

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 **5 February 2019**

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

## Membership:

Councillors Gerard Rice (Chair), Luke Spillman (Vice-Chair), James Baker, Clare Baldwin, Andrew Jefferies and Joycelyn Redsell

Lynn Mansfield, Housing Tenant Representative

## Substitutes:

Councillors John Allen, Steve Liddiard, Terry Piccolo, Jane Potheary and Pauline Tolson

## Agenda

Open to Public and Press

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<b>1 Apologies for Absence</b>	
<b>2 Minutes</b>	<b>5 - 12</b>
To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 18 December 2018.	
<b>3 Urgent Items</b>	
To receive additional items that the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency, in accordance with Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972.	
<b>4 Declaration of Interests</b>	
<b>5 Garages Review - Phase 1 progress report</b>	<b>13 - 16</b>

<b>6</b>	<b>Homelessness Prevention Strategy Review</b>	<b>17 - 22</b>
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**Queries regarding this Agenda or notification of apologies:**

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Agenda published on: **28 January 2019**

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## DECLARING INTERESTS FLOWCHART – QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

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

### Helpful Reminders for Members

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

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

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



**Does the business to be transacted at the meeting**

- relate to; or
- likely to affect

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

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests shall include your interests or those of:

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

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

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

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

### Pecuniary

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

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

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

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

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

### Non- pecuniary

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



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

## Our Vision and Priorities for Thurrock

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

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

## Minutes of the Meeting of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 18 December 2018 at 7.00 pm

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**Present:** Councillors Gerard Rice (Chair), Luke Spillman (Vice-Chair), Andrew Jefferies and Joycelyn Redsell

Lynn Mansfield, Housing Tenant Representative

**Apologies:** Councillors James Baker, Clare Baldwin

**In attendance:** Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health  
Carol Hinvest, Assistant Director Housing Management  
Dulal Ahmed, Housing Enforcement Manager, Adults, Housing & Health  
Andrea Clement, Assistant Director and Consultant in Public Health  
Ryan Farmer, Housing Strategy & Quality Manager, Adults, Housing & Health  
Tina Mitchell, Team Manager, Strategy, Communications & Customer Services  
Julia Curtis, HRA and Development Accountant  
Tisha Sutcliffe, Democratic Service Officer

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Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

### **16. Minutes**

The minutes of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 2 October 2018 were approved as a correct record.

### **17. Urgent Items**

There were no items of urgent business.

### **18. Declaration of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **19. Fees & Charges Pricing Strategy 2019/20**

The Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health presented the report and explained it was a brief update on the Fees and Charges pricing strategy for 2019/2020 which would also be presented at all other Committee meetings and will be going to Cabinet in February 2019.

The proposed fees and charges related to those that affected the General Fund and not the HRA.

Councillor Redsell asked whether the Mobile Homes site licensing fees and charges were referring to traveller sites.

The Housing Enforcement Manager, explained that the Council has a statutory duty to inspect mobile home sites with planning permission. The new fees covered the licensing function to inspect, monitor and enforce license conditions at mobile home sites. The three Council run traveller sites in Thurrock are:

- Ship Lane, Aveley,
- Gammons Field site, Grays,
- Pilgrams Lane Site, North Stifford

Their rent charges cover the Council's management and revenue costs to manage these sites. The Committee explored fees and charges for traveller sites as they seem to have increased.

Councillor Pothercary asked why the report had a Housing Benefit table. The Director confirmed the fees and charges report would be updated before the report is presented at Cabinet in February 2019.

**RESOLVED: That:**

- 1. The Committee note the revised fees, including those no longer applicable, and that Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee comment on the proposals currently being considered within the remit of this committee.**
- 2. The Committee note that director delegated authority will be sought via Cabinet to allow Fees & Charges to be varied within a financial year in response to commercial requirements.**

**20. Healthy Housing for the Third Age: Improving Older People's Health through Housing, Annual Public Health Report 2018**

The Assistant Director and Consultant in Public Health presented the report and explained it was a statutory duty of the Director of Public Health to prepare an independent report on the health and wellbeing of the local population each year. Last year's report focussed on the sustainability of Children's Social Care in Thurrock and this year it has focused on the current and future needs of older people with respect to housing. The report focuses on four key areas for older people's housing:

1. The need to build a bespoke range of specialist homes
2. The need to build mainstream homes which are suitable across the life-course,
3. The need to ensure existing housing is a suitable for older people



4. The need to develop health places which incorporate the age friendly features.

These changes suggest that it will help mitigate the effects of unhealthy, unsuitable, unsafe or insecure homes.

The Chair wanted to highlight that the residents' health is very important and it would be beneficial for older residents to move into smaller accommodation if needed which would also prevent the cause of accidents if they are moved into bungalows. Furthermore this would give younger people the opportunity to buy properties in Thurrock, although the Chair wanted to clarify that this was not a suggestion for older residents to be forced out of their homes.

Councillor Redsell highlighted that the classing of older people as being over 55 needed to be considered in the context that people of that age could be very active. The Committee highlighted that the examples used in the report were not local ones. In response Officers felt local cases would have more relevance and this would be amended before the report is presented at Cabinet.

Officers explained the report promoted healthy living and supported residents to remain in their homes and was not about building more specific complexes for older people.

The Committee briefly debated the effects of loneliness that might occur from people staying in their own properties for longer. Officers explained LAC (Local Area Co-Ordinators) were in place to tackle loneliness, who had done very well by interacting with older residents to ensure they were not feeling lonely or isolated.

Councillor Spillman shared his concerns about older residents aged 50 - 60 on a low income and questioned the effects on their health and wellbeing. The proposals in the report could impact on them being able to privately rent and would leave them in a challenging situation which would impact on their health.

With regards to Occupational Therapy services the Director highlighted that the Council was in an improved position than in previous years as the waiting time for an initial assessment was 2 - 4 weeks.

Councillor Jefferies asked whether the Council had explored the opportunity to provide more flats that offer additional support.

Councillor Pothercary praised the report author for the detailed and very positive report, although she felt concerned that the developers did not want to meet the needs of older people. Officers stated it was for the developers and the council to meet the residents' needs.

The Chair stated that most of the sheltered housing in Thurrock was of its time, having been built in the 1980s and 1990s and the scope of those

buildings were limited at that time. The Committee highlighted the figure of 8,000 residents on the housing waiting list and the incentives to encourage single occupants living in larger properties to relocate to smaller accommodation was discussed.

