing temporary accommodation the reasons for refusal of accommodation should be fully documented.

## **6. Shelter Mystery Shopping**

- 6.1 A total of 20 telephone calls, 10 email enquiries and 2 face to face visits were undertaken during June- July 2019. The team encountered some challenges in finding face to face mystery shoppers due to participants' inability to travel outside of London, and other issues for a number of shoppers. This was despite additional incentives offered during this exercise. The future mystery shopping recommendation would be for the authority to include local volunteers through partner stakeholders or service users' involvement projects.
- 6.2 A selection of typical advice scenarios with varying levels of needs were used. Some scenarios were sometimes repeated to assess the service's ability to identify repeat customers or where same (similar) advice situation would lead to a different result/outcome. All scenarios were tailored with local information for authenticity. Each mystery shopper was asked to contact the authority via the appropriate channel and then rate their experience against a number of assessment criteria. Shelter's Quality Standards was used to assess the results of the mystery shop.
- 6.3 The emails to the service are managed by a duty officer daily. The service receives an average of 25 emails per day of which 10 would be new enquiries requiring advice and information.
- 6.4 The reviewers found that the service is currently not set up to offer advice through emails as it serves as a filtering portal of enquires to the service. There is a need to update the current provision to ensure a high quality of advice is given at the first point of contact.
- 6.5 The mystery shoppers attended the Civic Offices, Grays, they accessed the service through the triage system and had an initial interview with the duty Housing Solutions Officer. The experience of one mystery shopper is more

positive with good advice being offered and the other requiring further advice and signposting to other relevant agencies.

- 6.6 A number of very positive reports and rating. Evidence of very clear advice given to customers. There was an indication that the first point of contact is managed by staff skilled at handling initial enquiries.
- 6.7 The ratings are largely positive due to the very good customer handling skills so even though some callers received limited advice or were told that someone would call them back, the customer felt confident/very confident that the authority took their call seriously and wanted to help.
- 6.8 Potential customers are routinely told that the Housing team will be able to help them and several callers were told that they would be treated as homeless and would be entitled to some help.
- 6.9 Ease of access was rated very good – no long delays or waiting for call to be answered. As with above results there is scope to provide better advice and information, and no one was told about other sources of help or directed to other sources such as the Council's website.

## **7. NPSS Review Findings and Key Themes**

- 7.1 The NPSS completed a Diagnostic Practitioner Review (DPR) which is designed to help local authorities to deliver more efficient and cost-effective homelessness prevention services.
- 7.2 The review highlights gaps in service provision, recognises good practice and makes recommendations for service improvements. It is, fundamentally, a 'critical friend' assessment of how a local authority is performing in its efforts to tackle homelessness.
- 7.3 The Reviewers completed a process mapping of the customer journey through the service by talking to and shadowing staff, talking to partner agencies and organisations (external and internal, statutory and non-statutory) and completing the off-site and on-site assessments.

The review focussed on 10 assessment areas:

- Quality of Housing Options
- Homelessness Strategy Overview
- Website Review
- Reception and Interview Room Facilities
- Hostels Focus Group
- Visit to Hostels
- Customer Interview Observation
- Staff Focus Group
- Managers Focus Group (including portfolio holder)
- Partners Focus Group

## 8. Quality of Housing Options

**Table 2 - Quality of Housing Options Results**

Service standards promote quality	64%
Baseline threshold service	63%
Good practice systems in place	50%
Confirmation of advice is provided	50%
Overall	59%

The Quality of Housing Options assessment involve four main areas which look at the processes that are in place: service standards that promote quality, what the baseline threshold service is like, what good practice systems that are in place including the advice and use of Personalised Housing Plans.

This differs from the overall score which encompasses the entire assessments undertaken in the 9 areas which looks at the practical application of the processes. The overall quality score of 59%, is higher because whilst there were good process in place, they were not always necessarily translated into operational working practice.

### 8.1 Areas of good service

- There reviewers found evidence that there has been investment in a number of comprehensive training courses for frontline staff. They all use the new Casework Management System Jigsaw and there is a uniform method of record keeping.
- There is a plethora of robust procedures in place to support the service and the response to the legislative changes. During the review, no customers were observed to wait more than 30 minutes.
- The website is excellent and provides opportunities for self-help, which is a good platform to begin using the Customer Portal
- The provision of Temporary Accommodations with support enables the service to meet the needs of a range of applicants.
- There is excellent partnership working, in particular with Children's and Adult Social Services.
- There is a continuous commitment towards improvements to address gaps in the service and increase capacity for staff.

### 8.2 Recommendations

- An amendment to the temporary accommodation procedure is required to align with the HRA 17.

- Consideration should be given to expanding the Triage Team to provide more opportunities for pre-prevention and advice work.
- Develop a procedure around Private Rented Sector incentives for landlords with the aim of increasing the number of landlords interested in working with Thurrock to house homelessness applicants.
- The service to support housing officers to deliver surgeries within the community, in an effort to work more upstream.
- Develop a placement policy to support officers and help with managing expectations of customers. Customers required information on the housing options and the possibility of being offered accommodation out of borough due to affordability and limitation of accommodation within Thurrock.
- Team managers require regular case supervision sessions with frontline officers, to ensure customers receive information and regular updates on progression of case.

## 9. Homelessness Strategy Overview

**Table 4- Homelessness Strategy Results**

Current Homelessness Strategy	50%
Review and Strategy Development	55%
Strategic Priorities	47%
Fit for Purpose	30%
Corporate Commitment	50%
Investment	40%
Evidence of joint working	50%
<b>Overall</b>	<b>45%</b>

As part of the off-site review the reviewers assessed the Homelessness Strategy. The current strategy was drafted in 2015 and requires updating to include the functions of the new legislation and other factors relevant to the delivery of the homelessness service.

### 9.1 Areas of good service

- On review it was found that there was good record of consultation amongst partners and good access to support services for identified cohorts.
- Although the strategy was drafted prior to HRA17, there was a commitment to the development of new social housing to meet demand. There was also specific focus on prevention of homelessness.

### 9.2 Recommendations

- Key partners should be involved in formulating the Homelessness Strategy
- The Strategy should highlight authority's allocation of funds from the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP).
- Use the Homelessness and Mental Health Forum as a tool to monitor Homelessness.

## 10. Website Review

**Table 5- Website Review Results**

Accessibility and Navigation	<b>92%</b>
Information and Advice	<b>75%</b>
Links and Directory	<b>100%</b>
Contact and On-line Application	<b>63%</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>79%</b>

### 10.1 Areas of good service

- The website contained very good range of accessibility tools for customers to use. The pages were well laid out in plain English, with excellent links, which makes information very easy read and to find.
- Throughout all the homelessness pages there are links to where people can get independent advice about their situation which is really good practice.
- There is an excellent range of information available for a range of different client groups/situations

### 10.2 Recommendations

- The reviewers made some recommendations in respect of the additional enhancements to the website which were already included in the customer excellence programme.

## 11. Reception and Interview Facilities

**Table 6- Reception and Interview Facilities Results**

Reception Facilities	<b>50%</b>
Interview Facilities	<b>45%</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>48%</b>

### 11.1 Areas of good service

- The face to face service is provided from the Civic Offices reception area.
- The service has the use of 4 interview rooms, which also provides space for the Housing Solutions Team Manager to be based at the reception with the frontline staff.
- All interview rooms are equipped with a phone and PC so that officers can “talk and type” when conducting interview, which is an efficient way of capturing information from customers.
- The reception area has a significant number of tablets for use by members of the public which give direct access to the Council’s website. In addition there are four PC’s for customers to use to access other services, e.g. Department of Work and Pensions for Universal Credit applications.

## 11.2 Recommendations

- Officers have the ability to print off leaflets and information for customers and there is good information displayed about transport links/departures on the screens.
- The out of hours service information needs to be clearly displayed in the reception area and outside the building
- The reception and waiting area would benefit from having some additional features to be more customer friendly and suitable for children whilst they wait, i.e. toys, books.
- The service standards should be displayed in the waiting area and develop more leaflets for customers.
- Consideration should be given to delivering surgeries within the community to make the Housing Solutions service more accessible.
- A review and risk assessment of the interview rooms is required to take into account the Equality Act 2010, the safety of staff and the overall customer experience.

## 12. Hostel Focus Groups

**Table 7 – Hostel Focus Group Results**

	Overall
Clarence Rd	<b>52%</b>
Charles Street hostel	<b>33%</b>

The reviewers met with 6 residents across the two hostels.

## 12.1 Areas of good service

- The hostel staff were supportive and had good rapport with customers. One customer was very happy with no complaints and was generally very happy with the outcome of this contact and assessment by the Housing Solutions Service.
- A common theme from the customer feedback at Charles Street was the lack of contact from Officers, some of the customers indicated that they did not know the name of their current officer and required further information.
- There was a general dissatisfaction with the length of stay in the hostel with most staying for over 6 months. This is impacted by the lack of Council accommodation and the expectation of customers that they would all be provided with social housing.

## 12.2 Recommendations

- Ensure that expectations around access to social housing are managed effectively.
- Ensure that where relief duties come to an end, a main duty decision is made on day 57 or as close to this as practicable.
- Complete a review of all residents in TA to ensure that main duty decisions are made where appropriate, and that all residents are made aware of the next stages for them in terms of move on.

## 13. Visits Overview

**Table 12 - Visits summary of the statutory Temporary Accommodation**

	71%
Overall	71%

The onsite visit included assessment of the temporary accommodation hostel building and review of records of key work sessions undertaken by staff to support customers during their stay.

### 13.1 Areas of good service

- The key work sessions undertaken by the support staff were seen as positive with staff discussing move on with residents. As part of the initial assessment when someone moves in, an assessment is undertaken to identify any health issues, with support offered to address the need.

- The support offer includes a period of floating support following their departure from the hostels. All the properties are very centrally located with easy access to public transport.
- It was evident that staff are very committed and very supportive of customers.

### 13.2 Recommendations

- The reviewers suggested additional features to improve the building and hostel environment. The recommendations included a consideration of separating the location of single people and families.

## 14. Customer Interview Observation

**Table 8- Customer Interview Observation Results**

Preparation	50%
Establishing the Facts	54%
Providing Advice	42%
Engaging with the Customer	50%
Efficiency of Approach	58%
Effectiveness Of Approach	46%
<b>Overall</b>	<b>50%</b>

As part of the onsite review the reviewers observed a number of interviews between customers and staff, covering the triage desk where initial assessments are undertaken, prevention interviews schedule appointments and relief interviews where applicants present as homeless on the day requiring emergency assessment and assistance.

### 14.1 Areas of good service

- There was evidence of kind and sympathetic approach, officers sourced the most appropriate facts, were calm and non-judgmental throughout interviews.
- Officers utilised the new casework management system to structure interviews and to be very focused on efficiency.
- At triage customers were provided with written record of appointments, as well as a checklist of required documents for further assessments.

### 14.2 Recommendations

- The recommendations follow the findings of Shelter detailed above. Principally, there is further learning on the interpretation of the legislation for staff, these are included in the team training and induction plan for all staff. There is also a requirement to increase the

level of engagement with customers after assessments have been undertaken.

## 15. Staff Focus Group

**Table 9- Staff Focus Group Results**

Customer Experience	56%
Operational Delivery	67%
Resources	67%
Staff Development & Involvement	50%
Evidence of Joint Working	67%
<b>Overall</b>	<b>60%</b>

The focus group was held with a number of housing solutions staff and included those working within temporary accommodation, private sector procurement and homelessness caseworkers.

### 15.1 Areas of good service

- Officers conducting the initial triage functions are skilled to make decisions.
- Managers have responded to making changes to the Duty Rota to increase capacity for staff to undertake casework and decisions making.
- There is a specific resource to support single, non-priority customers in to PRS accommodation and staff believe customers get treated the same regardless of priority need or any statutory duties owed. There was evidence of good partnership working, particularly with internal partners such as Children Services.

### 15.2 Recommendations

- There is a need to develop a minimum package for incentives to landlords to increase the number of affordable properties to ensure consistent message to Landlords.
- The whole team must be consulted on the Homelessness Strategy and be provided with details as to how their role supports the highlighted objectives.
- The 'Help to Rent' online resource for customer should further developed to encourage Landlords to work with Thurrock Borough Council This offer includes the provision of a landlord insurance which covers people with a history of rent arrears not vetted by landlord prior to the tenancy commencement.

- Members should be included in briefing sessions as a means of raising awareness of the new legislation, the prevention agenda detailed in the strategy and the work by the service to support customers. Further work is required to provide clearly defined pathways for customers with complex needs.

