

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 16 March 2021

Due to government guidance on social-distancing and COVID-19 virus the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 16 March 2021 will not be open to members of the public and press to physically attend. The press and public will be able to watch the meeting live online at the following link:

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Membership:

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

Lynn Mansfield, Housing Tenant Representative

Substitutes:

Councillors Daniel Chukwu, Sara Muldowney and Terry Piccolo

Agenda

Open to Public and Press

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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.

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Queries regarding this Agenda or notification of apologies:

Please contact Wendy Le, Senior Democratic Services Officer by sending an email to Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk

Agenda published on: **8 March 2021**

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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 19 January 2021 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Luke Spillman (Chair), Chris Baker (Vice-Chair), Qaisar Abbas, Joycelyn Redsell and Lynn Worrall

Lynn Mansfield, Housing Tenant Representative

In attendance:

Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health
Ian Wake, Director of Public Health
Carol Hinvest, Assistant Director of Housing
David Moore, Interim Assistant Director of Place Delivery
Keith Andrews, Housing Development Manager
Ryan Farmer, Housing Strategy and Quality Manager
Mike Jones, Strategic Lead, Finance
Chris Seman, Intelligence and Performance Manager
Alastair Wood, Technical Services Delivery Manager, Housing – Technical Services
Wendy Le, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being live streamed and recorded, with the video recording to be made available on the Council's website.

30. Minutes

Councillor Redsell said that she had mentioned sponsorship on the 'Automatic Gates' item (Clerk's note – within paragraph 12 of the 'Automatic Gates' item and amended to highlight Councillor Redsell's suggestion). Councillor Worrall asked for an update and whether comments had been passed to the Portfolio Holder. Carol Hinvest said that once consultation was completed on the sites mentioned in that report, this would then be fed back to the Portfolio Holder.

The Chair brought up a question from Councillor Fraser Massey (Ward Councillor for East Tilbury) who had asked about the boundaries of licensing for HMOs. The Chair said that Councillor Massey had pointed out that everyone paid council tax so the conditions and protection of HMO licensing should be the same across the Borough. Carol Hinvest answered that when the service had consulted on licensing, central government had set out a strict criteria for licensing on where licensing could be introduced. At that time, East Tilbury did not qualify as there had not been enough HMOs in that area due to density issues and the types of problems reported. The service would be consulting on selective licensing and property identification exercise and private stock condition survey would be undertaken to see whether the private rented sector had changed. This would identify what areas could have

selective licensing. A written response in regards to East Tilbury would be provided to Councillor Massey.

Subject to those amendments, the minutes of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 17 November 2020 were approved as a true and correct record.

31. Urgent Items

There were no items of urgent business.

32. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

33. Tenant Satisfaction Survey Results and Initial Action Plan Report

The report on pages 17 – 26 was presented by Chris Seman.

Members thought the response rate of the survey was good and commended the service on this. On Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Councillor Redsell questioned why it was the complainant that had to keep a log of ASB incidences. She was concerned that this would cause issues for the complainant and also questioned whether the Council's contracts with tenants needed updating. She also mentioned that there were fly tipping issues and untidy gardens and that tenants needed to look after their properties. Carol Hinvest said that residents were required to bring forward issues of ASB with evidence to enable enforcement action to be taken. She explained that the service had standard agreements in contracts with tenants and that terms and conditions for tenants were also available online for all to view. Councillor Redsell requested to discuss individual cases of ASB offline.

Councillor Worrall commented that the survey was good and in-depth and that the service needed to target themselves to do better. She thought people would wish to see actions arising from the survey and asked whether the survey would be undertaken annually. She suggested that once lockdown restrictions eased, Officers engage with Ward Councillors to narrow down where ASB hotspots were so the service could look to do better to improve the quality of neighbourhoods. She said that parking permits would not always resolve parking issues as most roads were not ideal to hold two/three bedroom houses and that smaller roads were backed up with cars parking on kerbs. She asked whether the service could look at more cuttings or more hardstandings and if this could come from the HRA or another budget that was needed.

Carol Hinvest answered that the service had been around the Borough to view ASB hotspots and could engage with Ward Councillors on this. She stated that the service worked with the police and other organisations to tackle ASB including more serious ASB such as drug offences and that the

Neighbourhood Officers also patrolled the Borough to identify issues in areas which they then reported to the relevant department e.g. most recently, a sinkhole issue. They also monitored the quality of the neighbourhoods particularly in areas where there were no caretaking services. It was hoped that the survey would be undertaken annually but a sample survey would be taken the next time round to ensure statistically relevant results where progress could be measured. She said that benchmarking helped the Council to identify places that were better than Thurrock and how Thurrock could learn from these places to enable Thurrock to become better.

Noting the figures on Repairs and Maintenance, Councillor Abbas asked what the service was learning from these figures and how the service could improve. He also mentioned that he had heard from tenants that some repairs were not handled well. Carol Hinvest explained that a survey was undertaken each time a repair was completed and that monthly meetings were held with contractors particularly more with Mears as the service's biggest contractor. Where there were dissatisfied tenants, contractors would follow up with these tenants and the service would undertake Learning Action Plans with contractors. It was identified that communication was where most of the issues arose from. She went on to say that the survey results from this report related to general repairs and that the survey undertaken after a repair was completed was different with higher figures as a result. From this survey, the service would learn from the results to identify what learning was needed and whether processes needed to be changed.

Members suggested that a working group could be set up with Mears as Members would be able to help resolve issues. It was said that it would be good for Members to see Mears in action. Officers said that the service could arrange for visits to Mears and Members to meet the General Manager of Mears. Officers would consider options for Members to interact with Mears.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee noted and commented on the report.

34. Housing KPI Performance Report (April to November 2020-21)

The report on pages 27 – 38 was presented by Chris Seman. Carol Hinvest stated that Environmental Health Officers were not going out during the lockdown restrictions which would have an impact on the figures in the report.

Referring to paragraph 3.5, Councillor Abbas noted that dissatisfaction levels were very high and asked how services could be delivered to tenants if the service could not understand tenants' needs. Carol Hinvest pointed out that paragraph 3.5 were the results of tenants who were dissatisfied with the service overall and the report broke down what was driving the dissatisfaction in dissatisfied tenants. She explained that the work undertaken from the previous report would link in with the work within this report and that some of the work was already underway such as keeping tenants informed and trying

to understand tenants' views and needs. These would benefit from focus groups once lockdown restrictions were eased.

Councillor Worrall questioned how many repairs were carried out in a year to which Chris Seman answered that Mears alone undertook between 25,000 to 30,000 repairs a year. Councillor Worrall noted that only a small sample of tenants (2,372) were canvassed from 25,000 repairs which was not enough as it also included dissatisfaction responses so the number of satisfied people was quite low. She suggested that some of this work could be incorporated into the service's wider surveys. She also sought more detail on paragraph 3.14 and how this would impact the HRA if £1 million had to be written off as she noted that the finance report highlighted that this would have significant implications. Carol Hinvest explained that the 9.54% reduction in the income from housing benefit did not mean that the service had not recovered that £1 million, it was a reduction and housing benefit was paid directly to the landlord whereas Universal Credit was not. Universal Credit was paid to the tenant and it was for the tenant to pay their rent with this. Despite the Universal Credit claims increase and the reduction in the income from housing benefit, the service was still on target with rent collection. The financial implications of this was that the service had to set aside a budget for bad debts in the HRA and it was assumed that rent arrears would arise despite there being no evictions. There would be no cuts and the bad debt was there as a provision but did not mean that the service would need it. Mike Jones confirmed that as rent arrears increased, so did the bad debt provision. He said that the entire rent income collection was assessed and a provision would be made against any unrecoverable income. Where anything was written off, it would come from the bad debt provision.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee noted and commented on the report.

35. Procurement Of Housing Capital Programme Delivery

The report on pages 39 – 48 was presented by Alastair Wood.

The Chair commented that the heating provisions were good as bills would be cheaper and homes would be more energy efficient although it would be a while before all storage heaters were removed from homes. He went on to say that the initiative was good and that the work in regards to the non-traditional homes gave people and the Council a better value for money.

Referring to paragraph 3.3, Councillor Worrall was pleased to see that it was acknowledged that mould and condensation was not a result of people's lifestyles. She questioned how many council flats still had storage heaters and if funding was obtained for the Chadwell flats, she asked whether that funding could be used to upgrade the heating systems in other tower blocks of flats as there was money allocated for the Chadwell flats. She also asked whether lower blocks of flats had storage heaters. Alastair Wood explained that out of the 15 council blocks of flats, Chadwell was the only block to have storage

heaters that were 30 years old and asset data showed that blocks in Grays and Blackshots had storage heaters that were 12 – 15 years old and the blocks in Tilbury were 15 – 20 years old. However, these could be reviewed for upgrade as well. Chadwell's block would be the pilot scheme and potential funding for this could be £1 million. If Chadwell was successful, the service would look to acquire additional funding for the heating systems in the Council's other tower blocks. He added that the Council had some lower blocks of flats that were sporadically placed and had no gas heating.

Councillor Redsell pointed out that the tower blocks in Blackshots were built in the 1960s. She went on to agree that it was not lifestyle's that caused mould and condensation as flats did not have drying rooms and that people could not be expected to open windows on higher floors where some windows were wide enough for a child to fall out of. She was pleased with the heating proposals for the Chadwell blocks and hoped that the Ward Councillor had been informed to which Carol Hinvest confirmed that they had.

Councillor Worrall questioned the financial limit that a Director could approve up to which Roger Harris confirmed was £750,000 but would need to go to Cabinet. Members were informed that this report would be going to Cabinet for approval.

RESOLVED:

Housing Overview and Scrutiny members were requested to:

- 1.1 Comment on the proposal to procure two new contracts for major works delivery programmes**
- 1.2 Comment on the proposal to delegate authority for award of the above contracts to the Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing.**

36. Annual Allocations Report - 2019-20

The report on pages 49 – 60 was presented by Ryan Farmer.

Councillor Redsell sought clarification on whether there was a Band 5 as she thought this had been removed. She also questioned if there were still people being added to the Council's housing list and the number of people on that list. Carol Hinvest explained that the report related to the 2019/20 financial year and Band 5 was abolished in April 2020. Ryan Farmer added that from April 2019, no new applications had been accepted for Band 5 and explained that Band 5 had been there to identify those who had no housing need. Band 5 applicants were still accepted for sheltered housing and most of the Band 5 applicants housed were sheltered housing applicants. However, Band 5 applicants for general needs were no longer acceptable in April 2019. In regards to the housing list, he said that anyone could apply for housing but they needed to meet the criteria to be accepted and added onto the housing list. The criteria had changed to ensure that people with the greatest needs

were prioritised. The report stated 9,000 people on the Council's waiting list which was correct at the time of the report but it was currently around 7,000 people.

Councillor Worrall asked whether the dining room in parlour type houses were allocated as a bedroom or if tenants could still have it as a dining room. Noting the removal of Band 5, she sought clarification on the options for adult children who still lived at home but were not on the housing list in the case of a succession. Ryan Farmer answered that properties were assessed on an individual basis by the relevant team.

In regards to Councillor Worrall's succession case query, Carol Hinvest explained that where there was a joint tenancy, the tenancy would go to the other surviving tenant. Each case was assessed individually and there had been cases where adult children were found to be earning above the one bed net income in the housing register so would not qualify for the housing list and would be expected to have the means to find housing of their own. Where adult children qualified for the housing list, the service would aim to help them but they would not succeed the same property.

Councillor Worrall commented that Thurrock had 8 HMOs and that there was a demand for one bedroom properties and that the service needed to be led by demand. She questioned whether the housing needs were addressed as she noted that there was a proposal for five 3 bedroom houses on Loewen Road and suggested that eight 2 bedroom houses be proposed instead. She also said more two bedroom properties could be built to enable people to downsize when relevant. Carol Hinvest explained that the one bed demand was for sheltered housing and there were a lot of voids in sheltered housing that the service had difficulty in letting. She said that turnover had to be considered and there was a lot of turnover in one bed and two bed properties compared to three bed properties. In addition, the percentage of bids on properties had to be considered. She went on to say that the proposals for developments on sites were based on what was suitable for that site and that there a lot of enquiries for three bedroom properties. She mentioned that the Council had an incentive scheme for downsizing. In regards to HMOs, she said that the Council would not be looking to buy and manage HMOs as it was not a growth area for the service although Councillor Worrall pointed out that it was a need area as people had been housed in hotels since March 2020. Carol Hinvest explained that most of the people housed in the hotels had been moved on and that others would be offered places.

RESOLVED:

Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee were asked to note and comment on the contents of this annual housing allocations report.

37. Housing Service COVID-19 Update

The report on pages 61 – 66 was presented by Ryan Farmer.

Carol Hinvest informed Members that the government had updated guidance for this lockdown which was different from the first. This time, lettings were allowed to continue following guidance and a lot more services could continue to be delivered. The Chair commented that the pandemic had enabled the Council to apply a housing first principle in terms of housing people first and getting people treatments and he hoped that this would be a new way forward. He said that there had been incredible work across the country and congratulated the service on their hard work.

Councillor Redsell sought clarification on whether there were still homeless people on the streets. She asked if any of them were ex-servicemen. Carol Hinvest answered that there were still a few homeless people on the streets and that the service had been trying to engage with them but they had no interest in being housed. The service had to activate their emergency weather initiative where they managed to temporarily house some of the homeless people but there remained a few on the streets. She was unsure whether any of the homeless were ex-servicemen but would check.

Referring to evictions, Councillor Worrall questioned whether the service knew how many evictions there would be and if the service were prepared for any of these evicted people that would become homeless. Carol Hinvest explained that there was an ongoing eviction ban from the first lockdown and that the service had heard of issues between private landlords and tenants. It was not known on the number of eviction cases as tenants had only been served a notice which was information between the landlord and tenant. She said that the guidance was clear on six month notices for tenants particularly where rents arrears had occurred during the pandemic. It was also clear that landlords needed to provide evidence to show that they had worked with the tenant particularly where rent arrears had occurred as a result of the pandemic. She went on to say that it was hard for the service to prepare for an unknown situation although they were aware. However, the service had been working to reduce caseloads by housing people so that the number of caseloads would be at a lower number.

Councillor Worrall asked whether the Homeless Reduction Grant covered the service's overall homelessness budget. She also sought clarification on the cold weather fund. Carol Hinvest explained that the cold weather fund was from the government which was for the Council's severe weather emergency protocol to enable rough sleepers to be housed. She said that the Homelessness Reduction Grant was within the General Fund as the homelessness service fell under this. Mike Jones explained that the grant was allocated to the homelessness budget did not cover the whole cost of the homelessness budget and additional funding was always needed from the General Fund to support the homelessness service. There would be an increase next year on the general homelessness budget which would help.

The Chair sought clarification on whether people had been evicted who hadn't been accepted on full license agreements. Carol Hinvest answered that not many had been evicted and that there were a number of decisions made for some that the service no longer needed to accommodate although a number

was still being accommodated. She went on to say that the guidance was opaque in some areas and due to the eviction ban, there was a limited number of accommodation available.

RESOLVED:

Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee were asked to note and comment on the contents of this update report.

38. Housing Revenue Account - Business Plan and Budgets 2021-22

The report on pages 67 – 76 was presented by Mike Jones.

