

5 March 2024		ITEM: 5
Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Cabinet Member Report – Housing 2022/23		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: None	
Report of: Cllr Barry Johnson, Cabinet Member for Children’s Services and Housing		
This report is public		
Version: Final		

1 Introduction

- 1.1. This report presents an overview of the range of Housing services and provides details of the department's performance in 2022/23.
- 1.2. The document identifies a range of key external factors which have affected and shaped service delivery throughout the 2023/24 financial year to date.
- 1.3. Finally, it sets out the financial position for the Housing Revenue Account and General Fund budgets within Housing.
- 1.4. The challenges facing the council currently are well publicised and this report should be read in that context. Current and future 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
- developing new affordable homes and enabling the work of housing associations
- 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 2022/23

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.

3.2. Performance in Housing is continuously monitored and is frequently reviewed by the Housing Management Team through a comprehensive suite of Power BI dashboards and Housing Performance Board. These dashboards have been made available to operational teams to ensure the thread of performance management runs through the whole service.

3.3. Tenant satisfaction surveys are completed by an independent research contractor who specialises in satisfaction surveys for the Housing sector. Further information about the areas of satisfaction which the Housing service monitors can be found further in this report.

3.4. Performance Indicators

Performance Indicator	Target	2021/22	2022/23
% Tenant Satisfaction with the Overall Service Provided by Housing	75.00%	73.80%	71.50%
% Satisfaction of Tenants with Transforming Homes	85.00%	90.30%	89.50%
% of Repairs Completed Within Target	95.00%	96.00%	94.30%
% Rent Collected	97.00%	97.80%	97.00%
Average Time to Turnaround / Re-let Voids (in days)	30	34.7	30.8
% of Gas Service Checks Carried out Within Statutory Timescale	100%	99%	99.60%
Number of Applicants with Family Commitments in Bed & Breakfast for Six Weeks or More	0	0	0
Number of Category 1 & 2 Hazards Removed as a Direct Result of Private Sector Housing Team Intervention	1000	1008	1302

3.4.1. The Housing Revenue Account continued to balance through the 2022/23 financial year. The final outturn position of the Housing General Fund was also balanced.

3.4.2. The Housing service recorded an increase in the number of Housing-related complaints received during 2022/23 compared with the 2021/22 financial year of 18.8%, with the overall percentage of upheld complaints increasing slightly from 31.5% to 37.8%.

100 compliments were received across the Housing service during the 2022/23 financial year. Member enquiries increased by 3.3% and enquiries made by MPs increased by 39.6%.

3.4.3. The 2022/23 financial year saw a slight reduction in overall tenant satisfaction with Housing services. Overall, 71.5% of tenants gave a rating of "very satisfied" or "fairly satisfied", 11.6% of tenants gave a neutral rating and 16.9% gave a negative rating of "fairly dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied".

A key area for dissatisfaction in 2022/23 was repairs and planned maintenance, accounting for more than half of all dissatisfied feedback responses.

- 3.4.4. Satisfaction with Transforming Homes remained high at 89.5%, representing a marginal decrease in satisfaction compared to the previous financial year; however, this continues to be above the target of 85% for this indicator.
- 3.4.5. The percentage of repairs completed on target slipped slightly below its target of 95%, achieving an outturn position of 94.3% in 2022/23.

A total of 25,171 repairs were completed across all workstreams in 2022/23, with a first-time fix rate of 99.3% against a target of 95%.

The graphics below shows tenant satisfaction against a number of repairs-related metrics following feedback provided through over 3300 ratings across the financial year.

Repairs Service Performance Indicator	Target	2021/22	2022/23
% Tenant Satisfaction – Overall Service	85%	90.2%	89.8%
% Tenant Satisfaction – Appointment Time Kept	85%	94.4%	93.5%
% Tenant Satisfaction – Quality of Repair	85%	92.4%	92.3%
% Tenant Satisfaction – Right First Time	85%	87.6%	88.1%
% Tenant Satisfaction – Keeping Tenants Informed	85%	89.1%	89.4%

- 3.4.6. The performance of the Housing service relating to rent collection was strong, achieving its target collection rate of 97%, despite pressures relating to cost-of-living factors experienced within homes across Thurrock.
- 3.4.7. Average void turnaround time performance improved again in the 2022/23 financial year, with properties being relet almost five days quicker than 2021/23 and almost 18 days quicker than 2020/21; however, the end of year performance of 30.8 days remained slightly above the target of 30 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 (67.7%) in 2022/23, with the average relet time for these properties recorded at 33.5 days, marginally above the 30 day target.

