

Leicester
City Council

MEETING OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

DATE: THURSDAY, 11 JULY 2024

TIME: 5:30 pm

PLACE: Meeting Room G.01, Ground Floor, City Hall, 115 Charles Street, Leicester, LE1 1FZ

Members of the Committee

Councillor O'Neill (Chair)

Councillor Zaman (Vice-Chair)

Councillors Bajaj, Gopal, Gregg, Halford, Modhwadia and Waddington

Members of the Committee are invited to attend the above meeting to consider the items of business listed overleaf.

For Monitoring Officer

Officer contacts:

Georgia Humby (Senior Governance Support Officer), and Kirsty Wootton (Governance Support Officer),

Tel: , e-mail: committees@leicester.gov.uk

Leicester City Council, 3rd Floor, City Hall, 115 Charles Street, Leicester, LE1 1FZ

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- ✓ where filming, to (via the Chair of the meeting) ensure that those present are aware that they may be filmed and respect any requests to not be filmed.

Further information

If you have any queries about any of the above or the business to be discussed, please contact: Georgia.Humby@leicester.gov.uk or Kirsty.Wootton@leicester.gov.uk of **Governance Services**. Alternatively, email committees@leicester.gov.uk, or call in at City Hall.

For Press Enquiries - please phone the **Communications Unit on 0116 454 4151**.

PUBLIC SESSION

AGENDA

NOTE:

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<http://www.leicester.public-i.tv>

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<http://www.leicester.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcasts>

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1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

To issue a welcome to those present, and to confirm if there are any apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Members will be asked to declare any interests they may have in the business to be discussed.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Appendix A

The minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Commission held on 12 March 2024 have been circulated, and Members will be asked to confirm them as a correct record.

4. MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMISSION 2024-25

Members will be asked to note the membership of the Housing Scrutiny Commission for 2024/25:

Councillor O'Neill (Chair)
Councillor Zaman (Vice Chair)
Councillor Bajaj

Councillor Halford
Councillor Waddington
Councillor Gopal
Councillor Modhwadia
Councillor Gregg

5. DATES OF THE COMMISSION 2024-25

Members will be asked to note the commission meeting dates as follows:

- Thursday 11 July 2024
- Tuesday 27 August 2024
- Tuesday 12 November 2024
- Tuesday 7 January 2025
- Tuesday 18 March 2025
- Tuesday 22 April 2025

6. SCRUTINY TERMS OF REFERENCE [Appendix B](#)

Members are asked to note the scrutiny terms of reference.

7. CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair is invited to make any announcements as they see fit.

8. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

Any questions, representations and statements of case submitted in accordance with the Council's procedures will be reported.

9. PETITIONS

Any petitions received in accordance with Council procedures will be reported.

10. HOUSING OVERVIEW [Appendix C](#)

The Director of Housing submits a presentation to provide an overview of the service and key challenges.

11. HOUSING REGULATOR [Appendix D](#)

The Director of Housing submits a report to provide an update on the changes taking place in the regulation of social housing. The Scrutiny Commission is recommended to make any comments as they see fit.

12. RENT ARREARS ANNUAL REPORT [Appendix E](#)

The Director of Housing submits a report to inform the Commission on the rent arrears progress within the general housing stock for the financial year, April

2023 - March 2024. The Commission is recommended to note the contents of the report and to make any comments as they see fit.

13. HOUSE BUILD & ACQUISITIONS UPDATE **Appendix F**

The Director of Housing submits a report to update the Commission on house building and acquisitions with a particular focus on new build council houses and the ongoing acquisitions programme. The Commission is recommended to note the content of the report and to make any comments as they see fit.

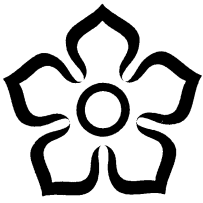
14. ENVIRONMENTAL BUDGET & PUBLIC REALM WORK 2024/25 **Appendix G**

The Director for Housing submits a report to update the Commission on how the Environmental Budget and other investment will fund improvements on estates across the city in 2024/2025. The Commission is recommended to note the contents of the report and to make any comments as they see fit.

15. WORK PROGRAMME **Appendix H**

Members of the Commission will be asked to consider items for the future work programme.

16. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS



Leicester
City Council

Item 3

Minutes of the Meeting of the
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: TUESDAY, 12 MARCH 2024 at 6:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Joel (Chair)
Councillor Zaman (Vice Chair)

Councillor Adatia
Councillor O'Neill

Councillor Singh Patel
Councillor Waddington

In Attendance

Deputy City Mayor, Councillor Cutkelvin – Housing and Neighbourhoods

* * * * *

59. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Aqbany and Cllr Mahesh.

60. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair asked members of the commission to declare any interests for which there were none.

61. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chair highlighted that the minutes for the meeting on 9 January 2024 were included within the papers and asked members for comments.

AGREED:

- It was agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 9 January 2024 were a true and accurate record.

62. PETITIONS

It was noted that none had been received.

63. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS OR STATEMENTS OF CASE

It was noted that none had been received.

64. ENVIRONMENTAL BUDGET UPDATE

The Head of Service presented the report, and it was noted that:

- The environment budget enables improvements to be made to council estates throughout the city. The budget has historically been set at £750k but due to pressures on the Housing Revenue Account it was reduced in 2023/24 to £200k and will remain at the reduced level for 2024/25.
- Consultation was carried out with ward councillors to prepare project proposals prior to the reduction to the environmental budget and the report sets out those that were completed and those that were put on hold across the three districts in the city.
- The £200k budget was not fully spent as resources did not allow for all landscape maintenance to be completed.
- Alternative funding was sought from the highways division to complete the St Peters shopping parade car park renovations.
- Projects on hold were anticipated to be taken forward in 2024/25 but the retained reduced budget may require further delays. Consultation is currently ongoing with ward councillors to identify new priorities or determine whether existing proposals should be taken forward. A further report will be provided to the Commission on consultation proposals.
- The environment budget is one funding stream for improvements to council estates but other funding such as the public realm investment is also available.

The Commission raised concerns regarding the reduction in the budget and requested that future reports incorporate all available budgets for consideration.

In response to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:

- The allocation of the environmental budget varied previously with reliance on proactive housing officers, community activists and ward councillors making suggestions. A consultation process has now been established to engage all ward councillors for proposals and it was agreed that the suggestion for a formalised process to document all proposals would be considered. The Deputy City Mayor provided assurance that correspondence would be reviewed to ensure all suggested proposals were included.
- It was the first time the budget was reduced and will remain at £200k during 2024/25 and the impact to local amenities is hoped to be minimal but will be reviewed in time.
- Cross-divisional services are responsible for ensuring cleanliness across the city. Neighbourhood services undertake street cleansing on a rota basis, highways cleansing of roads and drainage, and the housing

division provide additional services to housing areas through the Housing Revenue Account for estate wardens etc.

- Emerging priorities through ward councillor engagement, particularly in the east district, is for the environmental budget to be utilised for street cleansing and weed spraying. A report will be provided to the Commission on all proposals following the consultation.
- Various considerations are given to proposals to identify priorities for funding from the environmental budget including previous spend in wards, resource and capacity, health and safety or legislative requirements and the impact to the area.

AGREED:

- The Commission noted the report.
- Correspondence to be reviewed to ensure all ward councillor suggestions have been noted for consideration for the 2024/25 budget.
- Formal process for documenting ward councillor suggestions to be created.
- Future reports to include reference to other budgets available to investment in council estates.
- Item to remain on work programme for update on proposals following consultation with ward councillors.

65. ADAPTATIONS STRATEGY

The Head of Service presented the report, and it was noted that:

- All adaptation requests are assessed by an occupational therapist in adult social care. If an adaptation is required, it is referred to the locality team or adaptation team.
- Adaptations to council properties are processed by the technical service and works carried out by the inhouse repairs team or a contractor. Minor works, those less than £1k, usually require no delays – subject to availability of equipment. Larger adaptations are allocated priority points by an occupational therapist. The waiting list is dynamic and varies depending on the adaptation cases approved, and priority points awarded. Priority points are attributed to cases waiting to ensure adaptation will always be completed.
- The service has been proactive in increasing wheelchair adapted properties. The adapt to let scheme enables vacant properties that could be fully or partially accessible to be advertised on Home Choice and a minimum of 10% wheelchair accessible homes will be delivered through the new build programme, with the first due to be delivered at the Saffron Velodrome site.
- Adaptations for non-council homes are requested to be undertaken by contractors through adult social care. The housing division has a mandatory function to administer the Disabled Facilities Grant and therefore may be involved in non-council tenant major adaptation although some individuals choose to entirely self-fund. The Disabled

Facilities Grant is means tested and has specific requirements for funding such as access to an internal bathroom, cooking and sleeping facilities. The maximum grant is £30k.

