

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 **7 March 2023**

**Committee Room 2, Civic Offices, New Road, Grays, Essex RM17 6SL**

## Membership:

Councillors Allen Mayes (Chair), Colin Churchman (Vice-Chair), Steve Liddiard, Shane Hebb, Joycelyn Redsell and Lynn Worrall

Carol Purser, Housing Tenant Representative

## Substitutes:

Councillors Adam Carter, John Kent, Georgette Polley, Elizabeth Rigby and Lee Watson

## Agenda

Open to Public and Press

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<b>1 Apologies for Absence</b>	
<b>2 Minutes</b>	<b>5 - 14</b>
To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 10 January 2023.	
<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. To agree any relevant briefing notes submitted to the Committee.	
<b>4 Declaration of Interests</b>	
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<b>6</b>	<b>Homes for Ukraine Response Programme</b>	<b>29 - 40</b>
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Agenda published on: **27 February 2023**

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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 10 January 2023 at 7.00 pm

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**Present:** Councillors Allen Mayes (Chair), Colin Churchman (Vice-Chair), Steve Liddiard, Shane Hebb, Joycelyn Redsell and John Kent (Substitute) (substitute for Lynn Worrall)

Carol Purser, Housing Tenant Representative

**Apologies:** Councillor Lynn Worrall

**In attendance:**

Ryan Farmer, Housing Strategy and Quality Manager  
Mike Jones, Strategic Lead, Finance  
Ewelina Sorbjan, Interim Director Housing  
Mohammed Ullah, Repairs & Planned Maintenance Manager, Adults, Housing & Health  
Rhiannon Whiteley, Senior Democratic Services Officer

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

### 21. Minutes

Councillor Redsell commented that she wanted more of the points that she raised about HMO's to be included in the minutes. Councillor Redsell was advised to contact democratic services to confirm the particular points.

### 22. Urgent Items

The Interim Director of Housing updated the Committee on the C01 development. She explained that due to the increased cost of borrowing and increased construction costs the scheme would not be financially viable as a housing development site. She stressed that the economic situation is a national issue which is not just affecting Thurrock Council.

The Chair commented that it was disappointing news and he would be requesting that a report is added to the work programme for the next meeting so the matter can be fully discussed and to confirm the impact of this on all planned developments as more homes are needed.

### 23. Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

## 24. Housing Revenue Account - Rent Setting and Budgets 2023/24

The Strategic Lead for Finance presented the report. He confirmed that the report sets out the base budget position for 2023/24 following the review and update of the 30 year Housing Revenue Account business plan. The Government [launched a consultation on limiting rent](#) increases in 2023/24 to help tenants with the cost of living. Without a cap, social landlords would have been permitted to increase rents by the consumer price index (CPI) measure of inflation in September 2022 plus 1%, allowing a maximum increase of 11.1%. It has now been announced that rents for 2023/24 will be capped at 7%. The report recommends that the rent increase is 7%.

The Strategic Lead for Finance further explained that table 1 in the report shows that the 7% increase will still result in a 1.295 million deficit. This means reductions in expenditure will need to be made and these are detailed at paragraph 3.6 of the report.

Councillor Redsell noted the garage rents had gone up and queried whether garage repairs were still ongoing on the Blackshots estate. Councillor Redsell also queried what a 0 bedroom property is and queried the care taking standards of bronze, silver and gold.

The Strategic Lead for Finance confirmed a 0 bedroom property is a bedsit. The Strategic Lead for Finance responded that the standard boils down to if they have a dedicated care-taker service or not. Gold reflects the level of time spent there and where a more dedicated service is required for example in the high-rise blocks.

Councillor Liddiard raised that many tenants do not know what they are paying for in terms of service charges and it would be really helpful if the services and charges were discussed to see if tenants feel they are getting value for money.

The Interim Director of Housing responded that service charges are at the heart of the service delivery and there is more information they can give regarding the services being provided, a learning session could be done and that may invite challenges from tenants who are paying for things they didn't realise.

Councillor Kent commented that as a result of the Government intervention, the 30 year HRA business plan is subject to review, he queried what the timetable is for the review and if there is sufficient flexibility to take into account the outcome of that review.

Councillor Kent stated that he was very disappointed no local consultation with tenants had been completed about the rent increases and stressed that this is not good enough.



The Strategic Lead for Finance confirmed it has been debated nationally. When rents were reduced it took 200 million pounds out of the HRA business plan. The rent increase could have been 11.1 % to meet the inflationary costs and as a result of the cap a 7 % increase could be looked at as a rent reduction. The certainty around rents is crucial and affects large scale capital works as you have to commit at some point and therefore income streams need to be certain.

The Interim Director of Housing confirmed they did debate internally if they should complete a local consultation however the Government opened the consultation to tenant's groups as well as landlords.

Councillor Hebb referred to the rent increase and queried if the Council did push further and went up to 11% or below 7% what effect would that have on the Council's obligations. Councillor Hebb commented that 7% is hard at any time for anyone but especially hard in the current economic climate. He also queried if the Authority were ready to support those who are struggling to make ends meet.

The Strategic Lead of Finance confirmed that even with a 7% increase it does still create a deficit of 1.295 million. If this was reduced to 3% it would create a deficit of 3.295 million. The assisted decorating is the only thing that is discretionary in the budget. If rent increases were lower there would be genuine cuts which would affect operational service delivery.

The Interim Director of Housing confirmed they do have their own income recovery team and they have welfare benefits advisors who are well equipped to assist people who may get into difficulties and they try to engage with them before they get into arrears.

Councillor Redsell queried if transforming homes had finished. The Interim Director of Housing confirmed that transforming homes is still running.

Councillor Liddiard queried how many vacant posts there are that are not going to be replaced.

The Interim Director of Housing confirmed they are not trying to not replace posts but are looking at the natural churn and trying to slow it down. The underspend is then being captured as a saving.

Councillor Churchman raised concern about the Tevitt Avenue flats and explained that the residents are upset about the amount they are paying currently as there is not much you can do to transform the properties as they are very out of date.

The Interim Director of Housing confirmed she is well aware of the issues and the team are working tirelessly to make a viable financial case for development and will carry on repairing the homes in the meantime.

The Chair stated that table 7 on page 31 really highlights the situation and although nobody wants to put up rents, nobody wants to see cuts to the service either.

Councillor Kent highlighted that he welcomed the carbon reduction programme and getting ahead of the curve on that. He commented that he understood the need to pause the assisted decorating scheme but asked that all is done to bring it back as soon as possible as it does have an impact well beyond housing especially on vulnerable elderly residents as it is one of the only times when someone from the Council can see what is going on and it has a benefit well beyond housing.

Councillor Kent stated he could not support a rent increase of 7%, service charge increases of 10.1% and garage increases of 10%, too many tenants are going to be close to being tipped over the edge with food, fuel and heating and possible Council Tax inflation also. Councillor Kent noted the increase in traveller pitches of 4% and stated that he would like to have seen a figure closer to 4% for all the increases across the board. Councillor Kent also commented that in respect of Transforming homes, it would be useful to see the schedule published to members on a rolling basis so everyone could see where work would be done next so they could explain this to residents.

The Chair stated that nobody wants to be asking residents to pay more. A lower rent increase would mean cuts and therefore rents have to be put up.

Councillor Hebb requested more information on the impact of not increasing the rents on the Council's obligations statutory or otherwise.

The Strategic Lead of Finance responded that in effect they would have to find the bigger deficit figure. A more detailed analysis of repair and maintenance would need to be completed. Legally they couldn't reduce anything to do with essential testing and health and safety. The only other areas would be operational service delivery or the capital programmes. He further explained that if works are not completed it will likely become a cash drain with constant repairs and maintenance that may be more expensive in the long term. It will have a serious impact and the Council will fall behind on the business plan.

The Chair stated that he could not support cuts to the service.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- 1.1 That the Committee consider and comment on the proposed base budget for 2023/24 (as set out in Table 1).**
- 1.2 That the Committee consider and comment on a proposed increase in domestic rent charges of 7%, in line with the 30-year HRA business plan, to be implemented from 3 April 2023.**

- 1.3 That the Committee consider and comment on the proposed increase in service charges to reflect the cost of running each service in line with the budget estimate from 3 April 2023.**
- 1.4 That the Committee consider and comment on the proposed charges for garage rents (para 3.10) to be implemented from 3 April 2023.**
- 1.5 That the Committee consider and comment on the proposed increase in Travellers sites rent (para 3.11) to be implemented from 3 April 2023.**

## **25. Update on Voids Management Policy**

The Housing Repair and Maintenance Manager presented the report to the Committee. He explained that the report provides an update on the Council's management of void properties within its housing stock. The current Voids Policy has been reviewed and updated from March 2022. The new policy and voids process has been implemented by the Housing Directorate. Voids are unoccupied properties which often require repairs before being ready for let to new occupants.

The Housing Repair and Maintenance Manager commented that it will be of no surprise that there has been an increase in costs of around 23 %. The team has continued to deliver on void turnaround times.

The Housing Repair and Maintenance Manager highlighted that there is a new process in place for monitoring the works. Members of the Excellence panel will visit the property to view the works completed.

Councillor Redsell requested the current number of void properties. The Housing Strategy and Quality Manager said he would find the figure and report back as he didn't have it to hand.

The Housing Repair and Maintenance Manager clarified that the last figure they had for the churn of void properties in this current year is 405 but this number will have increased as this was the figure at the time the report was written.

Councillor Liddiard queried how many long-term voids there are. The Housing Repair and Maintenance Manager responded that they do have properties with structural issues, maybe a dozen at any one time. They are working with transforming homes partners to resolve these issues. There are also some properties that have been difficult to let.

Councillor Hebb queried the top reasons for void properties and how this can be reduced.

The Interim Director of Housing confirmed that the reasons for void properties often surround natural life events such as people moving, deaths, transfers and abandonment.

Councillor Hebb questioned when a tenant makes changes to a property, can the costs be recovered for this if they have to be rectified.

The Housing Repair and Maintenance Manager confirmed that they do have a Re-charge Policy and where work has to be completed to strip something back that has been completed this is at no cost to the incoming tenant. They will seek to recover the costs from the previous tenant however they exercise a degree of pragmatism in chasing tenants for this.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1.1 The Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee are invited to note and comment on the Council's Voids Management Policy.**
- 1.2 The Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee are invited to note and comment on the Council's Fit to Let standard.**
- 1.3 The Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee are invited to note and comment on the Council's Voids Recharge Policy.**

**26. Beaconsfield Place/Calcutta Road - Lessons Learnt**

The Housing Strategy and Quality Manager presented the report. He outlined that the purpose of the report is to share the background of the HRA development at Calcutta Road, known as Beaconsfield Place and share the lessons learnt. Following the completion and handover of the scheme and the subsequent first round of lettings at Beaconsfield Place, the Housing service and other appropriate stakeholders undertook a review to identify areas of learning which could inform future new build developments to avoid potential pitfalls and strengthen the likelihood of positive resident experiences of moving to and living in their new homes.

The Housing Strategy and Quality Manager outlined that the development was completed earlier last year in Tilbury and provides 35 homes for people aged over 55. The first lettings were completed on the 7<sup>th</sup> March 2022. The scheme was nominated for several awards. The tenant feedback survey confirmed that 75% were very satisfied or fairly satisfied with their new home. The Housing Strategy and Quality Manager highlighted that the most prevalent factor to be mindful of in the future is issues around anti-social behaviour, 75% of tenants reported that they feel safe in their home. There has been a detailed action plan put in place to address things that did not go so smoothly.

Councillor Liddiard commented that he had inspected some of the flats and he thought they were amazing. He noted there were issues with children getting into the communal areas but overall the development project was good.

Councillor Hebb stated he really liked the report. He queried how a change of designation can happen so easily.

The Housing Strategy and Quality Manager clarified that it wasn't necessarily an easy decision but it was a strategic decision. A report was carried out on all sheltered housing and in relation to Alexandra Road the condition and accessibility aspirations were not marrying up. It was an appropriate decision made at an appropriate level.

Councillor Hebb commented that a multi-departmental approach is required for projects in the future, the Council has a problem delivering projects and needs to do something very different going forward.

The Interim Director of Housing responded that she will take this away and look at how lessons learnt can be shared across the board.

Councillor Kent commented that he welcomed the re-designation of the new build. He stated that residents hate seeing something new being built across the road and would want the opportunity to move into it. Councillor Kent commented that he really liked the report and the opportunity to look back to see what went well and what didn't. Councillor Kent proposed a further recommendation that this is picked up across the Authority on any major project or new build and this was seconded by Councillor Hebb.

The Chair and Councillor Redsell echoed these comments.

The Chair stated that whilst it is right to celebrate the positives he had to also raise the negatives that he was aware that not all the snagging has been completed 9 months after residents have moved in. He added that residents had also moved out as they didn't feel safe. According to the tenant feedback survey 25 % didn't feel safe and that worried him. He also commented that there were no electric charging points and the windows didn't open more than 10cm. The chair requested that the windows issue be looked at. The Chair requested an assurance that the outstanding issues are completed before it is handed over.

The Housing Repair and Maintenance Manager confirmed that at the end of 12 months there will be an inspection where snags and defects will need to be completed before being handed over. They will be looking to arrange the inspections shortly.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1.1 Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to review this report and provide feedback on its contents to inform future new build developments delivered by the council.**

- 1.2 A further recommendation was added by members that following all new developments or major projects a report should be completed to consider what went well and what did not.**

## **27. Homelessness Update - 2022**

The Interim Director of Housing presented the report and explained that the report is the annual update on homelessness and a general overview of the service. The amount of homelessness presentations has been growing year on year. There has also been an increase in the last few weeks. The reasons for this are the Courts dealing with a backlog of possession cases as they were halted in the pandemic and Landlords putting the rents up in the private sector. The Interim Director of Housing confirmed that they got to a good point in January with moving people out of temporary accommodation however the numbers in temporary accommodation has recently increased again. The team work hard to ensure those that are in temporary accommodation are placed in Thurrock.

The Interim Director of Housing explained that in terms of rough sleeping, officers have worked tirelessly due to the severe weather recently to ensure support is provided. She highlighted that reports of people sleeping rough can be made via streetlink <https://www.streetlink.org.uk/>, via the StreetLink app or by calling: 0300 500 0914.

The Interim Director of Housing stressed that nobody should be sleeping rough in Thurrock.

Councillor Redsell queried if the Council are still giving priority to service personnel. The Interim Director of Housing confirmed this is the case.

Councillor Kent stated that the increase in homeless applications by 20 % in 2 years is shocking and commented that it is not a problem that's going to go away soon. He sought reassurance from officers that everyone who seeks help will be helped.

The Interim Director of housing confirmed that they are looking to grow their own portfolio of temporary accommodation, so they have more control over this. The Interim Director of Housing confirmed that the situation in Thurrock does reflect the national picture of homelessness rising.

Councillor Hebb raised the point that there will be some individuals who refuse help.

The Interim Director of Housing confirmed that they do know of a handful of people that are not willing to be housed and various offers have been made and to a certain extent they have to respect that but it is checked that support is in place. Following the recent bad weather, 11 people were placed over one

weekend and there were a few that the department did not know about. The Interim Director of Housing thanked the community as there were lots of acts of kindness over that weekend.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1.1 **Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note and comment on the contents of this update report.**

**28. Work Programme**

Councillor Redsell requested an update briefing note on garages.

An updated report on CO1 was requested and the wider development programme. The Interim Director of Housing confirmed they can do a development update on all of the schemes early in the new municipal year but March would be too early.

**The meeting finished at 9.07 pm**

Approved as a true and correct record

**CHAIR**

**DATE**

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<b>7 March 2023</b>	<b>ITEM: 5</b>
<b>Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>	
<b>Estate and Tenancy Management – Roles and Responsibilities</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> N/A
<b>Report of:</b> Peter Doherty – Strategic Lead – Housing Operations	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> n/a	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Ewelina Sorbjan – Interim Director of Housing	
<b>This report is public</b>	

## Executive Summary

This report has been drafted to reflect the activities of the service during the year. The challenges facing the Council during 2022 are well publicised and this report should be read in that context. Future service activity will need to reflect the intervention the Council finds itself in. Particularly difficult decisions will need to be made on levels of service and methods of service delivery during 2023 and beyond.

This report is being presented to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee to explain how we currently deliver the estate and management services but also to highlight the future ambition for the roles and responsibilities relating to estate and tenancy management.