## 16. Managers Focus Groups

**Table 10- Managers Focus Groups Results**

Service Structure & Staff Development/Involvement	58%
Customer Experience	58%
Resources	50%
Operational Delivery	56%
Evidence of Joint Working	58%
Corporate Commitment	75%
Overall	57%

The managers' focus group included interviews with the Portfolio holder for Housing, Corporate Director, Assistant Director, Housing Solutions Manager and Team Managers. The results indicate high corporate commitment to support the service and the prevention agenda. This extends to Portfolio Holder bi-weekly meetings with Senior Leadership Team, which is a clear indication of the support and interest in the service.

### 16.1 Areas of good service

- The authority is committed towards limiting the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation and only uses this as a last resort.
- The additional offer for single people, based on newly developed resource is excellent for those who would usually be owed limited duties after the expiration of the statutory duties. The offer called the 'New Start Scheme' is provided by two dedicated officers to help couples and single people, including those with a history of offending, to access suitable private rented accommodation. As well as helping you find suitable housing, the officers work closely with applicants and their landlords to sustain the tenancies.
- Officers have been provided a delegated budget to support creative prevention initiatives. There is a continuous process of procuring and increasing the temporary accommodation stock.

### 16.2 Recommendations

- Ensure there is a continued high-level dialogue with London boroughs to agree suitable arrangement for placements in the borough.

Customer portal to be launched to help manage customer contact in a more streamlined way.

- Managers should periodically observe interviews to ensure customer care is continually at the heart of all interactions.

## 17. Partner Focus Group

**Table 11- Partners Focus Group Results**

Operational Delivery	<b>64%</b>
Resources	<b>58%</b>
Evidence of Joint Working	<b>55%</b>
Customer Experience	<b>54%</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>58%</b>

This focus group was held with internal and external partners, it included staff from Adult and Children Social Care teams, Community Safety, Thurrock Mind, DWP, St Mungos and Open Door.

### 17.1 Areas of good service

- There were service level agreements in place across the board and effective joint working protocols between Housing and Children's Services. Partners have been involved in consultation meetings for the new Homelessness Strategy.
- There is a multi-agency approach which is reinforced by the Homelessness and Mental Health forum where there is a cross service representation from statutory and third sector agencies.
- Partner involvement in the Housing Staff Conference 2019 has improved communication and raised awareness of the housing service.
- The 14 Local Area Co-ordinators (LAC) assist with the early intervention and prevention of homelessness, supporting Housing Solutions Service in delivery the corporate agenda. There is financial help for deposits to assist applicants who are successful in finding private rented accommodation.
- All partners agreed there is a good relationship between partners and Housing Solutions Service.

### 17.2 Recommendations

- There is a need to clearly define pathways for Rough Sleepers, which includes a single service offer. Further exploratory work is required in

accessing funding opportunities to sustain/ expand the Housing First scheme for complex needs customers.

- Develop a joint working protocol with the LAC's to clearly define the interface between the two services. The service should continue to embed specialisms such as the Mental Health Worker in to the Housing Solutions Service.
- Customers with mental health should have a tenancy sustainment offer with appropriate signposting to other agencies for support.

## **18. Summary of Actions to date**

- 18.1 The review was commissioned and completed during a period where the service is still embedding the new functions within the HRA17, training and equipping staff, raising awareness of the prevention agenda and the need to reduce rough sleeping with stakeholders, whilst meeting the demands of an ever increasing presentation of applicants with complex needs.
- 18.2 The review has highlighted areas of high performance and shown the service is performing at a reasonable level. There is a continuous corporate commitment to help residents to prevent and relief homelessness.
- 18.3 The Housing Solutions Service prepared intensively for the challenges of the Act, there was a consideration of the anticipated new levels of demand with a heavy focus on early intervention, prevention and targeting of the key cohorts driving the demand.
- 18.4 To date, good progress has been made, through an initial remodelling of the service, the acquisition of a new bespoke system, work to strengthen partnerships, staff training to empower staff in delivering an excellent service.
- 18.5 An action plan detailing the recommendation from the review has been developed for the service to focus on tackling the gaps in the service and improving the customer experience.
- 18.6 Following the review there has been a number of activities undertaken to achieve some of the recommendations detailed in the reviewers report. The training programme for staff has been rolled out with the majority due to be completed by the end of the 2019 calendar year.
- 18.7 The new mental health practitioner has been recruited and commences on 16 September 2019. The officer will be based within the Housing Solutions Service and be on hand to offer the expertise and support to staff. They would also be available to conduct the necessary mental health assessments and assist in the formulation of a support plans for applicants.
- 18.8 Several enhancements have been made to the Jigsaw case management system to remove duplication and streamline the housing needs assessments, this has resulted in reduced interview times from over 2 hours to

approximately 1.5 hours. In addition, addition the service has successfully provided all the required government statistical data through using the information collated from the Jigsaw system.

- 18.9 The service has consistently limited the use of bed and breakfast accommodation and placements in out of borough areas for families and vulnerable households.
- 18.10 The landlord offer has been revised to include a combination of discretionary payment, deposits and advance rent payments. This will be shared on relevant platforms as a marketing tool to increase interest from the private landlord
- 18.11 The service has piloted holding surgeries within the hostels with staff attending daily to meet customers. This will be extended to the hubs and other venues such as the children centres and the local college.
- 18.12 In order to assist applicants in finding affordable alternative accommodation, the service has identified a new accommodation finding software which is provided with a bespoke landlord insurance developed specifically for homeless applicants.
- 18.13 Thurrock has been successful for additional rough sleeper funding from MHCLG. This is being used for the recruitment of a rough sleeper coordinator and additional outreach worker to increase the opportunity to find and assist anyone bedded down or likely to be street homeless within Thurrock. This recruitment is time limited for one year (2019- 2020) but the local churches have expressed an interest in working with Thurrock to establish a Night Shelter provision, the role of the Coordinator will therefore be vital in developing this with the churches.

## **19. Next Steps**

- 19.1 A continuous improvement plan has been developed which details the recommendations from the review. The service is working towards a target completion of March 2020.

The findings of the review will be shared with the Homelessness and Mental Health forum and relevant actions will be developed through the forum.

- 19.2 However, the suggested improvements to the reception area will require longer term planning as it is included in the Civic Office transformation programme. This will be monitored with on-going dialogue and involvement of the service to inform the final layout of the waiting area and interview rooms.

## **20. Reasons for recommendation**

- 20.1 Required as part of statutory service to provide homelessness service, assessing needs and providing resolutions.

## **21. Consultation**

- None

## **22. Background Papers used in preparing the report**

- Homelessness Reductions Act 2017
- Homelessness Code of Guidance 2019
- NPSS review findings presentation & Sheltered final report

## **23. Implications**

### **23.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**  
**Strategic Lead, Corporate Finance**

The service intends to meet the majority of the increased demand through the new ring-fenced `new burdens; grant as set out in the main body of the report. As this is for a transitional period, reliance on this funding cannot be given in the medium to long term and alternative funding will be required as demand on the service continues in line with current trends.

The Council identified additional growth within the Medium Term Financial Strategy as part of the 2019/20 base budget. However, as this is a demand lead budget, it continues to be closely monitored

### **23.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **Martin Hall**  
**Housing Solicitor/Team Leader**

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Following the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 it was expected that the service would need to adapt to cope with the new duties in a relatively short time frame. It is important that further/ongoing training is delivered to staff to ensure that the service is legally compliant and robust to limit successful lawful challenges.

### **23.3 Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**  
**Strategic Lead, Community Development and Equalities**

The new MHCLG data collection is being set up to receive household level rather than aggregated local authority level data. It will cover a broader range of households, including all those who receive homelessness assistance from

the local authority rather than, as now, focusing primarily on those that authorities are currently legally obliged to help under the statutory homeless definition.

The design of the new data collection has been shaped by the HRA 17 and will collect data to enable the effects of the Act to be monitored. We will continue to monitor trends for adverse and positive impacts on people with protected characteristics and review actions needed as required.

The Homelessness Strategy is being refreshed and the new data sets will inform a Community Equality Impact Assessment. We will work with partners and community groups to encourage representatives of diverse communities to be represented on Homelessness Forums.

**23.4 Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

- Staffing levels may need to be continually reviewed to effectively manage the increased demand.

**24. Appendices to the report**

- None

**Report Author:**

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Housing

<b>1 October 2019</b>	<b>ITEM: 6</b>
<b>Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>	
<b>Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy Report</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> N/A
<b>Report of:</b> Ryan Farmer, Housing Strategy and Quality Manager	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Carol Hinvest, Assistant Director of Housing	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health and Interim Director of Children’s Services	
<b>This report is</b> Public	

## Executive Summary

There is a statutory duty on every Local Authority to have a Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy which sets out the local authority’s plans for the prevention of homelessness and for securing that sufficient accommodation and support are, or will be, available for people who become homeless or who are at risk of becoming so.

The local authority must ensure that all organisations whose work can help to prevent homelessness and/or meet the needs of homeless people are involved in the strategy.

The current homelessness strategy was adopted in Thurrock in 2015.

A new Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy is now being developed which takes into account current homelessness in the borough, the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, the impact of recent welfare reforms, and new opportunities for preventing homelessness. The purpose of this paper is to advise Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee of progress to date, including the results of analysis, the identification of themes and to provide an opportunity for consultation with the Committee on the development of the final strategy and action plan.

A draft of the refreshed Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy will be brought to Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee in December 2019.

### 1. Recommendation(s)

**1.1 Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the contents of this report, and comment on the themes identified to develop a new homelessness prevention and rough sleeping strategy.**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

2.1 Following the introduction of the Homelessness Act 2002, every local authority was required to carry out a homelessness review, then formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the findings of the review.

2.2 The 2002 Act also requires local authorities to publish a new homelessness strategy, based on the result of further homelessness analysis, within five years of the publication of their last homelessness strategy. Local authorities are able to undertake homelessness reviews and publish homelessness strategies more frequently if circumstances change.

2.3 Thurrock Council last published its homelessness prevention strategy in November 2015. A kick-off paper was presented at Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee in February 2019 which outlined the plans for the development of a refreshed document.

## **3. Homelessness Strategic Analysis**

3.1 A range of strategic analysis has taken place, which considered the various factors affecting the provision of homelessness services across the borough. This analysis primarily looked at:

- national context, considering matters such as national trends, changing legislation/case law, welfare reform, and regional factors affecting homelessness
- local strategic context, considering the wider corporate priorities, and strategies from across the Council and other partner organisations
- local housing context, considering reasons and trends in homelessness across the borough such as rising levels of housing unaffordability in Thurrock, household composition, and the supply of accommodation across tenure types in the borough.

### **3.2 National Context**

3.2.1 There have been a number of developments in case law and legislation since the homelessness prevention strategy was last published, most notably the enactment of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which was widely welcomed by homelessness charities and support organisations. This Act amended and introduced a number of measures, including:

- Enhanced advice and information about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness
- New duties to prevent and relieve homelessness for all those who are eligible for assistance, regardless of intentionality or priority need

- An extension of the period of time where people are considered to be 'threatened with homelessness' by local authorities
- New personalised housing plans and assessments which outline the steps which both the individuals and the local authority will take to attempt to secure accommodation
- A new duty for specified public authorities, such as prisons and hospitals, to refer service users who they believe to be homeless or at risk of homelessness to local authority homelessness services

The primary function of the 2017 Act places greater emphasis on the prevention of homelessness and has significantly adjusted the criteria of those who approaching the Council who are eligible for assistance.

3.2.2 Other important changes to legislation include the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016, which introduced a cap on the total amount of benefits which individuals and couples were eligible to claim, including aspects such as Universal Credit, Housing Benefit and Child Benefit.

3.2.3 In addition to this, a freeze of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates was announced in 2015 which was set to run for four financial years from April 2016 to March 2020. LHA rates vary regionally across the country and they determine the amount of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit housing element that a claimant is eligible to receive. Whilst LHA rates have remained at the same level since 2016, private rental costs have increased.

3.2.4 Finally, the full Universal Credit roll-out for new claimants began in Thurrock in October 2017, replacing 'legacy benefits' such as Housing Benefit. These factors have had substantial impact upon the ability of households to secure and sustain tenancies in the private rental sector.

### **3.3 Local Strategic Context**

3.3.1 Work is currently underway to develop a new Welfare Reform Strategy for use across the Council, which will inform the action plan that is due to be published, managed and monitored alongside the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

3.3.2 In addition, the development of a refreshed Housing Strategy is due to begin imminently, with a kick-off paper elsewhere on the agenda for this meeting. Whilst the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy will go some way to addressing key issues affecting the provision of homelessness services, the Housing Strategy may be able to identify and tackle some of the wider factors that directly and indirectly affect the housing need of Thurrock's residents.

