

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

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".

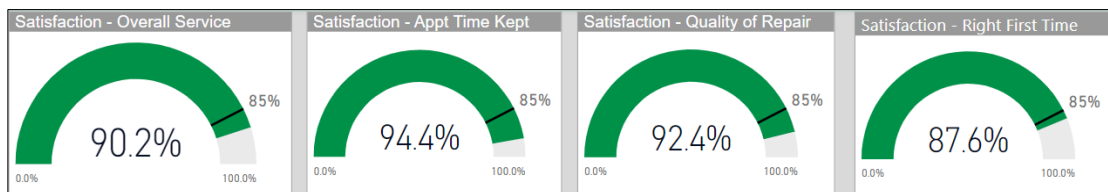
A key area for dissatisfaction in 2021/22 was due to a significant increase in negative feedback relating to council services not delivered by Housing including refuse collection, street sweeping, housing benefit and abandoned vehicles. Assessment of this data indicates that the 2021/22 general Housing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

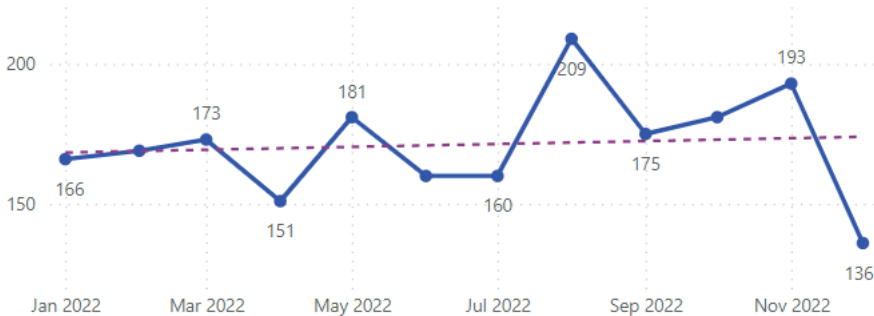
- 5.4.7. In addition to the anticipated measures in the Social Housing Bill, the Building Safety Act 2022 also introduced reforms which give residents more rights, powers and protection within legislation and regulation.
- 5.4.8. The Act created three new bodies to provide oversight of the new regulatory 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

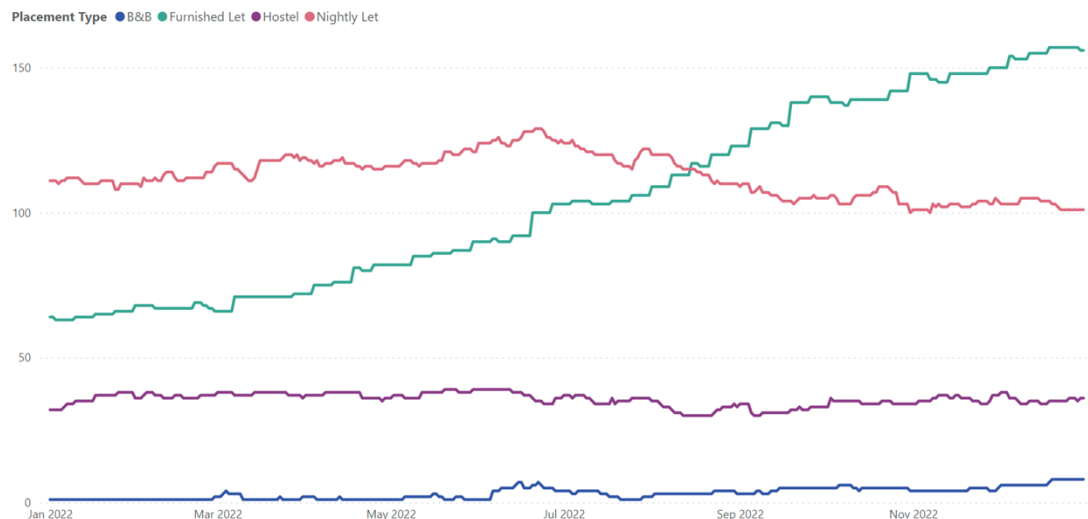
- 5.6.1. Measures introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic relating to the prevention from eviction ended in 2021, however courts dealing with case backlogs made progress at different paces, resulting in peaks in approaches during late summer in particular. This can be seen in the chart below.



- 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
	1,597

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
General Reserves	
HRA Minimum Balances	(2,175,000)
Financial Contingency Reserve	(1,659,280)
HRA Decant Reserve	(2,588,868)
Earmarked reserves to support capital	
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.

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

- 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