**RESOLVED: That:**

- 1. The committee noted and commented on the content and recommendations contained within the report.**
- 2. The committee considered how the findings of the report can best be used to influence wider corporate strategy**

**21. Out of Hours Procedures for Sheltered Housing**

The Assistant Director Housing Management presented the report and outlined the out of hours' procedures in place in sheltered accommodation following a request made at the last Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Spillman revealed the report was initially influenced by a particular incident in Thurrock and the concerns are with the emergency services attending to residents in a timely manner.

Officers confirmed some procedures were already being implemented to allow emergency services easy and quick access to properties including a master key being supplied to all Sheltered Housing Officers and implementing a key safe outside all sheltered housing properties in case of an emergency.

Councillor Spillman asked how these procedures were being communicated with residents. Officers advised that all sheltered housing residents were made aware at the beginning of their tenancy agreements.

The Committee wanted clarity on how the pendant alarms were being tested monthly as stated in the report. In response Officers explained that a new central control system was in place which alerts the care line before the battery on the pendant runs low, and when it was installed all the residents were asked to test them regularly, in addition to this the care line staff make outbound calls to residents to ensure their pendants are being tested. Councillor Redsell praised the care line and the technology in place to keep older residents safe in their homes.

**RESOLVED: That:**

- 1. the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers and comments upon on the out of hour's provision in Sheltered Housing**

**22. Housing Revenue Account Business Plan and Budgets 2019/2020**

The Officers presented the report which represented the updated HRA Business Plan for 2019/2020. It was highlighted that the Business Plan is a statutory requirement and the HRA needs to be financially viable, whilst being able to continue to deliver the Council's housing priorities.

Councillor Spillman asked for confirmation on the funding that could be borrowed now that the HRA borrowing cap had been lifted. Officers advised it was still work in progress and the HRA cap was lifted and a further report on the HRA new build programme will be brought back to the Housing Committee in February 2019.

Officers also agreed there is an aspiration to build more council homes in Thurrock. The Committee expressed the need for homes in Thurrock and the Chair stated, if there is not enough land they would potentially need to be built in the green belt; in the 1950s this was something which was done regularly.

Councillor Redsell asked for details on the upkeep and maintenance of garages. She commented whether it would be beneficial for the garages to be knocked down and used as public car parks. The Committee suggested if the budget was low, the Youth Offending Service could always provide support and help repair the garages.

Officers addressed the comments regarding garages and advised the Committee that the Council are aware of the maintenance on garages, which will be discussed during February's Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting and a report will be shared.

During the discussion Councillor Pothercary asked whether measures could be put in place to prevent residents falling behind on rent due to the introduction of universal credit changes. Officers reassured the Committee that the Council were being proactive with the support offered for people on Universal Credit to prevent people falling into arrears.

Councillor Pothercary also shared her concerns with the external wall upgrades to high-rise tower blocks in light of the cladding concerns raised from the Grenfell Tower incident. She felt safety assessments of refurbishments should be undertaken before they were installed. Officers noted these comments and advised it would be discussed at Cabinet, although the safety checks had been done. Officers added the work was being undertaken because the cladding was close to reaching its lifespan and needed replacing.

Councillor Spillman also raised concerns with sprinklers in the high rise tower blocks as this was previously mentioned at the Housing Overview and Scrutiny in October. The Director confirmed this would be discussed at the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee in February 2019.

**RESOLVED: That:**

- 1. That the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee comments on the assumptions reflected in the HRA Business Plan, as summarised in the report.**
- 2. That Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee comments on the budget information which is also provided.**

## **23. Housing Allocation Review 2018**

The Housing Strategy & Quality Manager, explained the purpose of the report was to outline the reason why Local Authorities are required to have an up to date Allocations Policy. The report sets out a number of recommended changes and matters for consideration regarding the current Housing Allocations Policy.

The recommended changes include:

- Removing of band 5 on the housing list
- Revisiting “families local connections”
- Employment
- Financial threshold
- Cancelling inactive applicants

Councillor Spillman expressed his disagreement with the removal of band 5 on the Council housing list as there was no ethical reason behind it, although it gives residents false hope of being housed.

Councillor Redsell asked Officers what they expect will change by removing band 5. Officers responded that it would allow properties to be allocated to those most in need i.e. bands 1- 4.

The Committee discussed “the family connections” criteria as there are a large amount of modern families in the borough which this policy would need to take into account.

Councillor Spillman felt unhappy with the report and stated that he would not be supporting the recommendations as he felt that Cabinet needed to take into account how families would be affected by this policy.

Councillor Redsell asked whether local employment held any weight in the eligibility criteria for social housing. Officers confirmed all applicants on the housing register were invited to take part in the consultations however only 539 responses were received.

Councillor Pothercary mentioned “Key workers” as they may not meet the local employment criteria, due to their income. Officers explained “key Workers” would focus on graduates and not necessarily include Doctors due to their income.

Officers explained that the Local Authority was under a legal duty to house residents, although few residents housed each year are band 5, only 15 - 50 residents on band 5 are housed each year. Officers added that Basildon Council have a 6 year minimum for living in the borough.

The Chair highlighted as part of the Local Plan, the Council proposed 10,000 Council properties over 20 years. There are 8,000 residents on the waiting list, and it would not be appropriate for the properties to be empty which would be the case if band 5 was removed.

The Director explained to the Committee that band 5 would not be abolished until (2019) and all residents currently on band 5 will have a small chance of being accommodated.

The Committee asked in particular what residents would be placed on band 5. The Director explained band 5 was for residents who are adequately housed in either privately rented homes or living with family members and are waiting to be accommodated by the Council but meet the other eligibility criteria.

Councillor Spillman said the residents on band 5 could also be individuals aged 40 or above living with their parents as it is exceptionally difficult for them financially to rent privately.

The Chair proposed for Members to move a motion as the committee seemed against the removing of band 5 on the housing list. He felt it would prevent the younger generation from getting social housing. Councillor Jefferies disagreed with the Chair's comment as it would not impact on the younger generation.

The Director advised that the Local Plan was out for consultation and the commitment was to build homes. The Committee stated that the new builds would need to be affordable homes.

During the discussion all Members decided that the recommendations **3.1.7, 3.2.3, 3.4.6, 3.5.12** would be approved and the Chair, the Vice-Chair and Councillor Pothercary disagreed with recommendation **3.3.4 - Banding and Lists, Matters for Consideration**.

**RESOLVED: That:**

**1. Members commented on the relevant sections of the report:**

**3.1.7 – Local Connection – Matters for Consideration**

**3.2.3 – Financial Qualification – Matters for Consideration**

**3.4.6 – Key Workers and Working Households – Matters for Consideration**

**3.5.12 – Applications, Bidding and Offers – Matters for Consideration**

**24. Consultation Update on the Housing Option of Additional Licensing scheme**

The Housing Enforcement Manager presented the report and explained in December 2016 the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed for Officers to introduce an additional licensing for privately rented properties. The scheme would provide protection to HMO tenants if approved.