3.3.3 Peer reviews of the Council's homelessness services have recently taken place by two industry experts, namely Shelter and the National Practitioner Support Service (NPSS). Positive feedback was received regarding a number of elements. Additional areas have been identified for further development,

which will feed into both the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy and the Housing Solutions Customer Excellence Programme.

### 3.4 Local Housing Context

3.4.1 Since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2018 the Council has experienced an increase in the number of households which are homeless or at risk of homelessness that have approaching the Housing Solutions service for assistance.

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
April to July	437	523	690
April to March	1395	1605	2070 (forecast)

\*Forecast

In 2018-19, the first year of the Homelessness Reduction Act, the number of households approaching the service increased by 15% compared to the year before. In the months between April and July 2019, the service has seen a 32% increase in approaches compared to the same period in 2018-19, and a 58% increase in approaches compared to April to July 2017.

3.4.2 Approximately 50% of households that approach the Council for assistance do so because of the termination, or risk of termination, of a tenancy in the private rental sector. Exclusion by family and friends accounts for the reason for homelessness cited by around 40% of households.

3.4.3 The Homelessness Reduction Act places greater emphasis on the Council assisting homeless applicants to prevent or relieve their homelessness. In some instances this is not possible, however the Council may still have a duty to secure accommodation if the applicant is eligible for assistance, is homeless or at risk of homelessness, has a priority need and is not intentionally homeless. In 2018/19, 58% of households owed this duty were comprised of a lone female parent with a dependent child or children, 15% were couples with a dependent child or children, and 3% were a lone male parent with a dependent child or children.

3.4.4 85% of applicants owed the rehousing duty had an identified priority need as a result of dependent children or pregnancy within the household. 9% of households had an identified priority due to physical disability, and finally mental health illnesses accounted for 6% of the households.

3.4.5 There have been significant changes in the housing market in Thurrock during the lifetime of the current Homelessness Prevention Strategy. These have led to increased challenges surrounding affordability in the borough for both residents attempting to find secure accommodation and for the Council to fulfil its rehousing duty.

3.4.6 Firstly, between February 2014 and February 2019 the average house price increased by 50%, from £199,666 to £298,694. Whilst the average house

price in Thurrock remains lower than in the neighbouring South Essex boroughs of Basildon, Castle Point, Rochford and Southend, the percentage increase experienced in Thurrock between 2014 and 2019 is greater.

3.4.7 There have been increases in property purchase prices across all sizes and types in the above period, as illustrated in the below table.

Property Type	Feb 2014 Value	Feb 2019 Value	% increase	£ increase
1 bed flat	£97,725	£149,643	53.1%	£51,918
2 bed flat	£129,129	£197,865	53.2%	£68,736
2 bed house	£178,653	£279,051	56.2%	£100,398
3 bed house	£205,486	£316,043	53.8%	£110,557
4 bed house	£291,783	£438,840	50.4%	£147,057

3.4.8 Analysis of household income data indicates that 59.8% of Thurrock households have a gross income of £40,000 or less. Further analysis of property purchase affordability indicates that a household income of £35,000-£40,000 is required for a first time buyer to purchase a flat or maisonette in Thurrock. This means that approximately 52.9% of Thurrock households would not meet the affordability requirements to purchase the smallest types of property available on the housing market. For terraced houses, semi-detached houses and detached houses, the percentage of first time buyers in Thurrock that would not be able to afford to purchase these types of properties are 76.6%, 84.2% and 92.4% respectively.

3.4.9 The average weekly cost to rent in Thurrock has also increased over the past five years. The table below illustrates both the lower quartile (LQ) and average weekly costs of renting by property size in both 2014 and 2019.

Property Type	2014		2019		Increase %		Increase £	
	LQ	Average	LQ	Average	LQ	Average	LQ	Average
1 bed	£129	£139	£166	£172	29%	24%	£37	£33
2 bed	£162	£174	£207	£219	28%	26%	£45	£45
3 bed	£196	£218	£265	£276	35%	27%	£69	£58
4 bed	£277	£296	£336	£357	21%	21%	£59	£61

This data indicates that to rent an average one bed property for 52 weeks in 2019, a household would be paying £8,944, compared to £7,228 for 52 weeks in 2014. This represents an increase in housing costs of £1,716. The annual increase to rent a two, three or four bedroom property for 52 weeks between 2014 and 2019 is £2,340, £3,016 or £3,172 respectively.

3.4.10 The most recent earnings by place of residence dataset published by the Office for National Statistics gives the below mean gross salary for Thurrock. A calculator has been used to show the net income based on deductions for income tax and national insurance for the 2019-2020 financial year.

	<b>Gross</b>	<b>Net (2019/20)</b>
Thurrock Mean Salary	£28257	£22751

According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the maximum Housing Cost to Income Ratio (HCIR) in order for accommodation to be considered to be affordable would be 1:3. This means that if a household is spending more than a third of its net income on accommodation costs, that accommodation would not be deemed to be affordable.

3.4.11 The below table illustrates the average housing cost affordability for households with one or two full-time earners in comparison with lower quartile and average rents

	<b>Average weekly affordability (1x FT salary)</b>	<b>Average weekly affordability (2x FT salary)</b>	<b>1 bed</b>	<b>2 bed</b>	<b>3 bed</b>	<b>4 bed</b>
Lower Quartile	£146	£292	£166	£207	£265	£336
Average Rent			£172	£219	£276	£357

3.4.12 This table indicates that for a household with a single full-time average income, weekly rents in the private sector are not affordable across all property sizes. A household with two full-time average incomes may find the private rental sector more affordable for properties with one or two bedrooms, however would experience less affordability with three or four bedroom properties.

3.4.13 There are also significant shortfalls between the maximum Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate and current weekly rents in the private sector. The table below displays the current weekly LHA rates for one, two, three and four bedroom properties as well as the weekly shortfalls between the LHA rates and average rental costs.

	<b>1 bed</b>	<b>2 bed</b>	<b>3 bed</b>	<b>4 bed</b>
LHA Rate	£136	£171.08	£199.80	£266.65
Lower Quartile Shortfall	£30	£35.92	£65.20	£69.35
Average Rent Shortfall	£36	£47.92	£76.20	£90.35

3.4.14 As demonstrated in the above table, the current LHA rates are not sufficient for average rental values in Thurrock. A claimant in an average one bedroom private rental property would have an annual shortfall of £1,872 between the cost of renting and the amount of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit housing element.

#### **4. Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy Themes**

- 4.1.1 A series of stakeholder meetings have taken place so far in order to understand the issues affecting homelessness in the borough. The main causes of homelessness in Thurrock are the loss of a private sector tenancy and exclusion by family and friends, however the fundamental principle that has informed all activity to date is that homelessness is not simply a housing issue, but is instead a complex social problem.
- 4.1.2 The first theme that has been identified therefore focuses on true partnership and collaboration, not only between Council services but also with public bodies such as NHS Trusts, Police and neighbouring local authorities, as well as homelessness charities, registered providers and other organisations that support those who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness.
- 4.1.3 This approach is necessary, as homelessness can be both a cause and result of factors beyond the boundaries and knowledge of the Housing service. There are examples of local authorities establishing homelessness partnership boards that bring experience and expertise together to address these key issues and make a joint commitment to tackling all forms of homelessness, including rough sleeping.
- 4.1.4 A major factor currently experienced in Thurrock is the number of households being placed in the borough by other local authorities, either within temporary accommodation or as a final placement. This impacts upon the availability of accommodation for the Council to secure as accommodation for its own residents, but also has an impact on the resources of the partners listed above.
- 4.1.5 These partners may also be aware of households or individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, but have not approached the Housing Solutions team for assistance. There may be a range of reasons for this, however increased relationships between organisations may help to encourage those who are often most vulnerable to seek assistance with the right support.
- 4.1.6 Lastly, new community groups, voluntary organisations and charities are set up which work with those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, however the Housing Solutions team may not always be made aware. By establishing a cross-sector network, it will ensure that all partners can be kept informed of new developments across organisational boundaries.
- 4.1.7 A second theme will focus on the health and wellbeing of those who approach the Council's homelessness service for assistance. The uncertainty that the loss of secure accommodation brings and its effect on daily life can have a substantial impact on general wellbeing, however there are often a number of other physical or mental health needs for which an applicant may require support.
- 4.1.8 Defined referral pathways between partners can be developed, redesigned or republished to help applicants to access the services that may be able to

assist their wellbeing and provide support for specific needs. Opportunities can also be explored to allow improved access to health services, especially for those who are rough sleeping or have no fixed address.

- 4.1.9 Thirdly, a theme will be explored surrounding the provision and accessibility of accommodation for those who approach the Council for assistance. There are significant pressures on finding and securing affordable accommodation in Thurrock, not only in the private rental sector but within social housing as well. Demand far outstrips supply for the Council's own stock, although there are a number of ongoing new build schemes, and there is a disproportionately small amount of housing association properties within the borough as an alternative.
- 4.1.10 Affordability is a key factor in securing accommodation. Through the development of a partnership approach, it may be possible to improve financial inclusion or increase access to employment opportunities, thereby increasing the number of affordable options available to applicants.
- 4.1.11 Additional challenges in this area include competition to secure stock within Thurrock with other local authorities with greater financial resources. Work is ongoing to develop a local offer to engage with local landlords and reputable lettings agents in order to build positive and beneficial relationships for the supply of properties.
- 4.1.12 It may also be possible to explore new options for emergency, temporary and permanent accommodation. Work is underway to bring Brooke House into use as more in-borough temporary accommodation, and it may be possible to explore options for night shelter provision within Thurrock. Further engagement with housing associations is also due to take place, with a view that further development of new social housing may be undertaken.
- 4.1.13 Finally, an important factor in the delivery of the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping strategy, as well as the day-to-day service provision, are the homelessness teams themselves. Officers serve as a vital link between partners, other professionals, housing providers and the households approaching the Council for assistance.
- 4.1.14 It is recognised that intense levels of support are required for some applicants, including rough sleepers, as well as an understanding of complex legislation and guidance in order to make correct decisions within defined timeframes. A key part of the Housing Solutions Customer Excellence Programme, and therefore the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy, is ensuring that staff receive ongoing training and development.
- 4.1.15 Officers will need to build new connections as well as reinforce existing relationships between the service and its partners in order to make best use of the knowledge and expertise available. Further areas for development are outlined in the Housing Solutions Customer Excellence Programme report.

## **5. Action Plan**

- 5.1 Once the themes have been finalised, an action plan will be developed to sit alongside the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy. Throughout all elements of partner engagement and consultation to date, it has been a shared aspiration that the action plan is a document which is jointly owned by partners to ensure that the best outcomes can be achieved by using the skills, knowledge and expertise of each organisation.

The action plan will be regularly monitored and updated to make sure that progress is made and that key actions are delivered within defined timeframes. A group will be responsible for this activity; formed either as a part of the existing Mental Health and Homelessness Forum or as part of a new partnership board which will be established. To ensure that there is appropriate oversight of the action plan, an annual update will be provided to Housing Overview on Scrutiny Committee.

## **6. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 6.1 As outlined, the Council has a statutory duty to ensure that it carries out regular analysis of homelessness in the borough and publishes a refreshed homelessness strategy at least every five years. The current strategy therefore requires a published refresh by November 2020.
- 6.2 Due to the significant changes since 2015 in welfare reform, homelessness legislation and housing provision in the borough, it is recommended that a draft Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy is brought to Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee in late 2019 so that the document can be published ahead of the statutory deadline.

## **7. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

- 7.1 As set out in the Homelessness Code of Guidance published by MHCLG, the Council must consult public or local authorities, voluntary organisations and other people considered appropriate before adopting or modifying a homelessness strategy.
- 7.2 Consultation activity that has taken place so far includes face-to-face sessions with Council staff and partner agencies, statistical analysis, and presentations to other key Council services, committees and boards.

Close work has and will continue to take place with a range of partners and service providers, such as the membership of the Council's Homelessness and Mental Health Forum, including NELFT, St Mungo's, Open Door, SERRIC, Mind, and Changing Pathways, and newer organisations such as the Friends of Essex and London Homeless.

- 7.3 As key themes have started to emerge, specific activity will take place with individuals that have engaged with the Council's Housing Solutions service. This will ensure that meaningful and appropriate actions can be identified to

address these matters, and can therefore be included in an informed action plan that will sit alongside the strategy.