### 1. Recommendation(s)

**1.1 The Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee is requested to note, comment and challenge the contents of this report which highlights the challenges in providing effective estate and tenancy management services and the ambition for addressing these through a person centred (tenancy management) and locality/place based (estates management) approach.**

### 2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The provision of estate and management services in Thurrock is undertaken by the Tenancy Management, Neighbourhood, Caretaking, ASB Teams with grounds maintenance being undertaken by the Clean and Green service under the terms of a service level agreement which is currently being reviewed/revised.

2.2 In December 2019 the role of the Tenancy Management Officer was created.

2.3 The main functions of the role are:

- Undertaking tenancy audits

A total number of 2581 out of 2634 audits have been undertaken for the high and low rise blocks for 2634 between 1/4/2022 to 31/12/2022.

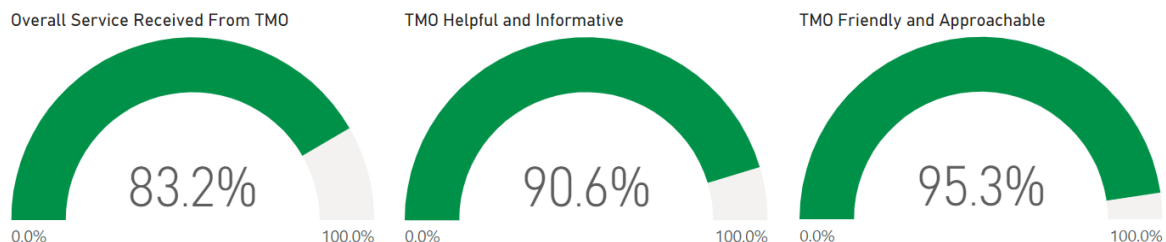
- Functions around starting and ending tenancies

429 secure and introductory tenancies have started and 433 secure and introductory tenancies have ended between 01/04/2022 and 31/12/2022. A satisfaction survey of new tenants whose tenancies started during the same period shows that 89% were satisfied with the overall lettings process, 89.3% were satisfied with the helpfulness of staff and 92.9% were satisfied with viewing arrangements. This is based on 275 satisfaction surveys.



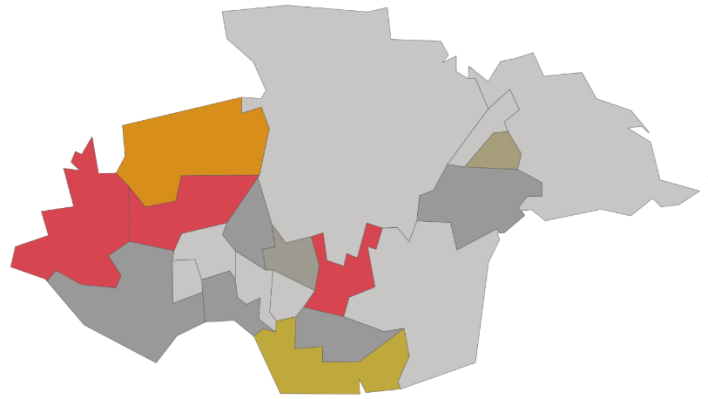
- Tenancy management and enforcement including managing the communal clear process.

A transactional satisfaction survey of tenants who have interacted with their Tenancy Management Officer between 01/04/2022 and 31/12/2022 shows that 83.2% are satisfied with the overall service they receive from their Tenancy Management Officer, 90.6% find their Tenancy Management Officer to be helpful and informative and 95.3% find their Tenancy Management Officer friendly and approachable. This is based on 948 satisfaction surveys.



- Management of low level ASB.

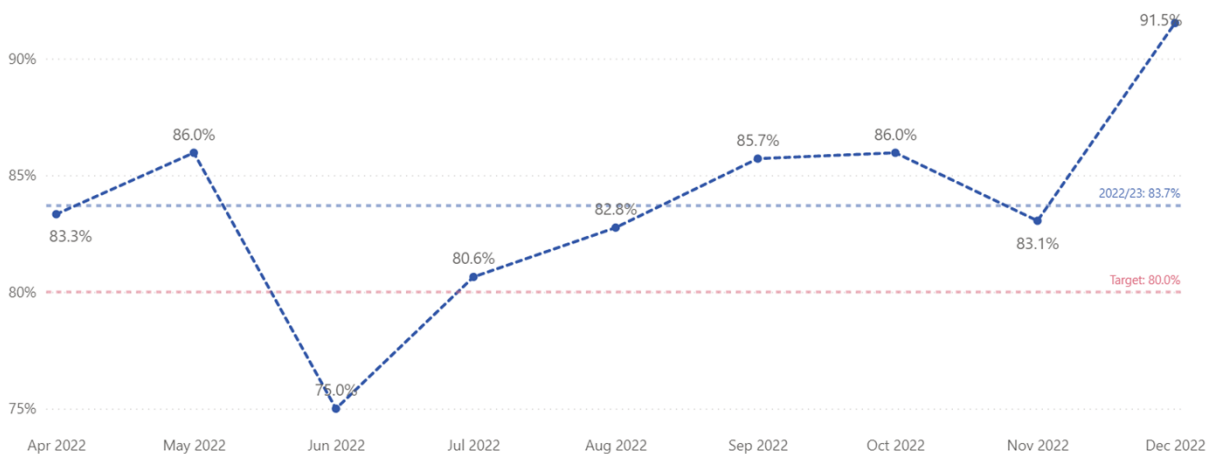
A total of 156 low level ASB cases have been dealt with by Tenancy Management Officers between 01/04/2022 and 31/12/2022 with the highest saturation of cases in Aveley and Uplands, Belhus and Chadwell St. Mary.



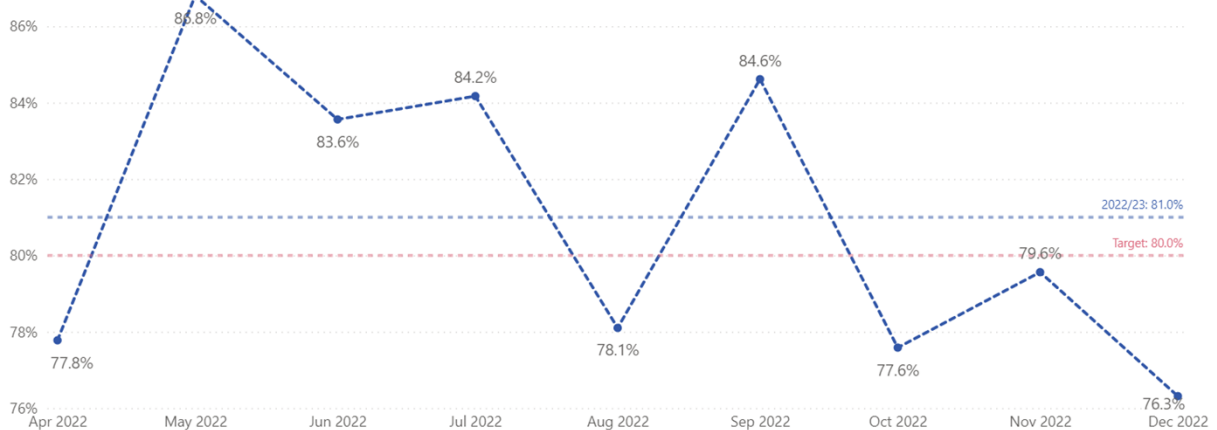
- Tenancy sustainment - referrals and signposting to appropriate agencies  
See Appendix 1 for case studies
- Caretaking and grounds maintenance.

Tenant satisfaction with caretaking and grounds maintenance are measures as part of our rolling perception tenant satisfaction survey. Between 01/04/2022 and 31/12/2022, 83.7% of tenants were satisfied with the caretaking service they receive and 81% of tenants were satisfied with the grounds maintenance service they receive. Over the course of 2022-23 to date, monthly satisfaction rates have not fallen below 75% for either measure. This is based on 1503 completed satisfaction surveys.

Satisfaction With Caretaking Timeline



Satisfaction With Grounds Maintenance Timeline



- 2.4 The operating environment has substantially changed over the last two to three years driven by the covid response, the fallout from Grenfell and cost-of-living issues. As a result the TMO role has become more resident focused, with estate monitoring functions being picked up by other teams e.g. Neighbourhood Officers and Caretakers.
- 2.5 An example of the role becoming more resident focused is in relation to the delivery of tenancy audits. When tenancy audits were introduced some years ago their focus was on combatting tenancy fraud and illegal subletting. When the programme was started, the focus was very much on enforcement and the gathering of information for the Fraud Team. However, over the last couple of years the audits have taken on a more tenant supportive focus.
- 2.6 The current role comes with a number of challenges:
- The current operational environment is often fragmented into specific areas that each focus on resolving single problems. Thresholds and eligibility criteria exist across the sector and housing support and services are no exception. Support may only be provided to those identified as eligible and that support is often standardised and focussed solely on the one single need, determined on a borough wide level.
  - The restructure failed to make adequate provision for the delivery of estate management services which led to an increase in complaints and insurance claims.
- 2.7 In December 2019 the role of the Neighbourhood Officer was created to address the gap in the provision of estate management services and inspections in particular.

- 2.8 The main functions of the Neighbourhood Officer role are:
- Undertaking estate inspections and taking ownership and responsibility for issues and outcomes.
  - Identifying environmental improvements to address key target outcomes e.g. reducing crime and fly tipping.
  - Liaison and partnership working with other services and agencies providing services to the estate / HRA public realm, for example Environmental Services in actioning fly tips
- 2.9 The current role comes with a number of challenges:
- The team's capacity is limited. They have to cover the whole of the borough (HRA land) and as a result they are working to a 12-week rolling programme which makes it challenging to prioritise risk.
  - The team have limited access to digital systems and processes which impacts on their effectiveness and efficiency. For example it is difficult for the team to get high level data on the performance of the services to whom they raise any actions.
- 2.10 The main functions of the Caretaker role in relation to the provision of estate management services are:
- Sweeping and mopping all internal entrances, corridors, staircases and lifts
  - Carrying out visual checks on communal areas to make sure there are no health and safety issues, including trip hazards, broken windows
  - Liaising with Tenancy Management regarding the enforcement of the communal clear process
  - Reporting any communal repairs / ASB or criminal activity to appropriate teams
  - Checking and cleaning the communal bin area and removing any excess rubbish
  - Removing bulk rubbish from communal spaces
  - Removing/reporting any graffiti
- 2.11 The main functions of the Anti-Social Behaviour Officer are:
- Leading on medium and high level ASB cases
  - Preparing and presenting cases for court
  - Working in collaboration with key partner agencies to address individual and group ASB
  - Attending and contributing to regular panels with local police teams in order to action plan high profile cases or estates with ASB 'hotspot' areas.

### **3. Our ambitions for estate and tenancy management**

3.1 The Housing Strategy 2022 -2027 sets the basis for a new way of working for housing services in Thurrock. This strategy and the new way of working follow eight principles:

- We work in partnership with residents to understand the things that matter to them in the context of their lives and the neighbourhoods in which they live.
- We work to provide people with services that are high quality, easy to access, and offer appropriate support
- We will relentlessly focus on reducing health inequality. We will ensure that resources are distributed in a way that accounts for variation in need at neighbourhood level
- The amount of resource we spend on bureaucracy is kept to a minimum ensuring maximum resources are available to provide people with the solutions they require.
- Our solutions look to use the assets within neighbourhoods and do not consist only of the services we provide.
- We empower resident facing staff to make decisions in the context of each resident they serve rather than being constrained by thresholds and one size fits all service specifications.
- We are flexible enough to respond and adapt delivery to changes in individual, neighbourhood and place circumstances
- Responsibility for housing is shared between individuals, neighbourhoods, our workforce and partners. We do 'with', not 'to'. We constantly co-design and coproduce.

3.2 This year we are developing housing support and services which will embed the housing core principles and a person-centred approach in order to provide tailored and bespoke support to residents. This strength-based 'whole person' approach will for example, enable officers to better challenge current delays, bureaucracy, thresholds, barriers and inefficiencies which might arise in delivering services to residents including those provided by other council services and partners.

3.3 As teams and services operate within this broader system, every interaction with a resident or household will present an opportunity for continuous engagement, learning, and improvement. This can be in the context of supporting those individuals by learning about the barriers preventing positive outcomes and designing ways to overcome them, or by identifying systemic issues through shared experience and practice that would require wider resolution.

3.4 For instance, as things currently stand if a TMO visits a resident and identifies a need for a grab rail - the process would require the TMO to refer the matter to Thurrock First who would then assess whether an Occupational Therapist assessment is required but only after the resident has completed a nine-page

self-assessment document. That process might take weeks/months depending on the capacity of the services and resident involved. There is no update provided so the TMO is not made aware of the outcomes.

- 3.5 The new way working would enable the officer to undertake an assessment with the resident using the OT guidelines and to order the works directly without the need for an onward referral thus reducing bureaucracy, time and resources and ultimately bringing services closer to residents.
- 3.6 The new Locality Officer will continue to deliver the core functions and responsibilities of the Tenancy Management Officer including tenancy audits, but these will be delivered within a more person-centred approach tailored to the individual needs of residents.
- 3.7 The Locality Officer role will be underpinned by a locality and neighbourhood model of integrated housing services at a systems and place level which adopts these eight principles.
- 3.8 This will start by way of experiment delivered from the Corringham Integrated Medical and Wellbeing Centre (CIMWC) and which we hope will then progress across the whole borough to the other three localities. We have chosen this particular location because it is the first of the four localities Integrated Medical and Wellbeing Centres to have been built and opened. What's more a number of teams have already started to provide services from it.
- 3.9 The basis of this experiment will be to enable officers to explore better ways of working alongside others such as adult social care, children's services, public health, NHS partners and the wider community to deliver the best possible outcomes for residents and their neighbourhoods.
- 3.10 It is our ambition that through this integrated working officers will develop new skills which will lead to blended roles across services.
- 3.11 At a place level officers will be expected to take greater responsibility for their estates/neighbourhoods. To this end officers will undertake regular diarised estate inspections which councillors and residents will be invited to attend. The inspections will be moved to a digital platform which will enable officers to better record and track repairs and make referrals and will therefore provide greater transparency and accountability.

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

- 4.1 The OSC has requested that the Housing Service provides a report to confirm the approach that is being taken to manage estate and tenancy management.
- 4.2 The move to a person centred / place-based approach to service delivery is a key deliverable arising from the Housing Strategy 2022 to 2027 and is a matter the OSC should have sight on.

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

5.1 This report is for information only.

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

6.1 There is no request for any changes to take place to any of the above

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1 Financial**

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

There are no direct financial implications arising from the report

Any expenditure arising as a result of the changes, or new ways of working will be contained within the existing housing revenue account budget, and contained within the relevant budgeted resource allocations

### **7.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **Deirdre Collins**  
**Principal Barrister, Housing, Litigation and Prosecutions**  
  
**Simon Scrowther**  
**Litigation and housing**

As set out in this report the Council has a responsibility under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 as amended by the Housing (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act and the Housing Health and Safety Rating System to ensure that its properties are managed and maintained as fit for habitation, suitable and free from damp and mould. Under the Anti-Social Behavior, Crime and Policing Act the Council has powers and obligations to combat anti-social behavior in its borough.

The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 section 4 (2) require that:

*“The relevant body shall be responsible for ensuring that the financial management of the body is adequate and effective and that the body has a sound system of internal control which facilitates the effective exercise of that body’s functions and which includes the arrangements for the management of risk.”*

As this report is an information item there are no direct legal implications.



### 7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Becky Lee**  
**Team Manager - Community Development and Equalities**

The proposed experiment has the potential to support greater integration of housing, health and care services across council and other agencies. The pilot builds on commitments to a whole-systems, human learning approach set out in the Housing Strategy, Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Better Care Together Thurrock – Further Case for Change.

The creation of blended roles, whereby TMOs are able to follow guidelines to commission works suited to individual needs of residents compliments other projects within Adult Social Care with the aim to increase the provision of services that achieve better outcomes for individuals where the right solutions are found first time and in the right place with residents empowered to achieve their version of a good life.

The proposal has the potential to benefit all protected groups and increase access to services tailored to the needs of individuals and households. There are no specific negative implications identified.

### 7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children

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 Strategy 2022-2027  
[Thurrock Council - Housing Strategy, 2022-2027](#)

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

- Appendix 1 - Case Study

### **Report Author:**

Peter Doherty  
Strategic Lead – Housing Operations  
Housing

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## **Appendix**

### **Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee Report**

#### **Estate and Tenancy Management – Roles and Responsibilities**

##### Case Study One

LH is a single person household - resident in a high-rise property. She approached her TMO requesting a move to alternative accommodation.