The Chair commented that people did not like to see bills increasing but it would not be sustainably financial to not increase rents as the Council needed to meet costs. He said that this was not always clear to tenants and that it would be difficult for some during the pandemic. He questioned how Officers would be communicating this to residents and what the alternative would be if rents were not increased. Mike Jones answered that the Council would look to reduce services as an alternative and there was very little discretionary available in the HRA. The rent reduction in past years had significant impacts on the HRA Business Plan and it had been a case of looking at what costs could be cut to maintain the existing level of service. Without a rent increase, inflation would take over the budget and a review of the costs within the HRA would be considered and certain works that were not statutory obligations could be reduced such as improving properties for residents.

The Chair sought reassurances that the service had considered the HRA in detail and that there was no significant amount of 'waste' where cost savings could be made without affecting services. Carol Hinvest assured that there was no 'waste' and that there was also not a lot of discretionary spend within the HRA. This was spent on the services needed for the Council's tenants which was identified from the survey results. Roger Harris added that there had been 4 years of rent reduction and that the service had stripped down significant savings in that period. The Chair supported the increases which was needed and it was a moderate increase. He highlighted the importance of communicating the increases clearly to tenants in a sensitive manner.

Councillor Redsell sought more detail on parking areas and garages. Mike Jones explained that the parking areas referred to hardstanding areas and that the maintenance of these. Carol Hinvest added that there were also garage plots that people could rent and build a garage on. In regards to garages, the service would be spending within the budget and the Garage Project Officer had been identifying potential sites for housing or to turn into hardstanding parking spaces.

Councillor Abbas commented that keeping a balanced budget was the priority as well as keeping an income coming in but he felt that with the current pandemic, he would support a 0.5% increase and not the proposed 1.5% increase for rent. He also supported the garage rent increase but not service

charges as residents complained that they did not receive all these services. Carol Hinvest highlighted that only 50% of residents paid the service charges and that residents could raise an enquiry if they felt that the service that they were paying for was not value for money. The Chair felt that service charges were controversial and commented that the other option would be to increase rents and wondered whether Members had other viable alternatives to put forward.

Councillor Worrall noted that 457 people had visited the portal and she asked if all 457 had completed the questionnaire. Ryan Farmer answered that 453 people had visited the portal and although he did not have the number of people who completed the questionnaire, he said that everyone was able to access the site and information there. Councillor Worrall asked that the data on the number of people who completed the questionnaire be sent to her.

Councillor Worrall went on to say that a letter had been sent out informing residents that face-to-face consultations were not taking place. She questioned why the information about the rent increases and service charges could not have been posted out in a half page letter as a way to consult residents instead. This would have ensured that all residents were able to take part in the consultation as not everyone had access to a computer. She also said that the portal was not easy to use and required people to register to use it. Carol Hinvest explained that the information would not have fitted into half a page and that there was a lot of information. She said that the portal enabled better presentation of the information which was more interactive and that she would feed the comments about the accessibility of the portal back to the Consultation Team.

The Committee agreed to suspend standing orders until 10pm.

Councillor Worrall said that the report did not highlight if residents agreed to the rent increase and that this was a decision for Cabinet, not for scrutiny. As she had been Portfolio Holder in the past, she understood how bad cuts were. She said that the Transforming Homes programme was needed as well as replacing heating systems along with other works ongoing within the service. She agreed with the 1.5% rent increase but she was not supportive of the service charges particularly the 3.90% increase for caretaking service or the 3.48% increase to the concierge service at Piggs Corner as pensioners there were having a more difficult year than usual. She also pointed out that the survey had showed that residents did not feel that service charges were value for money. She felt service charges were too expensive and had never been given a good reason to agree with these. She sought clarification on whether new builds included service charges to which Carol Hinvest confirmed that it was.

Councillor Redsell commented that where there some flats being charged service charges, some tenants were able to maintain those services themselves so service charges should looked at in a different context. She gave the example of the grounds maintenance charge from a few years ago

and said that a lot of younger people were capable of cutting the grass themselves.

RESOLVED:

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That the committee consider the base budget for 2021/22

1.2 That the Committee consider and comment on an increase in domestic rent of 1.50%, in line with the 30-year HRA business plan from 5 April 2021

1.3 That the Committee consider and comment on an increase in service charges to reflect the costs of running each service in line with the 30-year HRA business plan from 5 April 2021 (detailed in Tables 4 & 5)

1.4 That the Committee consider and comment on the changes to garage rents detailed in para 3.10

39. Housing Development Programme Update

The report on pages 77 – 86 was presented by David Moore. He updated that Elm Road Park had been removed from the Site Options List.

Councillor Abbas sought more detail on Richmond Road. David Moore answered that the service was not involved in the TACC and was looking at the site only if the TACC was to be removed. The Education Department was looking at other options for the TACC. Roger Harris added that TACC had said that the site was unsuitable for the TACC.

Councillor Worrall welcomed the removal of Elm Road Park as it was the resident's green space. She sought clarification on whether a planning application for the Culver Centre site had been submitted yet to which David Moore confirmed that it had been submitted in December 2020. She went on to ask if there were more sites to come onto the list. David Moore explained that the Housing Delivery Approach paper was due to go to Cabinet and had over 200 potential sites identified but had not made it onto the list yet.

The Vice-Chair was pleased to see the Broxburn Drive site on the list and said that there were issues of cars being abandoned there, garages not being used properly and rubbish dumped along the railway fencing.

RESOLVED:

Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee were asked to:

- 1.1 **Note progress on the list of housing development sites to be taken forward for further detailed work, involving engagement with stakeholders and communities.**
- 1.2 **Note the amendment to the proposed development area at Broxburn Drive.**

40. Work Programme

The following items were added for the next meeting:

- Leaseholder Survey Results.
- Housing Service Covid-19 Update.
- Head Start Housing Update.

The following items were moved to the next municipal year as these would not be ready for the next meeting:

- Housing Strategy Update
- Private Sector Stock Condition Survey

As this meeting would be Roger Harris' and Carol Hinvest's last meeting for Housing O&S, the Committee thanked them for their hard work and support. The Committee looked forward to working with Ian Wake who would be taking over Roger Harris' position in the interim.

The meeting finished at 9.58 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

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Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**

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16 March 2021	ITEM: 5
Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee	
Inspire - Head Start Housing : Supporting Care Leavers	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key
Report of: Tiffany Bright – Inspire - Skills Manager	
Accountable Assistant Director: Michele Lucas, Assistant Director Education and Skills	
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children’s Services & Roger Harris, Corporate Director Adults, Housing & Health	
This report is public	

Executive Summary

Local Authorities have a duty, as a corporate parent, to ensure continued involvement in supporting young people as they leave care and move into independence until they are 21 years of age (or up to 25 years if specific, targeted support is required). Thurrock is committed to ensuring that care leavers (CLs) and children in need receive targeted support in high quality accommodation.

Young people in care and leaving care can be highly vulnerable and at risk of experiencing multiple accommodation moves, and/or in the case of young people leaving care, are at risk of becoming homeless.

Head Start Housing (HSH) was formally launched in December 2018. This is a joint initiative between Children Service and Housing. The team comprises 4 officers, as part of the Inspire offer. There are 2.5 FTE Housing Officers, 1 FTE business administration apprentice and 0.5 FTE Mediation Officer.

HSH sources and manages a portfolio of accommodation for young people either in care or in the process of leaving care.

The HSH Strategy aims to return all care leavers (CL) to Thurrock by December 2023. This is so they can be better supported by more visits from their After Care Personal Advisor, can easily access the range of local services, diverse education and employment opportunities and regular access to networks of family and friends.

Preparing CL for adulthood remains a key priority for Thurrock Council. HSH has been created to provide a solution for CL accommodation.

The aim of this report is to provide Housing O&S with an overview of progress to date and to make some recommendations for further enhancing the service.

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 To scrutinise the cross directorate working to improve the quality of services to care leavers regarding housing options.**
- 1.2 To support and promote innovative ways to engage CLs to prepare for independent living including entry into employment.**
- 1.3 Housing Overview and Scrutiny is asked to note and comment upon the work undertaken by HSH.**

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Early pilot findings

- 2.1.1 In March 2016, Children's Services and Housing designed a pilot to test HMO's for vulnerable young people, either in employment or working towards or at risk of losing their job on account of unstable accommodation.
- 2.1.2 The first property, 4 bedroom in Chadwell St Mary, accommodated two males and 2 females. Three were in employment and one was working towards employment. Out of hours support was provided on a one to one basis and in group sessions and the early success lead to the modification of a second property.
- 2.1.3 The second property, 3 bedroom, also in Chadwell St Mary, accommodated three males. Two were in employment and one had an offer of employment. Out of hours support was provided and this was successful for nearly a year. With a change of tenants we did experience some unacceptable behaviours this was addressed in partnership with Housing and Children's services.
- 2.1.4 Considerable learning has been applied from the pilot to inform the Head Start Housing strategy, 2018 - 2023.
- 2.1.5 The aim is to return all CLs wherever possible to Thurrock by December 2023. This is so they can be better supported by more visits from their After Care Personal Advisor, can easily access the range of local services, diverse education and employment opportunities and regular access to networks of family and friends.
- 2.1.6 HSH sources and manages a portfolio of accommodation for young people either in care or in the process of leaving care.
- 2.1.7 Housing made a commitment to provide 6 beds each year, by 2023 for exclusive use by CLs by making use of Right to Buy receipts, increasing LA

owned housing stock and making a positive contribution to the Housing Reduction Act 2017.

2.2 Progress to date

- 2.2.1 Support from the LA with a £1m capital bid has enabled further work to be undertaken between Housing and HSH and as a result HSH has purchased 3 properties that will provide 12 beds (the aspirational target). Taking into account Legal fees and modification costs, approximately £140,000 will be returned to the capital fund. 5 young males have moved into the first property.
- 2.2.2 Since December 2018, Housing has enabled CLs to make use of 13 beds, with below market rental costs applied. A further 7 beds are anticipated to be available by end August 2021. This leaves a further 10 beds to be allocated by Housing by December 2023, for the allocation of 6 beds pa, to be met.
- 2.2.3 Over the past 12 months, 9 properties (6 out of borough) have been handed back. 19 beds, in borough, have been procured. Each property provides essential furnishings, utility bills, water rates, wifi, cleaning tools, blinds and light shades. This is designed to reduce the CL's outlay from their Setting Up Home Grant, enable online access to courses/employment, working with the communal cleaning contractor to learn how to keep the property clean, reduces the amount of property in storage and an added benefit of reducing the number of financial transactions for the Finance team.
- 2.2.4 HSH Mediation has worked with fewer than 10 young people and their families to delay/avoid homelessness, despite promotion of the service and regular meetings with Families First. This intervention remains very successful with more than 90% positive outcomes, with positive relationships maintained.
- 2.2.5 The process for CLs accessing Housing Benefit as a direct payment to HSH, has generated more than £150k so far, this financial year. This helps to offset the additional expenditure for high level needs supported accommodation. Typically Head Start accommodates 8 CLs in this category with support ranging from 5 hours per week to 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. During the first lockdown, demand for high level needs support increased to 21 young people (currently 14 and rising).
- 2.2.6 HSH works closely with other teams and external partners to provide targeted interventions so the arrangement is transitional and no one stays for longer than is absolutely necessary.
- 2.2.7 With support from senior leadership team, HSH has identified more than £522k additional Covid related costs and will receive £456k from the central fund to relieve the burden on the budget. In addition to this, with rent, council tax refunds (on hand backs), hand back of expensive properties, Housing Benefit (in 2.2.5) and reimbursement from Adult Social Care for emergency mental health care, the budget code is relieved by income of £287,232.

2.2.8 As of 15 February, HSH provides accommodation for 83 CLs. The team manages a portfolio of 27 properties, ranging in size:

Property size	No. of properties types in portfolio	Additional skills development support from external partner (no. of beds)
1 bedroom/self contained unit	16	13
2 bed	4	-
3 bed	5	3
4 bed	3	6
5+ bed	2	0
Average occupancy 84%		

2.2.9 Close working, with colleagues in Procurement, Commissioning and Housing has led to the creation and implementation of a single framework for temporary accommodation.

2.3 What next

2.3.1 HSH is working with After Care to move on 11 CLs in the next two months. HSH is preparing for 47 new arrivals, either from foster care, residential care or prison over the next 8 months. HSH works closely with a range of external partners to extend the portfolio of beds.

2.3.2 High level needs support is expensive, so HSH is part of a working group, led by Commissioning, to write a specification for a single framework. It is anticipated the contract will begin in September 2021.

2.3.3 Children's and Housing CL working group has enabled the delivery of a half day training session on 'all aspects of Housing' to social workers and support staff. Solutions to the delivery of practical skills to CL and formal sign off, of a standard met, is being explored. 21 CLs live out of borough (reduced by 25%, as of Apr 19) most because they are studying in East London. It is hoped that by raising awareness of HSH strategy to relocate as many CL to Thurrock by end December 2023, that preparatory work will begin earlier than their 18th birthday. There will always remain a small contingent <10, that due to lifestyle choices, are unable to return to Thurrock.

2.3.4 A local partner has invited HSH to collaborate on a pilot to provide CLs with accommodation and an apprenticeship in health and social care. For those that successfully complete the apprenticeship and secure sustained employment, the tenant(s) will be invited to switch to a private rental agreement with the partner, taking control of their accommodation/future.

- 2.3.5 Cross directorate conversations have started to explore the feasibility of self builds by CLs as a way of building community, pride and skills. Potential locations are being scoped now. Anticipated timeframe: 3 years.
- 2.3.6 HSH will continue reviewing systems and processes, making modifications as required to ensure a high quality service is delivered to CLs.
- 2.3.7 Continued work, cross directorate, to develop fair joint protocols, standardise templates and consistent terminology for services provided 16+ years, should provide a coherent transfer across services and improve young people's understanding of their entitlements and how to access them.
- 2.3.8 HSH and Aftercare are working in partnership to develop effective processes to enable accurate forecasting and the timely move on of CL from supported accommodation, into a HSH property then social housing/private rental. This will support HSH meeting the statutory requirements to provide suitable accommodation and ensures a balanced budget at year end.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 Covid has presented challenges but has enabled a number of new ways of working – we are working closely with ICT to enable us to access systems that enable quick turnaround re repairs.
- 3.2 Covid has meant we have had to work in a different way, the cross directorate working has proved incredibly helpful, an example of this is the school catering service has provided food parcels for young people who have had to self-isolate due to a positive Covid test.

4. Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.1 It is requested that the Committee agree the recommendations and use the reporting mechanisms to support and challenge the work of HSH's services, on behalf of CL.

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

- 5.1 There is no additional information for the committee as part of this report.

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

- 6.1 This report relates to the council priorities: People, where all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay; and Prosperity, a borough which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**
Strategic Lead, Finance

This report asks that the Committee notes the work involved in providing suitable accommodation to CLs. We recognise the growing demand for accommodation and have identified expenditure directly related to Covid 19. The LA has provided capital monies of £1m to further growth and enhance the HSH offer to our care leavers.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**
Interim Deputy Head of Legal (Social Care and Education)

7.2.1 Given the nature of this report there are no legal implications directly arising from it? By way of background information, the following summarises the relevant statutory/non-statutory guidance:-

7.2.2 The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, which came into force in October 2001 and gave Local Authorities the statutory duty to provide significantly **enhanced** leaving care service, with the intention to raise the quality of our support to that of good parents.