7.4 The final draft of the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy will be presented to members of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee in December 2019 for a final review.

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities, MHCLG

## 9. Implications

### 9.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**  
**Strategic Lead, Corporate Finance**

By undertaking work to analyse homelessness in the borough and developing a new strategy in line with the preventative aims of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, it is hoped that the costs associated with the provision of services will reduce.

### 9.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Tim Hallam**  
**Acting Head of Law, Assistant Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer**

Section 1(1) of the Homelessness Act 2002, requires a Local Authority to review homelessness in its area and to produce a strategy under s1(3). Section 1(4) requires that the strategy is reviewed and updated every 5 years, although Local Authorities may do this earlier/more frequently than that. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 changes should be reflected in such a strategy. Thurrock Council must comply with the legal requirement of having an updated strategy within five years of publication of its last strategy.

### 9.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**  
**Strategic Lead, Community Development and Equalities**

As outlined within this report and set out in the Homelessness Code of Guidance, consultation activity must take place with other public bodies, voluntary organisations, service users and other identified stakeholders before a new strategy can be implemented. By undertaking a homelessness review, a broad range of stakeholders throughout the community can be identified and involved in the activity to develop a holistic strategy. The consultation results will help to inform a Community Equality Impact Assessment prior to implementation of the strategy to identify and address any issues affecting those within the protected characteristics.

9.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

- None

10. **Appendices to the report**

- None

**Report Author:**

Ryan Farmer

Housing Strategy & Quality Manager

Business Improvement - Housing

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<b>1 October 2019</b>		<b>ITEM: 7</b>
<b>Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>		
<b>Housing Strategy Timetable</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> N/A	
<b>Report of:</b> Ryan Farmer, Housing Strategy and Quality Manager		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Carol Hinvest, Assistant Director of Housing		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health and Interim Director of Children's Services		
<b>This report is</b> Public		

## Executive Summary

It is important as a local authority that Thurrock Council has a document which states its ambitions and goals with regards to housing in the borough. The current Housing Strategy was adopted in Thurrock in 2015.

A new Housing Strategy is now required which takes into account current legislation, regulation and market trends, the impact of recent welfare reforms, as well as new opportunities for meeting the housing needs of Thurrock's residents.

This report summarises the reasons for the development of a new Housing Strategy, as well as the stages which are involved in the design and ongoing management of the document and outlining the consultation plan to ensure that the Housing Strategy reflects and respects the needs of households in the borough.

Activity to start scoping and developing the new Housing Strategy is expected to begin in late 2019, with a view that a draft can be presented to Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee in autumn 2020.

### 1. Recommendation(s)

**1.1 Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the contents of this report, and comment on the proposal to develop a new housing strategy. In particular, the Committee are asked to comment on the consultation proposals as set out in section 6.**

### 2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1. The Council's current Housing Strategy was agreed by Cabinet in March 2015. It was implemented later that year, and is due to run until 2020. In light of the upcoming expiration of the Housing Strategy, work will soon begin to develop a refreshed document.
- 2.2. It is anticipated that the refreshed Housing Strategy will be in effect from 2020 until 2025 and will cover the range of tenures available in Thurrock, not only social housing but also owner-occupiers and the private rental sector. It is important to note that the strategy will consider housing need in the borough and the barriers which residents may face with accessing safe and secure accommodation, rather than providing an analysis of options or sites for housing provision.
- 2.3. The development of the strategy will not be carried out in isolation within the Housing service – instead, the intention is to co-design the strategy in partnership with key internal and external partners and stakeholders. This will ensure that the final document reflects and respects the needs of the diverse range of households in the borough. Further examples of consultees can be found in section 6 of this report.
- 2.4. The broad strategic aims which will be identified over the coming months will be underpinned by an action plan with jointly owned themes and actions. Outcomes will be delivered through the action plan, which will have regular monitoring and annual updates provided to Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

### **3. Developments since 2015**

- 3.1. There have been a number of significant events and developments since March 2015 which have affected the housing landscape locally, regionally and nationally. These include:
  - The implementation of the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 which required social housing providers to reduce rent levels by 1% each year for four years, beginning in 2016/17
  - The freeze of local housing allowance rates, which controls the maximum level of Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit, running from April 2016 to March 2020
  - The introduction of the Housing and Planning Act 2016
  - The Government's Housing white paper, "Fixing our broken housing market", published in February 2017
  - The Grenfell Tower fire in June 2017, which led to a number of investigations, inquiries and reports, as well as reviews of fire and structural safety
  - The roll-out of Universal Credit for new benefit claimants in Thurrock in October 2017
  - The implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 in April 2018, significantly increasing the level of support and advice which

local authorities are required to provide to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness

- The removal of the Housing Revenue Account borrowing cap in October 2018, lifting restrictions placed on local authority borrowing for building, refurbishing and regenerating properties
- The implementation of Additional HMO Licensing in the borough in June 2019 which requires landlords to comply with national health and safety standards and local criteria before a 5-year licence is granted

3.2. Since 2015 the cost to purchase properties or rent in the private rental sector locally has increased significantly, however household incomes have not matched this. The population of Thurrock has also grown over the past four years, whilst the supply of new dwellings has not kept pace with demand. These factors impact upon the housing market in Thurrock which has led to rising unaffordability and limitations on the housing options available to residents of the borough.

3.3. There is also potential for further significant changes in housing policy and legislation, following the Government's response to a number of consultations including:

- "A new deal for social housing" – the Government's social housing green paper published in August 2018
- A review of the rules which govern the ways that that Local Authorities are able to use the money raised through Right to Buy sales, published in August 2018
- "Building a safer future" – proposals to reform of building safety requirements, published in June 2019, based on the recommendations in the Hackitt Report which reviewed building regulations and fire safety following the Grenfell Tower fire
- "A new deal for renting" – proposals to remove Section 21 'no-fault' private sector evictions and strengthen the Section 8 eviction process, published in July 2019

3.4. It is expected that further clarity on the above consultations will become available as work on the Housing Strategy progresses.

#### **4. Strategy Development Stages**

4.1. There will be a number of stages and milestones required for the development and ongoing management of the Housing Strategy. Throughout all stages, engagement with partners and stakeholders is essential.

4.2. In the first instance it will be necessary to undertake a preliminary assessment of the current housing situation in Thurrock, including the analysis of market trends, an investigation into the internal and external factors which affect housing locally, and a review of current and projected housing need in the borough. This piece of work will provide a clear understanding of local challenges and a strong foundation for the strategy to be built upon.

- 4.3. The second stage will be to establish a number of key themes and factors which are important to residents in Thurrock. This will allow for priority issues to be identified which will require further action to address.
- 4.4. The third stage of the development of the Housing Strategy will be to define the actions which are necessary in order to tackle the issues and challenges which have been identified. This will form the basis of the action plan which will detail accountability and ownership for each action.
- 4.5. Finally, once approved and published, it is of utmost importance that the strategy and its action plan is regularly reviewed to ensure it remains relevant and delivering outcomes in line with its strategic aims.
- 4.6. An initial timetable for the development, consultation and production of a reviews Housing Strategy can be seen below:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event/Stage</b>
1 October 2019	Launch development with paper to Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee
October 2019 – November 2019	Assessment of current Housing situation and analysis of factors affecting housing need in borough
December 2019 – January 2020	Identification of key themes and priorities through engagement with residents and key stakeholders.
February 2020 – March 2020	Development of key actions for action plan and identification of action owners
Late March 2020 – Early May 2020	Purdah due to Local Elections
June 2020 – August 2020	Public Consultation on Draft Strategy
October 2020	Final draft presented to Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee

## **5. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 5.1. As outlined, the current Housing Strategy which has been adopted by the Council requires a refresh as it is due for renewal in 2020.
- 5.2. Due to significant changes since 2015 in welfare reform, housing and homelessness regulation and legislation as well as housing provision in the borough, it is recommended that the development work outlined in this report

commences in late 2019 so that a new strategy can be published prior to the expiry of the current strategy.

## **6. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

6.1. As explained throughout this report, collaboration is a key principle in the design, development and ongoing monitoring of the Housing Strategy. There is an aspiration for wide-ranging consultation to take place with a variety of key partners and stakeholders which include, but are not limited to:

- Residents of Thurrock
- Council Officers from a range of services, including Housing, Adults Social Care, Childrens' Services, Public Health, Planning, Regeneration and Housing Development
- NHS representatives
- Housing associations
- Partner organisations
- Organisations from the voluntary sector

6.2. Examples of previous consultation activity which will be considered for use again includes face-to-face sessions with Council staff, partners and key stakeholders, online surveys, statistical analysis, and presentations to other key Council services, committees and boards.

6.3. It is intended that specific activity with members of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee will take place to ensure that all appropriate stakeholders and issues as identified by members can be included throughout any period of consultation.

**7. Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- None

## **8. Implications**

### **8.1. Financial**

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**  
**Strategic Lead, Corporate Finance**

Through robust financial management and assessment of plans to improve existing stock, develop new housing and deliver housing services across the borough, the Council will ensure that the refreshed Housing Strategy has the appropriate resources in order to deliver against any objectives and actions which will be identified through the development stages.

## 8.2. Legal

Implications verified by: **Tim Hallam**  
**Acting Head of Legal, Assistant Director of  
Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer**

A refreshed Housing Strategy will ensure that the Council will deliver on its statutory duties as both a local authority and a social housing provider. Legal Services should be consulted to provide ongoing advice and assistance.

## 8.3. Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**  
**Strategic Lead, Community Development and  
Equalities**

Consultation activity is planned to take place with other public bodies, voluntary organisations, service users and other identified stakeholders before a new strategy is implemented. By undertaking a review, a broad range of stakeholders throughout the community can be identified and involved in the activity to develop a holistic strategy. The consultation results will help to inform a Community Equality Impact Assessment prior to implementation of the strategy to identify and address any issues affecting those within the protected characteristics.

## 8.4. Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

- None

## 9. Appendices to the report

- None

### Report Author:

Ryan Farmer  
Housing Strategy & Quality Manager  
Housing

<b>1 October 2019</b>		<b>ITEM: 8</b>
<b>Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>		
<b>Local Lettings Plans</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> N/A	
<b>Report of:</b> Ryan Farmer, Housing Strategy and Quality Manager		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Carol Hinvest, Assistant Director of Housing		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health and Interim Director of Children's Services		
<b>This report is</b> Public		

## Executive Summary

The Council has a statutory duty to allocate properties in line with its published allocations scheme. This includes their own properties as well as those managed by Registered Providers in the borough where the Council has nomination rights.

Thurrock Council's current Housing Allocations Policy, agreed by Cabinet on 16 January 2019, includes provisions for the Council to set Local Lettings Plans on a case-by-case basis, for example where new-build development has taken place or if there is a specific strategic requirement for additional flexibility around qualification criteria in certain circumstances. Local Lettings Plans are beneficial as they allow the Council to:

- Create balanced & mixed communities
- Protect existing stable communities
- Reduce void rates & tenancy turnovers
- Improve new community stability
- Tackle low demand properties

It is important to note that Local Lettings Plans sit within the Council's agreed Housing Allocations Policy and therefore for a resident to be considered for a transfer they must first satisfy all other elements of the policy.

The Council is developing new-build properties at Tops Club in Grays, with handover currently scheduled between January and February 2020, and in Claudian Way in Chadwell St. Mary, where handover for the majority of properties is anticipated to be in March 2020.

The Council also nominates applicants for Elizabeth Gardens, a purpose built extra care scheme for older people in Long Lane, Grays. This scheme is managed by Anchor Hanover and although the Council has nomination rights to all vacant properties, if the Council is unable to provide a suitable nominee for a vacant property from the Housing Register within 5 working days then Anchor Hanover can offer the property to an applicant deemed appropriate from its own list.

The Council is seeking to implement Local Lettings Plans for the three sites as outlined above.