For sheltered housing voids, accounting for 32.3% of void properties, the average relet time in 2022/23 was 24.9 days – a significant reduction from the performance in 2021/22 of 50.6 days.

- 3.4.8. 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 2022/23 financial year, maintaining the same position as the previous two financial years.
- 3.4.9. The Private Sector Housing Team removed 1302 category 1 and 2 Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) hazards from private sector properties in 2022/23 against a target of 1000, and a 29.2% improvement against performance in 2021/22.

3.5. Tenant Satisfaction

3.5.1. The Housing service monitors a range of specific tenant satisfaction measures. In 2022/23, these measures were:

Satisfaction Performance Indicators	Target	2021/22	2022/23
% Tenant Satisfaction With The Responsive Repairs Service	90%	90.20%	89.80%
% Tenant Satisfaction With Gas Repairs	75%	90.40%	90.00%
% Tenant Satisfaction With Keeping Tenants Informed	75%	76.60%	76.60%
% Tenant Satisfaction with Grounds Maintenance	75%	78.50%	80.20%
% Tenant Satisfaction With The Caretaking Service	75%	80.20%	81.40%
% Tenant Satisfaction With The Quality of Home	75%	77.00%	77.90%
% Tenant Satisfaction That Home Is Safe And Secure	75%	84.20%	78.20%
% New Tenant Satisfaction With The Process of Moving Into Their New Home	75%	87.70%	89.30%
% Tenant Satisfaction With Their Neighbourhood	75%	79.20%	71.90%
% Tenant Satisfaction That Rent Provides Value for Money	75%	86.30%	80.60%
% Tenant Satisfaction That Service Charge Provides Value for Money	75%	78.60%	75.30%
% Tenant Satisfaction With The Sheltered Housing Service	75%	79.20%	84.80%

3.5.2. Tenant satisfaction against all but two measures performed strongly, building on the performance in 2021/22 and remaining above the target set at 75%.

3.6. Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs)

3.6.1. The 2023/24 financial year marks the start of formal recording of TSMs for reporting to the Regulator of Social Housing. The table below outlines the targets which have been established for each of the twelve TSMs

Measure Number	Theme	Description	Target
TP01	Overall satisfaction	Overall satisfaction with service provider	70.0%
TP02	Keeping properties in good repair	Satisfaction with the repairs service in the last 12 months	75.1%
TP03	Keeping properties in good repair	Satisfaction with time taken to complete the most recent repair	68.0%
TP04	Keeping properties in good repair	Satisfaction that home is well maintained	68.8%

Measure Number	Theme	Description	Target
TP05	Maintaining building safety	Satisfaction that home is safe	77.4%
TP06	Respectful/helpful engagement	Satisfaction that landlord listens to views and acts upon them	58.0%
TP07	Respectful/helpful engagement	Satisfaction that landlord keeps tenants informed about things that matter to them	68.8%
TP08	Respectful/helpful engagement	Agreement that landlord treats tenants fairly and with respect	73.0%
TP09	Effective complaints handling	Satisfaction with landlord's approach to complaints handling	31.0%
TP10	Responsible neighbourhood management	Satisfaction that landlord keeps communal areas clean and well maintained	66.2%
TP11	Responsible neighbourhood management	Satisfaction that landlord makes a positive contribution to neighbourhoods	62.3%
TP12	Responsible neighbourhood management	Satisfaction with the landlord's approach to ASB handling	53.4%

3.6.2. The targets for each indicator has been set using the best possible information currently available. Targets have been set in line with the median satisfaction score for Thurrock's comparable, geographical peer group as defined by Housemark (South Central LAs and ALMOs <10,000 Stock).

4 Housing Development

- 4.1. The council recently delivered a new development in Loewen Road, Chadwell St. Mary, comprising four three-bedroom houses. All four new properties at the Loewen Road development had been included in a local lettings plan, resulting in three of the homes being made available to tenants within the applicable boundary (the Chadwell St. Mary ward). The remaining property was let through the usual choice-based lettings process as outlined in the council's Housing Allocations Policy.
- 4.2. Significant consultation programmes regarding the redevelopment at Blackshots and Teviot Avenue have been undertaken with residents in both of these areas. Following the Cabinet decision to approve the principle of demolition of the high-rise flats at Blackshots, the process to decant tenants and buy back properties owned by leaseholders in these blocks is underway.
- 4.3. Planning permission has been granted on a number of schemes which have been designed by the Housing Development team and could potentially deliver up to 62 homes - namely Lyndhurst Road (6), Broxburn Drive (33), Vigerons Way (7) and Aveley Library (16).
- 4.4. Applications seeking planning permission have also been submitted for schemes which could deliver a further 116 homes - Anton Road (10), Teviot Avenue (48), and Darnley Road (58) – however this last site is not intended to be developed by the council as it has been included in identified assets for disposal.