She expressed suicidal thoughts and explained that she had previously been prescribed medication and CBT following admission through A&E some years ago and felt some of these thoughts returning due to feeling isolated in her accommodation. She felt this would be resolved by moving closer to family and friends elsewhere in the borough.

She had recently lost her job and also had significant current and former rent arrears, as well as other priority debts with council tax, utility companies and short-term lenders. This was causing her significant stress and anxiety.

The TMO convened a multi-agency meeting with the following;

- Council tax
- Financial inclusion
- Housing safeguarding,
- Social worker
- Allocations

This allowed us to have a single view of her debt, consider further steps to provide a financial plan, the ability to review her history to establish present risk and formulate an action plan to link her into primary health care services and mental health support services and agencies.

What we did

- Referrals were made to StepChange, a debt advice service, to manage her household finances and form sustainable agreements with her debtors.
- Sustainable payment plans were agreed for her rent arrears and council tax debt
- She was given welfare benefits advice to enable her to maximise her household income
- An immediate risk assessment was carried out and she was rated as a low risk of self-harm.
- A support plan was put in place to enable referrals for a mental health assessment through primary health care routes
- The TMO carried out regular check-ins and acted as a point of contact for her – and continued to link her into other services as her situation developed

The outcomes were:

- Her debt reduced to a sustainable level and she felt for the first time in years that she had a plan for the future.
- She linked in with mental health services via her GP and, after a short wait, was accepted for further talking therapy, as she did not want to accept prescribed medication.
- She enrolled to volunteer with a local charity – this helped her gain confidence and she is now also looking to retrain and return to employment
- She feels more secure and less isolated in her current property and no longer wishes to move

### Case Study Two

Mr H has paranoid schizophrenia – he has been open to ASC for many years, has a CPN and a history of being admitted under section when he is unwell.

He lived in a 1 bedroom bungalow amongst a complex of other bungalows at the centre of a general needs social housing estate.

He has a history of self-neglect, damaging property, hoarding behaviour, unsanitary behaviour by going to the toilet in the street after he had blocked his drains. He had been deemed as having capacity and was discharged from hospital back into his bungalow after it had been cleaned and cleared – to the cost of £25k, shared amongst services.

On return his behaviour was initially acceptable and he was accepting support but this deteriorated and his behaviour was impacting on immediate neighbours and the wider community who lived in the area and those who travelled through on foot. This behaviour was anti-social and potentially in breach of public order criminal thresholds.

The standard approach would have dictated that we focus on enforcement as the primary tool in dealing with this – this could have meant eviction and making Mr H homeless. However, due to his health and vulnerability, Thurrock Council would have had to have offered him services and accommodation to alleviate his homelessness.

We set up a multi-agency team consisting of;

- ASB
- Police
- Adult-Social Care
- NHS mental health
- Homelessness

The primary goal was to get Mr H to move to a more suitable, supported housing setting where he would be provided with the 24/7 access to services that would enable him to remain independent and living in a residential, rather than a clinical, setting.

#### What we did

- Arranged for daily visits to the property and site to inspect and resolve and immediate issues
- Daily caretaking site clean and clearance
- Set up regular contact with neighbours and a single point of contact for any concerns to be raised
- Weekly multi-disciplinary meetings were held throughout the duration of the interventions
- Joint work with NHS psychiatric teams to ensure that relevant information was considered.

We did retain the option of legal enforcement as an option – this was a fall back position to deal with worst case scenario and to ultimately protect the community.

#### The outcomes were

- Through persistent engagement from social work and community psychiatric teams, and intensive housing management to deal with the impacts of behaviour, we were able to work with MR H to persuade him to be discharged into a supported housing setting after a short stay in hospital.

Ultimately, this provided the best outcome for Mr H and also was quicker, more cost effective and less disruptive for the community.

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<b>7 March 2023</b>		<b>ITEM: 6</b>
<b>Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>		
<b>Homes for Ukraine Response Programme</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non key	
<b>Report of:</b> Dulal Ahmed, Housing Enforcement Manager		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> n/a		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Ewelina Sorbjan, Interim Director of Housing		
<b>This report is</b> Public		

## Executive Summary

This report has been drafted to reflect the activities of the service during the year. The challenges facing the Council during 2022 are well publicised and this report should be read in that context. Future service activity will need to reflect the intervention the Council finds itself in. Particularly difficult decisions will need to be made on levels of service and methods of service delivery during 2023 and beyond.

The Homes for Ukraine scheme was launched in March 2022 to allow the safe arrival of over 100,000 guests in the UK by the Government. However, the Ukraine and Russia war is worsening, so the need for new sponsors is increasing nationally.

Thurrock has welcomed 130 Ukrainian guests and 116 hosts have offered to sponsor a named Ukrainian national/family to live with them at the end of January 2023.

The council has kept up with the pace of the Homes for Ukraine scheme. This report updates members on the support and duties that the council has under this scheme. The UK Government asks that local authorities make provision for a welcome and resettlement support service, property inspections, safeguarding checks, administering payments to Ukrainian guests and host households and a rematching scheme when host/guest relationships breakdown on when hosts decide to stop hosting.

The key services that have been and continue to be drawn into this work are:

Private Housing, Homeless, Children's, Adults, Finance, HR, Corporate Communications, Community Development, Education, and Public Health departments.

Senior Management have oversight of the council's response to Ukrainian guests and local sponsors, operating under the government's Homes for Ukraine scheme.

Recently, the Government has announced new measures in January 2023 designed to maintain this programme's sustainability over the next 2 years.

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

**1.1 That the Committee comments on the progress of the Private Housing Service response to the Homes for Ukraine scheme in Thurrock.**

**1.2 That the Committee notes the council can deliver its Ukrainian response programme within central government funding**

**1.3 That the Committee notes homeless Ukrainian guests may be housed out of borough given local housing pressures if homeless presentations steadily rise**

## **2. Homes for Ukraine scheme**

2.1 The scheme allows Ukrainian nationals who were residents in Ukraine prior to 1 January 2022 and their family members to come to the UK if they have a named sponsor who can provide suitable accommodation.

2.2 Applicants can apply from Ukraine or from any other third country.

2.3 Children, who are currently outside of the UK, can use the scheme to reunite with their parent or legal guardian who are currently living in the UK, if they are the child's sponsor.

2.4 Hosts [sponsor] undergo eligibility and suitability checks prior to any visa being issued to a Ukrainian guest. Hosts have to sign up for a minimum of 6 months.

2.5 Individual members of the public can sponsor a guest from Ukraine who meets the eligibility criteria for this scheme.

2.6 Ukrainian guests have permission to remain in the UK for 90 days, and on arrival they can apply for a Biometric Residence Permit [BRP] to stay for 3 years in the UK. The BRP card allows the guest to work, proves their right to study and claim any benefits they are eligible for.

2.7 From July 15, 2022, young people with parental consent were allowed to enter the UK without an adult relative to live with a host. The host must pass an enhanced safeguarding check before an eligible child can begin their visa application.

2.8 The government is encouraging new hosts to come forward to meet the anticipated number of Ukraine guests rising as the war escalates abroad.



### **3. The Tactical Co-ordination Group Response**

- 3.1 The Assistant Director of Housing chairs the council's Tactical Co-ordination Group [TCG] consisting of Housing, Public Health, Adults, Children, Civil Contingency, Education, HR, Corporate Communications, and Finance, that oversees the council's Homes for Ukraine response programme, including the co-ordination of support and activities, and monitors emerging issues to ensure the council fulfil their responsibilities.
- 3.2 Adults, Children's, Finance, Community Development, Homeless, Education, Public Health, Corporate Communications and HR departments have been all drawn into various workstreams from across the council to deliver this programme.
- 3.3 Wider council services also have attended multi agency meetings with East of England Strategic Migration Partnership [SMP] and Essex County Council to receive information, communicate updates and local responses, share good practice, and make effective decisions to support guests and sponsors.

### **4. Homes for Ukraine scheme key information**

- 4.1 Please note these are the records at the time of writing this report, the numbers will change before Housing Overview Scrutiny on 7 March 2023.
- 4.2 This dashboard below shows the overall activity of the number of Guest arrivals and expected arrivals in Thurrock and Host payments from March 2022 to January 2023.
- 4.3 The key headlines are:
  - Thurrock has 116 sponsors matched to 244 Ukrainian guests of whom 130 have arrived and 74 have stayed to live in Thurrock.
  - 1 unaccompanied minor has arrived in Thurrock, since July 2022. The council's private fostering team is monitoring the young person's safety and care needs until he reaches 18 years of age.
  - The council has a statutory homeless duty where the sponsorship arrangement has broken down. So far, 11 Ukrainian guests have made homeless presentations requiring housing assistance and 3 of them have been housed in temporary accommodation.
  - 56 guests have left Thurrock to find an independent property, move closer to friends or nearer to work.
  - Ukrainian guests do have the right to leave the Homes for Scheme and find their own accommodation renting privately from a landlord in Thurrock or elsewhere in the UK, without involving the council.

- 4 guests have return back home to Ukraine.
- Sponsor ‘thank you’ payments are up to date as per the scheme conditions.
- The council temporarily increased the sponsor ‘thank you’ payment from £350 to £700 during the winter to mitigate the cost-of-living crisis and the rise of energy prices impacting sponsors housing Ukrainian guests.

<b>Performance Data</b>	<b>Number</b>
Total Number of Sponsor Requests	116
Total Number of Active Sponsors	44
Total Number of Sponsors withdrawn	15
Number of Ukrainian Guests Arrived in Thurrock	130
Total number of Ukrainian Guests expected to arrive in Thurrock	244
The total number of Adult Guests	99
The total number of Child Guests	31
The total number of Unaccompanied Minors who have arrived in Thurrock	1
Number of Ukrainian Guests who have left Thurrock	56
The number of current Guests in Thurrock	74
Number of Property Inspections completed	84
Number of Property Inspections waiting to be carried out within 10 days	3
No of Safeguarding Checks carried out	84
No of Welcome Visits	130
No of Resettlement Visits carried out	67
Number of Relationship breakdowns where the guest has left the property	6
Number of rematches of Guests reassigned to Thurrock Hosts from another local authority	1
Number of rematches of Thurrock Guests to a new Thurrock host	1
Number of Ukrainian Guests that have returned home to Ukraine	4
Number of Ukrainian Guests reassigned to another Local Authority	5
Number of Homeless approaches from guests here under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme	11
Number of £200 welcome payments paid to Ukrainian Guests	105
Total payment of Welcome Payments paid to Ukrainian Guests	£21,000
Total number of £350 Sponsor Payments made to Hosts	275
Total Value of £350 Sponsor Payments	£96,250
Total number of £350 top up payments made to Hosts from October to January 2023 for the cost-of-living crisis and energy price rise	138
Total Value of £350.00 top up payments	£48,300

4.4 The distribution of Ukrainian guests across Thurrock can be viewed in the table below.

<b>Area</b>	<b>No of Guests</b>
Aveley and Uplands	17
Belhus	8
Chadwell St Mary	2
Chafford and North Stifford	18
Corringham and Fobbing	4
East Tilbury	3
Grays Riverside	8
Grays Thurrock	15
Little Thurrock Blackshots	3
Little Thurrock Rectory	3
Ockendon	14
Orsett	6
Stanford East and Corringham Town	1
Stanford Le Hope West	9
Stifford Clays	1
The Homesteads	1
Tilbury Riverside and Thurrock Park	0
Tilbury St Chads	2
West Thurrock and South Stifford	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>130</b>

## **5. Government Funding**

- 5.1 The council has received £959,000 of Homes for Ukraine funding in 2022/23, this is subject to increase.
- 5.2 The UK government has paid the council £10,500 per each Ukrainian guest that has arrived in Thurrock. It's paid once to support Ukrainian guest and their sponsors.
- 5.3 The council must comply with the following payment conditions of the Homes for Ukraine scheme:
- A] to have completed a property inspection of the sponsoring household property
- B] to confirm that the accommodation is suitable, the guest is well and there are no serious safeguarding or welfare concerns
- 5.4 The sponsors 'thank you' payment must be paid monthly in arrears. The council administers this payment on behalf of the government.
- 5.5 This money paid to the council has been used to pay for a wide variety of costs including staff time, and associated expenditure. This is not an exhaustive list:

- Pay each new guest a £200 welcome payment
  - Welcome visits to every Ukrainian guest and host family
  - Provide wrap around support to hosts, and guests whether this is providing direct support and signposting to available support eg health, CAB, etc
  - Staff costs associated to this scheme eg property checks, safeguarding checks, refugee meetings, translators, administrative duties, safeguarding visits, sponsor newsletter, etc
  - HR to carry out sponsor DBS checks
  - Current and future costs of providing accommodation should the Ukrainian guest become homeless including rent deposits
- 5.6 The £350.00 host ‘thank you’ payment is funded separately by the UK government for up to 12 months. This ‘thank you’ payment has been declined by some Thurrock sponsors.
- 5.7 The UK government are expected to carry out a reconciliation process at the end of this financial year, recovering monies paid to the council for guests rematched to another local authority area under this scheme.
- 5.8 From 1 January 2023, councils will receive funding of £5,900 for each new Ukrainian guest instead of £10,500 per guest For unaccompanied minors, the year 1 tariff will continue at £10,500 after 1 January 2023.
- 5.9 The council can contact DLUHC if they are experiencing “unmanageable financial pressures” under the scheme or for less severe pressures, they can make a claim to DLUHC for additional funding if they incur additional essential costs beyond what could reasonably be regarded as normal expenditure and not available through other mainstream funding mechanisms.
- 5.10 School Academies have received separate funding in 2022/23 for children and young people. This funding covers three phases of education at the following annual rates:
- Early Years [ages 2 -4]- £3000
  - Primary [ages 5-11] £6,580
  - Secondary [ages 11-18] £8,755

## **6. Environmental Health**

- 6.1 The Environmental Health and Licensing Officers have led on the home inspection scheme part of the Homes for Ukraine.
- 6.2 The inspection checks the accommodation is suitable for the number and profile of people intending to live in it, with access to adequate facilities and that there are no serious safety issues, such as gas or electrical hazards.
- 6.3 The Private Housing Team have carried out this function alongside their statutory housing duties and priorities.

## **7. Homes for Ukraine Support Role**

- 7.1 The Private Housing, Well Homes Team has responded to support Ukrainian adults and families settling into Thurrock and providing resettlement support under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.
- 7.2 This includes the following activities:
  - Welcome visits
  - Welfare checks and ongoing follow up visits to guests and sponsors to check how their relationship is going and whether support is needed or if any concerns have emerged
  - 6 months checks in person
  - Joint safeguarding visits with adult services to host homes
  - Liaising with Adults and Children services supporting guests and hosts
  - Managing the requirements of the scheme and ensuring the Council are able to facilitate the necessary checks, payments process required to satisfy the scheme conditions
  - Responding to the new and emerging housing issues that are arising out of the scheme eg sponsor breakdowns, housing options, mediation, sponsor respite, rematching guests, council appeal for new sponsors, etc
  - Developing and supporting on the boarder resettlement outside of housing, there are growing demands on the council to work with partners to respond to needs around education, health, language, employment, benefits
  - Engaging with community partners and organisations eg British Red Cross, 180 Project, Thurrock Food Bank, Baby HQ, Gateway Peoples Centre, Thurrock Adult Community College, St Johns Church, Grays Job

Centre, who are proactively supporting the placement and settlement of families and their sponsors

- Encouraging new sponsors to register an interest in the scheme
- Responding to correspondence and FOIs that are being generated from the introduction and approach to the Homes for Ukraine Scheme
- Producing a host newsletter, regular sponsor and guest events to increase access to public services and information in regards to ESOL and adult education, school admissions, local activities and community safety.

## **8. Homelessness**

- 8.1 The council has duty to help Ukrainian guests who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- 8.2 Well Homes continue to prevent homeless presentations from Ukrainian households where there is a potential breakdown in relations between guests and hosts through mediation on trying to resolve their issues face to face.
- 8.3 So far, there has been 11 homeless presentations from March 2022 to January 2023, with 3 households having been placed in temporary accommodation/rehoused after being evicted by their host and where there has been no means of resolving the issue so that the Ukrainian households can stay on for an extended period.
- 8.4 It is evitable that the number of households requiring temporary accommodation will increase in the near future. The biggest challenge will be at the end of the host and guest arrangements because the council is not acquiring new housing stock to assist those households with accommodation. Therefore, it expected that there will be an increase in the number of homeless approaches as the only option available for the Ukrainian households if they cannot self-rematch and find a new host.