Councillor Redsell praised Officers and agreed there had been positive impact in the borough.

**RESOLVED: That:**

- 1. Note the new extended mandatory HMO licensing scheme came into force on October 1 2018**
- 2. Note Additional HMO licensing falls outside the scope of mandatory HMO licencing of private rented property which is let to 5 or tenants who form two or more households**
- 3. Note the proposed Additional Licensing designated areas in the borough will be subject to licensing for private rented property which is let to 3 to 4 tenants who form two or more households**
- 4. Note the outcomes of the public consultation exercise with a view to making recommendations to Cabinet.**

**25. Work Programme**

Members discussed the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for the upcoming meetings and the Chair requested for an updated report on the Housing Allocations Review 2019 for February's Committee meeting.

**The meeting finished at 9.55 pm**

Approved as a true and correct record

**CHAIR**

**DATE**

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

<b>5 February 2019</b>		<b>ITEM: 5</b>
<b>Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>		
<b>Garages Review – Phase 1 Progress Report</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All		<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-key
<b>Report of:</b> Carol Hinvest, Assistant Director of Housing		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Carol Hinvest, Assistant Director of Housing		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Roger Harris, Corporate Director for Adults, Housing and Health		
<b>This report is</b> Public		

## Executive Summary

This report provides an update to Committee on actions taken since the report on this subject considered in February 2018. The report sets out next steps to take forward the garages project work.

### 1. Recommendation(s)

#### 1.1 That the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee comment on the information in this report and the next steps described

### 2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 The Council has a current total stock of 2624 garages and garage plots of which 827 (32%) are empty of which 96 are ready to let. The remainder cannot be utilised at present for a variety of reasons e.g. we do not have keys, it is unclear if there are any items in some garages and these garages will need to be inspected.
- 2.2 This report was requested by the Committee to provide a progress update on the report received in February 2018 and reflects ongoing interest by members in ensuring we are utilising garages more effectively across the borough.
- 2.3 Since the last report was considered by the committee a gap analysis and garage audit have been carried out the results of which have informed this report. More analysis has been undertaken on the stock condition survey which has revealed that a more in depth survey is needed.

- 2.4 Demand for garages varies across the borough as shown in this table of data from Northgate on garage applications on the system. This shows the areas requested rather the number of applications as residents can request a number of different areas. This information will enable us to focus work on areas of greatest demand.

<b>Garage Area</b>	<b>Applications</b>
South Ockendon	376
Blackshots/Stifford Clays	249
Grays	236
Chadwell	220
Tilbury	196
Corringham	185
Stanford Le Hope	138
Purfleet	128
East tilbury	120
Aveley	118

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

- 3.1 A garage audit and gap analysis have been carried out within the Housing Service to ascertain the next steps to be taken to better utilise the garage stock.
- 3.2 It a project will be put together sponsored by the Assistant Director of Housing with project support from the Housing Quality and Business Improvement Team, involving the Strategic Lead, Housing Operations, the Estates Services Manager and a Garage Project Officer.
- 3.3 The project team will develop that an action plan to deliver the following outcomes:
- A full structural integrity survey of the garage stock to understand the current state of the garages and those that have a future and those that do not. The last such survey was undertaken in 2009 so ten years later would seem an appropriate time to review this data and undertake a new survey. We hope this survey would start in April 2019 and take approximately two months to complete. The stock condition survey was based on a review of 10% of the garages, this survey would review all the blocks and ensure that their structure is analysed. We are aware that a number of blocks have spalling concrete for example.
  - A programme of decoration of garage doors by the Community Payback team, this project has been discussed with the Community Safety Partnership Manager and has been agreed as a good project. This will commence once the weather has improved. This will improve the general outlook of garages which has been a key request of residents and members.



- Once we are clear which garage blocks have reached the end of their lives structurally and which have not the project will work with colleagues in Regeneration to assess sites that may be suitable for housing development either by the Council or by Thurrock Regeneration Limited.
- Another possibility for blocks that are no longer viable is to demolish the garages and create additional parking. There is a growing demand for parking spaces which can be hard to fulfil and can create issues between neighbours or health and safety concerns for the Council. Where possible additional parking spaces will be delivered.
- A review of the garage tenancy agreement with colleagues in Legal. As the previous garage report made clear many garages across the borough are no longer fit for purpose for storing cars and are used as general storage by residents. The garage tenancy agreement needs to be reviewed to reflect these circumstances and the issues around insurance on both sides.
- Review the rent for the garages consider the level at which a higher rent for non-Council tenants would increase income to the Housing Revenue Account without impacting on demand. Any proposals for changes to be made for garage rent setting for 2020/21.
- Implement the findings of the garage audit to bring garages back into use starting with those in the areas of highest demand.

#### **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 4.1 The proposals contained in this report are based on the recent work completed within the Housing Service and seeks to take forward a set of realistic proposals to improve the garages that form part of the Council housing stock.

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

- 5.1 The Council will consult with residents as required by the outcome of individual parts of the report for example where garages are proposed for redevelopment.

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

- 6.1 No specific implications identified.

#### **7. Implications**

##### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Julie Curtis**

## **HRA and Development Accountant**

The Council has an ongoing repairs budget of £75,000, in 2019/20 an additional £200,000 (we will have been allocated from the non-ring-fenced right to buy receipts subject to the sign off of the HRA Business Plan. This will support the delivery of the project outcomes.

### **7.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **Simon Scrowther**  
**Litigation Lawyer**

There are no legal implications associated with this report.

### **7.3 Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**  
**Community Development Manager**

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

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

- 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):

- None

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

- None

### **Report Author:**

Carol Hinvest  
Assistant Director of Housing  
Housing Service

5 February 2019		ITEM: 6
Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee		
Homelessness Prevention Strategy Review		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key	
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 strategy which sets out the local authority's plans for the prevention of homelessness and for securing that sufficient accommodation and support are, or will be, available for people who become homeless or who are at risk of becoming so.

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

The current homelessness strategy was adopted in Thurrock in 2015.

A new homelessness prevention strategy is now required which takes into account current homelessness in the borough, the impact of recent welfare reforms, and new opportunities for preventing homelessness.

### 1. Recommendation

**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 homelessness strategy. In particular, the Committee are asked to comment on the consultation proposals as set out in section 5.**

### 2. Introduction and Background

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

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

Thurrock Council last published its homelessness prevention strategy in November 2015 and is now seeking to start work on the development of a refreshed document.