"Care leavers should expect the same level of care and support that others would expect from a reasonable parent. The local authority responsible for their care should make sure that they are provided with the opportunities they need, which will include offering them more than one chance as they grapple with taking on the responsibilities of adulthood." Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations - Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers.

The duties introduced by the 2000 Act are supported by this statutory guidance. This guidance also sets out in chapter 7 and in Annex C the requirements on the Local Authority in planning accommodation provision for CL. It sets out the need for joint working between Housing and Children's Services and the creation of joint protocols.

There is further government non-statutory good practice advice on 'joint housing protocols for care leavers'

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/joint-housing-protocols-for-care-leavers/joint-housing-protocols-for-care-leavers-good-practice-advice>

which sets out the Corporate Parenting Principles in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 section 1 which the Council must have regard to when exercising its functions in respect of CL and its duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
**Community Engagement and Project
Monitoring Officer**

Supporting CLs with suitable accommodation is a significant function for Thurrock's most vulnerable young people. Data is collated to understand the profile of young people supported. Decisions are based on each young person's needs, including equality and diversity, SEND and emotional health needs.

The Authority recognises the importance of ensuring that young people who are leaving the care system can and should have access to the offers available locally. They are positively discriminated for priority housing and, by being in borough, can access a full range of offers and services to lead to sustainable employment. We are working cross directorate, in a holistic way, to provide CL's with the best life chances and ensure that they have a voice that is heard and shapes the provision.

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

There are no other implications as a result of this report.

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):

There are no background papers to this report.

9. **Appendices to the report**

There are no appendices to this report.

Report Author:

Tiffany Bright
Skills Manager
Children's Services

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16 March 2021	ITEM: 6
Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee	
Leaseholder Satisfaction Survey Results and Initial Action Plan	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: N/A
Report of: Chris Seman – Intelligence and Performance Manager	
Accountable Assistant Director: Carol Hinvest – Assistant Director of Housing	
Accountable Director: Roger Harris – Corporate Director Adults, Housing and Health.	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

An overview of the results of the leaseholder satisfaction survey is provided in addition to a summary overview of the actions which have been identified so far from the results of the survey.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That the Committee notes and comments on the report.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Starting at the end of July 2020 and ending at the beginning of October 2020, a full postal leaseholder satisfaction survey was undertaken by our service provider, KWEST Research Ltd, which was sent to every leaseholder. The project used a multi-mode approach, comprising a postal census survey targeting all of the Council's leasehold households, accompanied by email invitations and an online version to broaden survey reach and accessibility.

2.2 The questionnaire was designed in accordance with HouseMark's STAR guidance and includes a selection of STAR questions, alongside additional question-sets that cover specific areas of interest to the Council.

2.3 At the end of the data collection period, a total of 216 leaseholder responses had been received, representing a response rate of 25%. 216 responses provide overall data accuracy of $\pm 5.8\%$ for the leaseholder results, allowing findings to be used with confidence.

2.4 The data collected shows that 21% of the leaseholders who responded to the

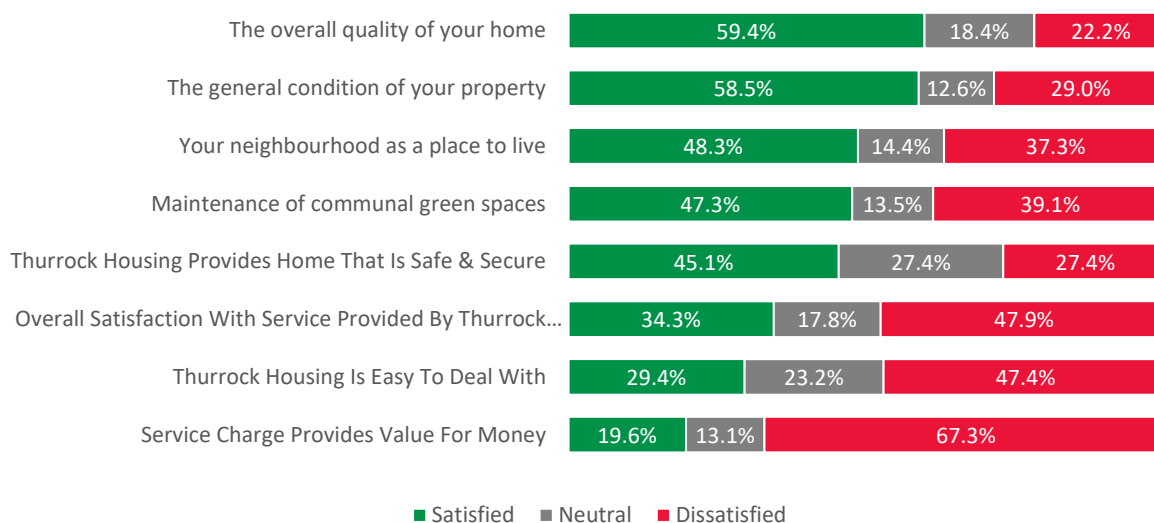
survey are not resident at the leasehold property in question and reside elsewhere. This can have an impact on the results with measures such as neighbourhoods, communal repairs and maintenance, estate services, anti-social behaviour and value for money as the respondent is not resident at the property and therefore will have a different perception on these measures to those who are resident.

3. Results

3.1 As part of the survey, a series of satisfaction questions were included to ascertain leaseholders' views of the key service areas provided by Housing. It is important to note that the bulk of responses were received between August and September 2020, not long after the coronavirus lockdown which resulted in a reduction in services provided by the Council.

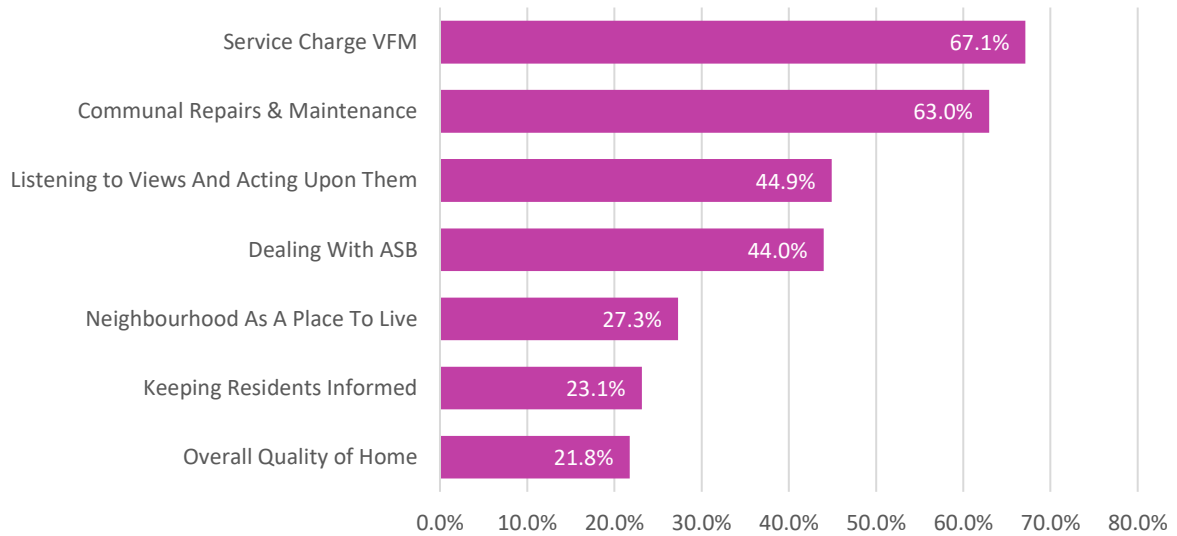
The survey results show mixed views from leaseholders on the services the Housing service provides, some of which contrast significantly with the results from the tenant satisfaction survey. There are moderate levels of satisfaction with the majority of measures but low levels of satisfaction and high levels of dissatisfaction with the overall service provided by Thurrock Housing, Thurrock Housing is easy to deal with and service charge provides value for money.

Satisfaction With Housing and Services



3.2 An important objective when undertaking the survey was to obtain leaseholder feedback on the services which are the most important services to them which are delivered by the Council with the results of this section shown below.

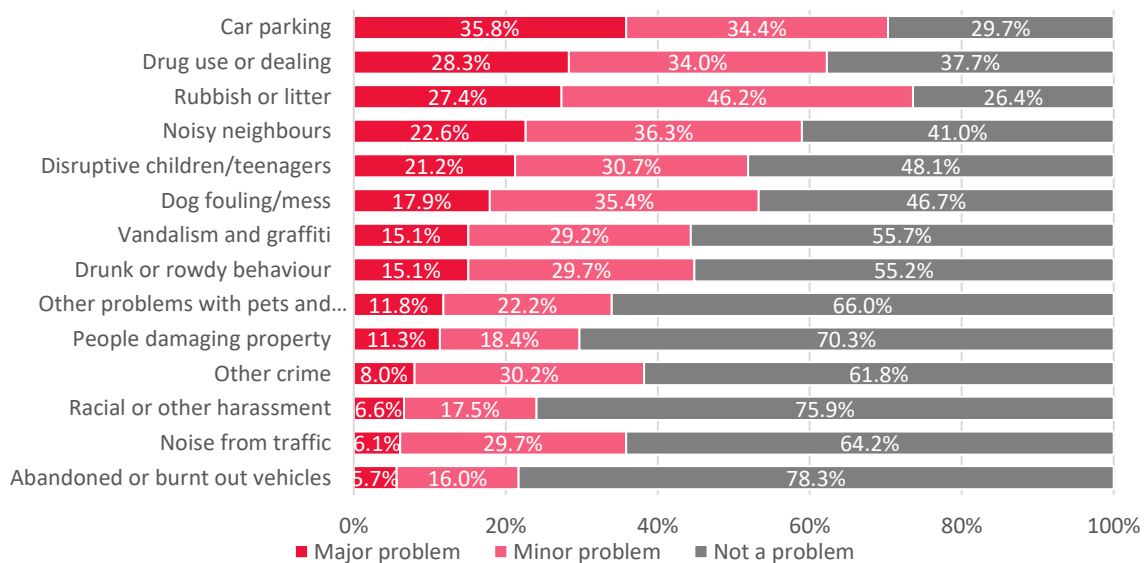
Leaseholder Service Priorities



The results from this question confirms that service charge value for money is the highest priority for leaseholders by a small margin with 67.1% of leaseholders indicating this was one of their priorities, followed by communal repairs and maintenance at 63%.

- 3.3 The survey also asked residents about problems in their area which can have an impact on residents' perception of their neighbourhood as a place to live. Leaseholders were asked to indicate whether each problem in a list was a major problem, a minor problem or not a problem. Full details of the borough wide neighbourhood problems is shown in the chart below.

Leaseholder Neighbourhood Issues

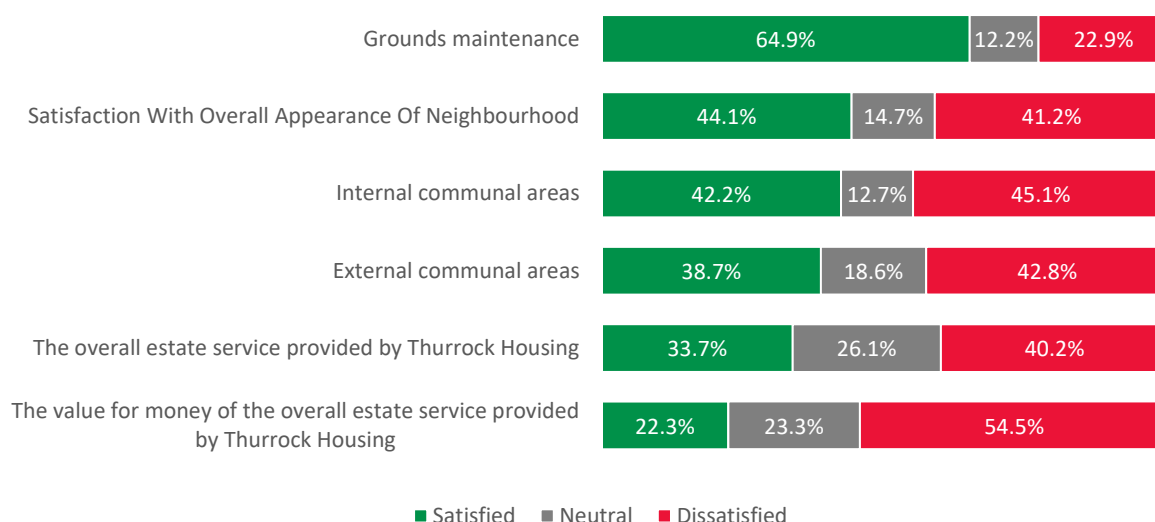


The most common neighbourhood problems indicated by leaseholders as part

of the survey are car parking, drug use or dealing and rubbish and litter and is broadly similar to the neighbourhood issues outlined by tenants. The resulting data from this question enables us to identify specific neighbourhood problems down to area, neighbourhood or even street level.

3.4 Another section of the survey asked leaseholders to feed back their views on the estate services function of Housing. Leaseholders were asked to indicate their satisfaction levels with six measures, the results of which are shown in the chart below.

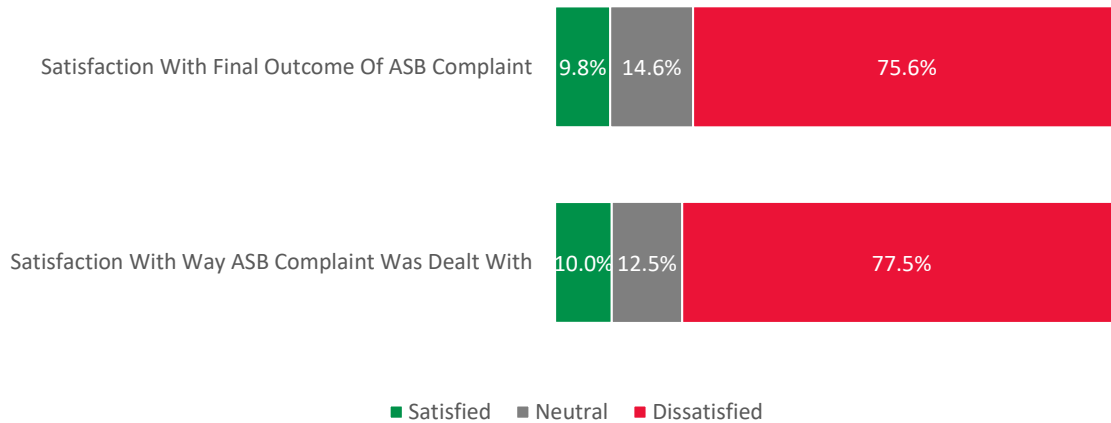
Satisfaction With Neighbourhood and Estate Services



The results show high levels of satisfaction with the grounds maintenance service, moderate levels of satisfaction with the overall appearance of their neighbourhood, internal communal areas and external communal areas but low levels of satisfaction with the overall estate service provided by Thurrock Housing and the value for money of the overall estate service provided by Thurrock Housing.