- An Adaptation Strategy is currently being developed – data has been gathered and key themes are being identified. The Commission will be invited to comment on the strategy in due course.

In response to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:

- Adaptations vary for completion depending on works required and priority. Minor adaptations such as grab rails or to enable a hospital discharge will usually be completed within seven days. External concrete ramps are likely to take longer. Major adaptations are allocated points to ensure urgent needs are met sooner but all adaptations are completed.
- Minor adaptations are generally undertaken by the in-house team and major adaptations such as equipment-based lifts, access showers, ground floor facilities and extensions are outsourced to contractors.
- The budget for 2021/22 was not fully spent during the pandemic as adaptations could not be undertaken within homes although the service continued to undertake external adaptations. The underspend was carried forward to 2022/23 to meet demand of adaptations but was reduced in 2023/24 due to budget pressures although the government Better Care Fund monies was increased following representations.
- Government have not confirmed Better Care Funding for 2024/25. Once funding is allocated to deliver adaptations for the twelve-month period the housing division will submit a bid to the General Fund to bridge the gap of what the service forecasts to be required based on historic trends. This is monitored throughout the year and additional funding bids can be requested if there is higher demand for adaptations.
- All adaptations assessed and referred by an occupational therapist will be undertaken but are completed on a priority needs basis. The service has generally completed all adaptations required within the financial year, but ongoing budget pressures could require some waiting times.
- Cost price inflation for materials and services in the construction sector is increasing the cost of adaptations and impacting the number that can be completed.
- Occupational therapists will try to ensure the recommended adaptations meet the needs of the individual in the existing building and affordability but may sometimes require review. For adaptations over £30k the division try and work with other agencies to enable the full cost to be met. Health funding can be contributed or where care home fees are excessive and the cost to fund an adaptation would be less can sometimes be supported although is rare. Charities may also contribute and families themselves may pay additional costs above the £30k Disabled Facilities Grant. Data is available on the number of adaptations above £30k and can be shared with the Commission.
- Some individuals chose to self-fund part of the cost. Where an occupational therapist has approved a scheme, a homeowner can request additional works and fund the equivalent costs.

AGREED:

- The Commission noted the report.
- Adaptations Strategy to remain on the work programme.
- Data to be shared on the number of adaptations above £30k.

66. HOUSING CRISIS DECLARATION AND ACTION PLAN UPDATE

The Deputy City Mayor for Housing and Neighbourhoods introduced the item highlighting the positive work of the Task Group which included Members from across various Scrutiny Commissions in assisting a housing crisis to be declared. It was noted that the Action Plan has been a helpful benchmark to monitor workstreams and progress. Two main benefits were noted including the communication with residents regarding the housing register and ensuring the issue became a corporate priority with cross divisional working.

The Director of Housing presented the report in which it was noted that:

- A housing crisis was declared in Leicester in November 2022. An Action Plan was developed including recommendations by the Task Group and adopted by full Council. The Action Plan includes actions for the Local Authority and demands of central government, both which have had good progress.
- The Local Authority is on track to deliver the 1,500 council and affordable housing targets with £250m investment. Poor quality private sector housing is being addressed through the development of the Private Rented Sector Strategy and Selective Licencing Schemes. Homelessness prevention includes private landlord offers and call before you serve landlord offer. The Action Plan is monitored by the Strategic Director for City Development and Neighbourhood Services to ensure cross divisional working.
- There has been good progress with demands on government including an £11.4bn fund to deliver 180k affordable homes over five years and the Local Authority continue to work on bids to secure additional funding for schemes in the city. The Local Housing Allowance cap will be lifted from April 2024 to enable individuals on low income or benefits to access homes up to the thirtieth percentile in the private rented sector. The division previously conducted work with De Montfort University on Local Housing Allowances and at that time only 3% was affordable to this group and further work may be undertaken on the new arrangements.
- Legislation is being introduced to end Section 21 no fault evictions and require robust justifications which was another demand of government as it currently accounts for over half of homelessness applications. Loopholes to holiday homes are currently being consulted on which the Local Authority will be submitting a response to. A national landlord register is also proposed in the Renters Reform Bill 2023 that would help tackle poor landlords.

The Commission thanked officers for the report and good progress. In response to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:

- Homes that have been empty for more than five years will be charged three times the council tax of an occupied home and from 2021, homes empty for more than ten years are charged four times the council tax of an occupied home. Unlike many other cities, Leicester has a dedicated small empty homes team who gather data with the council tax service to tackle private empty homes. There has been a slight increase in private empty homes in the city recent due to affordability to bring them back into use, but the team follow a process and work on early interventions with owners and monitor with compulsory purchase orders as a last resort.
- Homeowners may manipulate the system by leaving furniture in the property and proactively making it look as though it is occupied. The Local Authority is limited in its powers to gather evidence and the empty homes team must make a judgement on whether it is viable if legal action is pursued that a judge would determine it as empty on the evidence.
- If a ward councillor identifies land that they think may be suitable for development, they should contact the housing development team who are responsible for new housing developments and acquisitions. The team will follow a process to assess the viability of the site with finance, EBS, planning etc. It is expected that feedback would be provided to the ward councillor on the outcome.
- The viability and legality of a Housing Company was explored and progressed through to the setting up of a Housing Company. When assessed against the existing work of the division however it was felt that it was not an appropriate tool, and nothing further would be gained and therefore the priority should remain on delivering targets within services and in the HRA. A Housing Company will remain on the Action Plan for consideration if outcomes to be delivered are changed and as part of ongoing monitoring of how other Local Authorities utilise Housing Company's to determine whether it may be appropriate in future.
- Sites for long-term development have been identified and form part of the Local Plan proposals which has been submitted to the Government Inspectorate. A number of sites are included for residential purposes but overall there is insufficient land to meet housing needs in the city which has required an agreement with neighbouring Districts. If sites are removed this will reduce the ability to deliver more housing and developments in neighbouring Authorities will not give access to the housing register.
- The Local Authority are actively in discussions with owners of private sites that have not been developed to discuss the feasibility to bring them forward. If successful, the Commission will be updated.
- For a short period of time Local Authorities have been able to retain 100% of Right to Buy Receipts to use alongside other funding for acquisitions and housing developments. Right to Buy receipts can be used to fund 40% of a property. The recent Budget announcement reduces retained receipts to 50% and therefore the Local Authority will

have less money for its active initiatives to increase council homes in the city. The Local Authority will continue to bid to the £11.4bn Homes England Fund but this can only fund 30% of a property. Homes England Funding and Right to Buy receipts cannot be merged.

- Some properties lend themselves to conversion to multiple occupancy which often results in saturation zones that can have an impact on the community. The Article 4 Directive provides power to prevent further conversions in a particular area but does not prevent an individual purchasing and converting a property elsewhere.
- Data indicates that since the introduction of the Right to Buy scheme, Local Authority housing stock has reduced from c37% to c13% but the number of privately owned properties in the city has not increased. Instead, private rented properties have increased but there are no controls on what an individual does when they own a property.
- If the Local Authority purchase a former council property to rent it is protected for ten years. If the council tenant seeks to exercise the Right to Buy in the first ten years, they will have to pay the full rate that the Local Authority paid, after the ten years they will be entitled to purchase at the discounted rate.

AGREED:

- The Commission noted the report.
- The Commission to be updated if successful progress in bringing forward private sites for development.
- The Commission recommended the action plan be reviewed to make the status of items clearer.
- Item to remain on the work programme for updates on the Action Plan.

67. WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair noted it was the final meeting of the municipal year and thanked Members for their contributions and officers for their work. Members were reminded that suggested items on the work programme would be taken forward for consideration and were encouraged to share ideas with the Director for Housing and Senior Governance Officer.

68. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 20.05.

Item 6

SCRUTINY COMMITTEES: TERMS OF REFERENCE

INTRODUCTION

Scrutiny Committees hold the Executive and partners to account by reviewing and scrutinising policy and practices. Scrutiny Committees will have regard to the Political Conventions and the Scrutiny Operating Protocols and Handbook in fulfilling their work.

The Overview Select Committee and each Scrutiny Commission will perform the role as set out in Article 8 of the Constitution in relation to the functions set out in its Terms of Reference.