- 2.3 There have been a number of developments in case law and legislation since the homelessness prevention strategy was last published, most notably the enactment of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. This Act amended and introduced a number of measures, including:

- Enhanced advice and information about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness
- New duties to prevent and relieve homelessness for all those who are eligible for assistance, regardless of intentionality or priority need
- An extension of the period of time where people are considered to be 'threatened with homelessness' by local authorities
- New personalised housing plans and assessments which outline the steps which both the individuals and the local authority will take to attempt to secure accommodation
- A new duty for specified public authorities, such as prisons and hospitals, to refer service users who they believe to be homeless or at risk of homelessness to local authority homelessness services

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

- 2.4 In the period between April 2017 and December 2017, 1023 people approached the Council for assistance, with the number of approaches between April 2017 and March 2018 totalling 1395.

By comparison, in the time between the 2017 Act coming into force in April 2018 through to the end of December 2018, 1167 people approached the Council for assistance, representing an increase of 12.3% for the same period within 2017/18. If this trend continues, it is estimated that by the end of the reporting year in March 2019 a total of 1566 households will have approached the Council.

- 2.5 In isolation the increased percentage of households approaching the Council for assistance appears to be slight, however when this rise is put into the context of the new measures introduced through the Homelessness

Reduction Act 2017 the scale of the new challenges and pressures facing the Council becomes apparent.

With each of the new 'prevention' and 'relief' duties lasting for a period of 56 days, the introduction of personalised housing plans and the implementation of more frequent case progression reviews, every eligible applicant who approaches the Council now receives more detailed information and better assistance specific for their particular circumstances for longer than before.

### **3. Homelessness Strategic Analysis and Strategy**

#### **3.1 Homelessness Strategic Analysis**

3.1.1 A range of strategic analysis will take place, considering the various factors affecting the provision of homelessness services across the borough. This analysis will primarily look at:

- National context, considering matters such as national trends, changing legislation/case law, welfare reform, new government initiatives in end rough sleeping and regional factors affecting homelessness
- Local strategic context, considering the wider corporate priorities, strategies from across the Council and other partner organisations, and the statistical background of the borough
- Local housing context, considering reasons and trends in homelessness across the borough, household composition, the use and availability of temporary accommodation, and the supply of accommodation across tenure types in the borough.

#### **3.2 Homelessness Prevention Strategy**

3.2.1 It is anticipated that through the strategic analysis of homelessness a range of key issues will be identified. The homelessness prevention strategy will include:

- An identification of the main causes of homelessness in Thurrock and exploration of challenges and barriers which residents and services face
- A number of key priorities to be adopted in order to prevent and relieve homelessness across the borough
- The development of a clear action plan with regular progress reviews to ensure that goals are met in partnership with other public bodies and organisations.

### **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

4.1 As outlined, the Council has a statutory duty to ensure that it carries out regular analysis of homelessness in the borough and publishes a refreshed

homelessness strategy at least every five years. The current strategy therefore requires a published refresh by November 2020.

- 4.2 Due to significant changes since 2015 in welfare reform, homelessness legislation and housing provision in the borough, it is recommended that the analysis of homelessness in the borough commence in early 2019 so that a new prevention strategy can be published ahead of the statutory deadline.

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

- 5.1 As set out in the Homelessness Code of Guidance published by MHCLG, the Council must consult public or local authorities, voluntary organisations and other people considered appropriate before adopting or modifying a homelessness strategy.
- 5.2 Consultation will also take place with service users and specialist agencies which provide support to individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness across the borough.
- 5.3 Examples of previous consultation activity which will be considered for use again includes face-to-face sessions with Council staff and partner agencies, online surveys, statistical analysis, and presentations to other key Council services, committees and boards.

Close work will take place with a range of partners and service providers, for example those which form the membership of the Council's Homelessness and Mental Health Forum, including NELFT, St Mungo's, Open Door, SERRIC, Mind, and Changing Pathways.

Discussions and consultation will also take place with services across the Council, including both Adults and Childrens Social Care, as well as with bodies such as the Leaving Care Council and Youth Cabinet.

- 5.4 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.
- 5.5 The strategic analysis of homelessness is expected to take place between February 2019 and April 2019. It is anticipated that the consultation activity for a new homelessness prevention strategy will commence in May 2019 and run until August 2019.

## **6. Implications**

### **6.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Julie Curtis**  
**HRA and Development Accountant**

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

## 6.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Simon Scrowther,**  
**Litigation Lawyer**

The Homelessness Act 2002, s1 (3) requires a Local Authority to review homelessness in its area and to produce a strategy. Section 1(4) requires that the strategy is reviewed and updated at least every 5 years. The Homelessness Reduction Act changes must be included in such a strategy. Thurrock Council must comply with the legal requirement of having an updated strategy.

## 6.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**  
**Community Development Manager**

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

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

- None

## 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):

- Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities, MHCLG

## 8. Appendices to the report

- None

**Report Author:**

Ryan Farmer,  
Strategy and Quality Manager  
Housing Service



<b>5 February 2019</b>		<b>ITEM: 7</b>
<b>Housing Overview &amp; Scrutiny Committee</b>		
<b>Housing Allocations Policy Review 2018 – Financial Qualification Report</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All		<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-Key
<b>Report of:</b> Ryan Farmer – Housing Strategy and Quality Manager		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Carol Hinvest – Assistant Director of Housing		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Roger Harris – Corporate Director, Adults, Housing and Health		
<b>This report is:</b> Public		

## Executive Summary

The Council has recently carried out a review of its Housing Allocations Policy, featuring in-depth analysis of the current Housing Register and periods of consultation with applicants, residents and other key stakeholders.

The Housing Allocations Policy Review 2018 report was presented and recommendations approved at the Cabinet meeting held on 16 January 2019, at which time the Leader of the Council made an additional recommendation.

The recommendation asked for Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review the financial qualification outlined in 3.2.3 of the Housing Allocations Policy Review 2018 paper and report back to Cabinet with findings regarding the changes to the financial qualification criteria.

### 1. Recommendation(s)

#### 1.1 Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the contents of this report and advise Cabinet of the findings.

### 2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1. In order for an applicant to qualify for the 'Housing Waiting List' they must not have savings, assets or an annual income above the set caps. Applicants with savings, assets or an annual income above these levels will be expected to meet their own housing needs. The thresholds are set at different levels and are dependent on the type and size of housing that the applicant needs. They are related to the costs of renting and purchasing a suitable property.

There are different levels for General Needs properties as well as Sheltered Housing and Extra Care Housing. This report specifically looks at updating the financial caps for General Needs accommodation.

- 2.2. Thresholds should be reviewed each year using a set methodology and are dependent on the affordability of private rented or purchased accommodation within the borough. The current thresholds were set when the current policy was implemented in April 2016.