## **1. Recommendation(s)**

### **1.1 Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the contents of this report, and comment on the proposed Local Lettings Plans.**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

- 2.1. A local authority has a statutory duty under s166A of the Housing Act 1996 to provide a scheme which outlines how it will allocate social housing within the borough. The local authority may only allocate properties in line with its allocations scheme; this includes the Council's own properties and those managed by Registered Providers in the borough where the Council has nomination rights.
- 2.2. Following the Localism Act 2011, local authorities have greater flexibility over how they prioritise the allocation of social housing, subject to offering reasonable preference to certain groups i.e. the homeless, those with medical or welfare needs, those living in unsanitary or overcrowded conditions or those who need to move to a particular area in order to prevent hardship. These are known as the reasonable preference groups.
- 2.3. Allocations policies must be fair, simple and transparent and they must comply with equality legislation. Community engagement and good partnership working with Registered Providers is essential to achieve this.
- 2.4. The Housing Act 1996 s166A (6) provides that an Allocations Policy may have parts regarding the allocation of specific housing to particular groups of people, whether or not they fall within the reasonable preference groups. These provisions are more commonly known as "Local Lettings Plans".
- 2.5. Such plans enable housing authorities to deal with specific issues and concerns – for example:
  - Creating balanced & mixed communities
  - Protecting existing stable communities
  - Reducing void rates & tenancy turnovers
  - Improving new community stability
  - Tackling low demand properties

### **3. New Build Local Lettings Plans**

#### **3.1. Tops Club, Grays**

3.1.1. This development is situated beside the Seabrooke Rise estate. It comprises of 29 properties over five floors in single block, with property types broken down as below:

- 8 x 1 bedroom flats
- 15 x 2 bedroom flats
- 6 x 3 bedroom maisonettes

There are no specifically adapted properties at this development; as such all properties would be included in the Local Lettings Plan.

3.1.2. The applicable boundary of the Local Lettings Plan for this development is the Seabrooke Rise Estate, including The Echoes and the 6 South Grays high-rise blocks.

3.1.3. At the time of writing, data analysis indicates that there are 457 current general needs tenancies in the applicable boundary for the Tops Club development.

#### **3.2. Claudian Way, Chadwell St. Mary**

3.2.1. This development is bordered by Claudian Way to the south and Brentwood Road to the west in Chadwell St. Mary. The 53 properties at this site are a mixture of houses and bungalows, as well as flats within two low-rise blocks. The property types broken down as below:

- 8 x 1 bedroom flats
- 14 x 2 bedroom flats
- 15 x 1 bedroom bungalows
- 3 x 2 bedroom bungalows
- 1 x 2 bedroom wheelchair adapted bungalow
- 2 x 3 bedroom wheelchair adapted bungalows
- 10 x 3 bedroom houses

3.2.2. The 21 bungalows at this site, including three properties which have been specifically adapted for wheelchairs, would not be included in the Local Lettings Plan, however the remaining 32 properties comprised of flats and houses will be.

3.2.3. The applicable boundary of the Local Lettings Plan for this development is the Chadwell St. Mary ward.

3.2.4. At the time of writing, data analysis indicates that there are 1114 current general needs tenancies in the applicable boundary for the Claudian Way development.

### 3.3. Allocation of properties

3.3.1. 75% of first lettings will be for current Thurrock Council tenants who meet the criteria set out in section 3.6. The remaining 25% of first lettings will be allocated in line with the usual processes as set out in the Housing Allocations Policy.

3.3.2. A mixture of property sizes and floor levels will be made available for each group. Properties will be allocated to households with a need for the number of bedrooms provided, as determined by the bedroom standard as set out in the Housing Allocations Policy. The above outlined provisions only apply to the first lettings.

	Total number of new properties	Properties outside of Local Lettings Plan	Properties within the Local Lettings Plan	Number of properties to be allocated to current Council Tenants (75%)	Number of properties to be allocated through usual process (25%)
Tops Club	29	0	29	21	8
Claudian Way	53	21	32	24	8

### 3.4. Eligibility criteria for Council Tenants

3.4.1. Tenants will only be eligible for consideration for the 75% allocation of new properties if the following criteria are met:

A. Tenants must hold a current Thurrock Council secure tenancy – introductory and demoted tenants will not be eligible

AND

B. Tenants must meet Thurrock Council’s criteria for joining the Housing Transfer List as laid out in the Housing Allocations Policy:

- Tenants with rent arrears or other outstanding housing related charges (such as re-charges for previous works) will not be eligible
- Where a tenant has breached their tenancy agreement, or has otherwise managed their tenancy in an unacceptable manner, they will not be eligible

AND

- C. Tenants must live in a property, rented to them by Thurrock Council, which is situated within the applicable boundary of the respective plan

AND

- D. Tenants must pass a transfer inspection of their current property

### 3.5. Prioritising eligible Council Tenants

- 3.5.1. Tenants who are interested in being considered for the new properties at Tops Club or Claudian Way must first qualify under the eligibility criteria in section 3.4.

- 3.5.2. An initial list of interested tenants will be collected by the Allocations team following the publication of the Local Lettings Plans.

Where there are more tenants who are interested and qualify than available properties, tenants will be prioritised as follows:

Priority Category	Priority reason	Priority Factor 1	Priority Factor 2
1	Underoccupying tenants	Number of bedrooms underoccupied	Length of time living continuously within applicable Local Lettings Plan boundary leading up to current tenancy
2	Overcrowded tenants	Number of bedrooms overcrowded	
3	Adequately housed tenants	-	

- 3.5.3. The applicants with the highest priority would be tenants that are underoccupying their current property. Within this category, the number of underoccupied bedrooms within their current property would first prioritise applicants. For example, an applicant that is underoccupying by two bedrooms would be given a greater priority than an applicant underoccupying by one bedroom.

If two applicants were underoccupying their properties by the same number of bedrooms, the applicant with the longest length of time living continuously within the applicable Local Lettings Plan boundary would be given a greater priority. Where a tenant has been living at more than one property within the applicable boundary, the combined time will count, provided they have lived within the applicable boundary continuously leading up to their current tenancy.

For example, a tenant, who had lived in property A within the applicable boundary for 10 years and then moved to their current property B within the applicable boundary 5 years ago, will have a combined time of 15 years.

A tenant, who has lived in property C within the applicable boundary for 30 years, and then moved to property D outside of the applicable boundary for 3 years, and then moved back to their current property within the applicable boundary for 2 years, will have a combined time of 2 years.

The current rules regarding downsizing incentives would also apply.

- 3.5.4. Following this, tenants which are overcrowded in their properties would then be prioritised. Within this category, as with the underoccupying priority, the number of additional bedrooms required within their current property would prioritise applicants. For example, an applicant that is overcrowded by two bedrooms would be given a greater priority than an applicant overcrowded by one bedroom.

As before, if two applicants were overcrowded in their properties by the same number of bedrooms, the applicant with the longest length of time living continuously within the applicable Local Lettings Plan boundary would be given a greater priority. Where a tenant has been living at more than one property within the applicable boundary, the combined time will count, provided they have lived within the applicable boundary continuously leading up to their current tenancy.

- 3.5.5. Finally, other applicants which are currently housed in their current properties will be considered and will be prioritised based solely on the length of time that the tenant has lived continuously within the applicable boundary.

### **3.6. Identification of eligible Council tenants**

- 3.6.1. Any eligible tenants who are interested in moving to the new sites will be required to join the Council's Housing Transfer list, via the usual online application process. Assistance will be provided where tenants need help with completing the online form but have no one who can help them e.g. family, friends and support workers.
- 3.6.2. Qualifying tenants will also be required to advise the Allocations team of their interest, so that a separate register can be administered. This process will be advertised to tenants, with advice and assistance provided. Tenants with rent arrears will not be eligible for a transfer under the Local Lettings Plans, however reasonable assistance will be provided to encourage tenant to clear their rent accounts.

There will be a cut-off date for registering an interest that will be clearly advertised; no further interests can be registered after that date. It is important to note that tenants which transfer to a new property will be required to pay the rents and any applicable service charges which have been set against that property, which may be higher than the rent and service charges of their current property.

- 3.6.3. The 75% of properties within the Local Lettings Plans will not be advertised via the Choice Based Lettings process online. Officers will allocate these after the cut-off date for registering an interest, and tenants will be made a direct offer.

In the interests of fairness, consistency and transparency, details of the Local Lettings Plans for the two sites will be published on the Council's website.

- 3.6.4. The Allocations team will determine which properties are within the 75% quota, and which specific properties are allocated to individual households. Offers made will be on the basis of a one offer only policy.

#### **4. Extra Care Local Lettings Plan**

##### **4.1. Elizabeth Gardens, Grays**

- 4.1.1. Elizabeth Gardens is a purpose built extra care scheme for older people in Long Lane, Grays. There are 65 flats and the Council has nomination rights to 47 of these (16 x one bedroom and 31 x two bedroom).

The scheme is managed by Anchor Hanover Housing Association, and nominations are required from the Council within 5 working days of a property being available to let. If the Council are unable to supply nominees within this timescale then Anchor Hanover may select people from their own waiting list.

- 4.1.2. Eligibility criteria includes the need for extra care support, but applicants must also be eligible for a nomination of social housing which means they must qualify in the usual manner for an allocation i.e. they must have the appropriate local connection in line with the Council's Allocations Policy.

- 4.1.3. Applicants are also assessed for the number of bedrooms they require according to their household size. A single person or couple would normally be eligible for a one bedroom property, however there may be situations where a two bedroom is required - for example where there is a need for a live in carer or to accommodate large medical equipment.

- 4.1.4. The Council has no difficulty in nominating applicants for the one bedroom flats, but often cannot find applicants who qualify for the two bedroom flats. Many applicants who qualify for a one bedroom flat would like to have a two bedroom property but do not qualify for a property of this size under the Allocations Policy.

Subsequently there have been a number of occasions when the Council do not have nominees for two bedroom flats and Anchor Hanover have allocated properties to people on their own waiting list; since their waiting list has different criteria this could mean allocations to applicants from outside the borough without the 6 year local connection required by Thurrock Council.

- 4.1.5. A Local Lettings Plan was previously approved which allowed allocations to the two bedroom properties outside of the usual requirements where there were no suitable nominees waiting. This resolved the issue of losing nominations to applicants that had no local connection to the borough and ensured that the Council's own waiting list of applicants took priority. This plan has now expired and as such requires renewal.
- 4.1.6. Where the renewed Local Lettings Plan is used to nominate applicants, couples will take priority over single applicants for the two bedroom properties.

## **5. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

### **5.1. New Build Local Lettings Plans**

- 5.1.1. The objectives of the proposed New Build Local Lettings Plan are twofold. Firstly, the aim is to maintain balanced and sustainable communities within the new development localities. Inserting new developments with a concentration of properties can destabilise a community and therefore it is important to ensure that a high number of the new tenants are already part of the community.

Secondly, the New Build Local Lettings Plan aim to encourage current tenants to move to properties which are of a suitable size and type for their needs, thereby making available properties which would be more appropriate for other households on the Housing Register.

- 5.1.2. The proposed New Build Local Lettings Plans require allocation to applicants where the majority (75%) have demonstrated their ability to manage their tenancies in a suitable manner and have a connection with, and active desire to remain within the area.
- 5.1.3. It is essential that New Build Local Lettings Plans do not discriminate against equality groups and there are current tenants within all of the protected characteristics groups, i.e. elderly, disabled, BME, gender etc. Specific adapted and non-adapted properties at Claudian Way have been removed from the Local Lettings Plan so that they can be allocated to applicants needing those adaptations or property types irrespective of current tenure or location, thereby providing positive impacts for people with these needs.
- 5.1.4. By restricting the majority of new build properties to current tenants there may be a negative impact on people who wish to move to the area, but this will be mitigated by the resulting void properties following the transfer of current tenants, which will then be allocated through the usual housing allocations process.
- 5.1.5. The New Build Local Lettings Plans will be applicable only to first lettings; therefore no ongoing monitoring of the plan is required, however notifications

of how the first lettings were allocated can be advertised through the Council's website; no personal information will be provided.

5.1.6. A survey carried out on the Seabrooke Rise estate at the time that The Echoes were built indicated that 78% of residents surveyed were in favour of prioritising new build properties for people who already live in the area.

5.1.7. Since the New Build Local Lettings Plans only applies to first lets they will have a restricted life span and will no longer apply once the first lettings are completed.

## **5.2. Extra Care Local Lettings Plan**

5.2.1. A potential issue that might affect applicants moving into Elizabeth Gardens through this Local Lettings Plan relates to the Spare Room Subsidy. This is where those in receipt of Housing Benefit or the Housing element of Universal Credit are not eligible to receive the full amount of benefit for a two bedroom flat if there is only a single person or couple in residence. This would therefore lead to a shortfall between the benefit received and rent expected that the household would be required to meet.

5.2.2. There are exemptions to the households affected by the Spare Room Subsidy which may be applicable to applicants for extra care at Elizabeth Gardens, such as for those who have reached state pension age. There are also exemptions for those with a disability which require an overnight carer, and for couples where one person has a disability that means that they cannot share a bedroom, however in both examples the disabled person will need to be receiving one of the following:

- Attendance Allowance
- the middle or higher rate care component of Disability Living Allowance
- the daily living component of Personal Independence Payments.