Scrutiny Committees may:

- i. review and scrutinise the decisions made by and performance of the City Mayor, Executive, Committees and Council officers both in relation to individual decisions and over time.
- ii. develop policy, generate ideas, review and scrutinise the performance of the Council in relation to its policy objectives, performance targets and/or particular service areas.
- iii. question the City Mayor, members of the Executive, committees and Directors about their decisions and performance, whether generally in comparison with service plans and targets over a period of time, or in relation to their initiatives or projects.
- iv. make recommendations to the City Mayor, Executive, committees and the Council arising from the outcome of the scrutiny process.
- v. review and scrutinise the performance of other public bodies in the area and invite reports from them by requesting them to address the Scrutiny Committee and local people about their activities and performance; and
- vi. question and gather evidence from any person (with their consent). •

Annual report: The Overview Select Committee will report annually to Full Council on its work and make recommendations for future work programmes and amended working methods if appropriate. Scrutiny Commissions / committees will report from time to time as appropriate to Council.

The Scrutiny Committees which have currently been established by the Council in accordance with Article 8 of the Constitution are:

- Overview Select Committee (OSC)
- Adult Social Care Scrutiny Commission
- Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Commission (which also sits as the statutory Education Committee)

- Culture and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Commission
- Economic Development, Transport and Climate Emergency Scrutiny Commission
- Housing Scrutiny Commission
- Public Health and Health Integration Scrutiny Commission

The key work areas covered by each Scrutiny Commission are to be found here <https://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-council/decisions-meetings-and-minutes/overviewand-scrutiny>

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE

The Overview Select Committee **will:**

- Scrutinise the work of the City Mayor and Deputy City Mayors and areas of the Council's work overseen by them.
- Consider cross cutting issues such as monitoring of petitions
- Consider cross-cutting issues which span across Executive portfolios.
- Manage the work of Scrutiny Commissions where the proposed work is considered to have impact on more than one portfolio.
- Consider work which would normally be considered by a Scrutiny Commission but cannot be considered in time due to scheduling issues.
- Report annually to Council.
- Be responsible for overseeing the work of scrutiny and the commissions and to refer certain matters to particular commissions as appropriate.

SCRUTINY COMMISSIONS

Scrutiny Commissions **will:**

- Normally undertake overview of Executive work, reviewing items for Executive decision where it chooses.
- Engage in policy development within its remit.
- Normally be attended by the relevant Executive Member(s), who will be a standing invitee.
- Have their own work programme and may make recommendations to the Executive on work areas where appropriate.
- Consider requests by the Executive to carry forward items of work and report to the Executive as appropriate.
- Report on their work to Council from time to time as required.
- Be classed as specific Scrutiny Committees in terms of legislation but will refer cross cutting work to the OSC.

Housing Scrutiny Commission

Introduction to Housing

July 2023

Director of Housing



Housing

The overall aim of Leicester City Council's Housing Division is to provide a decent home within the reach of every citizen of Leicester. Under this aim the priorities for the HRA budget are:

- Providing Decent Homes
- Making our communities and neighbourhoods places where people want to live and keeping in touch with our tenants
- Making Leicester a low carbon city by improving the energy efficiency of homes
- Providing appropriate housing to match people's changing needs
- Making Leicester a place to do business by creating jobs and supporting the local economy

Housing Development

13



- HEDNA identified need for 786 additional new homes per year
- Loss of 350 homes RTB per year
- 6000 on waiting list
- Development of new Council Housing
- Over 1100 Council Homes delivered over last term
- Ongoing delivery of 1,500 new build and acquisitions

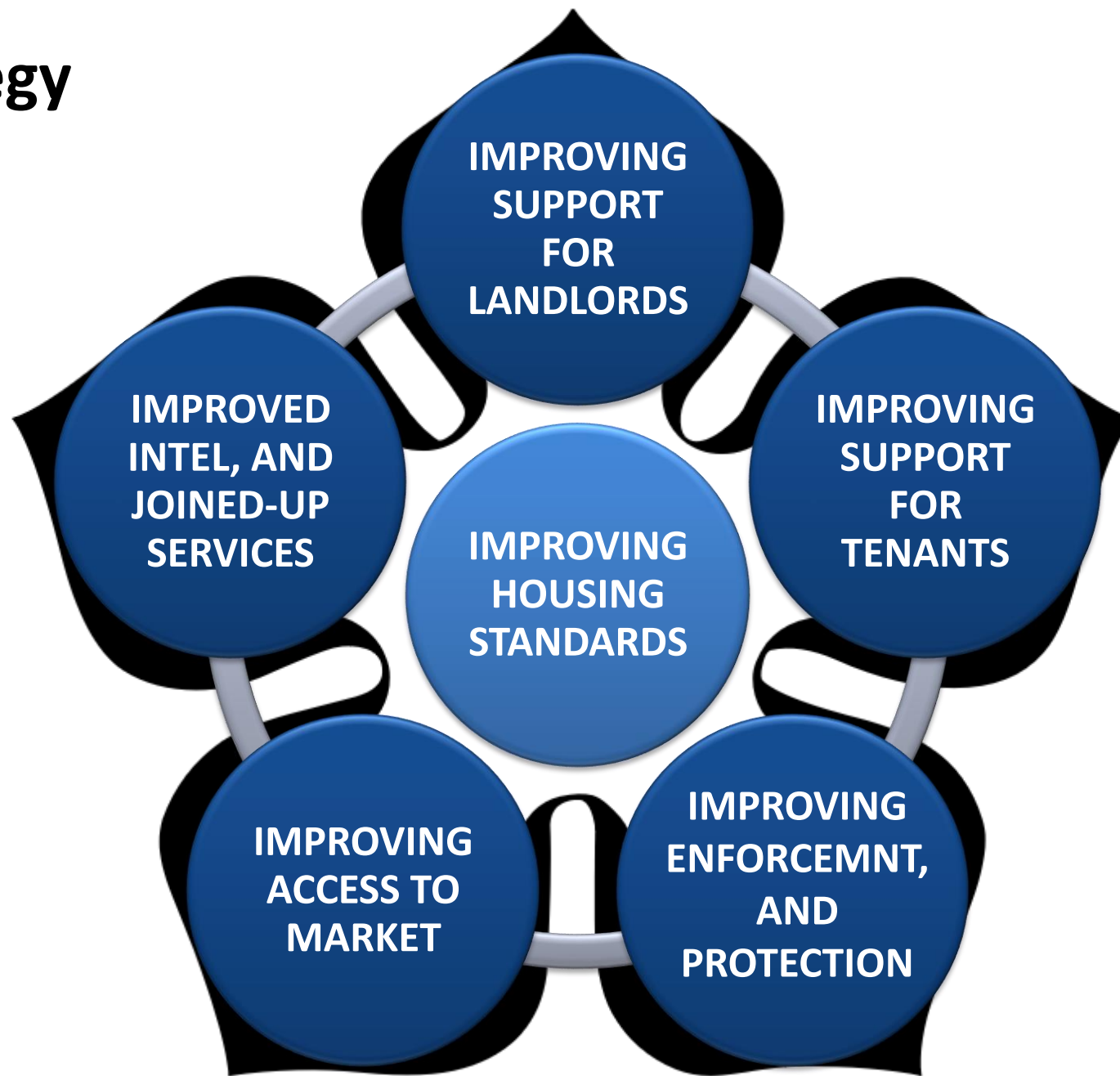
Homelessness Services

- Service Objective - to continue to deliver strong, effective homelessness functions to prevent, relieve and support the most vulnerable households facing homelessness.
- Commitment to work towards ending rough sleeping with a strong service offer and strategy over the next 3 years, supported by a successful bid of £2.3m.