### 3. Financial Qualification Thresholds

- 3.1. In order to qualify for the 'Housing Waiting List' and then to be offered a property at the point of successfully bidding on a property, the savings, assets or annual income for the application must be below the financial threshold. The current and proposed financial thresholds are below:

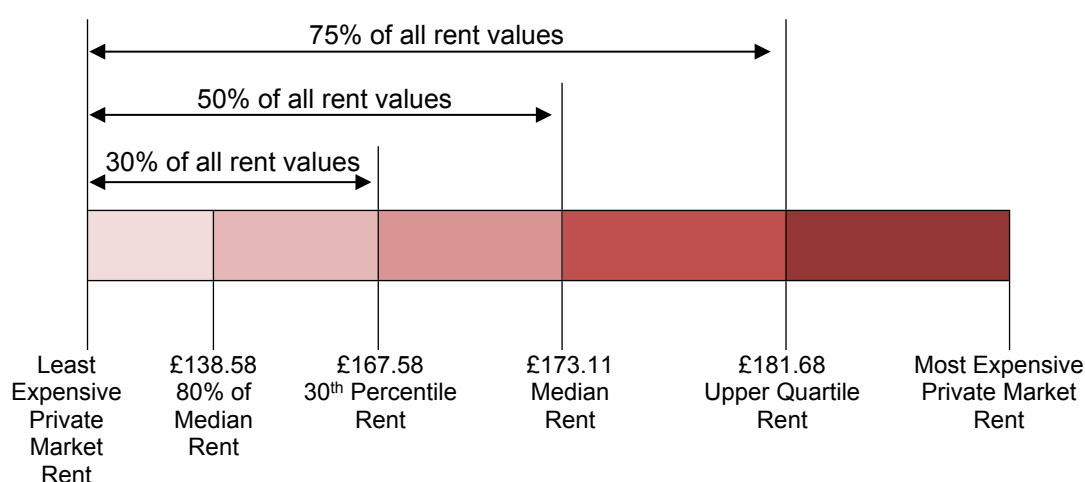
Property size – according to household make-up	Current Maximum Net Income	Proposed Maximum Net Income
Single Person	£23,000	£24,000
1 Bedroom (couple)	£25,000	£26,000
2 Bedrooms (Single/couple plus children)	£35,000	£37,000
3 Bedrooms (Single/couple plus children)	£41,000	£47,000
4 Bedrooms (Single/couple plus children)	£59,000	£60,000

The paragraphs below set out the approach which was taken to calculating the proposals as defined in the above table.

- 3.2. According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the maximum Housing Cost to Income Ratio (HCIR) in order for accommodation to be considered to be affordable would be 1:3. This means that if a household is spending more than a third of its net income on accommodation costs, that accommodation would not be deemed to be affordable.
- 3.3. The methodology used for calculating the above financial thresholds took into consideration both the average private rents and average property purchase prices in the borough. The data used was provided by a release from the Hometrack market intelligence system with up-to-date data in October 2018.
- 3.4. Whilst only one measure for the average property purchase price was included within the available data, a range of private rent statistics were provided by Hometrack. These were:

- 30<sup>th</sup> Percentile – this statistic indicates the rental amount that 30% of private market rents fall below.
- 80% Median – this statistic indicates 80% of the value of the average market rent, used for calculating ‘affordable rent’ in line with the Government definition.
- Median – this statistic indicates the value which is in the middle of the range of private market rents and can be identified as the average market rent.
- Upper Quartile – this statistic indicates the value that 75% of private market rents fall below.

To put this into context, the below chart displays these statistics in relation to the least expensive and most expensive private market rent amounts for one-bed properties.



In the process of calculating rental affordability, the calculation took the weekly accommodation cost, multiplied by 52 to give an annual accommodation cost, then multiplied by 3 to determine the affordability threshold in line with the maximum recommended HCIR.

- 3.5. For determining property purchase affordability, the calculation simulated a scenario where a first-time buyer was attempting to join the housing ladder. The calculation therefore made an assumption that a property would be purchased with a 90% mortgage.

Repayments were to be made over 30 years with an interest rate of 4.5%, as the average standard variable rate was approximately that amount at the time of the calculation. This calculation gave the monthly repayment amount, which was multiplied by 12 to establish the annual cost of the mortgage, and then by 3 to determine the affordability threshold according to the maximum recommended HCIR.

- 3.6. The table below shows the result of the calculations to determine the net income required for rental and property purchase affordability.

	1 bed		2 bed		3 bed		4 bed	
	Average cost per week	Annual Net Income Required	Average Cost per week	Annual Net Income Required	Average Cost per week	Annual Net Income Required	Average Cost per week	Annual Net Income Required
<b>Private rent - 30th Percentile</b>	<b>£167.58</b>	<b>£26,142</b>	<b>£199.60</b>	<b>£31,138</b>	<b>£261.35</b>	<b>£40,771</b>	<b>£348.64</b>	<b>£54,388</b>
Private rent - 80% Median	£138.58	£21,618	£170.15	£26,543	£216.20	£33,727	£287.71	£44,883
Private rent-Median	£173.11	£27,004	£212.60	£33,166	£270.40	£42,182	£359.64	£56,104
Private rent - Upper Quartile	£181.68	£28,343	£232.55	£36,278	£286.50	£44,694	£372.93	£58,177
	Average Purchase Price	Annual Net Income Required	Average Purchase Price	Annual Net Income Required	Average Purchase Price	Annual Net Income Required	Average Purchase Price	Annual Net Income Required
<b>Property Purchase</b>	<b>£147,688</b>	<b>£24,245</b>	<b>£262,644</b>	<b>£43,117</b>	<b>£286,594</b>	<b>£47,049</b>	<b>£364,836</b>	<b>£59,894</b>

- 3.7 The general approach to set the Housing Register financial qualification thresholds was to take whichever was greatest required net annual income between the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile private rent and the property purchase price by bedroom size. The table below give the rationale for each threshold.

Property Size	Current Threshold	Proposed Threshold	Rationale for proposed threshold
Single Person	£23,000	£24,000	1 bed need, but reflects the £2k variation between single person and 1 bed thresholds from current criteria
1 Bed	£25,000	£26,000	£26.1k required for private rent (30 <sup>th</sup> percentile)
2 Bed	£35,000	£37,000	There was a large variation between the cost of renting and buying 2-bed properties (£12k), resulting in significant distortion between the 1 bed and 3 bed thresholds. Instead, an amount which was halfway between the cost of renting and buying was applied (£6k).
3 Bed	£41,000	£47,000	£47.0k required for property purchase
4 Bed	£59,000	£60,000	£59.8k required for property purchase

#### 4. Local Context

- 4.1. The most recent earnings by place of residence dataset published by the Office for National Statistics gives the below median and mean gross salaries for Thurrock. A calculator has been used to show the net income based on deductions for income tax and national insurance for the 2019-2020 financial year. This calculation does not include any student loan or employee pension contributions. It is the net income which is considered against the financial thresholds as set out in the Allocations Policy.