## **9. New Government Measures 2023**

- 9.1 A new self-rematching scheme to encourage guests finding a new host for themselves in the first instance before approaching their local council. The council duty is carrying out their accommodation, DBS and welfare checks to facilitate the guest moving into the new accommodation and to make the 'thank you' payment payable to the new host.
- 9.2 Homes for Ukraine hosts to receive £500 a month as thank you for ongoing support after Ukrainian's first year of sponsorship. 'Thank you' payments will be extended from 12 months to 2 years.
- 9.3 £150m additional funding for local authorities across the UK to help support Ukraine guests move into their own homes and reduce the risk of

homelessness in 2023/24. This funding will be allocated between different parts of the UK in relation to their proportion of Ukrainian guests.

- 9.4 £2.2mn fund allocated to Thurrock to acquire housing stock in or out of borough for those fleeing conflict including Ukraine and Afghanistan refugees. The council has responded to DLUHC and not expressed an interest of acquiring new housing stock under this Housing Fund because of its section 114 notice and the match funding required to acquire housing properties.
- 9.5 A new marketing campaign to urge new hosts coming forward and apply to rematch existing guests through this scheme.
- 9.6 Councils shall receive a reduction in tariff funding to £5,900 per person for all new arrivals from 1 January 2023. We are reviewing the impact of this reduction of funding to the council to fulfil its responsibilities for up to 2 years.

## **10. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 10.1 The Homes for Ukraine scheme provides safe passage for Ukrainian refugees to enter and live within the UK for up to 3 years.
- 10.2 The council has experience of managing and delivering refugee resettlement programmes eg Afghan Relocations and Assistance Programme and Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme prior to the Homes for Ukraine scheme.
- 10.3 The Well Homes Team works very closely with internal departments, external partners and the voluntary sector to ensure joined up services for new and existing refugees in Thurrock.
- 10.4 The UK government has provided the council with the funds and option to claim additional support in exceptional circumstances, to provide services and support to refugees for up to 2 years.

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

- 11.1 NA

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

- 12.1 The council's section 114 notice does not impact on this scheme in 2022/23.
- 12.2 The TCG will continue to oversee the council's response and monitor community safety tension levels with the Community Safety Partnership regarding the arrival of refugees in Thurrock to keep them safe.

## 13. Implications

### 13.1 Financial

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

The UK government's grant allocation makes this programme sustainable to deliver on their behalf.

There is a financial burden to the council on administering the Homes for Ukraine scheme within the grant allocated to the council. Regular budget monitoring tracks costs to tackle any significant variances.

The council's temporary accommodation costs may well increase if homeless presentations of Ukrainian guests steadily rise. To support local authorities, mitigate this potential risk, the government have allocated a new homeless budget to support guests move into their own homes and reduce the risk of homelessness in 2023/24.

### 13.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Deirdre Collins**  
**Principal Barrister, Housing, Litigation and Prosecutions**

The Homes for Ukraine Programme is a Government scheme, which allows local residents to put their homes forward to support Ukrainian refugees who wish to come to the UK. In signing up as a sponsor, the Council is obliged to put in place such arrangements to assess suitability of the Household and its occupants so as to safeguard the Ukrainian refugees when they arrive in the UK. As such, the Council is following its statutory duties insofar as safeguarding is concerned and the appropriate advice and sign off of suitability of accommodation to meet refugee/guests needs. The government has issued Guidance for Councils. The Council has a statutory duty to promote the welfare of adults and children at risk and it has a number of responsibilities under the scheme, including to carry out accommodation checks, DBS checks, and welfare checks.

By virtue of the Housing Act, the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 the council must take reasonable steps to try to prevent and relieve homelessness for households who are threatened with becoming or are already, homeless when they apply for assistance.

Councils may facilitate the Ukrainian guest a rematch, providing the placement and accommodation are suitable and the authority is satisfied it will continue for at least 6 months.



The council must continue to consider their statutory homelessness duty if a suitable rematch is not available and provide housing to the Ukrainian guest. They do have to pass any requirements around 'habitual residence' ie a minimum amount of time that they have lived in the UK.

The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 section 4 (2) require that:

*“The relevant body shall be responsible for ensuring that the financial management of the body is adequate and effective and that the body has a sound system of internal control which facilitates the effective exercise of that body’s functions, and which includes the arrangements for the management of risk.”*

### 13.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Becky Lee**  
**Team Manager - Community Development and Equalities**

The council supports the Homes for Ukraine Scheme to tackle inequality and support individuals fleeing from persecution.

The funding provided to the council will support Ukrainian guests to settle in Thurrock to

- Integrate into the local community
- Have access to local services including healthcare, education, ESOL, employment support, voluntary agencies, and
- Be able to contribute to the local community via volunteering opportunities

### 13.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, or Impact on Looked After Children

The TCG will continue to monitor staffing capacity levels to manage this scheme within existing resources if demand increases as new guests arrive in Thurrock. This will be reviewed to increase capacity within the funds provided to the council.

### 14. 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):

- [Homes for Ukraine: council guides - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guides/homes-for-ukraine-council-guides)

**15. Appendices to the report**

- NA

**Report Author:**

Dulal Ahmed

Housing Enforcement Manager

<b>7 March 2023</b>		<b>ITEM: 7</b>
<b>Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>		
<b>Blackshots Estate – Demolition and Redevelopment</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> N/A	
<b>Report of:</b> Julian Wain – Strategic Place Adviser		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> N/A		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Ewelina Sorbjan – Interim Director of Housing		
<b>This report is</b> Public		

## Executive Summary

This report requests Committee to consider and comment on further approvals required relating to the redevelopment of the Blackshots estate. The report proposes a site area for redevelopment and advises that Cabinet authority will be sought for the vacation of the blocks and the making of appropriate payments to displaced residents.

## Government Intervention & Section 114

In July 2022, the Council was made aware of concerns around the valuation of specific investments. A review process commenced, and the initial findings highlighted significant concern with three investments and the position was shared informally with the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). On the 2 September 2022 DLUHC announced directions to implement an intervention package at the Council.

The Secretary of State exercised his powers under section 15(11) of the Local Government Act 1999 to give a Direction without complying with the requirement at section 15(9) to give Thurrock an opportunity to make representations about the Directions, as he considered the failures of the Council's compliance with its Best Value duty in respect of the functions specified in the Directions sufficiently urgent. This was because of the following:

- the scale of the financial and commercial risks potentially facing the Authority, which were compounded by the Authority's approach to financial management and the seriousness of the allegations that were made by third parties about the processes applied to the operation of the Authority's commercial strategy, and;

- the failure of the Authority to provide assurance to Ministers and the Department on the adequacy of the actions that they were taking to address the issues, taking account of the scale and pace of the response required.

The Secretary of State nominated Essex County Council to the role of Commissioner

On 19 December 2022, the Council's Acting Director of Finance & Section 151 Officer issued a report under Section 114 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988. This advises Councillors that the Council faces 'a financial situation of an extremely serious nature'.

Since that period the Council has continued to operate under the s114 Notice and is working alongside Commissioners to tighten its financial management procedures.

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

**Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to comment on :**

- 1.1 The proposed site area for developing proposals for the future of the Blackshots estate.**
- 1.2 Commencement of decanting residents from these properties and the treatment of these residents in line with the Council's allocations policy.**
- 1.3 Payment of home loss and disturbance payments as appropriate**
- 1.4 Approval to commence negotiation with leaseholders for the repurchase of properties with approval to complete purchase delegated to the Corporate Director Adults Housing and Health and Chief Financial Officer in consultation with the Director of Place and the Portfolio Holders for Finance, Housing and Growth.**
- 1.5 Subject to further Cabinet approval the use of Compulsory Purchase Powers under s226 Town and Country Planning Act 1990 should this become necessary.**
- 1.6 In view of the decant and leasehold repurchase decisions, no dwellings within these three blocks shall be re-let.**
- 1.7 Service of a demolition notice under Section 138B and Schedule 5A of the Housing Act 1985 which will confirm the Council's intention to demolish the buildings and suspend the obligation on the Council to complete right to buy applications on the three tower blocks in question.**
- 1.8 Approval to negotiate and settle any statutory compensation claims made by residents as a result of the service of the Initial Demolition Notice delegated as at Paragraph 1.4 above**

**1.9 Approval to establish a budget of £2.7m to meet the costs of purchase of leasehold interests**

**1.10 Agree to receive a report in December 2023 to consider the full Business Case for redevelopment of the site and determine the most appropriate financial option at that time.**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

2.1 Cabinet in December 2022 considered the future of the Blackshots estate in light of the fact that the tower blocks at Blackshots are in need of significant repair.

2.2 Initial consultation had been carried out with residents as part of the Council's duty to consult under s105 of the Housing Act 1985, resulting in a significant majority in favour of the redevelopment of the blocks.

2.3 Cabinet approved the principle of demolition and redevelopment to provide good quality housing and agreed the resources for and the appointment of a design team and advisers to develop schemes for consultation with residents.

2.4 This report asks Committee to consider and comment on a number of further steps to progress the scheme.

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

### **The reason for the demolition of Blackshots tower blocks**

3.1 Blackshots tower blocks have considerable problems with damp and mould which has been the subject of resident complaints, is an area of political concern, and has received local focus in the media. Damp and mould are also becoming increasingly a matter of national concern.

3.2 External refurbishment has been considered but while this was able to address some immediate issues at the three blocks in respect of the existing external cladding system, the ventilation of the communal areas and weatherproofing of the structure it was not able to address the overall design and layout of these properties which does not meet the requirements of today's modern living.

3.3 Additionally it was identified that the existing external wall system that has been in place for around 20 years does not conform to current building regulations- and major works are now required to remedy the fixing of these panels. The current smoke ventilation system to the individual landings also requires improvements. Other building elements including the roof covering and windows are reaching the end of their technical life expectancy. This situation combined with the latest regulatory framework that has recently been enacted through the parliamentary process indicated the fundamental works required to make these blocks both permanently safe and habitable.

- 3.4 Although much of the remedial work was technically possible, costs associated with a project for new systems on high rise residential buildings are prohibitively expensive for both short and long-term solutions.
- 3.5 The Council would have been in a position where it needed to undertake either short term measures to the blocks and spend in excess of circa £10m across the three blocks, whilst not upgrading essential items such as windows, and roof coverings. Alternatively, it could have spent a minimum of £16m to carry out the external works alone but even with further significant expenditure to the internal part of the blocks ultimately still deliver sub-optimal homes with poor and out of date internal arrangements, and no absolute guarantee that some at least of these problems would not recur within the 30- year life- time of the project.
- 3.6 The department was not able to continue to leave the blocks as they currently stand for any protracted amount of time because of the inherent defects. Additionally, it is not possible to remove the existing external wall system and leave the blocks exposed because this would make the blocks untenable, and conditions unliveable, in a very short period of time.
- 3.7 As the works should only be undertaken as a full building retrofit that will enhance the buildings and their performance and provide better accommodation for our residents for a minimum period of 25 years and this aspect cannot be achieved without significant investment for a sub-optimal product the principle of demolition and redevelopment was agreed.
- 3.8 Whilst the Council continues to maintain the buildings to safeguard the residents in respect of building and fire safety for the time being, the new building safety regulations coming into force from early this year, will potentially place the Council in a position of self-referral with the new regulatory framework because the existing external wall system on the building does have inherent defects because of the age and condition of the external wall system. This was a further driver for the principle of demolition, although it is still possible that the regulator may wish to put alternative measures in place and move more swiftly to empty the blocks.
- 3.9 In summary these blocks are not fit for purpose and need to be demolished so that good quality accommodation can be provided for the benefit of the Borough's residents. Refurbishment would produce a sub -standard product at old fashioned design standards, with no firm guarantee that the blocks would last the 30 years of the HRA Business Plan. It was on this basis that the principle of demolition was agreed.

### **Redevelopment of the Tower Blocks**

- 3.10 The three existing tower blocks provide 168 homes, of which 12 are leasehold and the remainder owned by the Council. Any redevelopment should ensure we replace at least a similar number of rented properties with an affordable housing product.
- 3.11 The Council's advisers carried out initial master planning work and developed indicative concept schemes. All the options provide circa 240 units of

replacement and additional housing, with apartments and a varying proportion of houses. The schemes would have a maximum height of six storeys, although subject to discussion with planners some blocks away from neighbouring properties could potentially be taller. The indicative plans demonstrate the options would create walkable, liveable blocks with attractive amenity spaces with good pedestrian/cycle links.

3.12 The four options are shown at Appendix 1. Option 4 is the preferred option recommended by this report. A red line plan showing the boundaries of Option 4 together with an indicative massing study are shown at Appendix 2.

### **Preferred Option – Scope for redevelopment**

3.13 Option 4 is the best overall solution for the following reasons:

- The scheme is the least dense.
- It allows for no costly undercroft parking which is not always resident friendly.
- It provides an opportunity to help with resident decanting, potentially enabling one move for residents. This will be subject to the views of the building contractor and their programme, and subject to consultation with residents, but it is an opportunity less likely to be available with the other options.
- This scheme is the most favourable option financially
- It provides better natural surveillance from the development overlooking the playing field.

3.14 As was discussed in the December Cabinet report option 4 will require the use of an area currently designated as Green Belt, and subject to the progress and outcome of the green belt review associated with the local plan, this would require the demonstration of the Very Special Circumstances required to permit development in the Green Belt.

3.15 In December Cabinet was also referred to the need for discussions with regard to the Fields in Trust status of the existing playing fields and the need to replace these. As the design progresses, options for this will be considered.

3.16 It is important to remember that the designs to date are indicative, and that they will both iterate and improve during the design and consultation process, as well as achieving an accurate cost position. Fixing the scope of the site enables the design process to progress in earnest.

### **Vacation of the blocks**

3.17 Given that the principle of demolition has been established and if Cabinet are minded to agree to the recommendation that there is a clear site area in place, it is now appropriate to begin to clear the blocks and to move residents to alternative accommodation.

3.18 The process will begin with a reassessment of the housing need of all those in the blocks, and further consultation under s105 Housing Act 1985 to discuss the process, their understanding and their requirements. This though will be

about the decanting and future redevelopment, not about the principle of demolition.

- 3.19 This will also mean that from the date of decision residents will attract priority through the Council's Allocations scheme giving them increased entitlement to be rehoused and the rehousing process will begin. The Council's Housing Decant Policy will apply. It is estimated that full clearance of these blocks will take up to two years dependent on availability of alternative accommodation and agreement with leaseholders to purchase those properties.
- 3.20 There will of course be a consequent effect in terms of a reduction of allocations to those in lesser priority need on the housing waiting list.
- 3.21 This will mean that for qualifying tenants Home Loss Payments under s30 Land Compensation Act 1973 will be due. This is currently set at £7,800 and amended by the government each year.
- 3.22 Disturbance payments will also be available. These are to meet 'reasonable expenses and are paid after the tenant has moved.
- 3.23 There will also be a need to repurchase the 12 Leasehold properties. The Council's emerging Housing Residential Leasehold Decant Policy applies to this. Home loss and disturbance payments are applicable to Leaseholders also as is the opportunity to have the property repurchased at an appropriate valuation by the Council. This report seeks authority to commence negotiations with leaseholders with a view to agreeing appropriate sale prices.
- 3.24 The Council fully intends to agree the necessary repurchase of properties by agreement. However, it is possible that difficulties may arise with some leaseholders and while it is premature to make resolutions concerning compulsory purchase at this time it is right that the Council should confirm its willingness to use these powers if necessary
- 3.25 Budgets for home loss and disturbance, and for leaseholder purchase are dealt with in the financial implications.
- 3.26 As these blocks are not fit for purpose and given the well-rehearsed defects noted above, together with the future involvement of the regulator it is not proposed to use these flats for temporary accommodation. In any event to bring these flats to a lettable standard for temporary accommodation, investment in the void properties of circa £9k per property would be required which is not good value in properties subject to demolition

### **Demolition Notices**

- 3.27 At this point it is also the correct procedure to serve an Initial Demolition Notice under the Housing Act 1985 to residents. The service of this notice confirms that the Council intends to demolish the blocks and suspends the requirement on the Council to grant the Right to Buy, or complete Right to Buy sales for a period to be determined of up to 7 years. Clearly, so far as possible, it is not appropriate to put the residents at risk of completing a sale on a property that will then have to be repurchased or increase the costs and administrative burden to all parties.