## **6. Reasons for Recommendation**

### **6.1. New Build Local Lettings Plans**

6.1.1. The Council is introducing new developments, some on sites previously unused for housing. It is essential that balanced and sustainable communities are quickly achieved within these new developments, through both existing and new Council tenants.

6.1.2. Existing communities can be negatively affected when a significant number of new households move into new developments located within estates. As such, it may be appropriate instead to move current tenants into the new developments from within the communities, and then back fill the vacated properties which are likely to be more dispersed. Overall the number of available properties is increased, however through the proposed prioritisation

methodology it also ensures that households are encouraged to move into properties which are a suitable size for their needs.

6.1.3. The use of Local Lettings Plans clearly identify how this can be achieved and ensures transparency, fairness and consistency in implementing the objective.

## **6.2. Extra Care Local Lettings Plan**

6.2.1. Extra Care housing is designed for people in need of a higher level of support than can be offered within Sheltered Housing.

6.2.2. Renewing the Local Lettings Plan for Elizabeth Gardens and opening up the two bedroom properties to applicants waiting for one bedroom properties could potentially reduce the waiting time for a number of applicants. This can be crucial where applicants are currently living in unsuitable accommodation or where they are suffering from dementia and would benefit from a move as early as possible, thereby minimising the impact of moving.

## **7. Consultation**

### **7.1. New Build Local Lettings Plans**

7.1.1. Previous consultation activity indicated that 78% of surveyed Council tenants were in favour of prioritising new build properties for people who already live in the area.

7.1.2. Consultation meetings will be taking place with the ward members for Grays Riverside regarding the Tops Club development, and with the ward members for Chadwell St Mary with regards to the Claudian Way development. Further member engagement and consultation is taking place through Housing Overview and Scrutiny committee.

### **7.2. Extra Care Local Lettings Plan**

7.2.1. Joint meetings were held between Housing, Adult Social Care and Hanover at the time that the previous Local Lettings Plan was established, with all in agreement with the recommendation.

## **8. Implications**

### **8.1. Financial**

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**  
**Strategic Lead, Corporate Finance**

Allocating new properties to existing council tenants through the New Build Local Lettings Plan will result in an increased number of void properties and the associated costs. The risk of increased rent loss can be mitigated to some

extent through early identification of transferring tenants, proactive advertisement of properties which will become vacant as a result and the early identification of works required to minimise void periods.

Currently, tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit or the Housing element of Universal Credit would not usually receive the full Housing subsidy for a two bedroom flat, however opening up allocations criteria for two bedroom properties through the Extra Care Local Lettings Plan could potentially allow tenants to claim a higher subsidy.

## 8.2. **Legal**

Implications verified by: **Tim Hallam**  
**Acting Head of Law, Assistant Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer**

Under the Housing Act 1996 part VI Councils may only allocate properties within the terms of their published Housing Allocations Policy. This includes nominations to Registered Provider properties.

s.166A(6) Housing Act 1996 enables housing authorities to allocate particular accommodation to people of a particular description, whether or not they fall in to the reasonable preference category. This is known as a Local Lettings Plan and may be used to achieve a wide variety of housing management and other policy objectives.

Thurrock Council's Housing Allocations Policy allows the Council to set Local Lettings Plans to allocate to specific schemes outside of the usual requirements.

## 8.3. **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**  
**Strategic Lead, Community Development and Equalities**

Thurrock's current Housing Allocations Policy allocates 75% of properties to applicants who are prioritised by their housing need. 25% are given to current Council tenants with a desire, rather than a need, to move.

The New Build Local Lettings Plans alternate this position and instead favour Council tenants over non-Council tenants for new Council Housing developments.

The justification for this is to ensure that the initial new communities that result will be sustainable. There is a greater probability of this being achieved where the majority of tenants have already proven the ability to manage their tenancies well and have an active connection with the area.

There is a provision within the New Build Local Lettings Plans to allow specially adapted properties to be allocated only to those with a disability, regardless of their current tenure.

The proposed renewal of the Extra Care Local Lettings Plan would impact only elderly and disabled applicants with support needs and would have a positive impact by potentially reducing the amount of waiting time for appropriate accommodation for Thurrock applicants.

8.4. **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

- None

9. **Appendices to the report**

- None

**Report Author:**

Ryan Farmer  
Housing Strategy & Quality Manager  
Business Improvement - Housing

<b>1 October 2019</b>	<b>ITEM: 9</b>
<b>Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>	
<b>Garage Project Update</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> N/A
<b>Report of:</b> Carol Hinvest, Assistant Director of Housing	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Carol Hinvest, Assistant Director of Housing	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Roger Harris, Corporate Director for Adults, Housing and Health and Interim Director of Children’s Services	
<b>This report is Public</b>	

## Executive Summary

Thurrock Council currently hold a stock of 2500 garage buildings located across the borough. The numbers of garages in use at any one time changes from week to week, however, at the date of this report, there are currently 716 void garages, which constitutes 28% of the overall garage stock. Of these void garages, there are 69 ‘Free to Let’ and the remainder are currently out of management due to a number of reasons including access issues, inspections required, repairs and clearance required. A planned programme of works has been set up to clear the garages and schedule the repairs over the next 6 months.

This report provides an update to the Committee on actions taken since the last report on 5 February 2019 and sets out next steps to take forward the garages project work and deliver the agreed outcomes.

### 1. Recommendations:

**1.1 It is recommended that Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive this report for information and comment.**

### 2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The Council owned garages located across Thurrock vary from standalone blocks of garages in large plots, to small isolated buildings on small sections of land, to garages located under town houses and blocks of flats. Examples are shown in the pictures below:



- 2.2 The variety of garage buildings presents a number of challenges and opportunities to the authority in terms of repair, maintenance and management to possible site redevelopment or land sale. Thurrock Council have recently undertaken a stock condition survey of the garages to allow us to develop a full and comprehensive understanding of the required levels of investment needed over the next 30 years.
- 2.3 The garage buildings in Thurrock have been subject to very limited investment in recent years meaning the overall portfolio is now in a “fair” condition and therefore requires a significant level of investment to maintain and improve the assets in the coming years to ensure these remain safe and usable assets for the residents of Thurrock.
- 2.4 Since the last report was considered by the committee, a number of interventions have been actioned by the council to mitigate the historic high void and rent loss and better utilise the garage stock.
- 2.5 The financial void loss remains at a similar level with last year’s figures and there are a number of contributing factors that have influenced this performance, in particular, the increase in rent charge in April 2019 which has meant that rent loss have not gone down despite a higher number of lettings carried out over the last 6 months, due to a high number of garages terminated.
- 2.6 Thurrock Council remains committed to continuously improving the garage service and the Garage Project Team was set up to deliver a number of agreed outcomes. Included in this was a dedicated Garage Officer who has developed a comprehensive Garages Action Plan for 2019/20.

### **3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

- 3.1 The key focuses of the Garages Action Plan are:
- Review of assets - including a full integrity stock condition survey and reviewing long term regeneration and development opportunities

- Review of back office process - including a review of the tenancy agreement and other garage documentation and the current rent charge
- Review of front office process and improving customer experience – including clearing the backlog of Free to Let garages. Timely processing of the garage waiting list, carry out lettings in line with waiting list and garage demand.
- Establishing an ongoing and dedicated communication programme across a number of channels.
- Resident engagement, consultation and positive publicity of Housing – strengthen relationships and develop collaboration with internal and external colleagues, undertake innovative schemes with partners such as Community Payback team, Mears and local resident groups. Carry out two garage door painting projects, in Springfield Road, Blackshots and Canterbury Parade/ Lime Close on the Flowers Estate in South Ockendon.
- Demonstrating a value for money service – reduce voids and increase income by improving turnaround for both repairs and lettings, taking part in pioneering projects to provide innovative and demand-led housing solutions. Support the Council’s recycling agenda and our local communities by improving recycling.

### 3.2 Review of assets - Stock Condition survey

- 3.2.1 In March 2019 Thurrock Council commissioned an external surveying consultancy to undertake a garage stock condition report with a view to provide a 30 year life cycle. The survey has identified there is a need for initial investment of £122,700 in the next 12 months to deal with immediate repairs and maintenance issues followed by a further £763,000 in the following four years. Past that stage it has been identified that an additional £11m would be needed. This is a significant amount of investment which will be required for the long term maintenance and management of the garage assets. This information and data needs to be combined with garage demand across the borough and balanced against potential income and the other demands on the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan for investment to see if this is the most viable solution moving forward.
- 3.2.2 This years proposed investment costs are made up of a number of different building elements, however, a considerable proportion of this is related to cracked and spalling concrete and steel reinforcement corrosion. This issue is very common in garage blocks because a large percentage of the garage stock is made of pre-cast concrete garage units that are susceptible to this deterioration. Left untreated this deterioration will continue and will have a detrimental effect on the structural integrity of the blocks therefore, it is essential these repairs are undertake in the next 12 months.
- 3.2.3 Review of the stock condition survey data has identified seven sites where it is considered demolition is the most appropriate course of action. This has been determined based on the locality of the sites, current condition of the garage assets, repeated issues with anti-social behaviour, fly tipping and

management of the blocks. These units accounts for 115 garages and plots, across the borough.

These sites are as follows:

Road	Number of Garages	% Occupancy
Martin Road, South Ockendon	13	54% Let or Sold
Hobart Road, Tilbury	12	66% Let
Vigerons Way, Chadwell St Mary	18	55% Let
Garrison Parade, Purfleet	3	66% Sold
Meadow Road, Grays	14	64% Let or Sold
Crammavill Street South, Grays	49	39% Let or Sold
Wills Hill, Corringham	6	50% Let

Note: a Number of garage units at Vigerons Way, Crammavill Street South and Wills Hill sites have already been demolished and only a concrete slab remains.

- 3.2.4 Following demolition of these garages there will be opportunities for the Council to consider alternative potential uses of the land, as an example, the garage site in Vigerons Way provides a site of approximately 0.4 of acre which could be considered for development or sale.

We will work with our colleagues in Enforcement to put in place target hardening measures prior to any demolition and ensure risks including encampments at any of the development sites are minimised.

- 3.2.5 Other garage sites, in addition to those above, are also being scoped for redevelopment or re-use. Potential reuse solutions could include additional car parking spaces or community amenities etc. In some instances it may be appropriate to propose land disposal due to the size, locality and restricted access to the sites. The housing department will ensure information is shared with the corporate assets team when appropriate to ensure the appropriate level of due diligence is undertaken. Ward members will also be consulted.
- 3.2.6 Another innovative and exciting solution to redevelop some garage areas is the Housing solution 'HUSK' which involves using the existing footprint of a garage site and a new dwelling within its brick framework. A feasibility study is currently underway in Defoe Parade, Chadwell St Mary, as a pilot site to redevelop it into a number of disabled adapted bungalows fitted within the boundary of the existing garage brickwork. Working with our responsive repairs Contractor Mears in partnership with HUSK, Thurrock Council is pioneering this project to transform and regenerate this site.



Defoe Parade garages. This site is currently underutilised is subject to frequent vandalism, fly tips and anti-social behaviour.

3.2.7 This concept seeks to utilize off site construction methods and the existing brickwork perimeter of the garage unit to provide housing on restricted sites such as the one identified above.

### 3.3 Review of back office process

3.3.1 A full review of all back office processes is currently underway. The repairs contract process has been looked at and streamlined, making voids turnover and day to day repairs more efficient. Empty garages in need of repair have been identified as inspections are carried out, however, due to the volume, the repairs are being staggered in batches. This will also allow for the steady letting as they become available.

3.3.2 The introduction of the new Northgate case management system will allow better tracking of key service data, more efficient record keeping and quicker processing of applications in line with demand. This means we will be able to particularly target our efforts in areas of the borough where garage turnover is high, need is high, etc.

	<b>April 2017 - March 2018</b>	<b>April 2018 – March 2019</b>	<b>April 2019 - August 2019</b>
No of voids	135	111	55
No of lets	99	122	67

Please note these figures are indicative of the voids and lettings in each year and will not include figures from previous years.

3.3.3 These figures show that the lettings performance has increased in the last two years and there is a strong indication that this will continue for the rest of this financial year. Indeed, from April to August 2019, there has been an 82% increase in the number of lettings carried out compared with the same period last year.

3.3.4 In addition to the Garage Project Officer, a temporary Garage Assistant has been brought in, this will allow some of the key tasks - garage application

processing, lettings, inspections and garage clearances - to be expedited. Good progress has been made to date with the backlog of uploading garage application data entry by the Garage Assistant and the Housing Quality and Business Improvement team.