	Gross	Net (2019/20)
Thurrock Median Salary	£24924	£20484
Thurrock Mean Salary	£28257	£22751

- 4.2. Corresponding activity has also been carried out to calculate the maximum gross annual income for each of the proposed financial thresholds, which can

be seen in the table below. The column for joint income displays two equal joint incomes with a combined total below as an example.

Property Size	Net (2019/20)	Gross (single income)	Gross (joint income)
Single person	£24000	£30095	N/A
1 bedroom	£26000	£33036	2x £13918 (£27836)
2 bedroom	£37000	£49212	2x £22007 (£44014)
3 bedroom	£47000	£66322	2x £23960 (£47920)
4+ bedroom	£60000	£88736	2x £38918 (£77836)

- 4.3. As evidenced in the tables above, both the net median income and net mean income for the borough are lower than all of the proposed financial thresholds. This information in conjunction with the approach taken to calculate the financial thresholds significantly reduces the likelihood that the income of a household being too high to qualify for the Housing Register but below the income required to find affordable accommodation in the private market.

**5. 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 Allocations Policy Review 2018 - <https://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/documents/s22836/Housing%20Allocations%20Policy%20Review.pdf>

**6. Implications**

**6.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Julie Curtis**  
HRA and Development Accountant

Redefining the financial thresholds may allow for more applicants to qualify for the Housing Register which may have been unable to do so if the household income was too high. An increase in potential applicants may reduce the length of time taken to re-let void properties, which should in turn reduce the amount of rent lost while properties are vacant.

Redefining the financial thresholds may allow for more applicants to qualify for the Housing Register which may have been unable to do so if the household income was too high. An increase in potential applicants may reduce the length of time taken to re-let void properties, which should in turn reduce the amount of rent lost while properties are vacant.

## 6.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Simon Scrowther**  
**Litigation Lawyer**

The allocation of housing by local housing authorities is regulated by Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 (HA 1996). A local housing authority (LHA) must comply with the provisions of Part 6 when allocating housing accommodation (section 159(1), HA 1996). However, subject to this compliance, authorities may otherwise allocate housing in any manner they consider appropriate (section 159(7), HA 1996).

As a result of changes made by the LA 2011, with effect from 18 June 2012, LHAs have been able to decide who “qualifies” for an allocation. Accommodation can therefore only be allocated to someone who qualifies under those local criteria (section 160ZA(6), HA 1996). Who qualifies is largely a matter for the LHA (section 160ZA(7), HA 1996). The Secretary of State does however have the power to prescribe classes of persons who are, or are not, to be treated as qualifying persons (section 160ZA(8), HA 1996).

## 6.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**  
**Community Development Manager**

Consultation activity has already taken place in the process of setting out the proposals included within this report, including with applicants and other key stakeholders. Consultation responses have informed our community equality impact assessment which will inform implementation.

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

- None

**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. Appendices to the report**

- None

**Report Author:**

Ryan Farmer,  
Strategy and Quality Manager  
Housing Service



<b>5 February 2019</b>		<b>ITEM 8</b>
<b>Housing Overview &amp; Scrutiny Committee</b>		
<b>Update on Fire Safety, including a Review of Fire Suppressant (Sprinkler) Systems</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All		<b>Key Decision:</b> No
<b>Report of:</b> Carol Hinvest, Assistant Director Housing		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Carol Hinvest, Assistant Director Housing		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Roger Harris, Corporate Director, Adults, Housing & Health		
<b>This report is:</b> Public		

## Executive Summary

This report updates members on fire safety measures undertaken by the council and addresses the question of retrospective installation of sprinklers in the council's 15 high-rise blocks.

The report outlines details of proposed changes in regards to fire safety legislation for social landlords following the publication of the Hackitt report and how the Council's current approach already covers some of these recommendations. Thurrock Council have always prioritised resident safety in the management of our assets to ensure that we maintain and improve our buildings so they provide the highest level of fire safety in line with the applicable fire safety standards for each property type.

### 1. Recommendation

**1.1 The Committee is asked to comment on the contents of the report and the ongoing fire safety work undertaken by the housing service to ensure all council owned property is safe.**

### 2.0 Introduction and Background

2.1 Thurrock Council have always taken a proactive approach to fire safety across the housing stock to ensure that our residents live in safe and secure accommodation. The council works closely with the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service to complete audits of applicable blocks in the borough on an annual basis. These inspections are in addition to the formal fire risk assessment undertaken by an external professional consultancy that are completed on a three year rolling programme, both of these are

supplementary to the day to day management inspections completed by Thurrock Council officers.

- 2.2 Over the last 12 months the Council in partnership with our contracting partners have been working through our fifteen tower blocks in the borough to maintain and improve the communal fire compartmentation measures and emergency lighting in the blocks. Further works are now planned to be completed in early 2019 to improved smoke ventilation to some of the communal areas in line with the recommendations of the fire risk assessments.
- 2.3 In regards to the wider portfolio, by the end of March 2019, all of the applicable properties within the Thurrock Council housing portfolio will had a new up to date fire risk assessment completed since October 2017. This ensures the Council remains compliant with its fire safety policy of having risk assessment completed with a three year rolling period.
- 2.4 Since the tragic events in June 2017, there has been a complete review of fire safety in social housing and all the relevant and legislation applicable to this. The first review to be finalised and published was the “Hackitt Review” **Building a Safer Future**, this report was an independent review of the building regulations and fire safety. The report made a total of 52 recommendations in regards to fire safety as a whole and specifically high rise residential accommodation blocks. In response to this report the MHCLG set up eleven expert working groups to ensure there is a full depth review of each recommendation. The aim of the working groups is to produce an integrated statutory regulatory framework in relation to fire safety. The working groups have been set to specifically focus on the different construction and professional roles in the industry, the eleven working groups are as follows:
- Working group 01: Engineers
  - Working group 02: Installers
  - Working group 03: Fire Engineers
  - Working group 04: Fire Risk Assessors
  - Working group 05: Fire safety Enforcement Officers
  - Working group 06: Building control / Building Standards
  - Working group 07: Architects and Building Designers
  - Working group 08: Building Safety Manager
  - Working group 09: Site Supervisors
  - Working group 10: Project Managers
  - Working group 11: Procurement
- 2.5 The Hackitt review took a holistic approach to the matter of fire safety and a number of the recommendations are in relation to resident engagement and a “residents” voice. This was matter was also identified in the recently published Social Housing Green Paper and went further to suggest a that a new regulator with stronger enforcement powers should be in place to increase transparency and improve overall engagement. The Green Paper also identified the need to review the current decency standards and raised the question if these are still relevant or if these should be higher.
- 2.6 The MHCLG is currently formulating an official response to the Hackitt report and this is due to be published in early 2019 whilst no date has officially been

set for this release, it is indicated that a new law / regulatory framework will be coming into force by 2020. This time frame is to allow a consultation to be undertaken in relation to building control documentation for the United Kingdom.