Private Rented Sector Strategy

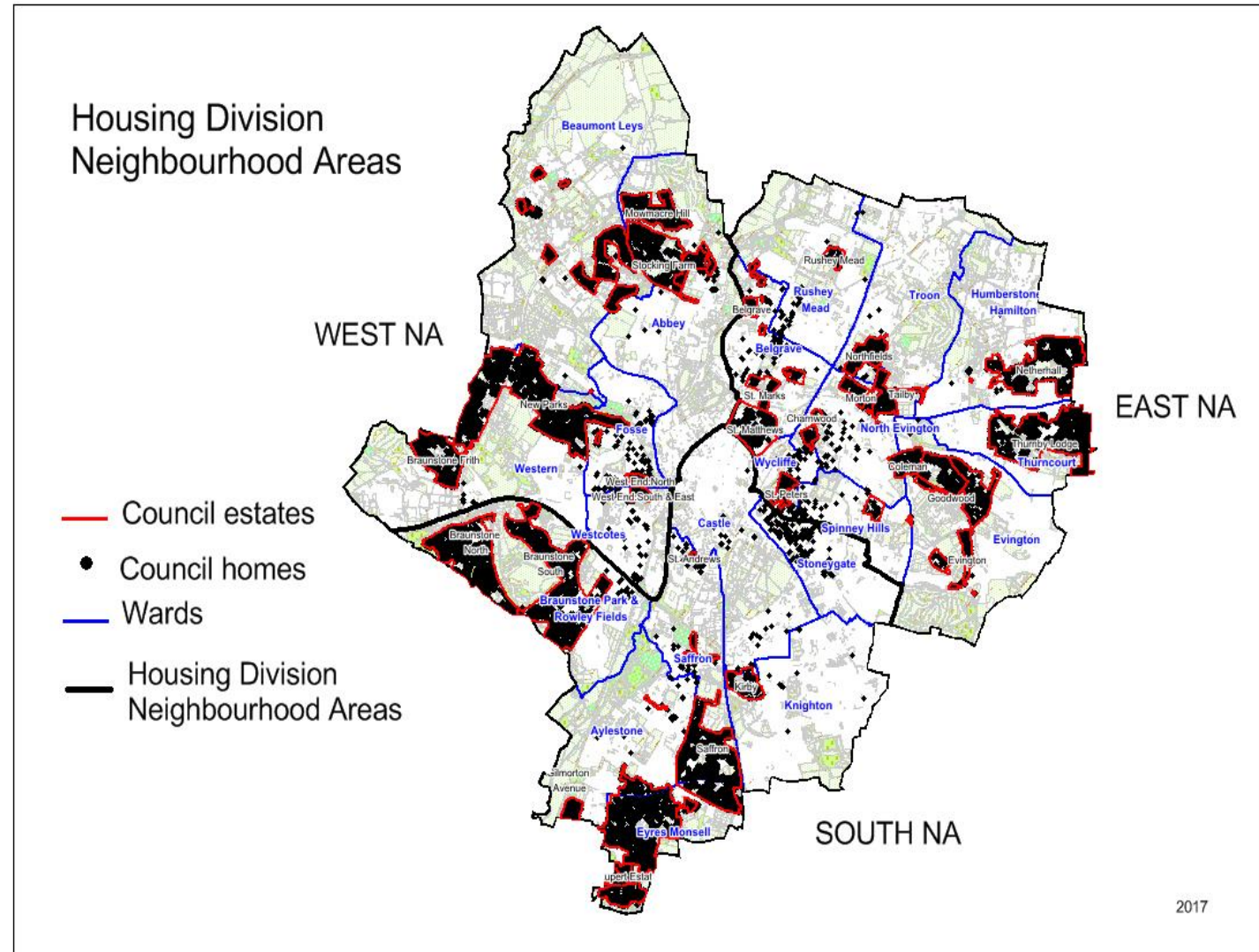
- Strategy led jointly by Housing, Neighbourhood and Environment, and Planning.
- Overarching aim to improve housing standards and conditions in the sector.



Support for Tenants

£90m in income collected every year- Funding:

- Support for tenants from Tenancy Management, STAR and the Income Management Team to sustain tenancies
- Partnership working with ASC, health, Children's services around safeguarding and health needs



Investing in Council Housing

- Investment into Council Housing through the capital programme every year
- 91,000 repair jobs completed annually
- Over 800 Void properties brought up to the 'decent home standard' every year
- Major refurbishment programme
- Environmental and communal works
- £4m invested in Public Realm Improvement Programme
- Estate improvements



Housing Senior Management Team

Contacts and Key Responsibility Areas



Chris Burgin
Director of Housing
0116 454 5143



Simon Nicholls
Head of Service
0116 454 5273



Gurjit Minhas
Head of Service
0116 454 5144



Caroline Carpendale
Head of Service
0116 454 1701



Zenab Valli
Head of Service
0116 454 3573



Charlotte McGraw
Head of Service
0116 454 5167



Joanne Russell
Head of Service
0116 454 0245



Sam Taylor
Head of Service
0116 454 0674

- Capital Investment
- New House Building and Acquisitions
- Home Improvement Team
- Housing Development
- Building Services
- Quality Control

- Districts – East
- Districts – West
- Districts – South
- Gypsy & Travellers Site Managements
- STAR (HRA)
- STAR (AMAL)

- Families Homelessness Housing Options
- Single Homelessness & Housing Options
- Rough Sleeping & Outreach

- Income Management Team
- Housing Administration
- Housing Transformation Team
- Programme Management – HTP/NEC
- Training Centre of Excellence, Apprentices, NIO Scheme

- Housing Registration & Allocations
- Property Lettings & Leicester Home Choice
- Private Rented Sector
- Fleet – Transport (Maintenance)
- Corporate Fleet
- Empty Homes
- Asylum

- Voids
- Housing Repairs & Maintenance
- Home Maintenance – Handyperson Service
- Gas
- Stores (including DCI team)

Adaptations
Housing Register
Fleet maintenance
Ukraine refugee support
Repairs and maintenance
Property lettings
Rent collection
Leaseholder management
Homeless services
Fire safety
Gypsy and traveller site management
Tenancy management
Tackling ASB
Sheltered housing
Void repairs
Tenant involvement
Tenancy support
Passenger transport service
Housing advice
Temporary accommodation
New build and acquisitions
Support for rough sleepers
Private rented sector advice
Building safety
Private rented sector advice
Environmental improvements
Homelessness Strategy
Private Rented Sector Strategy
Tenancy Strategy
Overcrowding Strategy
Adaptations Strategy



Changes to the Regulation of Social Housing

Housing Scrutiny Commission: 11 July 2024

Assistant Mayor for Housing: Cllr Cutkelvin

Lead Director: Chris Burgin, Director of Housing

Report Author: Nick Griffiths

1. Summary – Purpose of report

1.1 This report provides an update on the changes taking place in the regulation of social housing.

1.2 Executive Summary

1.2.1 In July 2023 the Social Housing Act received royal consent. The Act has cross party support and strengthens the powers of the Social Housing Regulator. It introduces consumer standards that all social housing providers are required to meet and will be measured against.

1.2.2 The legislation places key functions of social housing, including complaints, delivered by other parts of the council on a statutory footing. The regulator will be carrying out inspections of social housing providers, which have already started on a risk-based approach. The increased powers of the regulator include, audits, enquiries, penalty notices, transfer of stock, and censure of local authority employees.

1.2.3 The legislation is in response to tragedies such as Grenfell and the consumer standards that social landlords will now be audited against are:

- Safety and Quality Standard
- Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard
- Neighbourhood and Community Standard
- Tenancy Standard

1.2.4 The regulator at this stage is testing its methods and will be more interested in action plans landlords develop to improve services. The Housing Division has carried out a self-assessment and a comprehensive action plan has been developed. Work is underway to deliver the required change to ensure the Housing Division complies with the standards.

1.2.5 There is limited funding for social landlords to carry out the regulatory changes required. One of the key areas that we need to strengthen is communication. Initial work has started to develop a formal engagement strategy, to ensure tenants are aware of how to be involved in shaping the services we provide.

2. Background

2.1 The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 has significantly increased the role and powers of the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) to create a more proactive management regime for all providers of social housing. The Act also introduced a set of consumer standards which the RSH will use to assess performance and outcomes for customers. All social landlords are now subject to regulation from 1 April 2024, regardless of size, location or type.

2.2 It is important to note that in the same way as the Housing Division must comply with other pieces of legislation such as the Housing Acts (1985,

1996) and the Landlord and Tenant Act (1985), it must also comply with the consumer standards and regulatory regime. This applies to corporate services delivered on behalf of housing service e.g., Complaints and Customer Services.