- 3.28 The Council will provide detailed information to all residents affected by the service of a notice and how it affects their rights.
- 3.29 If, following the steps outlined in this report, it is decided to go ahead with the demolition, then the Council will need to serve a Final Demolition Notice which will permanently suspend any Right to Buy applications. This notice would not be served until the Council has advanced its plans and determined an accurate time period for demolition.
- 3.30 If the Council has not served a Final Demolition Notice within the period specified in the Initial Demolition Notice, then it will lose the ability to serve another Initial Demolition notice for a period of 5 years. For the reasons set out in this report, action is required imminently and so this is not expected to be an issue.
- 3.31 Service of an Initial Demolition Notice may give rise to compensation claims under Section 138C Housing Act 1985. This is in relation to expenditure that may have been incurred by residents in relation to Right to Buy applications that are suspended by the Initial Demolition Notice.
- 3.32 It should also be noted that where the Council buy back property from any leaseholders in the blocks, that under Section 160 Housing Act 1985 there are exemptions in relation to the normal requirements to repay any discount that they received under the Right to Buy scheme.

#### **4. Financial Commitments**

- 4.1 At December Cabinet the Council committed £200,000 for the design and development of the scheme and the appointment of a Tenant Adviser for the residents.
- 4.2 This report commits to the spending of home loss and disturbance payments for which a budget already exists and to the repurchase of leasehold properties for which a budget needs to be established.
- 4.3 The estimate for home loss and disturbance totals £1,201,200 against the 154 existing Social Rented units. For leaseholders our approach assumes all leaseholders are entitled to secure the Home Loss Payment. If it is the case that there are non-resident leaseholder properties present within the estate, then these may be subject to a reduced compensation reflecting Basic Loss Payment within the same Compensation Code. A further sum is assumed to provide additional compensation for relocation costs. Our cost allowance for the cost of leaseholder buy backs plus associated compensation totals £2,700,000 against the 12 existing Leasehold properties.
- 4.4 Key issues remain to be addressed during the design and development process; particularly the level of build costs, financing costs and rent levels. The very indicative scheme proposed for Option 4 continues to present viability challenges over the life of the HRA Business Plan, which will need to be addressed, but having agreed the site and the principle of demolition and

redevelopment the Council can now progress towards achieving a viable scheme.

- 4.5 At this stage there is no commitment to the financial costs of redevelopment until this work is done. The full Business Case for consideration will be available in December 2023 and a report will be brought to this Committee and Cabinet for final decision.

## **5. Options Considered**

- 5.1 It is clearly apparent that a 'do nothing' scenario is not appropriate.
- 5.2 Refurbishment was considered both in terms of its practicality, as discussed above, and financially. The redevelopment and replacement scheme based on the current indicative costs is lower cost over the 30-year period than the refurbishment option, and when rental income, day to day running and borrowing costs and the use of right to buy receipts on the new build option are taken into account is better in viability for the HRA, notwithstanding the current challenging position.
- 5.3 Demolition alone has also been considered as an option, but this would put further pressure on an already stretched housing stock and do nothing to deal with the Borough's housing needs or housing affordability issues. Nonetheless in the unlikely event of the Council being unable to produce a viable scheme this could be a fall-back option.
- 5.4 Four development scenarios were tested. Following consideration Option 4 is the proposed option from which detailed work to arrive at a viable and planning acceptable option will now take place.

## **Next Steps**

- 5.5 The multi-disciplinary consultancy to develop the scheme based on option 4 boundaries, together with the independent Tenant Advisor are currently under procurement. They will design the scheme and undertake detailed consultation with residents between April and September 2023 at which point the final Business Case will be drafted, leading to a Cabinet report in December 2023.

## **6. Public Health Implications**

- 6.1 The proposed demolition and redevelopment of the blocks and the development of new housing will provide a significantly healthier environment for residents and will be in accordance with the recommendations of the Council's emerging public health and wellbeing strategy.
- 6.2 Public health specialists will be consulted on the design of the redevelopment to ensure the provision of healthy housing and associated space.

## **7. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 7.1 The report seeks comment on the approvals necessary to progress the scheme for the redevelopment of the Blackshots estate and particularly to commence the decanting and buy back process

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

- 8.1 This paper provides opportunity for Members of this Committee to comment on proposals on the demolition and redevelopment of the Blackshots Estate.

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

- 9.1 The development of housing 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.

## **10. Implications**

### **10.1 Financial**

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

There are direct financial implications arising from the report.

The budget for the disturbance costs can be funded and contained within the specific decant reserve. This has a value of £2.60m and is detailed within the Housing Revenue Account – Rent Setting and Budgets 2023/24 Cabinet report 8 February 2023. This funding has been identified and held for this scheme. The current estimated cost for these works is £1.2m

A further budget requirement of £2.7m is required for the cost of leaseholder buy backs, as detailed in para 4.3. This can also be funded, initially directly from the HRA reserves, through a combination of the remaining funding within the decant reserve of £1.44m, with the remaining £1.26m from the financial contingency reserve (£2.00m), detailed in the HRA rent setting and Budget report. Therefore, for the costs as detailed in the report, there are no further borrowing requirements at this time, as this can be fully funded from existing resources within the Housing Revenue Account.

The works pertaining to tenants' disturbance and leaseholder buy backs are the first stages of the overall project, taking the immediate required actions as part of the long term solution for Blackshots Tower blocks which will require significant capital expenditure in future years. This is considered as part of the HRA business plan and budget setting process. Given the level of investment

needed in the units to ensure that they meet long term legislative requirements, a do nothing option will not be viable.

Refurbishment of the existing units would appear to not represent the best value for money based on the initial financial modelling, when set against a demolition and new build option. The level of Capital investment into the existing unit would be significant and would be required throughout the length of the 30 year HRA business plan.

In the event that the business case for the full regeneration of the units is approved, the costs identified for the works detailed within this report, could be capitalised as part of the overall project.

The demolition of the blocks, without a replacement will lead to lost revenue, from the rents and service charges of the existing Blackshots dwellings.

The investment required in the units will be contained and financed solely within the HRA and will need to be considered as part of the borrowing strategy. There will be no direct financial implications outside of the HRA ring-fence.

## 10.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Asmat Hussain**  
**Director of Legal and Governance**

### Repairing Obligations

The Council has a responsibility under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 as amended by the Housing (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018 to ensure that repair the structure and essential services of their properties and that they are fit for human habitation for the duration of the tenancy; and where the Council fails to do so, it is at risk as to compensation and abatement claims from its tenants.

Ordinarily to address this duty the council needs to have a planned maintenance programme with periodic inspections and an effective responsive repairs service. In this instance the Council should take appropriate responsive maintenance action prior to tenant decant.

Obligations under the Building Safety Act 2022.

The Council will face additional regulatory obligations under the Building Safety Act 2022 and it is prudent to formulate plans for the satisfactory discharge of such obligations in respect of the three Blackshots Tower Blocks as are anticipated to come into force from April 2023.

## Human Rights

Human Rights issues arise in respect of the proposed arrangements. The Council should be sure that the purposes for which the demolition and redevelopment are to occur and for which rights are to be overridden sufficiently justify interfering with the human rights of those with interests in the land affected. Furthermore, the Council is required to act in accordance with the European Convention on Human Rights (the **ECHR**) in deciding whether or not to implement the arrangements. Article 1 of the First Protocol of the ECHR are applicable and each are qualified rights.

In the present case it is considered that the public interest in demolishing the three Tower Blocks which suffer from the difficulties outlined in this report and proceeding to Full Business Case consideration of redevelopment proposals outweighs the rights of the individuals to peaceful enjoyment of their possessions and their right for private and family life and home and that the proposed use of the Council's powers amounts to a proportionate interference in all the circumstances.

### 10.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Becky Lee**  
**Team Manager – Community Development and Equalities**

An extensive consultation and engagement exercise has been completed with residents of Blackshots Estate with the results previously reported to Cabinet. An initial analysis of feedback received highlights the redevelopment of the estate is expected to have a positive impact for the health and wellbeing of residents. A full Community Equality Impact Assessment will be completed to account for the proposed redevelopment and will be the subject of an ongoing cycle of monitoring, review and refreshing by the project team.

Any contractor or consultant appointed by the council to fulfil works associated with the proposals will be directed to the council's CEIA and will be required to fulfil legislative requirements arising from the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty as standard. Contracts for services and works will include social value measures to be delivered by the provider/contractor and will be directed in line with the council's social value framework and supporting priorities for communities

### 10.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder and Impact on Looked After Children

None

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

Blackshots Estate- Proposals for the Way Forward – Cabinet, 7 December 2022 and 21 November 2022 Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

## **12. List of Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Indicative Options 1-4.

Appendix 2 – Option 4 Red line plan and massing study.

## **Report Author**

Julian Wain  
Strategic Place Adviser



Site A

Page 53  
 20 x 1b  
 32 x 2b  
 28 x 3b

Total - 80 Units

Parking = 125 spaces  
 (94 x podium)



Site B

40 x 1b  
 98 x 2b  
 22 x 3b  
**Total - 160 Units**  
**Parking = 290 spaces**  
**(188 x podium)**

**Key**

- Study area boundary
- Green Belt
- Ground Floor Parking
- Podium/Undercroft Parking
- Shared Space
- Proposed planting
- Key pedestrian/cycle links
- Main vehicular access

**Building Heights**

- FOGs
- 3 Storey
- 4 Storey
- 5 Storey
- 6 Storey

**TOTAL UNITS**

60 x 1b  
 130 x 2b  
 50 x 3b  
**Total - 240 Units**

Option 1 - 240 Units

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Site A

16 x 16  
32 x 32  
20 x 30  
12 x 12  
**Page 55**

Total - 80 Units

Parking = 78 spaces  
(24 x podium)



Site B

42 x 1b

64 x 2b

52 x 3b

2 x 4b

Total - 172 Units

Parking = 288 spaces  
(235 x podium)

Key

- Study area boundary
- Green Belt
- Ground Floor Parking
- Podium/Undercroft Parking
- Shared Space
- Proposed planting
- Key pedestrian/cycle links
- Main vehicular access

Building Heights

- FOGs
- 3 Storey
- 4 Storey
- 5 Storey
- 6 Storey

TOTAL

- 58 x 1b
- 96 x 2b
- 72 x 3b
- 14 x 4b

Total - 240 Units

Parking = 366 spaces (1.5/unit)

Option 2 - 240 Units

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Site A  
 20 x 1b  
 32 x 2b  
 28 x 3b  
 12 x 4b

Total - 92 Units  
 Parking = 147 spaces  
 (106 x podium)



Site B  
 38 x 1b  
 64 x 2b  
 44 x 3b  
 2 x 4b  
**Total - 148 Units**  
 Parking = 228 spaces  
 (161 x podium)

- Key**
- Study area boundary
  - Green Belt
  - Ground Floor Parking
  - Podium/Undercroft Parking
  - Shared Space
  - Proposed planting
  - Key pedestrian/cycle links
  - Main vehicular access

- Building Heights**
- FOGs
  - 3 Storey
  - 4 Storey
  - 5 Storey
  - 6 Storey

**TOTAL**  
 58 x 1b  
 96 x 2b  
 72 x 3b  
 14 x 4b  
**Total - 240 Units**  
 Parking = 375 spaces (1.7/unit)

### Option 3 - 240 Units

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Site A

16 x 1b  
32 x 2b  
20 x 4b

Total - 68 Units

Parking = 78 spaces



Site B

42 x 1b

64 x 2b

52 x 3b

14 x 4b

Total - 172 Units

Parking = 214 spaces

Key

- Study area boundary
- Green Belt
- Ground Floor Parking
- Podium/Undercroft Parking
- Shared space
- Proposed planting
- Key pedestrian/cycle links
- Main vehicular access

Building Heights

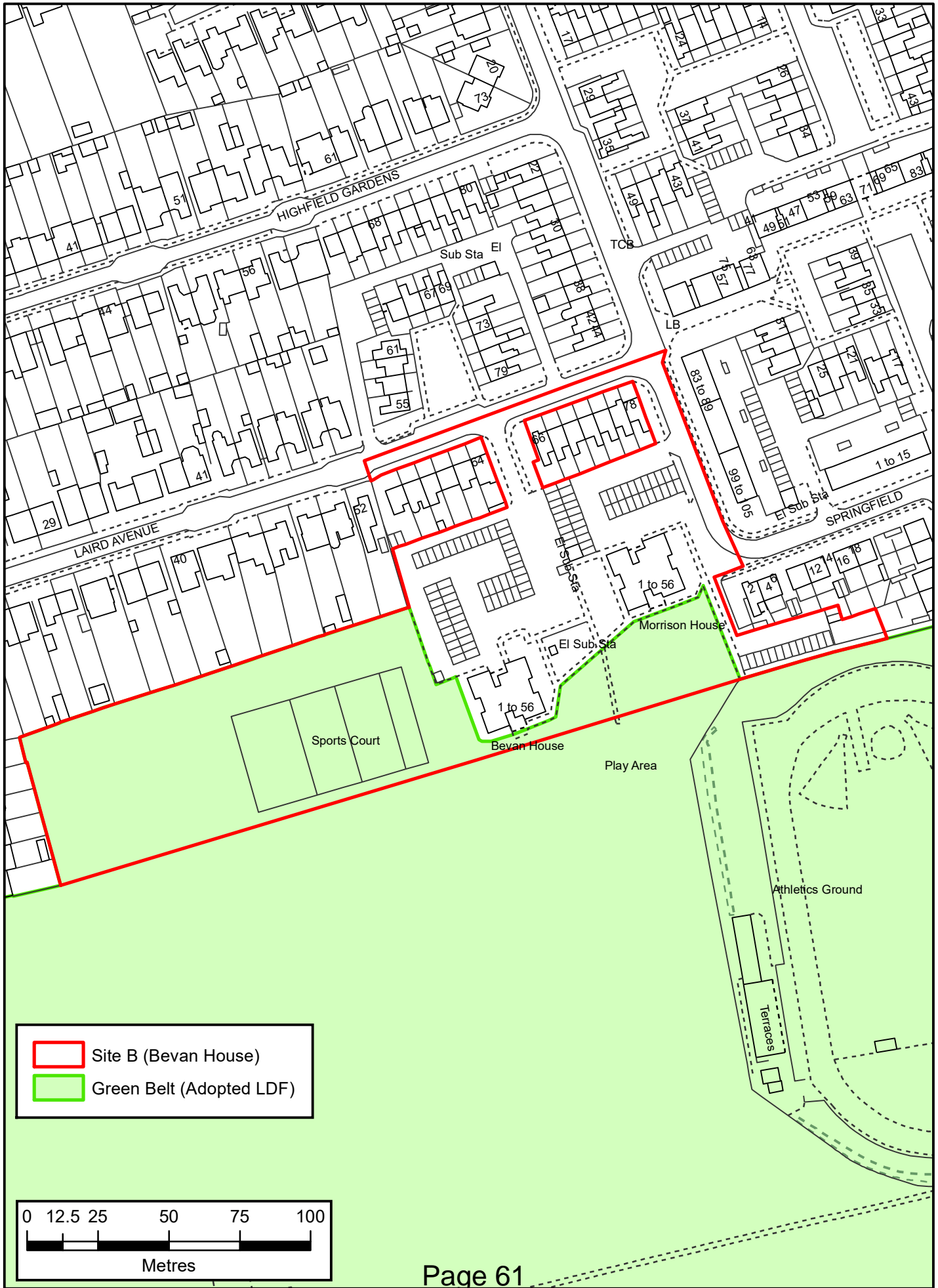
- FOGs
- 3 Storey
- 4 Storey
- 5 Storey
- 6 Storey



TOTAL

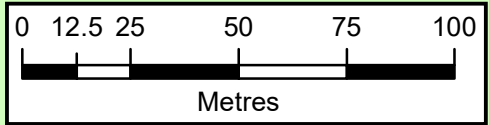
58 x 1b  
96 x 2b  
72 x 3b  
14 x 4b  
**Total - 240 Units**  
**Parking = 292 spaces (1.7/unit)**

Option 4 - 240 Units

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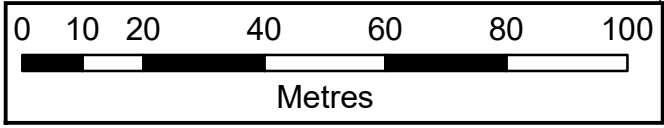


	Site B (Bevan House)
	Green Belt (Adopted LDF)