3.5 Leaseholders were asked to indicate whether they had reported an anti-social behaviour issue in the last 12 months and to provide their feedback on their experience if they had. Overall, 19.5% of leaseholders who responded to the survey said they have reported anti-social behaviour to Housing in the last year. The results for this section are shown in the chart below.

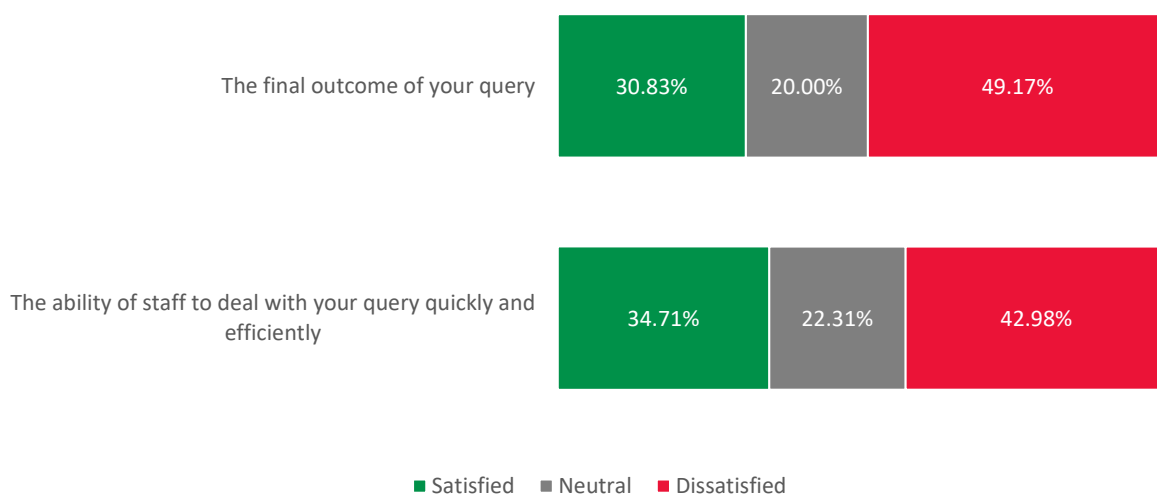
Satisfaction With ASB Complaint



Leaseholders’ responses to this question show low levels of satisfaction amongst the cohort of leaseholders who have reported anti-social behaviour in the last year with the way their case was dealt with and the final outcome of their complaint.

3.6 Similarly, leaseholders were also asked to indicate whether they had contacted the Housing department in the last 12 months and to provide feedback on their experience if they had. 57.8% of respondents indicated that they had contacted the Housing department in the last year. The results from this section are shown in the charts below.

Satisfaction With Recent Contact

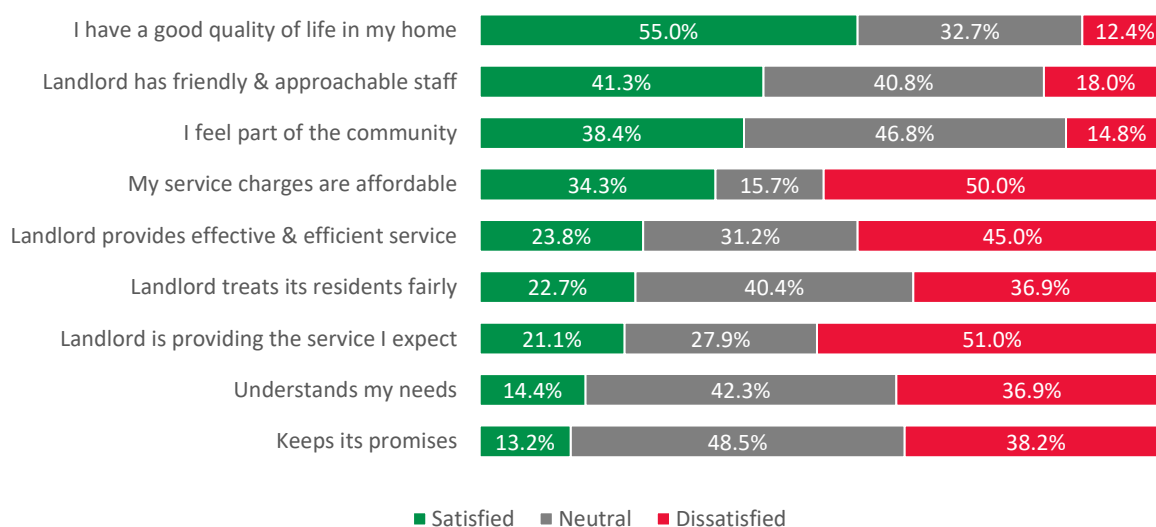


The results from this section of the survey show low satisfaction levels with the ability of staff to deal with enquiries and with the final outcome of the

enquiries.

3.7 The survey also contained a list of landlord characteristics from Housemark’s STAR question library. Leaseholders were asked to either indicate whether they agree or disagree with the measures included in the survey. The results of this section is shown in the chart below.

Views on Thurrock Housing



The results from this section show moderate and low levels of satisfaction with all measures with large proportions of leaseholders giving the neutral rating of “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied”. The measures with the lowest ratings overall were landlord is providing the service I expect, understands my needs and keeps its promises.

4. Initial actions identified

4.1 Relevant members of the Housing service have held a meeting to consider the results and initial analysis of the data which has identified some initial actions to address some of the dissatisfaction expressed by leaseholders, many of which will cut across both leaseholders and tenants. This is a fluid process and will be developed based on the results of further data analytics and intelligence and will be broadened over the coming months.

4.2 Satisfaction with Housing and services

Due to the fact that the cohort of leaseholders who responded to the survey is around ten times smaller than the cohort of tenants who responded to the tenant satisfaction survey, a very small amount of free text feedback was collected as part of the survey. The feedback collected was not specific to each measure and does not allow us to identify leaseholders’ exact reasons for dissatisfaction with each measure. However, the results do provide insight into how leaseholders view certain elements of the service offer as well as a steer on what leaseholder’s priorities are.

In order to better understand the reasons for dissatisfaction with the measures in this section, the Housing service intend to deliver focus groups with leaseholders as soon as it is practical to do so which focus primarily on the measures which leaseholders have identified to be their top priorities such as service charge value for money and communal repairs and maintenance. This will enable us to identify and determine which elements of the service offer leaseholders are dissatisfied with.

4.3 Neighbourhood Problems

The resulting data from this section enables us to identify the neighbourhood issues in granular detail down to street or post code level and allows us to identify the locations where certain neighbourhood problems may be more prevalent than others. An action has been identified to aggregate this data with the data from the tenant satisfaction survey to enable us to determine which neighbourhood issues are most prevalent in specific neighbourhoods. This will be shared with neighbourhoods team, the tenancy management team, the estates services team and the anti-social behaviour team for discussion and to develop specific action plans for areas or neighbourhoods for specific neighbourhood issues where it is necessary to do so.

Due to the fact that car parking has been identified as the most prevalent neighbourhood problem across both tenant and leaseholder satisfaction surveys, an action has been identified to explore options in relation to introducing parking permit areas based on the data as well as exploring options in relation to increasing car parking spaces where possible.

4.4 Estate Services

In order to develop an action plan for Estate Services, data analytics will be critical. An action has been identified to aggregate and compare the responses from both tenants and leaseholders to the Estate Services questions to identify whether satisfaction with the relevant measures differ between different areas or sites or differ between tenants and leaseholders. Tenant and leaseholder feedback, in this instance, is comparable as both tenures pay a service charge where a caretaking service exists and therefore any differences in satisfaction levels between tenures is likely to relate to specific elements of service delivery and not necessarily the service charge.

This will enable the service to identify areas of high dissatisfaction which will in turn enable the service to carry out an investigation in order to determine the reasons for dissatisfaction.

4.5 Anti-social behaviour and contact and communication

In relation to anti-social behaviour, an action has been identified to explore the possibility of mystery shopping in order to identify areas and touchpoints during the process of reporting an anti-social behaviour complaint which could be improved to enhance the customer experience during the entire process.

This will further inform the action plan through the identification of specific actions.

For contact and communication, a number of actions have been identified. The Housing service aims to introduce cross-divisional working to ensure staff are able to answer leaseholder's queries even if the query relates to another service area. This will be completed through the development of an internal directory to enable staff to find the information they require as well as enhancements to the Housing web page on the Council's website.

Another action which has been identified to improve contact and communication is to deliver training to customer facing staff in the skills required to communicate with tenants and leaseholders effectively as well as including this subject as part of new staff inductions.

A further and more wide ranging action has also been identified which will cut across both anti-social behaviour and contact. The Housing service will look to establish a wider project to identify issues in resident interaction across all Housing services with a view to improving and reducing customer effort to raise queries or issues and have them resolved.

4.6 Landlord characteristics

In order to understand dissatisfaction with the measures included within this section, the Housing service will look to deliver focus groups with leaseholders to explore the reasons for dissatisfaction in relation to each individual measure. This will enable the service to understand leaseholders issues on each subject and what leaseholders feel the service needs to do to address their issues to further inform the action plan. The delivery of focus groups will also demonstrate the services willingness to listen to leaseholders' views and develop a better understanding of leaseholders needs.

In addition to this, the Housing service will also look to ascertain whether there are links or correlations between leaseholders' responses to the landlord characteristics questions to establish whether service delivery in certain areas have an impact on leaseholders views on landlord characteristic measures through data analysis.

5. Reasons for Recommendation

- 5.1 The committee's comments are sought on the results of the full postal leaseholder satisfaction survey.

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

- 6.1 None.

7. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

7.1 None.

8. Implications

8.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Hannah Katakwe**
Housing Accountant

None.

8.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Tim Hallam**
Deputy Head of Legal and Deputy Monitoring Officer

Given the nature of this report there are no legal implications directly arising from it.

8.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project Monitoring Officer

The survey was designed to be as accessible as possible by providing multiple means for completion. The Housing service will also look to ascertain whether there are links or correlations between leaseholders' responses to the landlord characteristics questions. Through data analysis this should identify any areas of dissatisfaction related to a particular protected characteristic and actions can be identified if this is the case.

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

Not applicable

9. 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

10. Appendices to the report

None

Report Author:

Chris Seman

Intelligence and Performance Manager

16 March 2021	ITEM: 7
Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee	
Housing Development Programme Update	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: N/A
Report of: Keith Andrews, Housing Development Manager	
Accountable Assistant Director: Anna Eastgate, Assistant Director Lower Thames Crossing & Project Delivery	
Accountable Director: Andy Millard, Director of Place	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

On 11th February 2020, Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee were asked to comment on a list of Council owned site options which had been selected as being potentially suitable for redevelopment for residential purposes. An update report was last given to Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 19th January 2021 and this report updates Committee further on progress of that Housing Delivery Programme.

1. Recommendation(s)

Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to:

- 1.1 Note progress on the list of housing development sites to be taken forward for further detailed work, involving engagement with stakeholders and communities.**
- 1.2 Note the addition of a site at Lyndhurst Road, Stanford-le-Hope to the Site Options List.**
- 1.3 Note the deletion of a site at Crammavill Street, Stifford Clays from the Site Option List.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 Reports are presented regularly to Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee which have established and updated a list of Council-owned housing development option sites to be taken forward for further detailed work, involving engagement with stakeholders and communities. It has been

previously resolved that additional sites or amendments to the existing programme would be reported back to Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee on a regular basis.

- 2.2 The aim of the Sites Options List is to provide greater transparency on the sites being considered for potential housing development, to address the Council's growth aspirations and housing development targets.
- 2.3 The list of development sites also provides a focus for Housing Development activity, leading to greater efficiencies and improved delivery.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

Lyndhurst Road, Stanford-le-Hope

- 3.1 Following due consideration, the Portfolio Holder for Housing has now agreed to add an additional site at Lyndhurst Road in Stanford-Le-Hope to the Site Options List. This site is a small garage site largely within the Council's ownership and falls within the agreed criteria, as it is a site that has been identified by the HRA garage sites review as potentially suitable for redevelopment. There are 5 no. garages not in the Council's ownership and agreement will need to be reached with current owners in order to assemble the whole site for development. A preliminary assessment indicates that the site has capacity for up to 17 dwellings. A location plan and summary infographic is attached at Appendix A.
- 3.2 As with any other site on the list, it should be noted that Committee's views on the inclusion of the Lyndhurst Road site does not constitute any form of planning endorsement; nor does this report seek to create authority for schemes to proceed or construction contracts to be tendered.

The Sites Options List

- 3.3 Further analysis of the Crammervill Street/Fleethall Grove has been carried out and it has been concluded that the constrained access has rendered this site not to be a viable proposition. As a consequence and with agreement of the Portfolio Holder for Housing this site has now been withdrawn from the site options list.
- 3.4 The addition of the site at Lyndhurst Road, together with the removal of the sites at Elm Road Park as noted at the January 2021 Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and Crammervill Street means that there remains 14 locations on the Sites Options List. In total, they could deliver up to 609 new homes. It should however be emphasised that these figures remain largely indicative until schemes have progressed to detailed assessment and community engagement.
- 3.5 Progress on these sites is set out in Appendix B. For many of them, community engagement on initial proposals is the next step once the

necessary preparatory work is complete. A detailed consultation process was reviewed by Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2020 and will be used on all future consultations for housing development projects.

- 3.6 Members have previously asked for details on the size of properties on the sites options list for Council rent compared to demand. A new build housing supply target for general needs housing only has been established by officers taking into account demand for property size by those on the housing list. This excludes any specialist or older persons accommodation. The table below sets out anticipated supply against those targets. It should be noted that new build housing is only one source of supply of properties available for allocation.

Sites Option List	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed
Housing Supply Target	30%	48%	20%	2%
Anticipated affordable housing supply from Site Options List (General Needs Only)	31%	45%	24%	0%
Supported & Older Persons Housing	85%	15%		

The table below shows dwellings from projects not on the sites options list but within the existing development programme and either under construction or have been recently completed

Existing Programme	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed
Affordable Housing New Supply to 2021 (General Needs Only)	38%	40%	22%	0%
Supported & Older Persons Housing	89%	11%		

As site design and projects progress the numbers from the Site Options List will naturally change, and will be reported to future meetings of this Committee.

Project Updates

- 3.7 The 35 unit **Calcutta Road** project in Tilbury for older people has been designed to the HAPPI standard which provides generous internal space, plenty of natural light in the home and circulation spaces, avoids single aspect design apartments and promotes the use of balconies and provision of outdoor space for the residents. Work is progressing well with an anticipated completion date in summer 2021.
- 3.8 At the time of writing a decision on the 5 unit **Loewen Road** planning application is awaited and work is being progressed to enable a construction

tender to be issued immediately following a recommendation to approve the application at Planning Committee. Members approved the commencement of a procurement exercise at Cabinet on 13th January 2021 to appoint a building contractor for the project. These new homes are proposed to be built as five 3 bedroom family houses for rent together with associated parking to be let in line with the Council's Housing Allocation policy. The scheme has been designed to a high quality and seeks to achieve targets for renewable and low carbon technologies by being a zero gas development. Formal consultation will be carried out during the planning process in line with planning legislation.