- 2.3 During the passage of the Act through parliament, it received cross party support. Indeed, the aims were agreed by the select committee (chaired by Clive Betts MP) and the indications are that none of the main parties will be proposing any changes to the regulations in their manifestos, instead the focus will be on the supply of housing and the planning system.
- 2.4 Many of the provisions in the Act are responses to the tragedies of the 2017 Grenfell Tower fire and death of two-year old Awaab Ishak, who died in 2020 from exposure to serious mould. Additionally, the Secretary of State has recently written to several landlords to set out that their responses to complaints are seriously lacking.
- 2.5 Significantly, the Act puts the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code on a statutory footing, meaning that the way complaints are dealt with is no longer a matter of local decision making.
- 2.6 It is important to note that the RSH do not expect perfection on day one. The RSH is well aware that this is a journey for all landlords. The important thing is that we know where we are and what we need to do to achieve the standard and that the regulator has confidence that a provider is able to deliver on actions in a timely manner.
- 2.7 The regulatory changes should be considered in the context of available funding (which is conspicuous by its absence). It is inevitable over the coming years that difficult choices will have to be made in terms of budgets as some of the requirements and proposals will require resources and/or investment in services. These include the need to have accurate stock data on every home at an individual level, the need to hold accurate demographic data on tenants and the competency standard which will require providers to ensure that staff are trained, developed and in some cases hold recognised qualifications.
- 2.8 Going forward it is expected that councils with a HRA will need to meet the increase in regulatory requirements from existing budgets, which we know are under significant pressure.

3. The Consumer Standards

- 3.1 A set of revised customer standards came into force on 1 April 2024, alongside the new approach to customer regulation.
- 3.2 There are four standards which set out the expectations of the RSH, together with a revised Code of Practice. The standards are:
 - Safety and Quality Standard
 - Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard

- Neighbourhood and Community Standard
- Tenancy Standard

3.3 In broad terms, the standards cover the following:

3.3.1 Safety and Quality Standard:

- Have an accurate record at individual property level of the condition of all the homes LCC owns and manages.
- Meet the decent homes standard.
- Meet all H&S requirements (the “big six”, (although electrical safety is not expressly set out, it is implied)
- Carry out repairs, improvements and planned programmes.
- Deliver adaptation services.

3.3.2 Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard

- Treat all customers with fairness and respect, this includes prospective tenants (everyone on the housing register)
- Ensure that services are accessible and are tailored to meet the diverse needs of tenants and also know who is living in the properties by collecting and keeping up to date demographic information.
- Engage with tenants and take their views into account when designing and delivering services (and be able to evidence and demonstrate this).
- Provide information to tenants about how services are delivered and what they can expect from us as a landlord.
- Collect and provide information to tenants to allow effective scrutiny of services.
- Have a fair and accessible complaint process (which falls in line with the Housing Ombudsman’s code of guidance).

3.3.3 Neighbourhood and Community Standard

- Co-operate locally.
- Deal with ASB and hate crime.
- Tackle domestic abuse and provide effective support services.

3.3.4 Tenancy Standard

- Allocate homes fairly.
- Support tenants to maintain and sustain tenancies.
- Offer tenancies to ensure efficient use of stock and meet statutory requirements when doing so.
- Support tenants to mutually exchange.

3.4 Please note, there are further amendments to the standards which are based on legislative changes in due course, such as Awaab’s Law,

professionalisation & competency and Decent Homes. The government are able to make further direction in the future on these and other matters, if not already incorporated into the standards and inspection regime, they will be added at a later date.

3.5 Code of Practice

3.5.1 Sitting alongside the standards is a code of practice, while the code is not a binding requirement, landlords need to have “due regard” to the code when delivering services and when assessing if they are meeting the standards.

4. Inspections

- 4.1 As part of the regulatory regime all landlords will be subject to regular, cyclical inspections. Initial indications are that these will be approximately four years apart, but where there are identified shortcomings, it is likely that repeat inspection will be held on a more frequent basis. While not operating in the same way as the now defunct Audit Commission, there are some comparisons which can be drawn in the proposed inspection process.
- 4.2 Inspections have started and are being conducted on a risk-based approach. Given we have a high level of stock we anticipate being early in that cycle of inspections. We remain ungraded until that point.
- 4.3 Inspections will be outcome based. RSH will be looking for assurance that standards are being met or worked towards. They will look at the role of SMT and elected members, and how they scrutinise services by using meaningful information on performance and other indicators. The RSH expects that landlords can demonstrate how tenants’ views are at the heart of decision making, and how the governance structure ensure this happens and receives assurance of universal service delivery.
- 4.4 Inspections will be bespoke to each landlord, but there will be two core areas aligned to the consumer standards:
 - Service Outcomes
 - Transparency, influence and accountability
- 4.5 The RSH will grade each landlord from C1 to C4, with C1 and C2 being complaint, C3 being requiring improvements and C4 where the landlord is in serious detriment. These grades are aligned to the current governance (G) and viability (V) ratings the RSH gives to Housing Associations.
- 4.6 Where a landlord does not meet the standard, the RSH will look for evidence that they are aware of the gap and assurance that there is an adequate plan in place to meet the expectation. Where a landlord is not meeting the standards, the regulator will act to protect the interests of customers.

5. Enforcement Powers

5.1 Where a landlord is failing to meet a standard (or they are likely to fail to meet), there are a range of new powers available to the RSH. The landlord is also required to self-refer if in its own assessment it is not compliant with the standards. It is likely that the regulator will take an incremental approach to enforcement, by working with landlords to remedy any failings before more draconian measures are taken, unless the failing is of such a serious nature that there is no confidence the landlord was able to rectify the matter where swift intervention may be necessary. The powers are:

5.2 **Property Survey** - Applicable to all providers.

5.2.1 This power allows the regulator to authorise a person to enter a home managed by a landlord to carry out a survey of the property where the RSH suspects that the landlord is failing to maintain the premises to the required standard. The RSH can make the provider pay the costs of this survey.

5.3 **Inspections** - Applicable to all providers.

5.3.1 This allows the regulator to carry out inspections, to enter premises at reasonable times and to inspect documents and computer records.

5.4 **Inquiry and extraordinary audit** - Applicable to all providers.

5.4.1 The power to hold an inquiry will be used where the regulators suspect that:

- the affairs of the registered provider may have been mismanaged,
- the registered provider has failed to meet a standard under section 193, 194 or 194C¹ of the Act; or
- there is a risk that, if no action is taken by the regulator or the registered provider, the registered provider will fail to meet a standard under section 193, 194 or 194C of the Act.

5.4.2 If the provider meets the ground for an inquiry, no additional ground is needed to carry out an audit. An audit can be carried out as a standalone in the following circumstances:

- there is a material mis-statement in the accounts.
- the accounts have been qualified.
- a PRP's solvency is in doubt.
- there may have been a fraud; or

¹ S193 – standards relating to consumer matters.
S194 – standards relating to economic matters.
S194C – standards relating to information and transparency.

- auditors have raised matters of serious concern, for example in their management letter.
- There may be other circumstances where an extraordinary audit is considered necessary.

5.4.3 There is no right of appeal. Some powers can only be exercised during or following an inquiry. For local authorities these are transfer of management functions and censuring an employee.

5.5 Performance improvement plans - Applicable to all providers.

5.5.1 Where a provider has failed to meet a standard, or there is a risk of failing a standard or the provider has self-referred and failed to improve, the regulator can issue a performance improvement plan notice requiring the organisation to draw up a performance improvement plan (PIP).

5.5.2 The PIP will be considered by the regulator and can agree to it or suggest changes which the provider must comply with. There is an appeal process through the High Court.

5.6 Enforcement notices - Applicable to all providers.

5.6.1 The regulator can issue a notice which requires the landlord to take action or actions and will be where a landlord has failed to meet a standard, failed to comply with any enforcement notice or other serious failing. There is a right of appeal through the High Court.

5.7 Emergency remedial action - Applicable to all providers

5.7.1 This power enables the regulator to authorise an appropriate person ('authorised person') to enter social housing premises to undertake emergency remedial action. It is likely that this will be used in conjunction with the power to carry out a survey and will be used in circumstances where there is an urgent need to do a repair or make good a serious defect. There is a right of appeal through the High Court

5.8 Penalties - Applicable to all providers

5.8.1 The regulator can impose unlimited penalties (fine) on a provider where a failing has been identified. The failings are the same as listed under the section on enforcement notices (above). There is a right of appeal through the High Court.