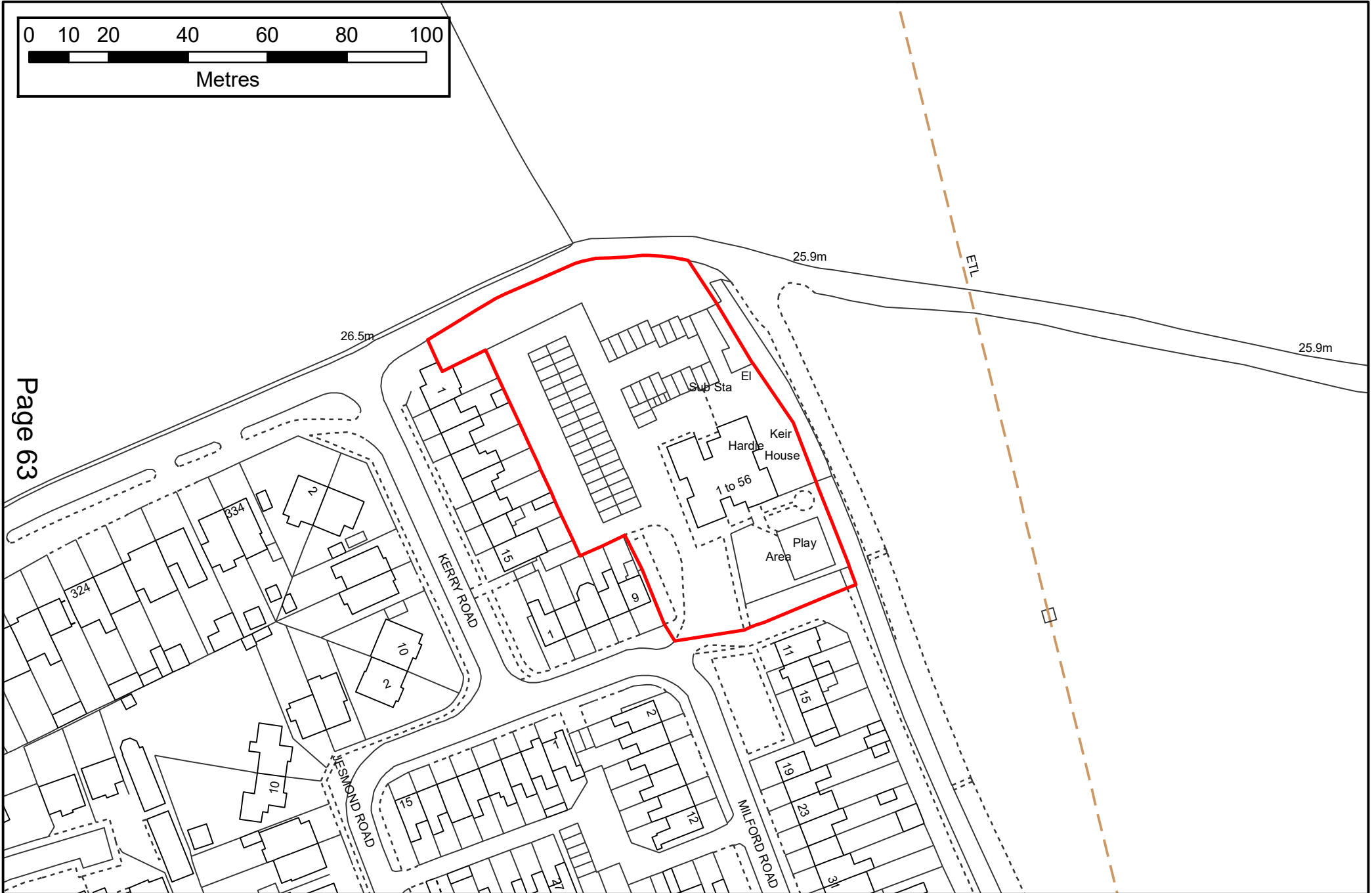


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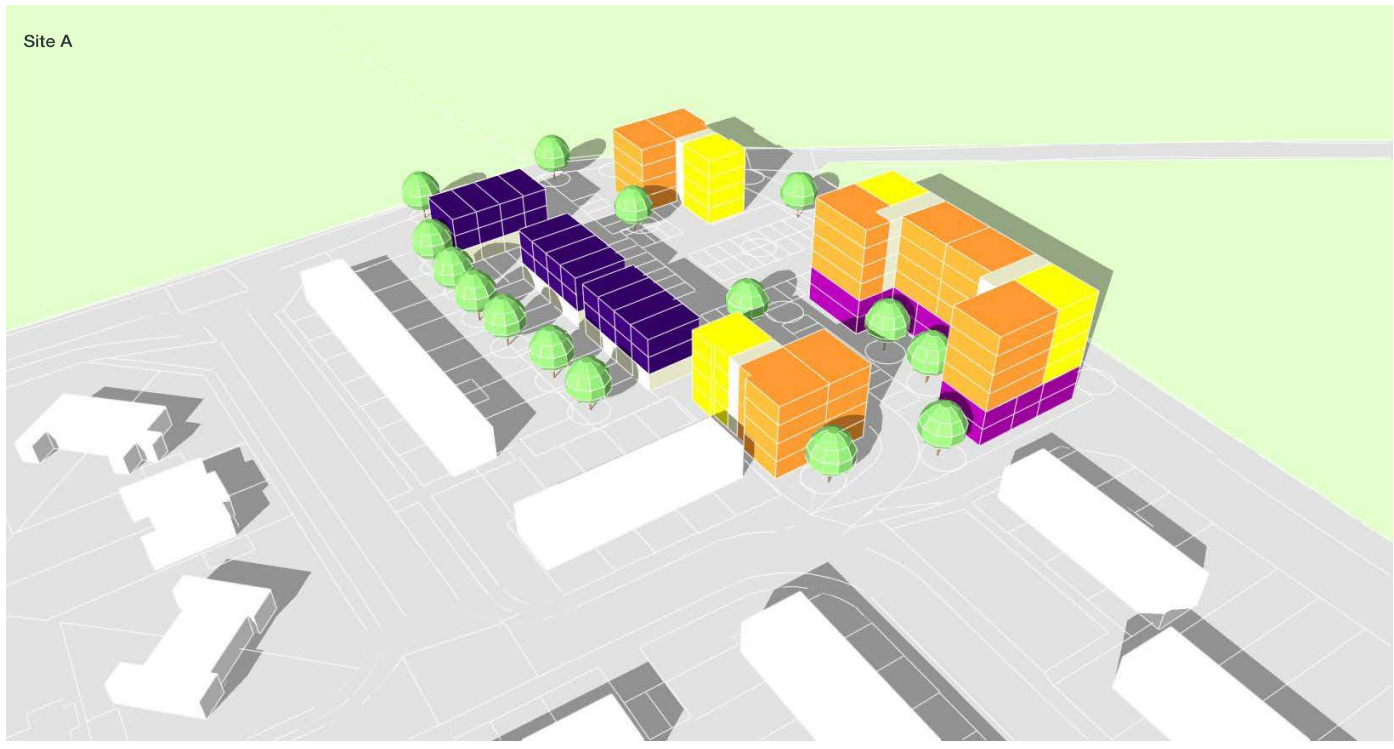




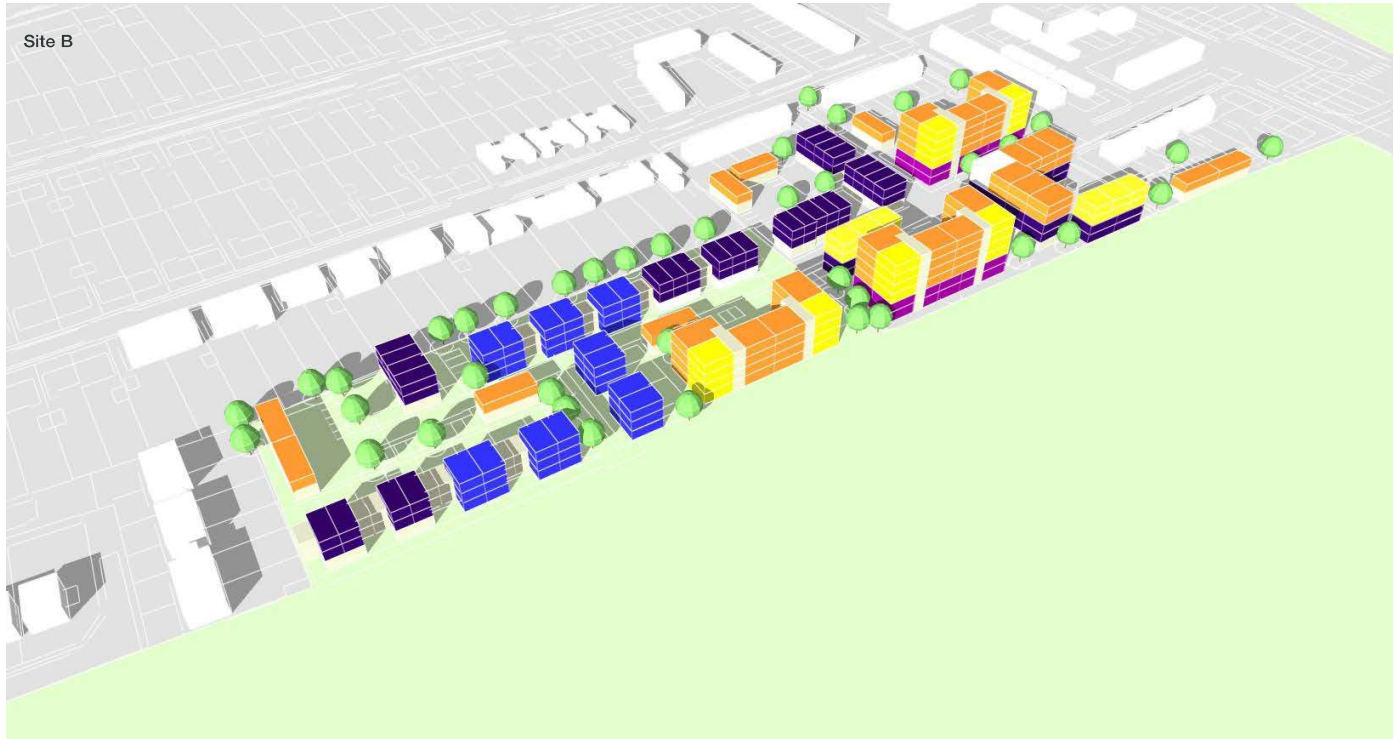
Page 63



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- 1b Apartment
- 2b Apartment
- 3b Maisonette
- 3b Town House
- 4b Town House



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<b>7 March 2023</b>		<b>ITEM: 8</b>
<b>Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>		
<b>Cabinet Member Report - Housing</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-applicable	
<b>Report of:</b> Cllr Luke Spillman, Cabinet Member for Housing		
<b>This report is public</b>		

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1.1. This report presents an overview of the range of Housing services and provides details of the department's performance in 2021/22.
- 1.1.2. This document also identifies a range of key external factors which have affected and shaped service delivery throughout the 2022/23 financial year to date.
- 1.1.3. Finally, it sets out the financial position for the Housing Revenue Account and General Fund budgets within Housing.
- 1.1.4. This report has been drafted to reflect the activities of the Housing service primarily during the 2021/22 financial year, with some reference to activity in 2022/23.
- 1.1.5. The challenges facing the Council during 2022 are well publicised and this report should be read in that context. Future service activity will need to reflect the intervention the Council finds itself in. Particularly difficult decisions will need to be made on levels of service and methods of service delivery during 2023 and beyond.

## 2. Service Overview

- 2.1. The Housing service provides a range of statutory and landlord functions, utilising rental income through the Housing Revenue Account and smaller General Fund budgets. The Housing service interacts with around 10,000 households in the borough directly through the provision of tenancy and leasehold management services and additional households through the housing advice and options, homelessness and private sector housing functions.
- 2.2. The key functions which the Housing service are responsible for delivering include:

- Tenancy management activities, including tenancy audits, sign-ups and exit inspections, and other day-to-day interactions with the council's tenants for both general needs and sheltered housing properties.
- Caretaking and estate services for many of the blocks and communal spaces across the borough
- Rent collection, financial inclusion and welfare advice
- Ongoing repairs and maintenance of Housing stock and assets
- Monitoring and maintaining over 300 CCTV cameras across the borough
- Tackling domestic abuse, hate crime and other safeguarding issues
- The investigation, management and implementation of enforcement action for anti-social behaviour issues
- Capital investment programmes delivering improvements to Housing stock and assets, such as the Transforming Homes programme.
- Homeownership services, including the administration of Right to Buy applications and leasehold management
- Tenant and leaseholder engagement through forums, community activities and other events
- The administration of the Council's Housing Register and the allocation of properties in line with the Allocations Policy
- The prevention and relief of homelessness in line with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, as well as the provision of temporary accommodation for households
- Management of three council-run Travellers' sites, including rent collection
- Private sector housing support through initiatives such as Well Homes as well as support for refugees and asylum seekers
- Mediation, enforcement and licensing activity for private sector landlords and tenants

2.3. The majority of Housing services use the NEC Housing Management System as the central system for administering, managing and monitoring the range of functions.

### **3. Performance in 2021/22**

3.1. The performance reporting in Housing is designed to ensure that key objectives are identified and monitored across three distinct sections:

- Corporate Performance Indicators (CPI) – Captures the contribution of the Housing service to the corporate suite of performance indicators, including measures such as budget variance, complaints received and upheld, and sickness absence. The targets for these indicators mirror the corporate targets.
- Key Performance Indicators (KPI) – A suite of service critical performance indicators designed to measure key outputs of the Housing service, including measures such as gas check compliance and tenant satisfaction with primary functions of the service.

- Local Performance Indicators (LPI) – An extensive suite of service level indicators that measure the outputs of individual teams within the Housing service and tenant satisfaction with specific services such as repairs, caretaking, and grounds maintenance.

3.1.1. Performance in Housing is constantly monitored and is frequently reviewed by the Housing Management Team. In addition, the suite of key performance indicators and corporate performance indicators form part of the quarterly performance report taken to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

3.1.2. Tenant satisfaction surveys are completed by an independent research contractor who specialises in satisfaction surveys for the Housing sector. In 2021/22 nearly 2000 tenants took part in perception surveys, representing almost 1 in 5 of all Thurrock Council tenants.

Further information about the areas of satisfaction which the Housing service monitors can be found further in this report.

### 3.2. Performance Indicators

Performance Indicator	Target	2020/21	2021/22
% general satisfaction of tenants with neighbourhoods/services provided by Housing	75%	75.5%	73.8%
% satisfaction of tenants with Transforming Homes (contractor and programme)	85%	86.5%	90.3%
% of repairs completed within target	95%	98.3%	96.0%
% of rent collected	98%	98.3%	97.2%
Average time to turnaround/re-let voids (in days)	28	47.5	34.7
Number of homeless applicants with family commitments in bed and breakfast for six weeks or more	0	0	0
Number of category 1 and 2 hazards removed as a direct result of private sector housing team intervention	1000	746	1008

3.2.1. The Housing Revenue Account continued to balance through the 2021/22 financial year. The final outturn position of the Housing General Fund was also balanced.

The Housing service recorded a marginal increase (1.28%) in the number of Housing-related complaints received during 2021/22 compared with the 2020/21 financial year, with the overall percentage of upheld complaints increasing slightly from 28.6% to 31.7%.

Member enquiries reduced by 4.13%, whereas enquiries made by MPs also increased by 7.55%

3.2.2. The 2021/22 financial saw a slight reduction in overall tenant satisfaction with Housing services. Overall, 73.8% of tenants gave a rating of "very satisfied"

or "fairly satisfied", 11.5% of tenants gave a neutral rating and 14.7% gave a negative rating of "fairly dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied".

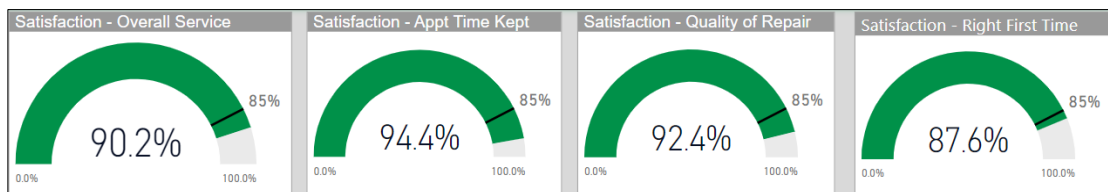
A key area for dissatisfaction in 2021/22 was due to a significant increase in negative feedback relating to council services not delivered by Housing including refuse collection, street sweeping, housing benefit and abandoned vehicles. Assessment of this data indicates that the 2021/22 general Housing satisfaction rating was negatively impacted by 1.4%.