- 2.7 Whilst the final document has not been released it is clear that based on the breadth and depth of the recommendations set out there are going to be fundamental culture changes in the social housing and construction sectors. These are likely to include the creation of a Joint Competence Authority, a new “gateway” process for the signing off of construction activities and explicate roles and responsibilities in organisations. This is to ensure there is a clearly defined responsible person for each section of building safety with the appropriate accountability assigned to this role. It is suggested this approach should take a similar framework as CDM 2015 Regulations (Construction and Design Management).
- 2.8 It is also proposed to redefine high rise residential building as HRRB’s (High risk residential buildings) and these will be subject to new more robust regulatory setting and overseen by a licenced Building Safety Manager with specific enforcement and prosecution powers. Throughout the report and all supporting publications in the industry has placed significant amount of emphases on competence in relation to all sections of fire safety and it is proposed that all professionals involved in the implementation of construction related activities will have to demonstrate their competence prior to being able to the implementation of any works on HRRB’s.
- 2.9 Thurrock Council have always worked to deliver a practical and robust approach to asset management and policy for fire safety to ensure it’s a consistent standard across the portfolio and we utilised the resources available effectively. Whilst there will always be room for review and improvement it must be noted that there have been a number of fires in the Council stock of both high and low rise flatted accommodation and all fires have been successfully contained in the flat / compartmentation area where it originated. The most significant fire in recent years in one our high rise blocks occurred in 2018 in Chadwell St Mary, whilst this fire completely destroyed the windows to the external façade, internally this was completely contained to the flat. In this instance the fire service implemented the stay put policy in the block which operated very successfully.

### **3.0 Thurrock Council’s current approach**

- 3.1 Thurrock Council are continuously monitoring the industry and publications to ensure that we are best placed to adapt and implement changes when these come into force. However, the Council has also started to implement changes to enhance previous approaches as we recognise that some of the suggested changes offer tangible benefits to our residents and the Authority as a social landlord.
- 3.2 In regards to community engagement applicable Council Officers have been attending certain resident steering groups to discuss fire safety to allow residents to understand the approaches that we are taking in respect to building management and repair and maintenance works in our buildings. It is proposed to continue and increase resident engagement in regards to fire

safety to provide them with the necessary platform to be able to share their view and raise specific concerns that they have.

- 3.3 As previously identified works are undertaken year on year across the portfolio in regards to fire safety, as part of these works a large amount of resident flat front entrance doors have been upgraded, however, these have been completed based on condition and not in a programme due to financial constraints and to ensure other priority works are completed. However, we are pleased to confirm that we are now about to deliver a programme to upgrade circa 350 flat front entrance doors to new FD30s fire doors. As part of this programme we will ensure any doors that needs to be replaced as a priority will be completed first, however, it is then proposed to upgrade all doors in complete blocks so we have a consistent standard in Thurrock's high rise buildings, whilst this programme will not replace all doors this year, it is planned to deliver a fire door replacement programme year on year moving forward.
- 3.4 Flat front entrance fire doors have been subject to an essential review by the Government in regards to regulatory compliance and again the Council have been very proactive in tracking and reviewing the documentation in relation to this. We can confirm that all new FD30s doors now being installed into Thurrock Council stock will meet the EN1634 fire and smoke resistance requirements. This new standard will be the UK's minimum mandatory fire performance requirement from 1 October 2019; however, we have taken the decision to only install doors that meet this regulation from this point forward.
- 3.5 At present one of the main challenges the Council face is in relation to management of communal areas within our high rise residential blocks, the issues relate to the discarding / dumping of items in defined sterile areas and frequent damage of communal fire doors / partitions in lobbies and stairwells. All fifteen tower blocks are covered by a dedicated caretaking services to identify and address these elements as they arise, however, because we are unable to identify how this has occurred we are limited in regards to effectiveness of preventing this happening again.
- 3.6 In order to help address the above issues the Council are currently consulting with the residents living in our tower blocks in regards to installing CCTV in the main communal areas on each floor of all fifteen blocks. This project is focused on maintaining safe homes for our residents and will enable the Council to review each floor if any of the above incidents occur or if any other anti-social behaviour incidents occur. Further to this it is proposed that in conjunction with the instillation of the CCTV, the smoke detection system that is in communal areas of all fifteen high rise blocks for controlling the fire compartmentation measures will also be linked back to the CCTV control room. This will enable the control room which is staffed 24/7, 365 days a year to immediately review the camera on the applicable floor where the smoke detector has been activated allowing them to take the appropriate course of action depending on the circumstances.
- 3.7 Thurrock Council is currently updating its fire safety advice booklet for all residents and it is planned for this to be finalised and published by April 2019.

#### **4.0 Fire suppressant (sprinkler) measure**

- 4.1 As documented in previous reports Thurrock Council took a proactive approach in reviewing their housing stock regarding fire safety and fire suppression systems and as part of this an initial feasibility study was completed in late 2017 to assess the benefits and costs of retrospectively fitting sprinklers into the fifteen high-rise blocks in the Borough.
- 4.2 All of Thurrock Council's high-rise blocks maintain and enforce "sterile" communal areas as these are kept free of combustible materials by the caretaking teams and the automatic door closing systems further limit the spread of heat and smoke. This combined with the instillation of CCTV into the communal areas further enhances fire safety. It is also very important to note the majority of fires start in individual flats and therefore this has been the focus of the assessment.
- 4.3 Sprinkler systems operate on the basis of 2 to 4 sprinkler heads set off by the heat working at any one time to suppress the initial fire. If the fire spreads the activation of additional sprinkler heads will cause the water pressure to drop in the system thereby reducing its effectiveness. The high-rise blocks within Thurrock range from 12-15 storeys in height and with the exception of the three tower blocks in Blackshots, the tower blocks are grouped in threes constructed in close proximity to each other. The feasibility assessment was based on a dedicated pump system purpose built centrally at the base of each cluster of three high-rise blocks that would serve all three blocks in the event of a fire.
- 4.4 The installation of sprinkler systems would require a stand-alone pipework system. This would need to be concealed in communal areas and contain anti-vandal fittings. Consideration would also need to be given to concealing the pipework in individual flats for aesthetic reasons.
- 4.5 It is estimated that the total cost of retrospectively fitting sprinkler systems into the borough's 15 high-rise blocks would be £3.3m. Grant funding of £10,000 per high-rise block has been made available to the council from ECFRS. This grant is only payable on completion of the works and at this stage is not time restricted. Whilst this is a significant amount of capital in the form of a grant it would still leave a £3.15m shortfall in the funding requirements if the council were to retrospectively fit sprinklers into each high-rise block.
- 4.6 Retro fitting a fire safety measure such as a sprinkler system into any building will always enhance fire safety if installed correctly for the appropriate building, however, sprinklers should not be seen as the panacea that must take precedence above all other measures. Whilst they do offer a tangible benefit, these should not be prioritised over the maintaining and upgrading of physical fire compartmentation measures that were fundamental to the building design such as passive fire stopping and fire doors etc. Therefore, there must be genuine and justifiable reasoning why a large-scale cost and programme of works is acceptable and prioritised over other key essential works, especially within occupied buildings such as general needs residential flats.