5 Key Events and Factors

5.1. **Housing Strategy 2022-2027**

5.1.1. A report was provided to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the progress made during the first year of the Housing Strategy 2022-2027, which featured difficult and changing circumstances including:

- the government intervention of Thurrock Council, and resulting financial restrictions
- the cost-of-living crisis, implementing a limit on rent increases and the rising cost of service provision
- emerging change in priorities based on significant national developments

Although the national and local context has resulted in a significant amount of turbulence and uncertainty, progress has been made in delivering the aims and objectives of the Housing Strategy 2022-2027. The following sections provide a number of highlights and headlines for each of the four themes of the strategy.

5.1.2. **Deliver Housing Support and Services**

- A transformation pilot took place in the Stanford and Corringham locality, utilising the Corringham Integrated Medical and Wellbeing Centre as a hub.
- The success of the pilot led to the establishment of further initiatives, including a 'single point of contact' approach between various services and collaborative work on issues like Fuel Poverty and the formation of a complex care team.
- Ongoing collaborative efforts included work with the pre-eviction panel, improved connections with colleagues at Basildon Hospital, and policy adjustments to support a multi-disciplinary approach, particularly focusing on care leavers.
- The *Better Care Together Thurrock: Case for Further Change* identified four localities for joint services: Grays, Aveley, South Ockendon and Purfleet (ASOP), Stanford and Corringham, and Tilbury and Chadwell.
- The Stanford and Corringham locality was selected as the area for the first Integrated Locality Team to be established, with a focus on collaborative efforts among various teams across Housing, Adult Social Care, and with Health partners.
- A steering group has coordinated work to establish other localities, and the success of the Better Care Together Thurrock Conference in March 2023 has led to interest in hosting smaller, locality-specific conferences.
- Housing staff received training in Occupational Therapy for low-level assessments and aid recommendations.

5.1.3. **Meet Housing Need**

- The Housing Strategy research and evidence base has been made available to officers to support and inform the development of the Local Plan.

- The Housing Development programme has provided a number of new homes in the borough to meet housing need, utilising a local lettings plan. The housing development pipeline reflects the types of affordable homes required.
- Work has commenced to improve access to health, care and support services, especially for those at risk of homelessness.

5.1.4. **Protect Resident Safety**

- Initiatives have been implemented to reduce local crime, improve the quality of homes in the private sector, and address fuel poverty.
- Support has been made available for residents living in council-owned homes regarding fuel poverty, removal of hazards, and increased use of sustainable and renewable technology.

5.1.5. **Strengthen Community Engagement and Empowerment**

- Work started and continued at pace to understand and address drivers of dissatisfaction, including implementing new tenant satisfaction measures.
- Resident feedback featured in setting the direction and priorities for the redevelopment of the Allocations Scheme.

5.2. **Social Housing and Building Safety Regulation**

- 5.2.1. The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, introduced following the government's social housing white paper, outlines a comprehensive set of reforms aimed at ensuring the safety, transparency, and efficiency of social housing provision. The Act focuses on three core objectives: establishing a new, proactive consumer regulation regime, refining the existing economic regulatory regime, and strengthening the Regulator for Social Housing's powers to enforce both consumer and economic regimes.
- 5.2.2. The Act brings about significant changes to the role and powers of the Regulator of Social Housing. It expands the Regulator's authority to include safety and transparency in addition to economic regulation. Notably, the 'serious detriment' test for regulatory intervention in cases of breaches of consumer standards has been removed, allowing for more proactive enforcement. The Act also introduces an Advisory Panel, mandates the collection of certain information, and enables the Regulator to set fees to cover all costs.
- 5.2.3. Collaboration between the Regulator and the Housing Ombudsman is emphasised to enhance information exchange and complaint resolution. The Act empowers the Regulator to conditionally register social housing providers based on consumer standard compliance and introduces a process for the deregistration of providers for significant breaches.
- 5.2.4. Tenant satisfaction measures (TSMs) have been introduced, allowing the Regulator to direct registered providers of social housing to gather, process, and publish data on their regulatory performance. A suite of TSMs covering themes such as property maintenance, building safety, and effective complaints handling is outlined. Landlords are required to submit TSM data to the Regulator, with the first national TSM data anticipated to be published in Autumn 2024.