3.2.3. Satisfaction with Transforming Homes remained high at 90.3%, representing an increase in satisfaction compared to the previous financial year and continuing to be above its target of 85%.

3.2.4. The percentage of repairs completed on target has maintained consistent performance levels against the contractual target of 95%, achieving an outturn position of 96% in 2021/22.

A total of 36,331 repairs were completed across all workstreams in 2021/22, with a first-time fix rate of 97.8% against a target of 95%.

The graphics below shows tenant satisfaction against a number of repairs-related metrics following feedback provided through 3680 ratings across the financial year.



3.2.5. The performance of the housing service relating to rent collection was strong, however collection levels fell slightly short of the performance target of 98%, achieving 97.2% by the end of the 2021/22 financial year.

There are several contributory factors this – many of which are linked to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting reduction in available income. The number of tenants claiming benefits during this period increased significantly, and many who had been furloughed for the first year of lockdowns and restrictions stopped working completely, with new Universal Credit claims by our tenants increasing by 20% from 3,094 to 3,706. Many of these tenants receive either full or partial housing costs which creates a delay in payment and an accumulation of arrears which is difficult to address.

The temporary Universal Credit uplift was removed in October 2021, and this was seen as a reduction in benefit rather than an ending of a temporary support measure, subsequently impacting household budgets. Over the final quarter of the year the increase in fuel costs, rising food prices and general cost of living increases left many tenants facing a deficit in outgoings versus income.

3.2.6. Average void turnaround time performance improved in the 2021/22 financial year, with properties being relet almost 13 days quicker than 2020/21;



however, the end of year performance of 34.7 days was still below the target of 28 days.

Void properties can be broken down by two designations; general needs and sheltered housing. General needs voids made up the majority of the cohort of voids (71.3%) in 2021/22, with the average relet time for these properties recorded at 28.2 days, marginally above the 28 day target.

- 3.2.7. For sheltered housing voids, accounting for 28.7% of voids properties, the average relet time in 2021/22 was 50.6 days. However, there is a clear disparity in turnaround performance between sheltered voids with an entrance door on the ground floor and sheltered voids with an entrance door on the first floor or higher.

The average re-let time for sheltered voids with an entrance door on the ground floor in 2021/22 was on target at 25 days, compared to 73.7 days average for properties other floors. Sheltered voids with an entrance door on the first floor or higher (which make up only 15.1% of overall voids) are known to be more difficult to let and was the clear driver of void relet time underperformance.

- 3.2.8. The number of homeless applicants with family commitments whom the council placed in bed and breakfast accommodation for six weeks or more was zero for the 2021/22 financial year, maintaining the same position as the 2020/21 financial year and reflecting an improvement against performance in 2019/20.
- 3.2.9. The Private Sector Housing Team removed 1008 category 1 and 2 Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) hazards from private sector properties in 2021/22 against a target of 1000 and a 35.1% improvement against performance in 2020/21.
- 3.2.10. The Housing service monitors a range of specific tenant satisfaction measures. In 2021/22, these measures were:

Performance Indicators	Target	2020/21	2021/22
Tenant satisfaction with quality of home	75%	78.3%	77.0%
Tenant satisfaction with keeping tenants informed	75%	77.7%	76.6%
Tenant satisfaction that home is safe and secure	75%	84.4%	84.2%
Tenant satisfaction that the Housing service is easy to deal with	75%	74.4%	73.0%
Tenant satisfaction that rent provides value for money	75%	89.4%	86.3%
Tenant satisfaction that service charges provide value for money	75%	79.8%	78.6%
Tenant satisfaction with caretaking service	75%	79.8%	80.2%

Tenant satisfaction with grounds maintenance	75%	85.3%	78.5%
Tenant satisfaction that the Housing service listens to views	75%	66.4%	61.4%

3.2.11. Tenant satisfaction against all but two measures performed strongly, building on the performance in 2020/21 and remaining above the target set at 75%.

#### 4. Housing Development – New Build

##### 4.1. HRA New Build Programme

4.1.1. The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) new build programme aims to provide a mix of houses, low rise flats, maisonettes and bungalows. The Housing Strategy 2022-27 established that that the viability for any new development will be assessed against rental levels within Local Housing Allowance rate.

4.1.2. Individual Housing Revenue Account schemes that are in stages of development, are funded, on-site or have been recently completed are listed below.

##### 4.2. Beaconsfield Place, Tilbury

4.2.1. In June 2017, an application for planning permission was approved for a 100% affordable development of 35 homes for people aged over 55 at Calcutta Road, Tilbury, designed with HAPPI (Housing our Ageing Population: Panel for Innovation) principles.

Work officially started on site in October 2019; however, the overall construction and development project faced significant levels of disruption due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.2.2. The development, now called Beaconsfield Place, comprises 31 one-bedroom flats and four two-bedroom duplex flats, indoor communal spaces, private communal gardens for residents, ample parking and mobility scooter storage.

Once the development was handed over to Thurrock Council, the first lettings were completed on 7 March 2022.

4.2.3. The scheme was nominated for a number of regional and national awards. It was shortlisted in the *Best older people's housing development - rural/suburban* category at the Inside Housing Development Awards 2022 and the *Meeting Housing Need* category at the Essex Housing Awards 2022. The scheme won the *Excellence in Development Medium Schemes (26-50 Homes)* award at the Essex Housing Awards 2022.

##### 4.3. Loewen Road, Chadwell St Mary

4.3.1. Planning permission for the redevelopment of a site on Loewen Road, Chadwell St Mary was approved in December. The proposals are to build four new three-bedroom houses at affordable rent levels.

4.3.2. The site was handed over to the council's partnering development contractor in August 2022, and the demolition of the former property on the site was completed in November 2022. Groundworks and foundations for all four plots have been completed, and bricklaying commenced in December 2022.

4.3.3. Completion of the development is currently anticipated for September 2023.

#### 4.4. **Blackshots Estate, Grays**

4.4.1. In December 2022 a report was presented to Cabinet to ask for agreement on a proposed approach to developing proposals for the future of the Blackshots estate, the principles for redeveloping the estate to provide good quality housing and enhance available stock, and to commence detailed design and planning for a proposed scheme to take forward to consultation with residents.

4.4.2. A £200,000 consultancy budget has already been identified within the HRA feasibility reserve to develop proposals, including appointing independent tenant advisors.

4.4.3. Cabinet agreed the proposals as set out, and work is now being taken forward as outlined.

### 5. **Key events and factors**

#### 5.1. **Housing Strategy 2022-27**

5.1.1. The council's new Housing Strategy 2022-27 was agreed and adopted by Cabinet in July 2022, along with the Housing Asset Management Strategy 2022-27 and Housing Resident Engagement Strategy 2022-27.

5.1.2. The Housing Strategy 2022-27 addresses the range of tenures available in Thurrock - social housing, owner-occupiers, and the private rental sector. It is important to note that this strategy will consider housing need and services in the borough and the barriers residents may face with accessing safe and secure accommodation.

5.1.3. The Housing Strategy 2022-27 established a new vision for housing in Thurrock:

*Every Thurrock resident will have access to a safe, secure, suitable, and affordable home that meets their needs and aspirations, serving as a foundation to support their health and wellbeing.*

*Residents will be supported at home and in their local area through connected services, neighbourhoods, localities, and communities to achieve their vision of a 'good life'.*

5.1.4. This vision, as well as the following eight Housing principles, also underpin the Housing Asset Management Strategy 2022-2027 and Housing Resident Engagement Strategy 2022-2027.

- **What is important to you?**  
We work in partnership with residents to understand the things that matter to them in the context of their lives and the neighbourhoods in which they live.
- **Right time, right place and high quality**  
We work to provide people with services that are high quality, easy to access, and offer appropriate support.
- **Supports health and wellbeing**  
We will relentlessly focus on reducing health inequality. We will ensure that resources are distributed in a way that accounts for variation in need at neighbourhood level
- **Minimises bureaucracy**  
The amount of resource we spend on bureaucracy is kept to a minimum ensuring maximum resources are available to provide people with the solutions they require.
- **Local, strength-based solutions**  
Our solutions look to use the assets within neighbourhoods and do not consist only of the services we provide.
- **Doesn't break the law and meets statutory duties**  
We empower resident facing staff to make decisions in the context of each resident they serve rather than being constrained by thresholds and one size fits all service specifications.
- **Flexible and adaptable**  
We are flexible enough to respond and adapt delivery to changes in individual, neighbourhood and place circumstances
- **Partnership working and collaboration**  
Responsibility for housing is shared between individuals, neighbourhoods, our workforce and partners. We do 'with', not 'to'. We constantly co-design and co-produce.

5.1.5. The four aims and their respective objectives set out in the Housing Strategy 2022-2027 will support the council in achieving its housing vision. They also align with and support the work and actions identified within the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2026 as well as the Better Care Together Thurrock: The Case for Further Change strategy.

5.1.6. The aims of the Housing Strategy 2022-27 are:

- Deliver Housing Support and Service
- Meet Housing Need
- Protect Resident Safety
- Strengthen Community Engagement and Empowerment

5.2. **Housing Asset Management Strategy 2022-27**

- 5.2.1. The Housing Asset Management Strategy 2022-27 provides a framework detailing how the council will manage, maintain and invest in its housing assets, ensuring that they offer quality and affordable homes for current and future residents.
- 5.2.2. The strategy demonstrates how the council's housing portfolio will meet its priorities. It provides the strategic direction for those involved in the day-to-day management of the stock and future housing asset investment decisions.
- 5.2.3. This strategy aligns with the council's corporate values, the Housing Strategy 2022-27 and the national policy context. It works alongside the HRA Business Plan in identifying the levels and timing of investment required to ensure the asset is maintained appropriately.
- 5.2.4. This strategy provides a set of guiding principles that allow the council to maintain and enhance its housing stock in both the short-term and the future. It ensures the council works transparently, keeping residents engaged throughout the processes and fosters a sense of joint ownership. This strategy also recognises that for some assets, further investment may not represent the best value or meet the community's future needs. Buildings in this category would go through an asset review process that fully considers resident views. This full appraisal of the different options will inform the most appropriate decision for the future of the asset.
- 5.2.5. The council's strategic ambition is to ensure the delivery of good homes in well-connected neighbourhoods. The council seeks to invest in its assets and the local environment, creating places that support and promote the health, happiness and wellbeing of residents in the borough. New and emerging legislation around building safety, decent homes standards and the net zero carbon agenda, in conjunction with an ageing stock, place significant pressures on the HRA.
- 5.2.6. The three core aims of the Housing Asset Management Strategy 2022-27 that will ensure the properties continue to offer good quality homes for current and future residents at an affordable cost are:
  - Deliver High Quality Homes
  - Maximise the Value of Assets
  - Plan for a Sustainable Future

### 5.3. **Housing Resident Engagement Strategy 2022-27**

- 5.3.1. The Housing Resident Engagement Strategy 2022-27 sets out the aims and ambitions of the Housing service in improving its interaction and communication with those who live in and around Thurrock Council's homes and neighbourhoods. The Housing service interacts with over 10,000 households across the borough across a broad range of services and recognises that each these households is unique. As a result of this diversity, those who access Housing services must have the opportunity for their voice and views to be listened to, not just heard.

- 5.3.2. The significance of meaningful engagement with residents may never have been higher than it is currently, in particular in response to reforms proposed in the Social Housing Bill. It is important for residents and communities to be able to access information, express their views and opinions on changes, and play an active part in the way that duties are fulfilled, and services are delivered by the Housing department.
- 5.3.3. This strategy sets the framework for future action which is meaningful and valuable to residents and communities, reinforcing the understanding that residents and communities must be at the centre of all that the Housing service does. The strategy sets aims to strengthen resident participation in the scrutiny and governance of the Housing service, which will offer greater transparency into how the Housing service operates.
- 5.3.4. Through this strategy, the Housing department lays the foundations to improve the experience residents and communities have when interacting with its services and further improve those services through continuous learning. This approach will ensure that the Housing department remains responsive, adaptable and flexible to residents' and communities broad and changing needs.
- 5.3.5. Five key aims have been identified through the process of designing and developing the Housing Resident Engagement Strategy 2022-27. These are:
- Strengthen Community Engagement and Empowerment
  - Protect Resident Safety and Security
  - Improve Communication and Interaction
  - Enable Resident Scrutiny and Participation
  - Deliver Opportunities for Engagement

#### 5.4. **Social Housing Regulation**

- 5.4.1. The Social Housing Bill is currently progressing through Parliament and is intended to bring about some of the most significant changes to social housing regulation in over a decade.
- 5.4.2. The Bill seeks to support a more proactive approach to regulating social housing landlords on a number of consumer issues, such as safety, transparency and resident engagement. It will also provide the Regulator of Social Housing with new enforcement powers to tackle failing landlords.
- 5.4.3. The Bill intends to reform the regulatory landscape in social housing and drive significant change, ensuring landlords have a greater focus on the needs of their tenants and are held more accountable for their performance and for health and safety issues.
- 5.4.4. One of the key features of this shift in regulation is the introduction of a suite of 22 new national Tenant Satisfaction Measures, as first suggested in the Social Housing White Paper. These come into effect on 1 April 2023, with an expectation that social housing providers will make their first data submissions in summer 2024. The government intend to publish this data in autumn 2024.

- 5.4.5. The Housing service have already taken a number of proactive steps in anticipation for this change and have already aligned much of its performance reporting to these new tenant satisfaction measures. A robust suite of monitoring dashboards have been developed and built using the Microsoft Power BI platform, enabling officers to drill down into the available information and undertake detailed interrogation of performance and satisfaction data.
- 5.4.6. An initial and indicative self-assessment against the Tenant Satisfaction Measures has been undertaken, and against the 16 measures where benchmarking information is available for comparison, the Council scored in the top two quartiles in seven areas.

Theme	Measure	Score	Quartile
Keeping Properties in Good Repair	Repairs completed within target timescale	94.8%	Q1
Respectful/Helpful Engagement	Satisfaction that the landlord listens to views and acts upon them	65.0%	Q2
Respectful/Helpful Engagement	Satisfaction that the landlord keeps tenants informed about things that matter to them	77.0%	Q2
Respectful/Helpful Engagement	Agreement that the landlord treats tenants fairly and with respect	86.3%	Q2
Effective Complaints Handling	Complaints responded to within complaints handling code timescales	92.6%	Q2
Responsible Neighbourhood Management	Satisfaction that the landlord makes a positive contribution to neighbourhoods	72.5%	Q1
Responsible Neighbourhood Management	Satisfaction with landlords approach to handling anti-social behaviour	65.0%	Q2

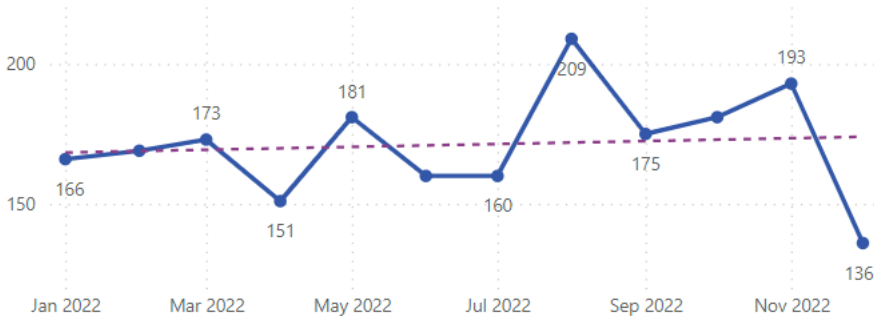
- 5.4.7. In addition to the anticipated measures in the Social Housing Bill, the Building Safety Act 2022 also introduced reforms which give residents more rights, powers and protection within legislation and regulation.
- 5.4.8. The Act created three new bodies to provide oversight of the new regulatory regime: the Building Safety Regulator, the National Regulator of Construction Products, and the New Homes Ombudsman.
- 5.4.9. The Building Safety Regulator will oversee the safety and performance of all buildings, as well as having a special focus on high-rise buildings through the implementation of a new regulatory framework.
- 5.4.10. It is anticipated that the detailed provisions in this Act will be implemented over the course of two years – for example, the Building Safety Regulator is anticipated to commence its responsibilities regarding high-rise residential buildings in October 2023.