- 3.9 In December 2020 the Council successfully bid to become one of three national pilot authorities for a project to encourage **Small and Medium Enterprise (SME)** building companies to build new Council homes. These new homes are to be built on land not already owned by the Council. The SME builders will be asked to construct the homes to an agreed specification and the Council's HRA will purchase the land and homes for allocation to residents on the housing list.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The recommendation is informed by previous reports and the agreed Housing Delivery process.

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

- 5.1 This paper provides opportunity for Members of this Committee to review progress on the delivery of the Housing Development Programme.
- 5.2 Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee has previously considered the Housing Development Options List on 11th February 2020 and 16th June 2020, 9th September 2020, 7th November 2020 and 19th January 2021.

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

- 6.1 The list of housing development sites aligns closely with the Council's Vision and Priorities adopted in 2018. In particular it resonates with the "Place" theme which focuses on houses, places and environments in which residents can take pride.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**

Strategic Lead – Corporate Finance

The funding for the SME Pilot scheme will be sourced through a combination of retained right to buy receipts and prudential borrowing.

Completion of the Calcutta Road properties will generate additional rental income in the Housing Revenue Account in order to finance the cost of the development.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Tim Hallam**
Deputy Head of Law and Deputy Monitoring Officer

There are no legal implications directly arising from this update report.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project Monitoring Officer

There are no equalities implications to this update report.

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

None

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):

- Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 18 June 2019, New Council HRA Home Building Programme.
- Extraordinary Meeting, Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 29th October 2019, Housing Development Process
- Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee 11th February 2020, Housing Development Options List
- Cabinet, 15 January 2020, Housing Development Process
- Cabinet, 12th February 2020, Housing Development Options List.
- Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 16th June 2020, Housing Development Programme Update and Housing Development Consultation Process.
- Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee 9th September 2020, Housing Development Programme Update
- Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee 17th November 2020, Housing Development Programme Update
- Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee 19th January 2021, Housing Development Programme Update

9. Appendices to the report

- Appendix A – Infographic showing Lyndhurst Road site.
- Appendix B – Progress report on the list of proposed residential development sites

Report Author:

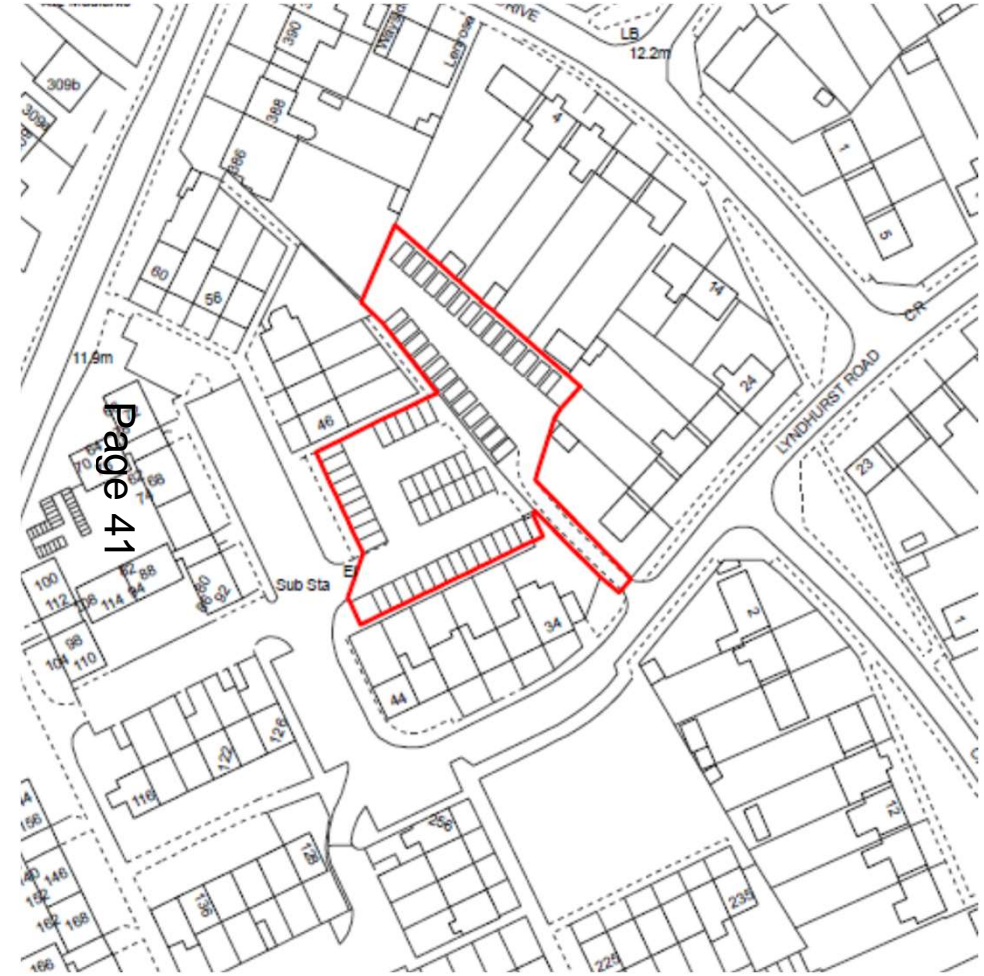
Keith Andrews

Housing Development Manager



Appendix A

Name – Site	Lyndhurst Road, Stanford-Le-Hope
Address	Lyndhurst Road, Stanford-Le-Hope, SS17 7SJ
Ward	Stanford East and Corringham Town
Site Area	0.23 Hectares / 0.57 Acres
Tenure	Freehold
Existing Use	Garages
Local Plan Designation	No Designation
Estimated Site Capacity	Total: 17 Units



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APPENDIX B - SITES OPTION LIST - MARCH 2021

Site Number	SCHEME NAME	Potential Capacity	Ward	Update
1	Aveley Library/Hall/Car Park	9	Aveley & Uplands	The future of this land held in the General Fund remains subject to any decisions on land disposal. Work has currently been paused pending release of the land for redevelopment. The site could provide a minimum of 9 homes if released for HRA development.
2	Culver Centre & Field	173	Belhus	A Planning application for 173 homes has been submitted and awaiting decision.
3	Whiteacre	46	Belhus	RIBA stage 2 completed and early Design Council review held. Detailed design work currently on pause to explore potential linkage to the NHS redevelopment of South Ockendon Health Centre.
4	Prince of Wales Public House	10	South Ockendon	Former public house. A planning application has been submitted for demolition.
5	Broxburn Drive	56	Belhus	The technical team have been appointed. Site footprint expanded to improve integration with existing stock. Resident consultation in early 2021.
6	Darnley & Crown Road	87	Grays Riverside	Capacity Study completed and pre-planning advice taken. Consultant team being appointed to develop design leading to public consultation.

7	CO1(Civic Offices).	82	Grays Riverside	Architects appointed and Design at RIBA stage 1 (Capacity study). Viability analysis underway.
8	Argent Street	17	Grays Riverside	Capacity Study and first design completed and pre-planning advice taken. Initial cost plan in place.
9	Thames Road	43	Grays Riverside	Grays Town Board decision that the Grays Beach and Riverfront area will be a primary focus for the Town Investment Plan. Work on housing development of the car park has therefore been paused while the approach to the wider park area is resolved and to ensure a coordinated approach to the locality.
10	Richmond Road	51	Grays Thurrock	Work has currently been paused pending potential release of the land for redevelopment. Maximum wider site capacity approximately 50 dwellings.
11	13 Loewen Road	5	Chadwell St Mary	Resident consultation completed. Planning application submitted November 2020 and tender documents being prepared.
12	Vigerons Way	8	Chadwell St Mary	Architects appointed and work progressed. Capacity study complete and cost plans prepared. Resident consultation programmed for Spring 2021
13	River View	5	Chadwell St Mary	Architects, Employers Agent/Cost consultant appointed and work progressed. Capacity study complete and cost plans prepared. Viability review required prior any decision to progress to public consultation.
14	Lyndhurst Road	17	Stanford East & Corringham	Architects appointed and Design at RIBA stage 1 (Capacity study) and further detailed studies underway.
Total		609		

16 March 2021	ITEM: 8
Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee	
Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy – Action Plan	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: No
Report of: Ryan Farmer – Housing Strategy and Quality Manager	
Accountable Assistant Director: Carol Hinvest – Assistant Director of Housing	
Accountable Director: Roger Harris – Corporate Director, Adults, Housing and Health	
This report is 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 are 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 Council’s current Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy was adopted in 2020 and its development considered levels of homelessness in the borough, the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, the impact of recent welfare reforms, and newly identified opportunities for preventing homelessness.

The purpose of this report is to present an update on the Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan, which underpins the delivery of the strategic aims of the wider strategy document, to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee for its oversight and review.

- 1. Recommendation(s)**
 - 1.1 Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note and comment on the content of this report.**
- 2. Introduction and Background**

- 2.1. The Homelessness Act 2002 placed a duty on every local authority to carry out a review of homelessness within their area. Following this review, local authorities were required to formulate and publish a Homelessness Strategy based on its findings.
- 2.2. Each strategy must set out plans for the prevention of homelessness, including securing that sufficient accommodation and support are, or will be, available for people who are homeless or who are at risk of becoming so.
- 2.3. The 2002 Act also includes requirements for local authorities to publish refreshed strategies, based on the result of further analysis, within five years of the publication of their last document. Local authorities are able to undertake such reviews and publish refreshed strategies more frequently if circumstances change.
- 2.4. In August 2018 the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published its Rough Sleeping Strategy where the government stated a commitment to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and end it by 2027. Within this document it was also outlined that local authorities would be required to update their existing homelessness strategies.
- 2.5. Thurrock Council refreshed its Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy in January 2020. The document represented an ambitious approach rooted by the fundamental principle that homelessness is not simply a housing issue, but is instead a complex social challenge requiring true collaboration to tackle effectively.
- 2.6. The Council's strategy presented comprehensive details of the local and national issues which affect homelessness in Thurrock and reflected a number of developments in case law and legislation, most notably relating to the enactment of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which significantly reformed England's homelessness legislation.
- 2.7. Four strategic themes were set within the strategy, namely:
 - Partnership and collaboration
 - Health and wellbeing
 - Provision and accessibility
 - Customer excellence
- 2.8. Within each of these strategic themes, a number of high-level actions were identified through stakeholder engagement. This report and its appendix sets out the granular actions which have now been compiled and form the initial action plan for the strategy.

3. Development of the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan

- 3.1. One of the most significant high-level actions set out in the strategy was to establish a Homelessness Partnership Board for Thurrock. The board is

comprised of key stakeholders from services across Thurrock Council, from other public bodies and public sector organisations such as the NHS, and from organisations within the community, voluntary and faith sector. The board also seeks to learn from those with lived experience of homelessness.

- 3.2. Whilst the board is strategic in nature, the aim is that members of the board are able to make commitments for practical action towards delivering outcomes in their respective organisations. The success of the board rests in its endorsement by its members and their belief in its ability to deliver positive change to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- 3.3. The board, which first met in March 2020, collaborated on the development of the action plan for this strategy, resulting in a jointly owned document. This approach will ensure that successful outcomes can be delivered over the lifetime of the strategy by leveraging the collective knowledge, experience, influence and expertise of the range of board members and their respective organisations.

4. Progress to date

- 4.1. Shortly after this strategy was adopted and the first Homelessness Partnership Board meeting was held, work to deliver against the action plan for this strategy, and indeed deliver the action plan itself, was significantly affected by COVID-19.

This pandemic changed the legislative, operational and societal context for not only the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy, but also for those responsible for its delivery and those who the strategy intends to help.

- 4.2. On 18 March 2020, the government announced a “complete ban on evictions” for those living in rented accommodation in England and Wales for at least three months. Following this, on 20 March 2020 the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (commonly referred to as the ‘furlough’ scheme) was presented, backdated to 1 March 2020 and set to run until the end of May 2020.
- 4.3. On 23 March 2020, the government issued its national ‘stay at home’ instruction to mitigate and manage the growing COVID-19 pandemic. The impact of the pandemic on all partners and their respective organisations led to the necessary prioritisation of operational activity which directly responded to COVID-19 pressures.
- 4.4. Soon after, on 26 March 2020, the government announced its response to COVID-19 in the context of rough sleeping by introducing the ‘everyone in’ directive. This asked local authorities to secure emergency temporary accommodation for those who were experiencing or at risk of experiencing rough sleeping, and therefore were more vulnerable to the risks posed by COVID-19, to enable this cohort to follow government and public health

guidance. To date, the Council have assisted approximately 60 individuals through this initiative.

- 4.5. Since these initial announcements, all elements have experienced extensions or reintroductions, often at short notice. The ban on evictions is now in place until the end of March 2021, with notice periods having been extended from two months to three months, and subsequently increased again to six months at present.

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme is currently due to operate until the end of September 2021 following an extension announced in the Budget in March 2021, a 'Protect Programme' was introduced in Winter 2020 to run alongside 'Everyone In', and at the time of writing England was in its third nationwide lockdown following extremely high COVID-19 case rates throughout November and December 2020.

- 4.6. These factors, amongst others directly and indirectly related to COVID-19, have significantly disrupted the progress which may otherwise have been made within the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan, including the meaningful membership of 'experts by experience' as part of the Homelessness Partnership Board which is a priority.
- 4.7. Despite the volatility of the past 12 months, some successful outcomes have been achieved in line with the action plan.
- 4.8. In the Partnership and Collaboration theme, in addition to the founding of the Homelessness Partnership Board, work towards a communications campaign to raise awareness of the StreetLink app and website began. StreetLink is used to collect referrals from members of the public if a person is seen sleeping rough, which is then passed on to outreach workers who will attempt to connect with that person and coordinate support from others in the community, voluntary and faith sector. A video has been produced, and is available to view on the Council's YouTube channel.
- 4.9. Under the Health and Wellbeing theme, the Mental Health and Homelessness Forum has been re-established, bringing together a network of professionals and practitioners to share information, best practice and training resources. Through the forum, members are also able to access a range of subject matter experts to help achieve positive outcomes for individuals or families who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Through the Homelessness Partnership Board, the current joint protocol between Housing and Children's Services relating to homeless children and families has been highlighted as an area for action and review, ensuring close working relationships are maintained for the future.

Also within this theme of Health and Wellbeing, a briefing was arranged for officers from across the Housing service through Stoll's No Homeless Veterans campaign, encouraging all Housing staff to 'Think Veteran'.

- 4.10. Within the Provision and Accessibility theme, although it was not possible for the Winter Night Shelter provision to be made available for Winter 2020, emergency accommodation options were identified and implemented when the severe weather emergency protocol (SWEP) was called into action.

In addition to this, the Council took ownership of 82 new homes which were built as part of the HRA development programme. These included 23 flats and six maisonettes at the Alma Court development in South Grays, and 22 flats, 19 bungalows and 12 houses at the Claudian Way/Healthlyn Close development.

An annual review of social and affordable housing demand was also undertaken to identify the sizes of properties which were required and to inform the future development pipeline.

- 4.11. Finally, through the Customer Excellence theme, work to develop a proposal for supported accommodation in partnership between Housing, Adult Social Care and Children's Services began.