5.9 Management tender- Applicable to all providers.

- 5.9.1 The regulator can make a landlord tender all or some of its functions. This means that if all the functions have to be tendered, then effectively the management will pass to another organisation (likely be a housing association) or it could be one part of the function, for example repairs or cleaning services. There is a right of appeal through the High Court
- 5.10 **Management transfer** - Applicable to all providers.
- 5.10.1 This power allows the regulator to order a provider to transfer all or some of its functions to a specified person (transferee manager). This power can only be used following an inquiry or extraordinary audit.
- 5.10.2 Under this power, the regulator will identify the transferee manager and appoint them based on the specific needs of the functions which are being transferred. There is a right of appeal through the High Court.
- 5.11 **Appointment of advisers to local authorities** - Applicable to Local Authorities only.
- 5.11.1 The regulator can appoint (or require to be appointed) one or more advisers to assist the LA in managing all of the social housing function or some parts of that function.
- 5.11.2 There is no statutory right of appeal in this power, but the local authority can use the Regulators Appeal Scheme.
- 5.12 **Censure of local authority employees** - Applicable to Local Authorities only.
- 5.12.1 This power enables the regulator to issue a censure notice to a local authority identifying an employee or agent who has contributed to failures during or following an inquiry under Section 206 of the Act. The local authority can then decide whether to take action against such individuals, as this is outside of the regulator's remit.
- 5.12.2 The regulator may issue more than one censure notice in relation to the same failure, but only one employee or agent can be named in each censure notice. This power can only be used during or after an inquiry.
- 5.13 As can be seen the powers are wide ranging and are focused on the consumer standards and customer outcomes. It is vital that landlords are able to demonstrate that they are meeting the standards with clear evidence. The RSH will not accept a policy statement or a process document, they will be looking to see how the landlord measures how services are delivered and want to hear "we know it's working, and this is how we know".

- 5.14 The RSH also expects that there is clear oversight by members / lead member of performance.
- 5.15 As the Ombudsman is now under a regulatory footing, failure to action an order issued by the Housing Ombudsman can result in the regulator taking enforcement action.

6. Preparation.

- 6.1 In terms of the revised consumer standards, although they came into force in April 2024, a baseline self-assessment was carried out in Q4 of 2023/24. The draft assessment against each standard has been assigned to a Head of Service to lead on and they will now look at the outcomes, consider the findings which have been fed into the action plan.
- 6.2 We also need to be able to analyse and submit complaints data, performance data and feedback from tenants on access and delivery of services.
- 6.3 This will be overseen by an internal RSH Project Board that has been set up and Chaired by the Director of Housing and will tie into a series of service improvement areas that are inter-related and cross cutting. The board will also ensure that the requisite consultation and engagement with the Tenant and Leasehold Forum is carried out.

7. Performance

- 7.1 In relation to performance, we collect data from all key housing service areas, which will be submitted to the regulator. Some of areas demonstrate particularly high performance, 93% of tenants are satisfied when a repair has been completed, which is a great achievement when you consider **104,860k** repairs were carried out over the last year. Feedback from this process is fed directly back to the service.
- 7.2 In addition, our Housing Officers have carried out **1,623** welfare visits to check on tenants and the STAR service provides wraparound person-centred support for our most vulnerable tenants. This is reflected in high tenancy sustainment rates at 95% and high rent collection which is at 98.5%. Where we have been able to invest, we see direct evidence of customer satisfaction.
- 7.3 Where we are aware of specific issues in particular wards, we have responded immediately by putting in multi-agency action plans. Please find below examples of work completed.

7.4 The Burns Flats

The work on the Burns Flats in the New Parks area is an example of where the Housing Service responded effectively to the concerns of tenants and ward Cllrs. The housing service was made aware of the need for improvements. The service developed a wide-ranging action plan to improve external and internal areas within the buildings.

- Setting up a programme to review and improve the standard of cleaning, including regular deep cleans.
- Procuring additional bin stores
- Starting a programme to replace soil vent pipes.
- Clearing guttering
- Setting up a programme to review balconies.

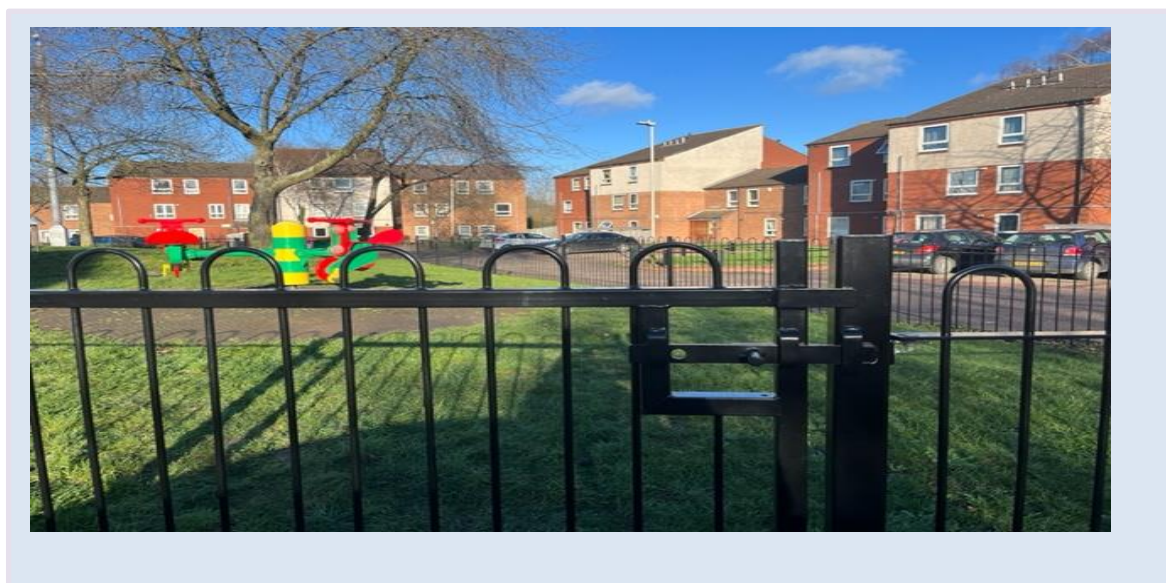
The Burns Flats

Refurbishing the community rooms and handing it back to the tenants so that a new Burns Flat Tenant's Association could be set up!



Neston Gardens in Saffron is another example of where when we had complaints of drug use around the blocks in 2022. Housing and community safety staff went door to door to reassure tenants and introduced a local letting policy until the problems in the area settled down. We also got the Police Design out Crime Officer out to assist us with improving security on the estate to prevent further issues. Ward and

environmental budget funding was used to secure the play area for children on the estate.



8.7 We regularly attend patch walks and site visits independently or when requested by residents. Tenants in council areas have expressed their appreciation of the work that has been carried out on estates across the city, as indicated in the compliment received below.

May I take this opportunity to extend my total gratitude for all the sterling work that you in particular, and your team have done to improve the standards and aesthetics of the area in which I live.

8. Self-Assessment.

- 8.1 In Q4 of 2023/24 a baseline self-assessment against the proposed standards was carried out.
- 8.2 The interim analysis shows that out of 69 specific expectations, we can demonstrate, with evidence, that we are 13% fully compliant. There are a further 36 areas (52%) where we are working towards compliance. It should be noted that we have judged ourselves critically in order to ensure that we pick up everything we can do to prepare for an inspection.
- 8.3 The assessment against each standard has been assigned to a Head of Service to lead on and they will now look at the draft outcomes, consider the findings and collate the necessary action plan.

- 8.4 The service analysis and improvement will feed into an overall action plan, which will be presented to the Tenant and Leasehold forum to be discussed, and the priorities agreed.

9 Improvement Plan

- 9.1 The action plan is being overseen by the RSH Project Board and will tie into a series of service improvement areas that are inter-related and cross cutting. Initial improvement work has already started on some areas in relation to communal cleaning and estate maintenance.
- 9.2 Each of the standards has been assigned to a Head of Service to lead on:
- Safety and Quality, Simon Nicholls
 - Transparency, Influence and Accountability (TIA), Charlotte McGraw
 - Neighbourhood and Community, Gurjit Kaur Minhas
 - Tenancy Standard, Gurjit Kaur Minhas
- 9.3 The headline focus for each workstream can be summarised as:
- 9.3.1 Safety and Quality will focus on stock data and information on the condition of assets. Work on this took place during 2022/2023 when the service was reviewed. A new team is currently being recruited to commence individual inspections in 2024.
- 9.3.2 TIA will concentrate on two main themes. Firstly, ensuring services are delivered to meet the diverse needs in the City, and secondly that tenants are involved and engaged with the landlord function
- 9.3.3 Neighbourhood and Community's focus will be ensuring that the centralised ASB service delivered by the Community Safety team is compliant with the standard.
- 9.3.4 The tenancy standard is broadly compliant with the requirements, and the focus will be ensuring that the evidence base is robust.
- 9.4 In addition to the individual standards, there are several across-cutting themes which have been identified, which are:
- Policy review.
 - Accessibility of services for customers.
 - Ensuring the KPI suite is fit for purpose.
 - Reviewing the staff induction and training plans.
- 9.5 Work is underway on all of these themes, and in some cases has been carried out as part of business as usual.