5.2.5. Overall, the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 represents a comprehensive effort to address various aspects of social housing, prioritising the safety and wellbeing of residents, improving transparency, and holding landlords accountable for their performance. The introduction of TSMs and the enhanced powers of the Regulator signal a commitment to continuous improvement and increased oversight in the social housing sector.

6 Financial Summary

6.1. Housing General Fund

6.1.1. The 2023/24 financial position for the Housing General Fund is shown below.

Service Area	Forecast Opening Balance 2023/24 £000s
Homelessness	942
Private Sector Housing	259
Travellers Site Provision	53
Sub-Total	1,597

6.1.2. A proactive approach to providing support for homeless people through the growth of council-owned temporary accommodation continues to significantly reduce 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 2023 is shown below:

General Reserves	Budget 2023/24 £000s
Balances (HRA)	(3,321)
Financial Contingency Reserve	(2,000)
HRA Decant Reserve	(2,600)
Sub-Total	(7,921)

Reserves earmarked to support capital	Forecast Opening Balance 2023/24 £000s
Housing Zones Funding (HRA)	(1,274)

Reserves earmarked to support capital	Forecast Opening Balance 2023/24 £000s
Capital Reserve – Existing Stock (HRA)	(744)
RTB Attributable Debt	(42)
RTB Buy Backs	(737)
Sub-total	(2,797)

Total Reserves	Forecast Opening Balance 2023/24 £000s
General Reserves	(7,921)
Reserves earmarked to support capital	(2,797)
Grand Total	(10,719)

6.2.2. The estimated level of useable reserve for 2023/24 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. This balance is assessed on an annual basis to ensure that it remains sufficient. In addition, there is £2.000m within the financial contingency reserve. 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 2023/24 budget for the HRA, as agreed by Cabinet in February 2023, is shown below.

Service	Budget 2023/24 £000s
Rent and Income	(55,091)
Financing and Recharges	27,087
Operational Services	15,458
Repairs and Maintenance	13,841
Grand Total	1,295

- 6.3.2. After the application of the rent recommended rent increase, and inflationary cost pressures, there was a resulting budget deficit of £1.295m for the HRA in 2023/24. There is a statutory requirement to set a balance budget, and therefore this deficit needed mitigation.

In order to minimise the impact on tenants and avoid significant deterioration in the condition of the stock, the following proposed savings were made in order to finance the overall budget:

Budget Saving/Mitigation	Saving 2023/24 £000s
Application of a 5% vacancy factor within the staffing budget	(547)
Pausing of assisted decorating programme	(634)
Increase in service charges	(114)
Grand Total	(1295)

- 6.3.3. Income raised through tenants' rents and service charges is ring-fenced and cannot be used to fund expenditure outside of the HRA.
- 6.3.4. By applying the full 7.0% rent increase at the start of the 2023/24 financial year, it was estimated that the HRA would generate additional revenue of £2.974m. 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 its statutory duties.

6.4. HRA Capital – New Build

- 6.4.1. 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.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1. In conclusion, the Housing service plays a crucial role in the borough, providing a diverse range of functions to meet the needs of households. The comprehensive overview of the service's activities highlights its commitment to ensuring the wellbeing and satisfaction of residents.
- 7.2. The performance in the 2022/23 financial year reflects a focus on monitoring and improving key indicators. While overall tenant satisfaction experienced a slight decline, several measures, such as satisfaction with Transforming Homes and gas service repairs, remained strong. The Housing service has demonstrated resilience in achieving targets, notably in rent collection and reducing void turnaround times.

- 7.3. The report also delves into the Housing Development initiatives, emphasising the council's commitment to delivering new, quality social housing. Planning permissions for multiple schemes and successful consultations with residents underscore the ongoing efforts to address housing needs in the borough.
- 7.4. Key events and factors, such as the Housing Strategy 2022-2027 and the introduction of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, have presented challenges and opportunities. Despite external pressures, progress has been made in meeting the objectives of the Housing Strategy.
- 7.5. In summary, the Housing service has navigated challenges and continued to provide essential services while adapting to changing circumstances. The commitment to performance, engagement and responding to new regulatory regimes positions the service well for the future.
- 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):

- Text

9 Appendices to the report

- None