A new Hostel and Floating Support Contract commenced in Autumn 2020, and this will allow for a refreshed engagement and feedback approach with people with lived experience of homelessness alongside the delivery partner.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1. It is the aspiration that significant progress will be made towards a number of existing actions throughout the 2021/22 financial year, however it is expected that the action plan will continue to develop across the life of the strategy. This will ensure that the Council and its partners have a plan which will respond and react to future opportunities, demands and challenges, particularly when the current COVID-19 protections and schemes are withdrawn.

For example, it is probably that there will be an influx of evictions when extended notice periods expire or when bailiff enforced evictions can be undertaken again, or that unemployment levels and households experiencing financial hardship may increase when the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme finally ceases, which could result in instability and uncertainty for households in the borough.

6. Reasons for Recommendation

- 6.1. Within the adopted strategy, it was outlined that in order to ensure appropriate oversight of the action plan, an annual update will be provided to Housing Overview on Scrutiny Committee – this report is the first such update.

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

7.1. Consultation activity for the development of the initial strategy document included face-to-face sessions with Council staff, with individuals which have used the Council's homelessness services, and with partner agencies. Statistical analysis was undertaken, and presentations to other key Council services, committees and boards were made to share findings and gather feedback. The Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee had opportunities to provide feedback in both the development phase and on the draft strategy document itself, and have the opportunity for annual reviews of progress against the action plan.

7.2. Close work has and will continue to take place with a range of partners and service providers, such as the membership of the Homelessness Partnership Board and the Council's Mental Health and Homelessness Forum, which includes representation from organisations such as Thurrock CVS, NELFT, Sanctuary Housing, Open Door, SERICC, Thurrock Mind, and Changing Pathways.

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 Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025, Thurrock Council

9. Implications

9.1. Financial

Implications verified by: **Hannah Katakwe**
Housing Accountant, Finance & IT

By analysing homelessness in the borough, developing a new strategy in line with the preventative aims of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, and delivering its action plan in partnership with others with key responsibilities towards those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, it is hoped that the costs associated with the provision of services can be contained within the budget allocation.

9.2. Legal

Implications verified by: **Tim Hallam**
Deputy Head of Legal and Deputy Monitoring Officer

Given the nature of this report there are no legal implications directly arising from it.

By way of background information and context, 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.

This report sets out the progress towards achieving the aims of the strategy, published in Spring 2020.

9.3. **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
**Community Engagement and Project
Monitoring Officer**

As set out in the Homelessness Code of Guidance, consultation was carried out with other public bodies, voluntary organisations, service users and other identified stakeholders in the work to implement this new strategy. By undertaking a homelessness review, a broad range of stakeholders throughout the community were identified and involved in the activity to develop a holistic strategy.

The ongoing partnership approach to delivering this strategy will ensure that the range of diverse support needs of those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness will be appropriately considered and addressed.

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

Not applicable

10. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix A - Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan

Report Author:

Ryan Farmer

Housing Strategy & Quality Manager

Business Improvement - Housing

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Appendix 1 – Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan

Partnership and Collaboration

	Strategic Action	Action	Outcome
1.1.1	Establish a Homelessness Partnership Board for Thurrock, bringing together partners from the public, private and community, voluntary and faith sectors as well as those with lived experience to tackle homeless in the borough	Establish the Homelessness Partnership Board	Forming a board to achieve the key strategic aims included within the HPRSS through this jointly developed and owned action plan
1.1.2	Establish a Homelessness Partnership Board for Thurrock, bringing together partners from the public, private and community, voluntary and faith sectors as well as those with lived experience to tackle homeless in the borough	Identify and invite 'experts by experience' to join the Homelessness Partnership Board	Better understanding to shape and deliver the HPRSS action plan from the perspective of those with lived experience of homelessness
1.2.1	Commit to work closely with London authorities to reduce the impact of out-of-borough placements of homeless households in Thurrock	Investigate options to improve working relationships with London boroughs and set up information sharing agreements	Improved notification and interaction with London boroughs with a reduction in impact of temporarily or permanently placed households in Thurrock
1.2.2	Commit to work closely with London authorities to reduce the impact of out-of-borough placements of homeless households in Thurrock	Engage in ongoing exploration of 'Capital Letters' scheme for Essex	Improved pan-Essex working to support homeless households
1.2.3	Commit to work closely with London authorities to reduce the impact of out-of-borough placements of homeless households in Thurrock	Undertake an initial assessment to identify the number of out-of-borough placements made in Thurrock, and any accompanying needs within households	A detailed understanding of the current situation in Thurrock and establish a baseline for future work
1.3.1	Work with stakeholders and the community, voluntary and faith sector to address the support, education, training and employment needs of vulnerable people	Support and engage in the development and maintenance of the Stronger Together directory as a central point of information relating to community, voluntary and faith sector groups	A detailed, central information source which is regularly consulted to signpost individuals to appropriate support and assistance

	Strategic Action	Action	Outcome
1.3.2	Work with stakeholders and the community, voluntary and faith sector to address the support, education, training and employment needs of vulnerable people	Improve links with community led local development (CLLD) programme in Tilbury to support unemployed people into work	Increased number of people gaining necessary skills, qualifications, experience and confidence to enter the jobs market in Tilbury and beyond
1.3.3	Work with stakeholders and the community, voluntary and faith sector to address the support, education, training and employment needs of vulnerable people	Develop support opportunities for young people at higher risk of harm due to experiencing homelessness	Increased support provided to this vulnerable group
1.4.1	Share knowledge between partners to improve the identification of individuals experiencing rough sleeping in Thurrock in order to provide appropriate and timely support	Develop a communications campaign to increase the detail provided in StreetLink referrals	More detailed referrals to be received which will better support the identification of individuals experiencing rough sleeping
1.4.2	Share knowledge between partners to improve the identification of individuals experiencing rough sleeping in Thurrock in order to provide appropriate and timely support	Develop a communications campaign for the voluntary sector to improve identification of people experiencing rough sleeping	Increased number of organisations with knowledge and confidence to identify and refer rough sleepers for support
1.4.3	Share knowledge between partners to improve the identification of individuals experiencing rough sleeping in Thurrock in order to provide appropriate and timely support	Develop and deliver rough sleeper awareness training to officers and partners	Improved understanding and awareness of rough sleeping for key stakeholders
1.4.4	Share knowledge between partners to improve the identification of individuals experiencing rough sleeping in Thurrock in order to provide appropriate and timely support	Investigate tools and methods which can be used to gather intelligence for identifying individuals experiencing rough sleeping across a large geographic area	Wider range of sources of intelligence available for identifying rough sleepers

Health and Wellbeing

	Strategic Action	Action	Outcome
2.1.1	Redefine and simplify pathways for vulnerable households to access health and wellbeing services across the borough, especially in relation to mental health	Maintain the Mental Health and Homelessness Forum to bring together professionals and practitioners for information sharing and training	An established network to support professionals and practitioners, and to assist with the delivery of the HPRSS action plan
2.1.2	Redefine and simplify pathways for vulnerable households to access health and wellbeing services across the borough, especially in relation to mental health	Undertake a mapping exercise to identify all existing health and wellbeing provision across the borough with entry mechanisms and details of support provided	An improved understanding of current health and wellbeing provision to determine areas for further focus and development
2.1.3	Redefine and simplify pathways for vulnerable households to access health and wellbeing services across the borough, especially in relation to mental health	Develop stakeholder understanding regarding referral pathways to mental health services and wider networks, and work to streamline where possible	An improved understanding and refinement of referral pathways to enable those supporting people experiencing homelessness to direct them to access appropriate support
2.2.1	Increase awareness of the physical impact of homelessness and work with partners to improve access to primary care services for those experiencing rough sleeping	Identify options to fill gap in access to primary care services for people with no fixed abode or living in temporary accommodation	Improvements in access to primary care services for those with no fixed abode or living in temporary accommodation

	Strategic Action	Action	Outcome
2.2.2	Increase awareness of the physical impact of homelessness and work with partners to improve access to primary care services for those experiencing rough sleeping	Explore ways to expand primary care mental health practitioner project to other localities in the borough	Improvements in access to primary care mental health services across localities
2.2.3	Increase awareness of the physical impact of homelessness and work with partners to improve access to primary care services for those experiencing rough sleeping	Develop and deliver an training and communications campaign to raise awareness of the impact of homelessness on physical health	Improved awareness and understanding of impact of homelessness on health
2.2.4	Increase awareness of the physical impact of homelessness and work with partners to improve access to primary care services for those experiencing rough sleeping	Identify an approach to reduce inequality in accessing health and wellbeing services, including preventative screenings	Increased number of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness accessing health and wellbeing services
2.3.5	Increase awareness of the physical impact of homelessness and work with partners to improve access to primary care services for those experiencing rough sleeping	Develop the relationship with primary care networks to improve the recording and referral of homeless households	Improved understanding of prevalence of health needs in homeless households across the borough and increased utilisation of 'duty to refer'
2.3.1	Explore opportunities to deliver improved services to armed forces veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness	Assess current policies and practice against guidance and suggested actions outlined in the local authority toolkit produced by the Royal British Legion	An identification of areas for policy and service improvements to better support armed forced veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in Thurrock

	Strategic Action	Action	Outcome
2.3.2	Explore opportunities to deliver improved services to armed forces veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness	Undertake an analysis exercise to understand the number of armed forces veterans which are known and unknown to the Council	An improved understanding of the number of armed forces veterans in the borough to better inform service provision
2.3.3	Explore opportunities to deliver improved services to armed forces veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness	Proactively engage with armed forces charities to develop support and referral pathways	Improved relationships and pathways with specialist organisations to better support armed forced veterans
Page 57 4.1	Review and revise the existing joint protocol for supporting those at risk of homelessness as a result of fleeing domestic and sexual abuse	Review and revise the existing joint protocol for supporting those at risk of homelessness as a result of fleeing domestic and sexual abuse Review and analysis of DASH risk assessments to identify trends	An up-to-date protocol which meets current and forecasted needs
2.4.2	Review and revise the existing joint protocol for supporting those at risk of homelessness as a result of fleeing domestic and sexual abuse	Identify other joint protocols relating to homelessness and establish a review schedule	An established schedule to revise, review or develop protocols between Housing and other appropriate partners to support those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness

Provision and Accessibility

	Strategic Action	Action	Outcome
3.1.1	Explore options to increase council-owned temporary accommodation available within the borough	Identify opportunities to increase the provision of council-owned temporary accommodation	A reduction in the use of more costly forms of temporary accommodation, including those out-of-borough
3.2.1	Review the Winter Night Shelter to assess its impact in order to guide future provision	Undertake a review and identify lessons learned from the Winter Night Shelter in Winter 2019/20	An understanding of successes and areas for development following the 2019/20 Winter Night Shelter
3.2.2	Review the Winter Night Shelter to assess its impact in order to guide future provision	Engage with delivery partners for the Winter Night Shelter in Winter 2019/20 to explore options for SWEP accommodation for Winter 2020/21	A range of accommodation options available as emergency accommodation for 2020/21
3.2.3	Review the Winter Night Shelter to assess its impact in order to guide future provision	Monitor Government and Public Health guidance to shape provision for Winter 2021/22	Establish a position to deliver the provision of a winter night shelter in Winter 2021/22

	Strategic Action	Action	Outcome
3.3.1	Develop new social housing in the borough to be let at levels within Local Housing Allowance rates	Progress and maintain the Council's HRA development plan	Ongoing supply of new council-owned social housing
3.3.1	Develop new social housing in the borough to be let at levels within Local Housing Allowance rates	Develop closer working and increased engagement with Housing Associations to increase availability of other affordable housing across the borough	Ongoing and increased supply of non-council-owned affordable housing
Page 59 3.3.3	Develop new social housing in the borough to be let at levels within Local Housing Allowance rates	Undertake an annual review of required property mix to inform social housing development plans	A maintained and informed understanding of the borough's social and affordable housing needs
3.3.4	Develop new social housing in the borough to be let at levels within Local Housing Allowance rates	Explore options for housing provision through S106 contributions on private developments	An understanding of available opportunities for alternative affordable housing within Thurrock
3.4.1	Engage with landlords in the private rented sector to secure safe, suitable and affordable accommodation for homeless households	Improve engagement with PRS landlords through Landlord Forum	Increased number of landlords working with the council to offer accommodation for longer-length tenancies

	Strategic Action	Action	Outcome
3.4.2	Engage with landlords in the private rented sector to secure safe, suitable and affordable accommodation for homeless households	Improve landlord understanding of the Council's homelessness prevention duties	Increased opportunities for mediation and alternative solutions to private rental sector evictions
3.4.3	Engage with landlords in the private rented sector to secure safe, suitable and affordable accommodation for homeless households	Work with Private Sector Housing team to improve quality of PRS accommodation across the borough	Increased standard and quality of private rental sector accommodation to support health and wellbeing of residents

Customer Excellence

	Strategic Action	Action	Outcome
4.1.1	Ensure that training regarding homelessness legislation and best practice is available for council staff and partners involved in supporting homeless households in Thurrock	Develop and deliver a regular training programme for staff and partners who interact with those who are experiencing, or are at risk of, homelessness	Increased knowledge and understanding across council staff and partners to better support people
4.1.2	Ensure that training regarding homelessness legislation and best practice is available for council staff and partners involved in supporting homeless households in Thurrock	Create and maintain a set of resources which can be used by staff and partners to provide consistent advice and guidance	Increased and consistent knowledge and understanding through a readily available toolkit
4.1.3	Ensure that training regarding homelessness legislation and best practice is available for council staff and partners involved in supporting homeless households in Thurrock	Increase the knowledge of members around homelessness and the advice they can provide	Increased knowledge and understanding across members to better support people
4.2.1	Consider ways in which the council could develop support and accommodation options for people with complex needs	Develop a proposal for supported accommodation in partnership between Housing, Adult Social Care and Children's Services	A detailed proposal to understand what a provided service would look like

	Strategic Action	Action	Outcome
4.3.1	Engage with those with lived experience of homelessness to support future service and policy development and design	Develop an engagement and feedback approach with people with lived experience of homelessness alongside partners such as Sanctuary and Open Door	Established opportunity for the council to gain valuable feedback from
4.3.2	Engage with those with lived experience of homelessness to support future service and policy development and design	Engage with organisations across the homelessness sector to develop tools and methods for meaningful engagement	Increased knowledge and understanding of best practice based on sector expertise to shape the council's approach
4.4.1	Build a directory of specialist knowledge and skills, embedding officers with these skills directly into the homelessness service where possible, to provide timely and appropriate support to homeless households in need	Undertake an analysis of the support which is identified as being required by people who are experiencing homeless or are at risk of homelessness, and compare that with current provision	A detailed understanding of the strengths of service delivery as well as identification of gaps of specialist knowledge or skills
4.4.2	Build a directory of specialist knowledge and skills, embedding officers with these skills directly into the homelessness service where possible, to provide timely and appropriate support to homeless households in need	Undertake an analysis of specialisms and skills across Thurrock Council and partnering organisations in relation to supporting homeless households	Identification of specialist skills and knowledge which could support homeless households

16 March 2021		ITEM: 9
Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Interim Housing Strategy Timetable		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: None	
Report of: Ryan Farmer – Housing Strategy and Quality Manager		
Accountable Assistant Director: Carol Hinvest – Assistant Director of Housing		
Accountable Director: Roger Harris – Corporate Director, Adults, Housing and Health		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

As a local authority, it is important that Thurrock Council has a document that states its ambitions and goals regarding housing in the borough. The current Housing Strategy was adopted in Thurrock in 2015.