10 Improving Perception and Satisfaction

- 10.1 The action plan itself will address key areas that will impact on perception and satisfaction levels.

- We are developing a communication strategy that will look at innovative ways of promoting what we do well. We are aware there have been issues with communicating with tenants with an increase in online service provision and a decline in attendance at ward meetings, especially in areas where we have council housing.
- We are also developing an engagement strategy to improve how we involve tenants in shaping housing services. We currently have the Tenant's Forum, excellent work already happens on estates with consultation on local services the Environmental Budget, the Public Realm Work and now engagement around fire safety in tall buildings.

10.2 Work has already started to address the gaps identified as follows:

- Customer Care training is being procured and rolled out for housing staff this year.
- We are working with Customer Services to improve the service they provide to tenants on the call lines.
- A review of cleaning in the communal areas has commenced and the SLA for housing services is being reviewed.
- The environmental budget is being used to replace bin stores in key areas where issues have been identified.
- The ASB service has been realigned and resources are being reviewed. The service has already improved access to services and provided one single point of contact for council tenants.
- The ground maintenance contract is being reviewed and tenants are now involved in closer scrutiny of the work that is carried out.
- Housing surgeries around the city to improve access to housing officers and more clarity is being provided about their role.

11 Resource Implications

- 11.1 As set out above, adherence to the consumer standards is not optional. This will inevitably mean that there will be a need to review how the Housing Division delivers services and ensures that they are accessible to all customers.
- 11.2 Failure to meet the standards will result in the RSH taking action against the council which could, in the worst-case scenario result in the forced transfer of services to another provider, or the entire housing division being turned into a housing association. However, the RSH has indicated that it will work with providers who are not meeting the standards to assist them to improve.
- 11.3 It is clear that no landlord will be fully compliant with all of the standards on day 1. Indeed, the RSH has openly stated that they are aware of the diversity of organisational type and the challenges they each face in the sector. The expectation is that landlords know where their strengths and weaknesses are and have robust plans in place to drive improvements.
- 11.4 There are resource implications to many of the requirements which will put additional pressure on the HRA for subsequent years.

- 11.5 From the initial self-assessment, the current involvement and engagement structure does not fully meet the requirements, and this is seen as a priority area. The role of tenants in the decision-making process and scrutiny of performance is vital to successful delivery of landlord services. During the next 12-18 months there will be a need to resource this area of work and ensure that the division is compliant.
- 11.6 In addition, the conduct and competency standard will require a more co-ordinated and focussed approach to staff development and training. The need for senior staff to obtain a recognised qualification will not only have a financial cost but will also mean that staff are absent from work when they are completing studies.
- 11.7 There are some workstream areas where the housing division may need to deviate from the current corporate approach which might require some duplication or parallel processes.

12 Governance

- 12.1 The regulatory regime is based on assurance and evidence. As such, all landlords need to ensure that their governance structures are fit for purpose and information and data is readily available for scrutiny.
- 12.2 The expectation is that landlords are open in their approach to publishing additional performance and management information.

13 Implications

13.1 Financial Implications

The subscription fee payable to the regulator is circa £106K, with an additional £156,585.00 in Ombudsman fees for the 2024/2025 year which has been built into the HRA revenue budget. The cost of work associated with compliance with the regulations will, in the first instance, need to be absorbed within existing budgets. As workstreams become established, shortfalls in resource may emerge, and budgetary pressures may need consideration within future HRA budgets.

Stuart McAvoy – Head of Finance

13.2 Legal Implications

As detailed in the report, the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 introduces provisions for an increase in the regulation of social landlords and for protecting tenants from serious hazards in their homes.

Elements of the legislation are already in force with further regulations to follow.

Jeremy Rainbow – Principal Lawyer (Litigation)

13.3 Climate Emergency Implications

There are no significant climate emergency implications directly associated with this report.

Aidan Davis, Sustainability Officer, Ext 37 2884

13.4 Equality Implications

Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which means that, in carrying out their functions, they have a statutory duty to pay due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.

Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

The report provides an update on the changes taking place in the regulation of social housing which should lead to improved outcomes for tenants/customers, who will be from across a range of protected characteristics. The Act aims to drive landlords' compliance with the consumer standards by empowering the regulator with new enforcement powers to tackle failing landlords. The Act will implement a set of policy measures to ensure that tenants know how their landlord is performing and are able to hold them to account, these include ensuring customers are treated with respect and fairness and ensuring diverse needs are met in the city. This would ensure that we take into account the demographic profile of Leicester, including protected characteristics.

The council need to ensure that equality considerations continue to be taken into account across the four standards and related workstreams and where changes are to be implemented, it is recommended that Equality Impact Assessments are undertaken as appropriate.

Sukhi Biring, Equalities Officer

Rent Arrears Report

April 2023 to March 2024

Housing Scrutiny Commission: 11 July 2024

Assistant Mayor for Housing: Cllr Elly Cutkelvin
Lead Director: Chris Burgin

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: ALL
- Report author: Zenab Valli
- Author contact details: Zenab.valli@leicester.gov.uk Tel: 0116 4543573
- Report version number: v.1.3

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform the Members of the Scrutiny Commission on the rent arrears progress within the general housing stock, over the full financial year, from April 2023 to March 2024.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The report is for information and Members are asked to note the contents of the report.

3. SUMMARY

- 3.1 At the end of the financial year (31st March 2024) the cash amount outstanding was **£1.974m**, for current tenant rent arrears within the general housing stock. This is **14% higher** than at the same point in the previous financial year, and this increase was anticipated and projected in last year's annual rent report. Like many Social Landlords nationally, the team faced significant challenges in collecting rent and service charges, due to the cost-of-living crisis which continues to impact tenants' financial circumstances. Notwithstanding, the rent arrears are much lower when compared to other Local Authorities with similar stock, and the team have managed to control rent arrears from increasing to unmanageable amounts and continued with sustaining tenancies despite the economic pressures. (See 4.4, Table 1 & 2).
- 3.2 The proportion of rent collected between April and March 2024 was **98.54%**. The figure reflects a rolling 52-week performance and demonstrates the hard work and tremendous efforts made by the team in maximising rent collection.
- 3.3 The team supported tenants to apply for Discretionary Housing Payments. A total **£201,403** was paid in awards for all qualifying Council tenants. This is a 49% decrease in awards compared to the previous financial year as the DWP grant was substantially reduced compared to previous years. (See 4.32 & 4.33)
- 3.4 The team processed Household Support Fund applications to award **£500k** worth of housing costs to tenants affected by the cost-of-living crisis. A total of **572 tenants** were supported by this scheme and **50% were disabled households**. A combined total of **540 children** living within these tenancies benefited from this support. A further **5,108** tenants or **27%** of all Council tenants were supported with fuel, water costs, food, and white goods. Many tenants received multiple awards for different things. (See 4.34 to 4.37)

- 3.5 The total value of the top 500 cases at year-end 2023/24 was **higher** by over **18%** when compared to the same point in the previous year. We are seeing an upward trend on many more tenants not engaging and vulnerable tenants requiring intensive support. Efforts to engage tenants with complex needs takes a longer period and quite often they build up higher debts in the interim. (See 4.11 to 4.13 & Table 7 & 8)
- 3.6 By the end of the financial year 2023/24, a total number of **7,248** council tenants were claiming UC equating to **39%** of all current council tenants. This compares to **32%** of council tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit. By the end of the year a total of **55%** of tenants claiming UC were in rent arrears (see 4.17, Table 9).
- 3.7 The Rent Management Advisors (RMA) have been supporting tenants with welfare benefit claims. They received a total of **1,016 referrals** throughout the year, which is **8% higher** than at the same point in the previous year and **72%** of the households had some type of vulnerability. (See 4.23 to 4.31)
- 3.8 In the last financial year, **7 evictions** were carried out for non-payment of rent, and this figure compares to 5 in 2022/23 and 7 in 2021/22. Since April 2023, a total of **81 cases** were submitted to court for rental possessions which equates to an **average of 7 cases** per month and this compares to 80 court submissions in the year 2022/23. Pre-Covid, the average court submissions were around 80 cases per month which represents **92% annual reduction** in possession actions. (See 4.38 to 4.40)

4. REPORT

Current Tenant Rent Arrears

4.1 Current Rent Arrears at the end of each quarter for the financial year 2023/24:

Table 1. Quarterly Arrears

Period	Arrears at Quarter End
Quarter 1	£2,397,451
Quarter 2	£2,756,968
Quarter 3	£1,826,357
Quarter 4	£1,974,282

4.2 Comparison of year-end figures over the last four years:

Table 2. Financial Year End Figures

Period	Arrears at Financial Year End
2020/21	£1,799,863
2021/22	£1,576,981
2022/23	£1,724,846
2023/24	£1,974,282

4.3 Table 1 shows the cash amount owing at the end of each quarter in the last financial year. The arrears were higher at the start of the year and decreasing towards year-end which historically, are normal patterns and trends that are seen.