- 3.3.5 The next six months will review the garage lettings, voids and termination processes to ensure all documentation, workflows and other functions are streamlined, efficient and can be incorporated into other Housing functions similarly to dwelling lettings, voids and terminations. Redistributing these functions to other Housing teams for garage allocations, rent and tenancy management, will eliminate the need for a permanent Garage Officer.
- 3.3.6 The garage rent charge will be also be reviewed in line with market value and benchmarked against other local authorities. This will be considered as part of the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan which the Committee will see at Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting in December.
- 3.4 Review of front office process and improving customer experience
  - 3.4.1 Further targeted work will focus on eliminating paper based applications, putting in place workflow within Northgate for voids and lettings processes that would be similar to those for dwellings. This work will take place after the upgrade of the Northgate system.
  - 3.4.2 Key actions for the coming 6 months will focus on Thurrock Council website information regarding garages to ensure it is sufficient, clear and user friendly. In addition, we will looking at improving the front end garage process for lettings, enquiries and terminations linked through Northgate. This will include available garages locations so residents can identify availability in their preferred area, an easy to use tracking system so applicants can check where their application is in process, and a more streamlined process for dealing with garage enquiries.
- 3.5 Resident engagement, consultation & positive publicity of Housing
  - 3.5.1 In collaboration with the Community Payback team, we are undertaking garage door painting projects in Blackshots and the Flowers Estate in September 2019. 21 garages in Springfield Road and 36 garages in Canterbury Parade/ Lime Close were identified as in poor state of decoration. Working with Cllr Redsell and Cllr Jefferies to move these decorating projects forward, consultation has been carried out with local resident groups to agree the new door colour and all garage tenants have been notified of the project.
  - 3.5.2 The success of these projects was captured by local media and publicised through a number of internal and external communication channels including Thurrock's eNewsletter, our in house eMagazine *#Team Thurrock* and Social Media channels. Depending on the availability of the Community Payback team, we hope to expand the garage decorating project over the coming year and identify further locations to be painted.

3.5.3 Further activities aimed at engaging with residents regarding future garage developments and redevelopment will identify and consider specific housing improvement projects to replace redundant garage areas. Working with the Communications team we will take the opportunity to celebrate successes and promote the continued good works of the Housing Department.

### 3.6 Demonstrating a value for money service

3.6.1 It is important to note that the Council has been and will continue to take further proactive steps to actively improve the garage service. Priority activity goes to reducing the void loss costs by letting the garages which are free to let and repairing the garages currently out of service and letting them as quickly as possible. The additional staff resources now in place means that this is now happening at a greater rate than previously.

3.7 Excluding garages to be redeveloped or require major works, it is anticipated that the majority of void garages currently out of management will be let by end of April 2020.

3.8 As part of the garage clearance phase, the reuse and recycling initiatives that have been, or are in the process of being, implemented are listed below:

- Working with Book Rescuers.com to recycle over 2500 books
- Recycled 2 tonnes of scrap metal and generated £32.40 to go towards the Mayor's Fund
- Recycled 20 white goods and 36 small electrical items
- Working with the Local Area Co-Ordinators and Sheltered Housing teams to identify families and individuals in need. Donated 13 items of furniture and household equipment to date.
- Working with Teracycle to recycle over 1000 records, CDs, DVDs, video and cassette tapes.
- Working with local charities and textile recycling services to recycle over 60 large bags of textiles.
- Distributed 8 large crates of unused stationery to various Housing teams
- Recycled 19 large bags of personal documents left by residents in the garages, this is approximately three 660 litre euro bins of paper. All personal documents have been disposed of securely via the confidential waste disposal service. Approximately four 240 litre wheelie bins of other recyclable paper has been disposed of.

3.9 Working with our colleagues in the Environment & Highways Directorate, we will continue to recycle and re-use as much as possible to support improving the Council's recycling rates.

## 4. **Reasons for Recommendation and Considerations**

- 4.1 This report has sought to provide an overview of the challenges and actions to date, but also our continued commitment to improving Garage Services for residents.
- 4.2 A number of broad and targeted initiatives have been introduced and a range of new initiatives will be implemented to continue efforts to improve Thurrock's garage services.
- 4.3 There are a number of opportunities open to the authority in regards to the future approach to garages and the sites that they are located on, for commercial and income growth and to establish high functioning systems and processes to meet future demand.
- 4.4 It is acknowledged that providing efficient and effective garage services has been a challenge for the Housing Service, however, significant strides have been made over the last six months which have resulted in an increase in the number of lettings and a clear direction of service development being established. This will lead to an increase in rental income, reduction of the number of voids and better processing of garage applications.

## **5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

- 5.1 This report is an update of garage services in Thurrock, including the current position and planned actions. No consultation was required or undertaken at this time. However, the Council will consult with residents in line with particular actions from the Garage Action Plan including where garages are proposed for redevelopment.

## **6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact**

- 6.1 The implications of the recommendations in this report may require a review of local policies and procedures.

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**  
**Strategic Lead for Finance**

The Council has an ongoing repairs budget of £0.075m, and an additional 2019/20 of Capital funding of £0.200m has been identified with the HRA reserves. This will support the delivery of the project outcomes, and is included within the overall HRA business plans.

### **7.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **Tim Hallam**  
**Acting Head of Legal, Assistant Director of  
Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer**

There are no legal implications associated with this report

### 7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**  
**Strategic Lead of Community Development**

Whilst there are no direct implications at present arising from this report Community Equality Impact Assessments will be carried out in future against proposals where required.

### 7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

- There are no other implications arising from this report.

### 8. **Background papers used in preparing the report**

- None

### 9. **Appendices to the report**

- None

### **Report Author:**

Carol Hinvest  
Assistant Director of Housing  
Housing

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<b>1 October 2019</b>	<b>ITEM: 10</b>
<b>Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>	
<b>HRA Rent and Service Charges</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> N/A
<b>Report of:</b> Mike Jones, Strategic Lead of Corporate Finance	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Carol Hinvest, Assistant Director of Housing	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health and Interim Director of Children’s Services, Sean Clark, Director of Finance, IT and Legal	
<b>This report is Public</b>	

## Executive Summary

The 2019/20 financial year is the 4th and final year of the governments rent reduction policy. From 2020/21 local authorities and registered providers have the ability to increase social and affordable rents in line with the newly issued Rent Standard.

### 1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 **That the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee comment on the proposal for rent and service charge increases within the Housing Revenue Account**

### 2. Introduction and Background

#### Central Government Directives and Policy

- 2.1 The Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 aimed to reset the levels of rents in the social housing sector, relative to private rents. This involved reducing social and affordable rents in England by 1% a year for 4 years from April 2016.

The Act effectively suspended the previous social rent policy guidance. Instead of on-going rent increases of CPI + 1%, landlords of social housing were expected to reduce rents by 1% from 2015/16 levels each year for a period of four years (to 2019/20). The Commons Select Committee was advised that this assumed reversion to previous guidance (CPI + 1%) from

2020/21. This was confirmed in October 2017 and applied annually up to and including the 2024/25 municipal year.

### Regulation and Policy

- 2.2 The significant change to previous regulation is the inclusion of local authority housing within the rent standard issued by the Regulator of Social Housing. In effect, this means that Local Authority rents now follow the same process and standards as those managed by registered social landlords, bringing an end to the convergence objectives prior to the rent reductions

### 3. Issues, options and analysis of options

#### Implications for Thurrock Council housing tenants

- 3.1 The majority of properties within the HRA are charged a social rent, however, the newly developed units are based on affordable rents. The current stock level for the HRA has been updated to August 2019, and the impact of the proposed rent increases are shown below:

#### Social Rent properties

Number of dwelling by Bedrooms	Number of Properties	2019/20 Average Weekly Rent £	2020/21 Rent Increase per week £	2020/21 Average Weekly Rent £	Additional Annual Income £	Total Income 2020/21 £
0	243	59.95	1.92	61.87	23,309	751,718
1	2,800	73.92	2.37	76.29	331,164	10,680,047
2	2,199	80.30	2.57	82.87	282,517	9,111,164
3	4,222	100.55	3.22	103.77	679,222	21,904,904
4	216	113.30	3.63	116.92	39,156	1,262,768
5	7	113.22	3.62	116.84	1,268	40,894
6	2	122.85	3.93	126.78	393	12,678
<b>Total / Average</b>	<b>9,689</b>	<b>87.54</b>	<b>2.80</b>	<b>90.34</b>	<b>1,357,029</b>	<b>43,764,172</b>

- 3.2 The assumption has been made that the prevailing rate for CPI will be 2.2% (to be confirmed at the end of September 2019), and on that basis, the rent will be increased by 3.2% compared to the 2019/20 level.

#### Affordable Rents

- 3.3 The rent setting process for the existing affordable rent properties will follow the same guidance as applied to the properties within the HRA that are charged a social rent. This has the following impact:

Number of Bedrooms	Number of Properties	2019/20 Average Weekly Rent £	2020/21 Rent Increase per week £	2020/21 Average Weekly Rent £	Additional Annual Income £	Total Income 2020/21 £
1	18	114.06	3.65	117.71	3,285	105,942
2	59	139.59	4.47	144.06	13,177	424,974
3	13	173.67	5.56	179.23	3,612	116,497
<b>Total / Average</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>139.41</b>	<b>4.46</b>	<b>143.87</b>	<b>20,075</b>	<b>647,413</b>

- 3.4 In addition to the existing affordable rent properties currently within the HRA, it will be required to calculate the rent levels for the HRA new build schemes that will complete in the near future (namely Topps clubs and Claudian Way). Whilst it is not possible to give an accurate indication of these at the time of writing, included below is a summary as to how the affordable rent levels need to be determined.

- 3.5 The rent for affordable rent housing (inclusive of service charges) must not exceed 80% of gross market rent. Gross market rent means the rent (inclusive of any applicable service charges) for which the accommodation might reasonably be expected to be let in the private rented sector. Property size, location type and service provision must be taken into account when determining what gross market rent a property might achieve if let in the private rented sector.

- 3.6 Properties let by registered providers are not subject to the Local Housing Allowance. Nevertheless, providers should have regard to the local market context, including the relevant Local Housing Allowance for the Broad Rental Market Area in which the property is located, when setting affordable rents.

- 3.7 Valuations for initial rent setting must be made in accordance with a method recognised by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. This requirement is intended to help ensure that registered providers adopt a consistent and transparent approach to the valuation of market rents.

### 3.8 **South West Essex Broad Rental Market Area (Local Housing Allowance)**

Shared Accommodation Rate: £67.37 per week

One Bedroom Rate: £136.00 per week

Two Bedrooms Rate: £171.08 per week

Three Bedrooms Rate: £199.80 per week

Four Bedrooms Rate: £266.65 per week

### Service Charges

- 3.9 Service charges for both tenants and leaseholders are based on the actual costs of providing services and are set on the basis of full cost recovery. Councils are entitled to recover the costs of these services from all users i.e. leaseholders and tenants. The cost of providing the services is reviewed annually as part of the budget setting process, and the charges set accordingly.
- 3.10 Leaseholder service charges are set in line with the terms set out in the lease. Tenant's service charges are flat to all tenants receiving the service or service standard.
- 3.11 Details of the current service charges (for financial year 2019/20) are shown in the table below. As a prudent approximation, it has been estimated that in order to ensure that the cost of service delivery is fully recovered, charges will increase in line with rents i.e. at 3.2% as set out above. The full details of the increases to the charged will then form part of the HRA budget estimates for 2020/21.