A new Housing Strategy is required, which considers current legislation, regulation and market trends, the impact of recent welfare reforms, and new opportunities for meeting the housing needs of Thurrock’s residents whilst considering the turbulence and uncertainty resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

This report summarises the reasons for the development of a new interim Housing Strategy, outlining the indicative stages for the design and ongoing management of the document and setting the scope of consultation to ensure that this interim document best reflects and respects the current and future needs of households in the borough.

Activity to start scoping and developing the new Housing Strategy is expected to begin in Spring 2021, with a view that a draft can be presented to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee in Winter 2021.

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. The Committee is also asked to comment on the consultation proposals as set out in section 6.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1. The council's existing Housing Strategy was agreed by Cabinet in March 2015. It was implemented later that year and was due for review in 2020. A report was presented to the council's Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 29 October 2019, which provided an outline plan and timetable for the refresh of this document, with the anticipation that a draft could be presented to the Committee in Autumn 2020.

Preliminary work was scheduled to begin in late 2019 with the compilation of the base of evidence for this work with initial stakeholder engagement to follow soon after; however, the process to develop this key document subsequently experienced significant disruption.

- 2.2. Shortly after the outline plan and timetable were presented to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the council entered a pre-election period as a result of the passing of the Early Parliamentary General Election Act 2019. Although this did not affect the ability to undertake research for the foundation of the strategy development, it pushed back any initial stakeholder engagement into the new calendar year; however, this too would be disrupted.
- 2.3. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to instability and uncertainty for households across the borough, not only in relation to their housing need but in their everyday lives. It became apparent that much of the research which had already been undertaken, based on findings before the pandemic began, may no longer be appropriate to use as the foundation of this key strategic document.
- 2.4. It was therefore determined that the development of the Housing Strategy should be deferred until such time that there was greater stability and certainty. This decision has been kept under regular review, considering the impact that social distancing rules and the implementation of lockdown measures would have on meaningful consultation with residents across the borough.
- 2.5. Neither the Housing service nor the wider council can be solely responsible for responding to housing demand in the borough or addressing the wider social issues at the heart of homelessness. It is only through true collaboration across organisational and institutional boundaries and across the public, private, and community and voluntary sectors that sustained progress can be achieved. The operational impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on partners and stakeholders has had to be given due consideration, and understandably, efforts to respond to and tackle the virus have taken priority.
- 2.6. At present, there are still concerns that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on housing and homelessness has not yet been felt fully.

Initiatives such as 'Everyone In' and the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, and the introduction of legislation to temporarily implement a moratorium on evictions and extend eviction notice periods have provided some stability and security to households in Thurrock during a time of significant uncertainty, but these are not permanent resolutions. At the start of the 2021/22 financial year,

the first of the extended eviction notice periods will expire, and the the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme is now expected to end in September 2021, along with the £20 per week Universal Credit increase. When these temporary protections are removed, it is highly likely that there will be a surge in Thurrock households experiencing financial hardship and at risk of homelessness.

- 2.7. Although insecurity remains for families and households across the borough, other important pieces of work are in development across the organisation, such as the Local Plan and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. There are benefits that can be realised by producing a Housing Strategy that complements these other strategic documents.

In November 2020, the government published their social housing white paper, “the charter for social housing residents”, which builds on the proposals set out in the green paper published in August 2018 and outlines standards for landlords that social housing residents can expect.

- 2.8. With all these factors taken into consideration, it is proposed that an interim Housing Strategy is developed. The final document will have a reduced term so that a refresh can be undertaken once the full effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have been reviewed and analysed.
- 2.9. The interim Housing Strategy 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.

The development of the strategy is expected to engage key internal and external partners and stakeholders as fully as is possible in line with any legislation or government and public health guidance in place at that time. This will ensure that the interim strategy best 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.

- 2.10. 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 that 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 that requires landlords to comply with national health and safety standards and local criteria before a 5-year licence is granted
 - The government's social housing white paper, "The charter for social housing residents", published in November 2020
- 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 five years, whilst the supply of new dwellings has not kept pace with demand. The impact of these factors on the housing market in Thurrock has led to rising unaffordability and limitations on the housing options available to residents of the borough.
- 3.3. There is also the potential for further significant changes in housing policy and legislation, following the government's response to a number of consultations, including:

- A review of the rules which govern the ways that Local Authorities are able to use the money raised through Right to Buy sales, published in August 2018
- The Building Safety Bill – draft legislation announced in the Queen's Speech in December 2019, which followed the "Building a safer future" proposals for building safety requirement reform, published in June 2019 and based on the recommendations in the Hackett Report 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 may 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 interim Housing Strategy. Throughout all stages, engagement with partners and stakeholders is essential. Best endeavours will be undertaken to obtain as full participation as is possible in line with legislation and guidance in place.

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. It will also be important to understand the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on all of these factors to differentiate between short-term effects and much longer-term changes.

This piece of work will provide a clear understanding of local challenges and a strong foundation for the strategy to be built upon. The strategy will also be supported by a private sector stock condition survey which has been commissioned and an affordability study which is being undertaken in partnership with Public Health colleagues.

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 interim 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 that 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:

Date	Event/Stage
16 March 2021	Launch development with paper to Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee
April 2021 – May 2021	Assessment of current Housing situation and analysis of factors affecting housing need in the borough
June 2021 – July 2021	Identification of key themes and priorities through engagement with residents and key stakeholders.
August 2021 – September 2021	Development of key actions for action plan and identification of action owners
October 2021 – December 2021	Public Consultation on Draft Strategy
January 2022	Final draft of Interim Housing Strategy presented to Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee
January 2022	Final document presented to Cabinet for approval and adoption

- 4.7. This timetable is indicative and based on the understanding and context at the time of writing. It is anticipated that a review will be undertaken in Summer 2021 after the evidence base has been collated, and key themes and priorities have been identified. This review will determine whether the strategy will continue as an interim document or if circumstances at the time provide the certainty required for a full strategy to be developed.

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 was 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, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the needs and requirements of households, it is recommended that the development work outlined in this report commences in Spring 2021 so that an interim strategy can be published in an appropriate timeframe.

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 interim Housing Strategy. There is an aspiration for wide-ranging consultation to take place with a variety of key partners and stakeholders; however, these must be within the guidance and legislation in effect at the time. It is intended that, wherever possible, consultees will include (but are not limited to):

- Residents of Thurrock
- Council Officers from a range of services, including Housing, Adults Social Care, Children's 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, depending on restrictions in place, include face-to-face sessions with Council staff, partners and key stakeholders, online surveys, statistical analysis, Teams virtual briefings and workshops, 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: **Hannah Katakwe**
Housing Accountant, Finance & IT

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**
Deputy Head of Legal and Deputy Monitoring Officer

Given the nature of this report there are no legal implications directly arising from it. By way of background information and context, 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: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project Monitoring Officer

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)

Not applicable

9. **Appendices to the report**

- None

Report Author:

Ryan Farmer

Housing Strategy & Quality Manager

Business Improvement - Housing

16 March 2021	ITEM: 10
Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee	
Housing Service COVID-19 Response - Update	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: No
Report of: Ryan Farmer – Housing Strategy and Quality Manager	
Accountable Assistant Director: Carol Hinvest – Assistant Director of Housing	
Accountable Director: Roger Harris – Corporate Director, Adults, Housing and Health	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

This report is the fifth to be presented to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which details the Housing service response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This update report provides additional information on the continuing action taken by the Housing service due to the challenges faced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In line with government guidance and legislation, the Housing service has taken action to restore, in part and in full, specific aspects of suspended and altered service delivery to ensure that key elements can be provided while staff and people who use Housing services continue to be best protected from the risks posed by COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to test the resilience and planning of the Housing service, and this report records the ongoing action which is being taken to maintain critical services in these challenging times.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note and comment on the contents of this report which sets out the continued response of the Housing service in relation to the challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1. The Housing service of Thurrock Council, much like the wider organisation, implemented a number of measures to address the challenges brought by COVID-19, particularly in response to the announcement of the

Government's 'Stay at Home' guidance on 23 March 2020. Since this time, the Housing service has continued to react and respond appropriately to further changes in guidance as restrictions have been eased and tightened.

The Housing service acted to protect the health and wellbeing of its staff and those who use its services from the risks posed by COVID-19. Close attention was paid to statutory responsibilities, new and existing legislation, and changing government guidance. All services considered their activities against a broad framework in order to determine whether they:

- needed to be suspended, either for the safety of staff and service users or in line with government guidance
- could continue to be delivered, but with significant alterations
- could continue to be delivered, but at a greatly reduced rate.

2.1.1 It is important to note that the Housing service did not act in isolation in developing its response to COVID-19, and this approach has also been followed as steps are now being taken to restore services that were suspended or reduced.

The Housing service continues to be represented within the council's Tactical Coordination Group and the Thurrock Stronger Together partnership and has interacted with the Thurrock Coronavirus Community Action (TCCA) as well as a range of other cross-service, cross-directorate and cross-organisation groups and forums during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.2. **High-level summary of changes to service delivery**

2.2.1 **Suspended services**

A number of services and processes were suspended across Housing, not only as a result of service-led reviews but also due to measures that have been implemented nationally by the Government. Many of these services have now restarted, in part or in full, where it has been safe to do so.

The choice-based lettings process was initially suspended, however following a change in government guidance in May 2020, this process restarted on 11 June alongside an upgraded Housing Online customer portal. Since this time, the advertising and letting of properties have continued.

The delivery of aspects of the Transforming Homes programme was suspended, and this has also recommenced now. The restarted programme features revised working practices to ensure that works are completed safely and in line with government guidance. Contractors have also accelerated their output in order to successfully deliver their works within the existing timeframes.

Scheduled resident engagement activity which was due to take place physically had been cancelled in March 2020, including resident meetings, events in communal halls at sheltered housing complexes, and the planning for this year's Tenant Conference. Since this time, resident engagement activity has continued using virtual platforms, such as through the use of social media, whilst restrictions remain in place for physical meetings.

The wider use of sheltered housing complex communal halls continues to be suspended due to ongoing social distancing guidance and the range of local and national lockdown measures which have been in place since March 2020.

There continues to be no court action taken on those in arrears, which is a position reflected nationally due to a moratorium on eviction proceedings. The ban on evictions is now in place until the end of March 2021, with notice periods having been extended from two months to three months and subsequently increased again to six months at present.

The Rents and Welfare team have worked rigorously to contact tenants who have fallen into arrears or were at risk of doing so and have provided support accordingly.

2.2.2 Altered services

As almost all members of Housing staff continue to work from home in line with the current national lockdown restrictions, interactions that would ordinarily have taken place face to face are instead being undertaken by telephone, by video call or online.

In line with government guidance, the service greatly expanded its support for those rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping by providing accommodation and food, giving opportunities for self-isolation and therefore reducing the risk of infection in this particularly vulnerable group.

The ongoing closure of the Civic Offices has resulted in homeless applications being made by telephone, email, or through an online portal. Whilst this has enabled applications to be made, the reduction in face-to-face interaction has made the verification of documents challenging and has added to pressure on officers across the authority.

Due to the risks identified in gas safety and water testing, statutory compliancy checks for properties in these areas continued; however, a number required reprogramming for a future date where access to properties had been impacted by shielding and self-isolating residents.

2.2.3 Reduced services

It has been possible, and in some cases vitally important, for some services to continue, albeit at a reduced level. Tenancy sign-ups continued for homeless households and applicants whose safety was at risk where they

were living during the start of the first national lockdown. Tenancy sign-ups have since been restored, albeit with additional measures to ensure social distancing guidance can be followed.

Estate caretakers have been key in ensuring that our communal areas remained safe and clean for those who live in and travel through our estates, and priorities were adjusted to focus more heavily on sanitising. Although full operating hours resumed in July 2020, recent restrictions have again affected day-to-day operations.

It was possible to continue to deliver emergency repairs to properties, with additional arrangements made to record requests which were received for routine repairs so that these could be addressed once it was safe to do so. The full repairs service resumed on 8 June 2020 with a backlog of requested repairs – the majority of which have now been completed or booked for completion.

3. Service area responses

3.1. Allocations

In response to the Government's 'Stay at Home' guidance, steps were taken to suspend all choice-based lettings from 23 March 2020. Whilst properties were not made available for applicants to place bids on through this process, provision was made to ensure that direct offers could continue to be made to risk-assessed homeless households and applicants whose safety was at risk where they live, such as those experiencing domestic abuse.

Choice-based lettings resumed on 11 June 2020, which coincided with the release of an upgraded Housing Online customer portal.

Significantly in this financial year, the 29 properties at the new Alma Court development and 53 properties at the Claudian Way/Heathlyn Close development have been allocated and/or let.

3.2. Anti-Social Behaviour and Housing Safeguarding Team

Cases of anti-social behaviour have increased in the 2020/21 financial year compared to the year before. In the twelve months between April 2019 and March 2020, 474 cases were reported, of which 22 were complaints regarding noise.

Between 1 April 2020 and 1 February 2021, a total of 887 anti-social behaviour cases were recorded – an increase of 86% compared to the entire 2019/20 financial year. The number of complaints relating to noise or neighbour disputes also increased in this period, with a total of 107 complaints received in this period. These continue to increase as a result of people being at home.

It was observed that reported cases rose during periods when COVID-19 restrictions were lifted, and these cases commonly related to breaches of COVID-19 regulations and groups of young people gathering in groups.

There have been significant arrests on the Garrison Estate of young people in possession of drugs and causing vandalism and damage to a value in excess of £22,000. An increase in the numbers of reports of young people using off-road motorbikes in various locations around the borough has also been noted.

The Housing Safeguarding Team have also experienced an increase in cases between January 2020 and January 2021. During this time, the teams engaged in a total of 685 cases.

The team have managed to adapt their processes in order to do this work remotely and refer local support services which are still operating, as well as facilitating the 'move-on' process from Thurrock Women's Refuge to free up much-needed spaces.

During this challenging period, the team continue to work to introduce the new Domestic Abuse Bill, which will create a statutory duty for housing services to provide a domestic abuse support service and help people into safe accommodation.

3.3. **CCTV**

The CCTV cameras which have been installed across the borough are essential for the prevention and detection of crime and for maintaining community safety.

Overall, crime levels have decreased in the borough in line with the national picture across the UK. However, reports of anti-social behaviour have increased in relation to breaches of coronavirus measures to Essex Police and the council.

A total of 844 camera incidents have been logged between April to December 2020, and 336 video packages have been produced for housing enforcement and police investigation. Video packages are produced to help enforcement agents investigate criminal offences or tenancy breaches against a tenant.

Throughout the pandemic, crime and anti-social behaviour occurrences due to more people being at home have been captured on camera, primarily through fly-tipping and anti-social behaviour observed on housing land.

Although many forms of crime have fallen in the borough, some individuals have used periods of lockdown and restriction as opportunities to commit offences against the person and property, such as robbery, theft, vehicle crime, and violence.

The council's surveillance cameras continue to protect residents and public spaces and pursue those who set out to harm communities and the environment in partnership with enforcement authorities.