4.7 The high rise buildings in Thurrock like most other existing high rise building in the UK are of that age, where most of the original fire safety provisions are not always in line with modern standards. Therefore, consideration is always given to improving existing safety measures when an opportunity arises especially during refurbishment works and this is the approach that Thurrock Council currently adopts. Under the Regulatory Reform Order (Fire Safety) 2005, improvements where practicable can be made to achieve a reasonable standard to outdated fire safety measures. The considerations now, why is it deemed essential to retro fit an active life fire safety measure such as a fire sprinkler system within a building that was designed and constructed and deemed a safe residential building. Under the Regulatory Reform Order 2005, the aim is to provide an adequately safe building for its occupants and firefighting in practicable means, but not to upgrade/retro fit existing buildings to new standards.

4.8 At the time of preparing this report no government guidance or regulation had been received in relation to retrospective fitting of sprinkler systems into high-rise blocks. These will be kept under review.

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

5.1 Residents in all buildings with communal entrances, including the high-rise blocks, have been provided with detailed information on all fire safety measures applicable to where they live. Fire safety information is posted on notice boards in all communal entrances.

5.2 There is a current consultation ongoing throughout January 2019 in relation to the proposed implementation of the CCTV project in the fifteen high rise blocks.

5.3 Any further fire safety improvement works to the buildings would require leaseholder consultation.

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

6.1 The authority has corporate responsibility for all appropriate fire safety measures in dwellings with communal entrances, including low, medium and high-rise dwellings. Failure to provide adequate safety measures including the fabric of the building and the advice given to occupiers and visitors could be a breach of this corporate responsibility. The work undertaken to date to deal with any outstanding safety issues identified by ECFRS (Essex County Fire and Rescue Service), the ongoing work to upgrade fire safety measures in individual flats and communal areas and the regular updating of information for residents and visitors is essential in meeting our corporate responsibilities.

## **7.0 Conclusion**

7.1 The Council has continued to take a proactive approach to fire safety across the whole housing portfolio and has a robust and detailed approach to ensuring the safety of all occupants in its high, medium and low-rise blocks and other dwellings with communal facilities. This includes providing up to date advice to all residents and visitors, regular inspection, remedial action

where necessary and regular reviews of current measures. This also includes assessing the benefits of retrospectively fitting sprinklers to individual dwellings in high-rise blocks.

- 7.2 The Council will continue to maintain and improve our assets in relation to fire safety in an equal and balanced manner across the portfolio. The Council will continue to monitor and review all relevant documentation and will implement any changes to law or regulation when this becomes applicable.

## **8.0 Implications**

### **8.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Julie Curtis**  
**HRA and Development Accountant**

The funding for the ongoing fire safety measures outlined above has been budgeted for in the current Housing Revenue Account Business Plan. Funding for the retrospective fitting of sprinklers into high-rise blocks is estimated to be in excess of £3m and would have to be met from the Housing Revenue Account. This would be a further pressure on the Housing Revenue Account and would need to be included in future HRA Business Plans.

### **8.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **David Lawson**  
**Assistant Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer**

The council currently meets all of its obligations regarding the health and safety of its tenants.

### **8.3 Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**  
**Community Development Manager**

The council's fire safety and enforcement measures are applied equally to all residents and visitors in the council's managed and maintained stock, however, individual bespoke arrangements / systems are in place to meet the needs of vulnerable resident groups where deemed applicable.

### **8.4 Other implications**

- None

## **9. Background papers used in preparing this report**

- Essex County Fire & Rescue Service Sprinkler Funding Offer

- Hackitt Review, Building a Safer Future May 2018

**10. Appendices to this report:**

- None

**Report Author:**

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Housing Service



# Work Programme

**Committee:** Housing Overview and Scrutiny

**Year:** 2018/2019

**Dates of Meetings:** 28 June 2018, 2 October 2018, 11 December 2018 and 5 February 2018

Topic	Lead Officer	Requested by Officer/Member
<b>28 June 2018 – CANCELLED</b>		
<b>10 July 2018</b>		
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
HMO (House of Multiple Occupation) - update & Private Sector Licensing update	Dulal Ahmed	Officer
Mental Health and Domestic Violence within Homelessness case reviews	Roger Harris / Richard Birchett	Officer
Gas repair procurements	Roger Harris / Richard Birchett	Officer
External decorations	Roger Harris / Richard Birchett	Officer
<b>2 October 2018</b>		
Fire Safety Update – including an assessment on the fitting of sprinklers	Roger Harris	Member

# Work Programme

Topic	Lead Officer	Requested by Officer/Member
Social Housing Green Paper consultation / Right to Buy sales consultation	Richard Birchett / Roger Harris	Officer
Verbal update on implementation of HMO licensing	Richard Birchett / Roger Harris	Officer
<b>18 December 2018</b>		
Housing Fees and Charges Report	Andrew Austin	Officer
Annual Public Health Report 2018: Older People's Housing	Andrea Clement	Officer
Review on HMO (House of Multiple Occupation) & Private Sector Licensing update	Dulal Ahmed	Officer
Housing Allocation Review	Carol Hinvest	Officer
Sheltered Accommodation / Out of Hours Response	Carol Hinvest	Officer
HRA 2019/20 Business Plan	Carol Hinvest / Roger Harris	Officer
<b>5 February 2019</b>		
Update report on garages.	Carol Hinvest / Roger Harris	Officer
Fire Safety Update (Sprinklers)	Carol Hinvest / Roger Harris	Member
Homelessness Strategy	Carol Hinvest	Officer