Service Charge	2019/20	% Increase	2020/21
	Weekly Rate		Weekly Rate
	£		£
Lift Maintenance	3.16	3.2%	3.26
Door Entry	3.34	3.2%	3.45
Door Entry	3.34	3.2%	3.45
Communal Electricity	1.48	3.2%	1.53
Bruyns Court Electricity	3.34	3.2%	3.45
Caretaking	0.58	3.2%	0.60
Caretaking	7.59	3.2%	7.83
Caretaking	8.92	3.2%	9.21
Caretaking	12.66	3.2%	13.07
Caretaking	13.80	3.2%	14.24
Caretaking	13.98	3.2%	14.43
Concierge	32.23	3.2%	33.26
Concierge - Piggs Corner	34.75	3.2%	35.86
Sheltered	10.00	3.2%	10.32
Heating	5.78	3.2%	5.96
Heating	9.22	3.2%	9.52

- 3.12 Service charges generate income to the HRA in the region of £4.5m per annum. This is essential in order to continue to delivery of services to tenants and leaseholders

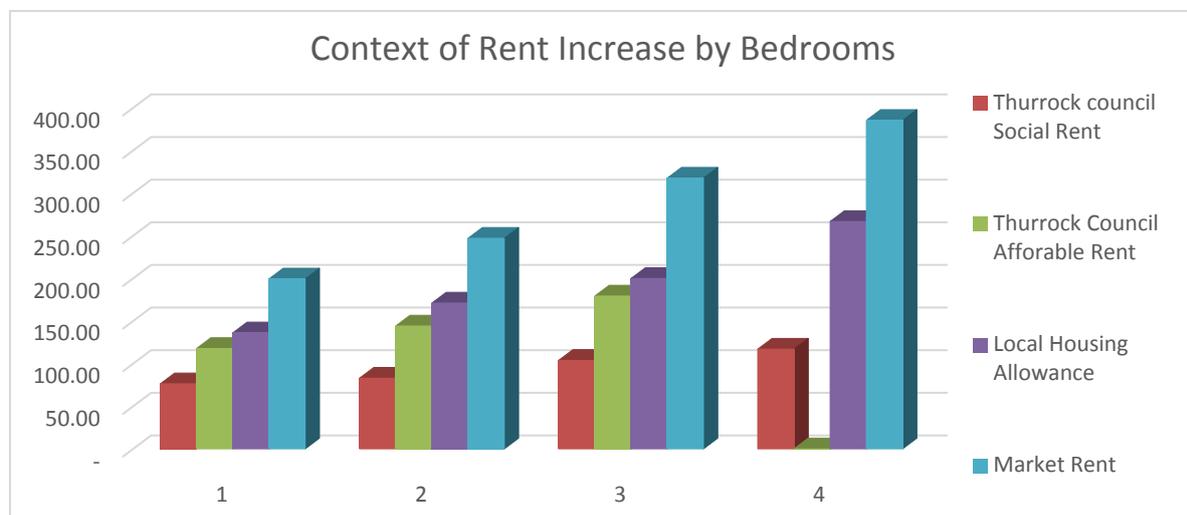
### Garage Rents

3.13 The current weekly charges for garage rents are £10 per week for council tenants and £12 per week for non-Council tenants. It is recommended that these charges are increased to £10.50 for a Council tenant, and £15.00 per week for a non-Council tenant in 2020/21. This will bring the up to a level in line with inflation as they have been historically low.

#### 4. Reasons for recommendation

##### Wider context of HRA rents

4.1 The graph below is an illustration of how HRA rents compare to other levels of charges. This demonstrates that whilst there is a requirement and recommendation to increase the current rents level in line with the government's proposals, social rent levels are still significantly lower than those of the local housing allowance and market rents.



##### Impact on HRA Business Plan

4.2 The introduction of the rent reduction reduced the cumulative level of resources available within the 30 year HRA business plan by £281.34m. The Medium term financial impact 2015-16 to 2019-20 during the rent reduction period had a cumulative reduction of revenue of £18.7m, meaning that without the rent reduction, the HRA would have an additional £18.7m per annum to spend.

4.3 The decision to reintroduce the ability for Local Authorities to increase rents is essential in order to maintain and improve the existing stock, as well as introduce other improvements within the service.

The following section of the report details the need for significant further investment into the existing housing stock. This is essentially where the additional income raised from rent increases will be spent, in order to maintain and improve the Councils housing stock. Without an increase in the current

level of rent, it will not be possible to allocate sufficient additional resources to this without having to find reductions to the current level of front line services

### Capital Investment in Existing Stock

- 4.4 The Stock condition survey undertaken in 2017 demonstrated a need for an overall investment of £101.8m over the next 5 years to ensure all properties are maintained to a good standard and continue to provide reasonably modern facilities and services. A total of £452.485m is required over the 30 year lifespan of the business plan.

Component - Extrapolated costs	£m's Full 30 Years
<b>Dwelling</b>	
Kitchen	35.353
Bathroom	23.455
Heating	37.809
Electrical Works	41.543
Misc	5.642
<b>Communal Areas</b>	
Per Floor	2.420
Lifts	2.990
<b>External Areas</b>	
Roof Renewal	57.596
External Refurbishment	27.407
Boundaries, Landscaping	21.090
Windows and Doors	41.046
<b>Scaffold Access</b>	<b>77.668</b>
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>374.019</b>
<b>Garages</b>	<b>19.446</b>
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>393.465</b>
<b>Prelims at 15%</b>	<b>59.020</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>452.485</b>

- 4.5 Annual requirements as estimated by the survey fluctuate annually depending on when specific elements are projected to reach the end of their useful lives. On average £15m a year investment is required in our existing stock to ensure it is in good repair and fit for purpose. This equates to a spend per property requirement of approximately £1,530 per property per annum.

- 4.6 Within the current 30 year HRA business plan (as at February 2019) there are assumptions regarding capital investment in the existing HRA stock. The current capital investment programme of £11.96m a year is addressing the highest priorities only and concentrates on the critical works while not allowing for additional improvements. This investment delivers the current Transforming Homes programme for the next two years and will replace the single glazing in around 1,000 properties.
- 4.7 In addition, there are also have a large number of properties in the stock where the double glazed windows have reached the end of the lifespan but current investment levels will not accommodate their replacement yet. The current programme will also start to tackle some of the priority external works required on the Garrison Estate but will not accommodate full external refurbishment.
- 4.8 The Council is commitment to achieving its objectives of providing homes to meet the decent home standard to all of its tenants. The tables below illustrates the funding that the HRA has been able to invest into the Capital programme in prior years.

### **Budget Profile**

- 4.9 The financial profile of programme is as follows (in £m).

<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>
16.69	20.29	19.56	10.27	10.06	11.96	11.54

- 4.10 Furthermore, changes in legislation and items that fall outside of the standard decent homes survey have resulted in the need for the HRA to allocate considerable funding from its capital programme to meet compliance directives.
- 4.11 It is important to note that the capital budget allocated to the transforming homes programme is required to covers capital costs of works outside of the standard scope for decent homes refurbishment. These additional areas major works to void properties which fall outside of programme, properties with structural concerns, energy efficiency works, management of damp and mould and major adaptation requirements as identified by Adults services.

### **Key Objectives for Years 7 and 8 of the Programme 2019 – 2021**

- 4.12 Looking ahead for the remaining years of this programme, the following agreed key objectives have been identified:
- Completing internal improvements works to remaining council housing stock, helping to improve long term viability of council properties while improving the wellbeing of residents

- Replacement of single glazing in residential properties in the housing stock. There are a number of properties across the borough with the largest concentration being in the low rise blocks in Ockendon and Belhus.
- Priority external refurbishment in line with the results of the stock condition survey. The priority areas for this are in Chadwell and on the Garrisons Estate in Purfleet
- Continued resident focused delivery in the format that has been proven to deliver strong customer satisfaction results
- Statutory leasehold consultation supplemented with face to face leasehold engagement in relation to external and communal works packages
- Extending strong partnerships with contractors delivering works, ensuring ongoing improvement in performance and partnership working, underpinning the ability of the Council to bring additional tangible benefits to local residents.
- Consulting on and seeking Cabinet approval for the delivery of a programme of stock investment from 2021 onwards

### **HRA Revenue Position**

- 4.13 The impact of the rent reduction has led the services to take various initiatives in order to maximise the resources available to deliver front line services. Below are some of the initiatives taken to combat with budget pressures and growth during the last four years:
- A major service review was carried out in 2017/18 which resulted in significant changes to each service area within Housing services to generate efficiencies and synergies between the teams
  - New Service charges have been identified and the introduction was phased over the last three financial years to ease the burden on the residents.
- 4.14 Despite these initiatives, the rent reduction has reduced the non-earmarked HRA reserves to the statutory minimum level making it difficult to fund any further budget pressures, growth or the resources required to meet the demands identified within the Capital programme.
- 4.15 The earmarked reserves within the HRA are committed towards supporting the transforming homes programme, and the remainder are ring-fenced for the delivery of additional housing purposes and cannot be used for any other purpose.
- 4.16 Moving forwards, while pay inflation (2%) and repairs and maintenance contractual uplift (2.9%) have been built into the business plan, there are no assumptions regarding additional service provision to tenants for housing management or repairs and maintenance as these require either additional income to be identified or significant cuts to be made to existing front line services budgets.

## **5. Consultation**

- 5.1 A full, detailed consultation exercise with tenants, to fully explain the process and implications of the proposed rent increase will be undertaken throughout October. This will allow sufficient time to provide detailed feedback of this exercise to inform further reports in relation to future year's rents. The increase will ultimately be subject to formal ratification by Cabinet as part of the 2020/21 budget setting approval.
- 5.2 The consultation process will aim to engage residents with a series of meetings set across the Excellence Panels scheduled meeting dates and their various locations. The meetings will seek to inform tenants of how their rents are calculated, as well as the plans that the department has for how the additional resources will be invested.

## **6. Impact on corporate priorities**

- 6.1 The recommended increases in rents in line with Central Government policy is essential to allow the HRA's to remain financially viable, and to work towards its objectives of sustaining the capital investment needed to maintain the stock, and ensure compliance with health and safety regulations.
- 6.2 The HRA is required by statute to make a minimum revenue contribution to finance it's the capital improvements required by existing stock. This is calculated at £10m but there is definite need to increase this in order to meet the requirements detailed in the stock condition survey. The actual requirements for funding were detailed in the Housing Revenue Account – Business Plan and Budget 2019/20 report to the Committee on 18 December 2018.

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Jonathan Wilson**  
**Assistant Director of Corporate Finance**

The financial implications are set out in the body of the report.

### **7.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **Martin Hall**  
**Housing Solicitor / Team Leader**

Section 76 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 imposes a duty on local housing authorities to prevent debit balances arising in their Housing

Revenue Account (“the HRA”). The HRA is a record of revenue expenditure and income in relation to an authority’s own housing stock.

The principal statutory provision governing the fixing of rent for Council property is contained in section 24 of the Housing Act 1985, which provides that authorities may “make such reasonable charges...as they may determine.” Further, it requires the local authority, from time to time, to review rents and other charges and make such changes, as circumstances may require.

### **7.3 Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**  
**Strategic Lead of Community Development**

The Councils Housing Revenue Account works to reflect the Council’s policy in relation to the provision of social housing with particular regard to the use of its own stock. In addition to the provision of general housing, it incorporates a number of budgetary provisions aimed at providing assistance to disadvantaged groups. This included adaptations to the stock for residents with disabilities.

### **7.4 Other implications**

- None

### **8. Background papers used in preparing the report**

- None

### **9. Appendices to the report**

- None

#### **Report Author:**

Mike Jones  
Strategic Lead  
Finance and IT

# Work Programme

**Committee:** Housing Overview and Scrutiny

**Year:** 2019/2020

**Dates of Meetings:** 18 June 2019, 1 October 2019, 10 December 2019 and 11 February 2020

Topic	Lead Officer	Requested by Officer/Member
<b>18 June 2019</b>		
Homeless Hostels, Housing First and Support	Lorrita Johnson	Officers
500 New Council Housing Update	Detlev Munster	Officers
Housing Performance Update	Chris Seman	Officers
Selective Licensing	Dulal Ahmed	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services	Standard Item
<b>1 October 2019</b>		
Housing Solutions Customer Excellence Programme – External Review Findings	Lorrita Johnson	Carol Hinvest
Homelessness Prevention & Rough Sleeping Strategy Report	Ryan Farmer	Officers
Housing Strategy Timetable	Ryan Farmer	Officers
Local Lettings Plans	Ryan Farmer	Officers
Garage Project Update	Carol Hinvest	Officers

HRA Rents and Service Charges	Carol Hinvest/ Mike Jones	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services	Standard Item
<b>10 December 2019</b>		
Fees & Charges 2020/21	Roger Harris	Officers
Tenant Satisfaction Survey	Carol Hinvest	Carol Hinvest
Housing Performance Update	Chris Seman	Officers
Homelessness Prevention & Rough Sleeping Strategy	Ryan Farmer	Officers
Tenant & Leasehold Satisfaction Monitoring	Chris Seman	Officers
HRA medium term financial strategy, rents and service charges	Roger Harris / Julie Curtis	Officers
Update Report - 500 New Council Housing	Detlev Munster	Members
Work Programme	Democratic Services	Standard Item
<b>11 February 2020</b>		
Selective Licensing Final Report	Dulal Ahmed	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services	Standard Item

Possible further reports:

## Work Programme

- Older People's Housing Strategy
- Review of Sheltered Housing
- Affordability Study
- Independent Living
- Thurrock Regeneration Ltd (TRL)
- New Builds

Clerk: Kenna-Victoria Healey  
Last Updated: 06 August 2019

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