**5.5. Damp and Mould**

- 5.5.1. The *Spotlight on Damp and Mould* report produced by the Housing Ombudsman identified 26 recommendations across four main themes to assist social landlords with the management of damp and mould within its housing stock. Since the publication of the report, the council has made progress in adopting a number of service improvements and measures in managing damp and mould within its properties which are consistent with the recommendations of the Ombudsman.
- 5.5.2. The council has commissioned stock condition surveys across its housing assets to identify a wide range of fabric and structural issues. Every year 30% of council housing stock are to be surveyed, and these include a specific focus on damp and mould issues within surveyed properties. The stock condition surveys will provide a further evidence base for ongoing and future capital investment programmes.
- 5.5.3. The council has also developed a number of business intelligence dashboards which are used to analyse and visualise damp and mould repairs data. These dashboards have been used to select properties with a high prevalence of damp and mould based on historical data and the council’s partnering repairs and maintenance contractor has been commissioned to visit and survey the selected properties as part of a proactive pilot programme of preventative maintenance. The aim of these proactive surveys was to identify any early indications of damp and mould, and to subsequently order and undertake appropriate corrective works.
- 5.5.4. The overall data-driven approach will be linked through a new Housing Asset Management database that is currently undergoing its final stages of testing. The intended outcome is to ensure more robust data capture, recording and diagnosis of damp and mould issues within the housing stock, ensuring the delivery of more intelligence-based service and investment decisions, facilitating effective tackling and management of damp and mould within the housing stock.

**5.6. Housing Solutions**

5.6.1. Measures introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic relating to the prevention from eviction ended in 2021, however courts dealing with case backlogs made progress at different paces, resulting in peaks in approaches during late summer in particular. This can be seen in the chart below.

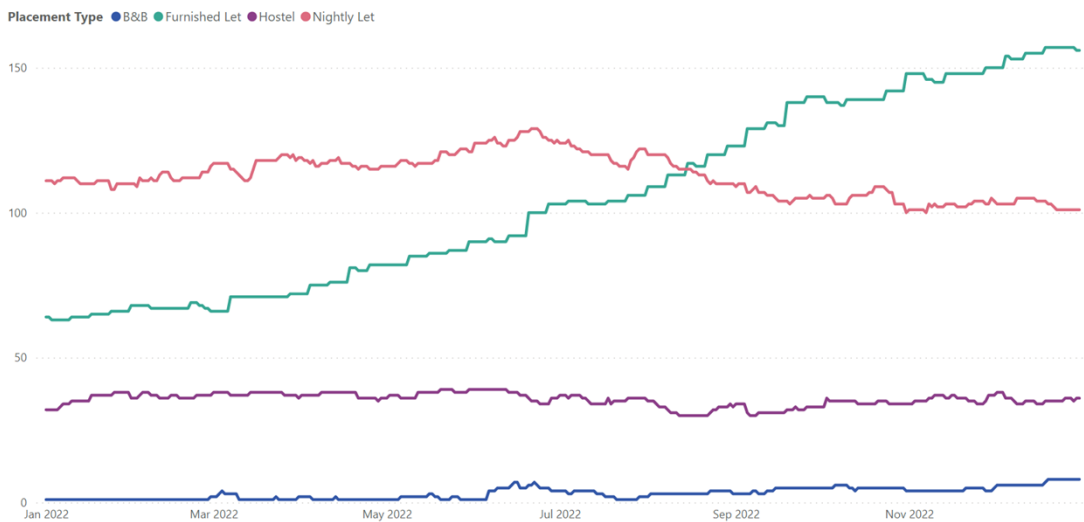


5.6.2. The impact of the cost-of-living pressures has been driving up approaches to the service. A total of 2054 approaches were made to the council’s Housing



Solutions team in the 2022 calendar year – an increase of 10.3% against the 2021 calendar year.

- 5.6.3. The start of 2022 saw significant progress by the service to support many of the 'Everyone In' cohort of clients to move from temporary accommodation into longer-term and more secure forms of tenure.
- 5.6.4. This process was supported by the purchase of new homes utilising Right to Buy receipts, combined with HRA prudential borrowing, to purchase properties on the open market. In 2021 these properties were retained in general needs stock with direct offers made to those in temporary accommodation.
- 5.6.5. In 2022 the council utilised purchased properties to increase the its temporary accommodation portfolio, aiming to reduce costs and increase control over the quality and location of the placements. Whilst overall numbers of households in temporary accommodation increased by around 50% during 2022, the numbers of households in temporary accommodation sourced from the private rental sector reduced over the same period. There has also been a significant reduction in the number of households placed outside the borough when requiring emergency accommodation.
- 5.6.6. The chart and table below illustrates the shift over time to reduce the use of private rental sector nightly let temporary accommodation, which reduced by 22% from its peak in June 2022.



Placement Type	1 Jan 22	31 Dec 22
Nightly Let (Private Rental Sector)	111	101
Furnished Let (Council Owned)	64	156
Hostel	32	36
B&B	1	8

Total	208	301
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5.6.7. The council responded successfully to the ‘Everyone In’ initiative introduced by the government during the COVID-19 pandemic, and has subsequently applied the same principles in its approach to supporting rough sleepers beyond the end of that scheme.

5.6.8. The council aims to make a suitable offer of accommodation to anyone who finds themselves roofless, regardless of their ability to demonstrate that they have an identified priority need. There has been positive evidence of what can be achieved with the right amount of support, however the scale of the challenge is significant, as is the impact on the council’s resources. Through this approach, at least 27 people experiencing rough sleeping have been supported into permanent accommodation – 24 into private rental sector (of which 18 moved directly without the use of temporary accommodation), and three into council-owned homes, including one individual which joined the council’s Housing First scheme.

**5.7. Private Sector Housing Initiatives**

5.7.1. As at the end of January 2023, as a borough Thurrock has welcomed 130 Ukrainian guests and 116 hosts have offered to sponsor a named Ukrainian national or family to live with them.

5.7.2. The council has kept up with the pace of the Homes for Ukraine scheme. The government asks that local authorities make provision for a welcome and resettlement support service, property inspections, safeguarding checks, administering payments to Ukrainian guests and host households and a rematching scheme when host/guest relationships breakdown on when hosts decide to stop hosting.

5.7.3. Through the council, the key services that have been and continue to be drawn into this work include the Private Sector Housing team, Homelessness service, Childrens Services, Adult Social Care, Finance, HR, Corporate Communications, Community Development, Education, and Public Health.

5.7.4. The council has received £959,000 of Homes for Ukraine funding in 2022/23.

5.7.5. The Private Sector Housing and Well Homes teams have responded to support Ukrainian adults and families settling into Thurrock and providing resettlement support under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme through the following activities:

- Welfare checks and ongoing follow up visits to guests and sponsors to identify whether support is needed or if any concerns have emerged
- 6 months checks in person
- Joint safeguarding visits with adult services to host homes

- Liaising with Adult Social Care and Childrens Services which are supporting guests and hosts
- Managing the requirements of the scheme and ensuring the council are able to facilitate the necessary checks and payments process required to satisfy the scheme conditions
- Responding to the new and emerging housing issues that are arising out of the scheme, such as sponsor breakdowns, mediation, sponsor respite, rematching, and appeals for new sponsors
- Developing and supporting the broader resettlement outside of housing, regarding needs such as education, health, language, employment and benefits
- Engaging with community partners and organisations who are proactively supporting the placement and settlement of families and their sponsors
- Producing a host newsletter and holding regular sponsor and guest events to increase access to public services and information

## 5.8. Transformation, Localities and Human Learning Systems

- 5.8.1. Following the adoption of the Housing Strategy 2022-27, the Housing service has begun a phase of transformation. The council has started to develop a neighbourhood model for housing services in order to better focus on delivering what matters to residents in different localities across the borough. This work supports the ambition of the *Case for Further Change* by bringing housing together at locality level, empowering front line staff from across housing to form relationships and networks across the system, working together with residents to design and deliver meaningful, personal and holistic solutions.
- 5.8.2. The housing locality working model will be expanded into broader integrated locality networks in order to collaborate more effectively with residents and other professionals across council services such as Adult Social Care and partners such as health service providers. Through being part of these networks encompassing a wide range of health, care and third sector partners, staff will be able to collaborate with each other and with residents to co-design bespoke integrated solutions rather than making referrals. This approach will also support the expansion of the knowledge and skills held by housing staff in order to better support residents.
- 5.8.3. Work has already started in a number of pilots and experiments to test these ways of working. Increased collaboration between teams in Housing, Adult Social Care, Childrens Services and health partners has seen a more flexible approach applied to our remits. Vulnerable adults (including care leavers) who may have experienced challenges sustaining tenancies or who have moved between increasingly expensive care placements, hospital admissions or the criminal justice system have been offered further housing opportunities, with multidisciplinary teams supporting them.

5.8.4. The work and successful outcomes of these multidisciplinary teams has led to the creation of a Complex Care Team that will sit within the Adults, Housing and Health directorate, and the existing Housing First initiative will be expanded to include a specialist area of provision led by a Community Psychiatric Nurse for those with serious and enduring mental health challenges.

## 6. Financial Summary

### 6.1. Housing General Fund

6.1.1. The 2022/23 financial position for the Housing General Fund is shown below.

Service Area	2021/22 Budget
	£000's
Homelessness	1,188
Refuge	117
Private Sector Housing	239
Travellers Site Provision	53
	<b>1,597</b>

6.1.2. The new approach to providing support for homeless people as outlined in the previous Housing Solutions section of the report has significantly reduced the demand for expensive private rental sector temporary accommodation and the provision of bed and breakfast as emergency accommodation. However, the increases in homelessness approaches places additional pressures on the resources within the Housing General Fund.

### 6.2. Housing Revenue Account Reserves

6.2.1. The HRA Reserve position as of 31 March 2022 is shown below:

Reserve	Projected Opening Balance 2022/23
<b>General Reserves</b>	
HRA Minimum Balances	(2,175,000)
Financial Contingency Reserve	(1,659,280)
HRA Decant Reserve	(2,588,868)
<b>Earmarked reserves to support capital</b>	
Housing Zones Funding (HRA)	(1,274,363)
Capital Reserve – Existing	
Stock (HRA)	(743,691)
Development Reserve	(2,746,389)

6.2.2. The estimated level of useable reserve for 2022/23 are detailed in the above table. Funding within the development reserve is earmarked against the cost of the HRA new building programme, and the housing zones funding

supports the development of identified sites for regeneration of additional housing.

- 6.2.3. The HRA is required to maintain a level of general balances, which amounts to £2.175m in 2022/23. This balance will be assessed on an annual basis to ensure that it remains sufficient. In addition, there is £1.659m within the financial contingency reserve. As the HRA moves toward a more ambitious capital and development programme, it is essential that this is maintained to add further resilience to the business plan.

### 6.3. HRA Revenue Position 2022/23

- 6.3.1. The 2022/23 budget for the HRA is shown below.

<b>Service</b>	<b>2022-23 Budget</b>
	<b>'000</b>
Development	54
Financing and Recharges	4,458
Repairs and Maintenance	2,893
Operational Activities	4,412
Rent and Income	<b>i2,017)</b>

- 6.3.2. Income raised through tenants' rents and service charges is ring-fenced, and cannot be used to fund expenditure outside of the HRA.

- 6.3.3. By applying the full 4.1% rent increase at the start of the 2022/23 financial year, it is estimated that the HRA will generate additional revenue of £1.845m. This additional resource has been required to finance increased costs in the existing level of services, and to provide further mitigation against bad debt and tenants rent arrears. This also allows the service to maintain its investment commitment to the HRA Capital Programme and ensure the Council complies with all of its statutory duties.

### 6.4. HRA Capital – Existing Stock

- 6.4.1. The allocated budget for the HRA Capital Works programme in 2022/23 was £31.147m. The Transforming Homes programme continued to operate to deliver significant improvements in council-owned homes, having been allocated £10.3m from the overall capital works budget for the financial year.

- 6.4.2. Investment into the council-owned high-rise blocks has continued, with £8.137m allocated towards their refurbishment and £4.7m towards carbon reduction in a number of the high-rise blocks, representing a forward-thinking programme to address carbon reduction legislation anticipated to come into force in the future.

- 6.4.3. Funding for an updated stock condition survey was also identified and was carried out across 2021/22 and 2022/23.

### 6.5. HRA Capital – New Build

- 6.5.1. The Council has a clear ambition to deliver new, quality social housing as set out within the Housing Strategy 2022-27 and through the ongoing pipeline of new housing delivery as set out within this report. New homes can be delivered using a combination of prudential borrowing and the application of Right to buy one for one capital receipts, however the progression of any new housing project must be assessed for financial viability against rental levels within Local Housing Allowance rates. The progression of any new scheme must also be in keeping with any applicable directions in the context of the government's intervention at Thurrock Council.
- 6.5.2. Further development sites continue to be identified and will come forward to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee through housing development update reports as well as further political oversight from the portfolio holder for housing and respective ward councillors.

## **7. Conclusion**

- 7.1.1. The council continues to provide a high-performing housing service which tenant feedback indicates offers value for money.
- 7.1.2. The pipeline of new housing delivery continues, having recently handed over an award-winning HAPPI scheme, developing of a number of new homes for delivery in 2023, and progressing the most ambitious regeneration scheme which has been seen in the council's housing stock for many years.
- 7.1.3. The adoption, roll-out and implementation of a new suite of Housing strategies will see the transformation of Housing services in the future, enabling far greater and more effective integration across the system and with related services for the benefit of Thurrock households.
- 7.1.4. The council is well positioned to meet new obligations and duties which will be introduced through the most significant regulatory changes in the social housing sector in over a decade, making use of new technology and an intelligence and data driven approach to tenant satisfaction and stock investment.
- 7.1.5. Regardless of tenure, the council continues to provide meaningful support and services for those in need, going beyond the statutory minimums and taking a person-centred approach through true collaboration and partnership with other council services and public and voluntary sector organisations.
- 7.1.6. The HRA revenue and reserve positions remain strong, whilst the HRA capital programme continues to provide significant investment in not only the improvement and maintenance of the council's housing stock but also through the introduction of new technology and approaches to help meet its carbon reduction obligations.

## **8. Appendices to the report**

- None

**Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee  
Work Programme  
2022/2023**

Dates of Meetings: 21 June 2022, 29 September 2022, 22 November 2022, 10 January 2023 and 7 March 2023

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Lead Officer</b>	<b>Requested by Officer/Member</b>
<b>21 June 2022</b>		
Housing Strategies 2022-2027	Ryan Farmer	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services	Standing Item
<b>29 September 2022</b>		
Structure of HRA	Mike Jones	Members
Interim report for Stock Condition Survey of Housing Portfolio	Alastair Wood	Officers
Housing Development Programme Update	Julian Wain	Members
Work Programme	Democratic Services	Standing Item
<b>22 November 2022</b>		
Fees & Charges Pricing Strategy 2023/24	Dulal Ahmed	Officer
Housing Ombudsman Report: Spotlight on Damp and Mould	Mohammed Saheed Ullah	Members
Blackshots Estate - Proposals for the Way Forward	Julian Wain	Officers
Allocations Policy Update 2022-23	Ryan Farmer	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services	Standing Item
<b>10 January 2023</b>		

Housing Revenue Account – Rent Setting and Budgets 2023/24	Mike Jones	Officers
Homelessness Update - 2022	Ben Tovey	Members
Update on Voids Management Policy	Mohammed Saheed Ullah	Members
Beaconsfield Place / Calcutta Road – Lessons Learnt	Ryan Farmer	Members
Work Programme	Democratic Services	Standing Item
<b>7 March 2023</b>		
Portfolio Holder Update Report	Cllr Spillman / Ryan Farmer	Members
Homes for Ukraine Response Programme	Dulal Ahmed	Members
Estate and Tenancy Management – roles and responsibilities	Peter Doherty	Members
Blackshots Estate – Demolition and Redevelopment	Keith Andrews	Officers
Management of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) – Verbal Update	Ewelina Sorbjan	Members
Work Programme	Democratic Services	Standing Item

Items for 2023/24 Work Programme:

Portfolio Holder Report  
Housing Strategy report  
CO1 Development Update – Keith Andrews

Briefing Notes

Housing Stock Data – Mohammed Ullah  
High Rise Allocations – Ryan Farmer – to be sent  
Garages – Peter Doherty – to be sent



Clerk: Jenny Shade  
Last Updated: November 2022

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