3.4. Estate Caretaking

An altered service is currently in operation for Estate Caretaking due to ongoing national lockdown restrictions; however, this will again revert to usual operations once these restrictions end.

Despite this alteration, the out of hours provision remains unchanged, offering a 24-hour service, with a member of the team available outside of usual operating hours during the week, as well as all weekend and on bank holidays. This service has continued to assist with calls to Careline by accompanying the alarm wardens throughout the night.

A number of battery-operated atomisers have been procured for the team, which are used to spray a disinfecting food-safe solution that sanitises on contact and dries in 60 seconds. These are used in all communal areas and lifts, including the Sheltered Housing complexes, where caretaking services have been increased and are now visited daily during the week.

3.5. Homelessness

Following the Government guidance on 26 March 2020 to 'bring everyone in', the council worked to identify and provide accommodation to all known rough sleepers. By the end of February 2021, temporary emergency accommodation had been provided to 75 individuals (72 'households' comprised of 66 single people and three couples) who were rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping.

Each individual accommodated by the council received an assessment by the team's Senior Mental Health Practitioner and has been offered robust care, housing and support assessments undertaken by the council's support provider to generate a clear understanding of each individual's support needs.

Tailored offers of support were provided, including with Thurrock Mind, and the team have had a high rate of success in the levels of engagement in this process.

Support has also been provided to individuals to make positive transitions into independent living. To date, a more than 50 households have moved on from the temporary accommodation which had been provided by the council, including 34 households who have moved into the private rental sector after council support. Regular contact continues to be made to all those whom the council is providing ongoing accommodation as part of this work.

3.6. Private Sector Housing

MHCLG has regularly published specific guidance for local authorities regarding enforcing standards and landlords' obligations to meet their legal duties during the COVID-19 pandemic. The council's Private Housing team have followed those recommendations, including the suspension of property inspections unless there is an imminent risk to health.

The Private Housing team have found new ways to triage complaints, working closely with landlords and tenants to provide higher levels of informal advice (1812 instances, increase of 163%) and early mediation (1167 instances, increase of 255%) when compared to the previous year, and this approach will continue until restrictions are further eased.

Landlords have adapted to virtual property management and the Private Housing team continue to negotiate and mediate solutions between landlords their tenant, to ensure that landlords comply with their legal obligations.

However, in cases of very serious risk to the occupier, to ensure tenants are kept safe, enforcement action is necessary on an assessment of risk under the Housing Act 2004. Enforcement action has increased during the pandemic in private rented properties compared to 2019/20, in particular with improvement notices (14 instances, increase of 600%) and public health notices (3 instances, increase of 200%).

Despite the challenges of the past 12 months, there are no current indications of landlords in the borough seeking to exit the rental market after the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.7. Right to Buy

Due to COVID-19, the Government issued guidance that clarified that the requirements for the administration of Right to Buy applications are set in primary legislation. Consequently, it was not possible for Right to Buy to be suspended or amended in the short term.

As a result, the service explored ways to continue to meet the statutory targets and mitigate the risk of potential non-compliance. The process and situation were carefully managed by working with the external property valuer to adjust the method of valuing properties, taking them from physical to desktop valuations.

Other elements of the Right to Buy process were reorganised and re-engineered to make the process efficient, and applicants were contacted to clarify that these adjustments were necessary and would not affect their right to buy the property.

The service has continued to meet the strict targets during the lockdown, and the number of applications has increased from approximately 2 per week to approximately 10 per week. This increase can be attributed to the Government's announcement of a Stamp Duty Tax holiday, which was

extended during the Budget announcement in March 2021 until the end of June 2021.

3.8. Rent and Welfare

At the end of the 2019/21 financial year, 2317 of the council's tenants were receiving Universal Credit, with a total arrears figure of £863,867.36. As of the end of January 2021, 2993 tenants are reported to be receiving Universal Credit, representing a 29% increase compared to the year before. Arrears for this cohort have also increased and now total £1,187,554.30. This amount reflects 63% of the council's overall tenant arrears, which were £1,897,766.57 at the time of writing.

All of the council's Rent Officers are able to give general budgeting and debt advice, and the team of Financial Inclusion Officers support tenants with more complicated needs or vulnerabilities. In the first ten months of this financial year, the Financial Inclusion Officers have provided support to 1105 tenants, helping them to secure additional income to the combined value of £376,486.00

Financial Inclusion Officers contact all new Universal Credit claimants to make them aware of the way that payments are made to them and how payments for rent can be made. Those receiving support have also had assistance completing Discretionary Housing Payment claims, Council Tax benefit claims, Personal Independent Payment claims and many other income-related benefits. They also provide food vouchers if needed.

The Rent Officers continue to contact tenants who have fallen into arrears and complete budgeting forms, and make affordable payment arrangements. Where tenants have consistently not engaged, despite officers attempting many different means of contact, an arrears letter is sent. Since August 2020, officers have started sending notices seeking possession to tenants where arrears continue to increase.

All court action regarding arrears have been suspended since March 2020, meaning that no cases have been taken to court during this financial year; however recent changes to government guidance mean that some cases have been passed to the council's Legal services to request court hearings.

The pre-court panel and arrears panel had both been suspended from April 2020 until November 2020. Both panels were reinstated in December 2020, providing an extra opportunity for tenants and senior officers to engage before any further action is taken.

3.9. Repairs and Planned Maintenance

The council have continued to deliver a full repairs service since 8 June 2020, following which there was a sustained increase in responsive repairs demand for a period of 12 weeks. This had been due to residents raising their unreported repairs from the beginning of the pandemic, in addition to

normal repair demand. At its peak at the end of August, weekly repair demand was 44% higher than usual demand levels for the comparable time of year. Repair demand has since returned to normal levels.

A total of 919 backlog repairs were registered by Mears for completion prior to services resuming in June. Of these, 911 repairs (99.1%) have been completed, seven repairs (0.76%) are being held at the residents' request, and one repair (0.10%) has a future appointment.

For the 2020/21 year to date (at the end of December), 98.5% of responsive repairs have been completed within priority timescales, and 92.5% of tenants were satisfied with the repairs carried out in their homes, with 77% "very satisfied".

All planned maintenance works have continued in line with statutory obligations, and all programmed visits have been completed.

Gas servicing compliance stood at 99.91% at the end of January 2021. Between April 2020 and the end of January 2021, there were 8119 properties that were due a gas service. Of these, 8112 properties have had their gas service undertaken. The remaining seven properties are due to be completed by the end of February. Any resident who is in self-isolation will continue to have their appointments booked for when their self-isolation period ends accordingly. The council and its contractors continue to work in line with government guidelines when entering homes, including the use of PPE and social distancing measures.

3.10. **Sheltered Housing**

Due to the nature of sheltered housing, a significant proportion of tenants had been identified as either clinically extremely vulnerable (required to follow shielding guidance) or clinically vulnerable (advised to follow social distancing guidance closely).

During the first lockdown period in March 2020, Sheltered Housing Officers have been carrying out increased health and wellbeing calls to tenants. Officers were asked to attempt to make these calls with all tenants at least twice a week, and additional time has been spent on each call to ensure that tenants feel safe and to alleviate any feelings of isolation. From 23 March 2020 to January 2021, nearly 100,000 health and wellbeing contacts have been made.

The Sheltered Housing service achieved a sustainable weekly shopping and prescription collection provision during the first lockdown, and this has continued throughout all of the lockdowns.

Throughout all of the lockdown periods, tenants have been kept informed on government guidelines via posters produced by communications as and when changes have occurred. The communal halls have remained closed,

and life in sheltered housing for the staff and tenants has changed drastically.

Sadly, during the most recent national lockdown, there has been an increase in deaths within Sheltered Housing due to COVID-19 and support provided by the team through calls has been crucial for tenants and their families. Sheltered Housing Officers continue to provide daily support for tenants who have lost loved ones and friends, inside and outside of Sheltered Housing.

Members of the Sheltered Housing Team have continually remained available on site when required to support emergencies, tenants and legislative fire health and safety checks.

3.11. Tenancy and Neighbourhood Team

Tenancy Management Officers have let 324 properties this reporting year, with sign-ups completed in line with government guidance. New ways of working have been introduced, which have significantly reduced the time spent face-to-face with others. Vulnerable tenants continued to receive regular contact to ensure that appropriate support is being provided, including in-person visits where contact with tenants could not be established.

The process for holding tenancy audits have continued with initial telephone calls during the current restrictions; however, these will be completed once the team resume non-essential visits. Work has also commenced in relation to the annual fire evacuation plans, which are also being part-completed by telephone and will continue with visits once the team are able to.

The Travellers' sites are visited daily to check they are safe, and residents are contacted on a regular basis; this particular approach has been well received by the residents.

Garage lettings have continued to take place, and a total of 175 new garage lets have taken place since April 2020. The team is continuing to work with contractors to clear and repair a number of garages, and a number of developments projects are being explored and progressed.

The Neighbourhood Officers have completed inspections in locations where there is no caretaking service on a three-month cycle. Issues identified and reported to date include fly-tipping, repairs requirements, anti-social behaviour, as well as grounds maintenance and environmental concerns. A number of improvement projects have also been completed.

Resident Engagement has continued to grow virtually, using social media as the main platform and instigating and supporting a number of garden projects across the borough, which has been greatly appreciated by residents. The work has also included raising awareness of a number of issues with residents, such as domestic abuse, anti-social behaviour and providing a platform for partners to share information and outcomes.

3.12. Transforming Homes

Transforming Homes contractors are continuing to deliver external improvement works to blocks and individual dwellings as programmed.

Works are completed according to revised working practices which are in line with government recommendations. At the same time, enhanced liaison with residents is providing reassurance of the measures being taken to maintain the safety of all parties.

During 2020/21, the Transforming Homes Programme has delivered external improvements to 63 blocks of flats. Window upgrade works have also continued, and 439 individual households have now benefitted from new double glazed units.

Works to void properties have continued without disruption.

3.13. New Build Housing Development

In the 2020/21 financial year, the council took practical handover of both the Alma Court and Claudian Way/Heathlyn Close developments, adding 82 properties to the council's own housing stock.

The local lettings plan for Claudian Way/Heathlyn Close set out that 75% of the first offers of flats and houses within the plan would be made to current residents of Chadwell St Mary. This meant that of these 32 dwellings, 24 would be offered through the local lettings plan.

The 21 bungalows at this site, including a number which had been specifically adapted for wheelchairs and other accessibility requirements, were not included in the local lettings plan as a reflection of the borough-wide need for these types of properties.

Of the 22 flats at this development, 15 were allocated to applicants within Chadwell St. Mary, as well as all ten houses. This means that a total of 25 of the 32 flats and houses have been let to households from Chadwell St Mary.

In addition, six of the 21 bungalows have been let to households from Chadwell St Mary, however as outlined above these properties were let through the usual processes as set out in the council's Housing Allocations Policy, rather than through the local lettings plan for this development.

The Calcutta Road project timeline remains unchanged, with handover anticipated in Summer 2021.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to test almost every aspect of resilience and business continuity planning. This report serves as a further record of the action taken to achieve the aim of maintaining a Housing service that provided critical services in the most challenging of times.

4.2. This document can be referred to in any upcoming exercises to identify and review the 'lessons learned', and also to assist with establishing future business continuity plans.

5. Implications

5.1. Financial

Implications verified by: **Hannah Katakwe**
Housing Accountant, Finance & IT

COVID-19 has had financial impact upon service delivery across the Housing service. Where relevant, namely in relation to financial demands relating to homelessness and rough sleeping, additional costs are being recorded against the central government funding allocations. In relation to rent losses and potential increases in bad debts, this will continue to be monitored as part of the housing revenue accounts forecast budget outturn position, and reported corporately. A continued increase in the number of existing tenants claiming Universal Credit poses significant financial risk to the stability of the Housing Revenue Account.

5.2. Legal

Implications verified by: **Tim Hallam**
Deputy Head of Legal and Deputy Monitoring Officer

This report summarises the actions taken to date by Housing in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. There do not appear to be any direct legal implications arising from this report.

This report sets out the actions taken by Housing, in line with government guidance and relevant legislation, in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The service demonstrated its commitment to meeting its statutory obligations whilst balancing the health and safety of staff and residents.

5.3. Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project Monitoring Officer

The action outlined in the report demonstrates the steps which the Housing services took to ensure that support continued to be provided in a safe way to those who were most vulnerable and in need of assistance.

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

Not applicable

6. **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):

- Not applicable

7. **Appendices to the report**

- None

Report Author:

Ryan Farmer

Housing Strategy & Quality Manager

Business Improvement - Housing

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**Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Work Programme 2020/21**

Dates of Meetings: 16 June 2020, 9 September 2020, 17 November 2020, 19 January 2021 and 16 March 2021

Topic	Lead Officer	Requested by Officer/Member
16 June 2020		
Housing KPI Performance (2019/2020)	Roger Harris/Carol Hinvest	Officers
Tenant & Leaseholder Satisfaction Monitoring	Chris Seman	Officers
Housing Development Programme Update	David Moore	Members
Housing Development Consultation Process	Keith Andrews	Officers
Housing Social Value Framework	Susan Cardozo	Members
Housing Service COVID-19 Response	Ryan Farmer	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services	Standing item
9 September 2020		
Housing Development Programme Update	David Moore	Members
Housing Service COVID-19 Response - Update	Ryan Farmer	Officer
Garage Project Update	Carol Hinvest	Members
Work Programme	Democratic Services	Standing item

17 November 2020		
HRA Rent Setting Process	Roger Harris	Officers
Housing Development Programme Update	David Moore	Officers
Licensing Houses of Multiple Occupation	Carol Hinvest	Members
Automatic Gates	Carol Hinvest	Members
Fees and Charges Pricing Strategy 2021/22	Kelly McMillan	Officers
Sheltered Housing Decommissioning - Alexandra Road and Dunlop Road	Ryan Farmer	Officers
Housing Service COVID-19 Financial Update	Ryan Farmer	Chair
Housing Development Delivery Approaches	Andy Millard	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services	Standing item
19 January 2021		
Tenant Satisfaction Survey Results and Initial Action Plan Report	Chris Seman	Officers
Housing KPI Performance Report (April to November 2020-21)	Carol Hinvest	Officers
Procurement Of Housing Capital Programme Delivery	Sue Cardozo	Officers
Annual Allocations Report - 2019-20	Ryan Farmer	Officers
Housing Service COVID-19 Update	Ryan Farmer/Mike Jones	Chair

Housing Revenue Account - Business Plan and Budgets 2021-22	Mike Jones	Officers
Housing Development Programme Update	David Moore	Members
Work Programme	Democratic Services	Standing item
16 March 2021		
Head Start Housing Film	Michele Lucas/Tiffany Bright	Officers
Leaseholder Satisfaction Survey Results and Initial Action Plan	Chris Seman	Members
Housing Development Update	Keith Andrews	Officers
Homelessness Prevention & Rough Sleeping Strategy - Action Plan	Ryan Farmer	Members
Interim Housing Strategy	Ryan Farmer	Members
Housing Service COVID-19 Response - Update	Ryan Farmer/Mike Jones	Chair
Work Programme	Democratic Services	Standing item
TBC for next municipal year		
Private Sector Stock Condition Survey	Assistant Director of Housing	Officers
Garages Update	Assistant Director of Housing	Members

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