4.4 Table 2 shows the cash amount owing at week ending **31st March 2024**. The total arrears were **£1.974m**, which is over **14% higher** compared to the same point in the previous financial year, this increase is as anticipated and projected in last year's annual rent report. This figure does not represent non-dwelling properties.

Like many Social Landlords nationally, the team faced significant challenges in collecting rent and service charges due to the cost-of-living crisis which continues to impact tenants' financial circumstances. In March, the cyber incident affected the Councils IT systems, meaning that the team were unable to proactively collect rent, and tenants were unable to access the Housing Online systems: this resulted in delays to the expected rent payments. Overall, these factors have contributed and influenced the level of outstanding arrears. Notwithstanding, the rent arrears are much lower when compared to other Local Authorities with similar stock, and the team have managed to control rent arrears from increasing into unmanageable amounts and continued with sustaining tenancies despite the economic pressures.

4.5 ARCH (Association of Retained Council Housing) and the NFA (National Federation of ALMOs) together represent around 90 local authorities and ALMOs that manage 952,000 local authority homes across England. They collectively produced survey findings in August 2023, from data provided by local authorities and ALMOs across England which collectively manage around 294,000 local authority homes. A total of 85% of survey respondents reported **increased rent arrears since the start of the cost-of-living crisis**. In March 2022 a total of 97,220 households were in rent arrears, this had risen to 101,203 households in March 2023, a **4% increase** and the total **value of rent arrears** for the same period had risen to **11%**. This demonstrates the impact on rent arrears across the various authorities are very similar to the position in Leicester. The country is experiencing the worst cost-of-living crisis in decades. It is a crisis which is disproportionately affecting the poorest because inflation has driven up the cost of essentials and incomes having not kept up with the cost of living.

4.6 The proportion of rent collected between April and March 2024 was **98.54%**. The figure reflects a rolling 52-week performance and demonstrates the hard work and tremendous efforts made by the team in maximising rent collection. The rent collection figures for Leicester remains good in comparison with other authorities with only **38%** of our current tenants in rent arrears.

4.7 **The list below sets out a summary of some good working practices and achievements of the team.**

- Processed Household Support Fund applications to award **£500k** worth of housing costs to tenants affected by the cost-of-living crisis. A total of **572 tenants** were supported by this scheme and **50% were disabled households**. A combined total of **540 children** living within these tenancies benefited from this support.
- The team communicate with tenants in various ways to encourage rent payments, maximise rent collection and reduce rent arrears. A total of **44,140 telephone**

contacts were made or received by the team in the financial year 2023/24 including duplicated contacts made by the team to the same tenant, averaging 176 calls per working day.

- A further **7,719 text messages** were sent by the team to reach out to tenants for payment and support. This doesn't include the automated bulk texting facility.
- **Emails** were also sent and received to tenants and a total of 16,569 were sent and 10,244 were received which is a **combined total of 26,813** throughout the year, averaging 107 emails per working day.
- A total of **999 home visits** were completed to tenants' home which is an average of 4 visits per working day throughout the year.
- The team produced and issued **49,284 letters** throughout the year not including the system generated automated letters. This includes a combination of general rent payment reminder letters and invites to appointments alongside anything more serious where legal actions due to persistent non-payment is being considered. This equates to 196 letters per working day.
- We worked with the Councils IT department to develop the **Housing Online** system enabling tenants to access a breakdown of their service charges. This allows tenants to provide DWP a breakdown of their rent and service charges to support their Universal Credit applications and ensure claims can be updated and processed in a timely way. The system has been further enhanced allowing tenants to see any additional amounts owed in their sub-accounts for example warden or alarm charges.
- We referred over **330 tenants to the National Energy Action** who provide a single point of contact service for people with health conditions or vulnerabilities that put them at greater risk of being affected physically or mentally by the cold. The dedicated energy advisers provide tailored support to tenants with their energy bills, negotiating with energy suppliers, adding them to the Priority Services Register, if eligible, as well as long-term energy advice.
- Effective **partnership working** with the District Managers (Tenancy management) and the Repairs managers to agree decisions to progress complex cases and discuss any tenant issues which might be causing reasons to withhold rent payments.
- A joint approach and attendance at **Corporate Income Collection meetings** to identify any emerging patterns and trends impacting debt collection. Sharing performance information and good practice to ensure there is a consistent culture in corporate debt collection across the council.
- Continuing cross cutting and **multi-agency work on non-engagement cases** by utilising the strategies that were developed in the recent years. For example, applying internal system messages alerting all Housing staff that tenants need to engage with the team urgently. Enabling the tenants to discuss their position and offer proposals in writing opposed to speaking or meeting with us. Consulting with the tenancy management teams and police to carry out welfare checks or checking hospitals, Social Care, and prisons on tenant whereabouts.

- Frequent **complex case review meetings** with Manager and Team Leaders to explore serious arrears of more than £1,500. The meetings help produce a plan of action and kept the team challenged as the cases were overseen by management.
- An ongoing **emphasis on staff performance management** to ensure output and productivity is not affected whilst the service continues operating from home.

Number of Cases

4.8 The number of current tenants with rent arrears owing 7 weeks or more net rent is shown in tables 3 & 4 below:

Table 3. Breakdown of Arrears Cases by Quarter end 2023-24

Period	Owing 7 Weeks or more Net
Quarter 1	1,167
Quarter 2	1,317
Quarter 3	913
Quarter 4	862

Where no net rent is payable (i.e. on full benefit), full rent used as a default value to calculate number of weeks owing)

Table 4. Breakdown of Arrears Cases by Year End

Period	Owing 7 Weeks or more Net
2020/21	1,431
2021/22	956
2022/23	968
2023/24	862

4.9 The number of cases in arrears owing 7 weeks or more net rent, **decreased by 11%** over the previous year end figure. The 7-week arrears include lower amounts of net rent, so this is not a true reflection of the serious debt cases.

Average Arrears Per Debtor

4.10 The total arrears divided by the total number of tenants in rent arrears at the specified intervals are shown in tables 5 & 6 below:

Table 5. Average Arrears per Debtor by Quarter End 2023/24

Period	Average Arrears
Quarter 1	£285.21
Quarter 2	£309.67
Quarter 3	£256.62
Quarter 4	£273.79

Table 6. Average Arrears per Debtor by Financial Year End

Period	Average Arrears
2020/21	£264.10
2021/22	£233.14
2022/23	£246.94
2023/24	£273.79

4.11 Table 5 shows the average arrears fluctuated at each quarter end and Table 6 demonstrates, by year end they were **higher** by almost **11%** compared to the previous year end which correlates with the increase in the value of the rent arrears.

This figure is variable depending on the number of tenants in arrears at any given time. The increase is reflective of the number of tenants in rent arrears at year end which had increased slightly from **37% to 38%** when compared to the previous year 2022-23. The increase is not concerning at this stage and was expected due to the current challenges tenants are facing due to the cost-of-living crisis.

Top 500 Arrears Cases (by value)

4.12 Table 7 & 8 (below) shows the top 500 accounts with the highest arrears and total value of arrears at the end of each quarter and year end regardless of tenants payment methods.

Table 7. Top 500 Arrears Cases by Quarter End

Quarter End 2023/24	Highest Case	Lowest Case	Average	Total Value
Quarter 1	£3,913	£807	£1,133	£566,355
Quarter 2	£5,435	£877	£1,286	£642,931
Quarter 3	£5,971	£749	£1,160	£579,845
Quarter 4	£5,889	£717	£1,101	£550,651

Table 8. Top 500 Arrears Cases by Year End

Period	Highest Case	Lowest Case	Average	Total Value
2020/21	£7,211	£706	£1,296	£647,951
2021/22	£3,569	£607	£940	£470,151
2022/23	£3,009	£650	£930	£464,865
2023/24	£5,889	£717	£1,101	£550,651

4.13 Table 7 shows that the total value of top arrears cases **decreased by almost 3%** at year-end when compared to quarter 1. The total value figures within this table have been relatively stable throughout the year except for a slight peak at the end of Quarter 2.

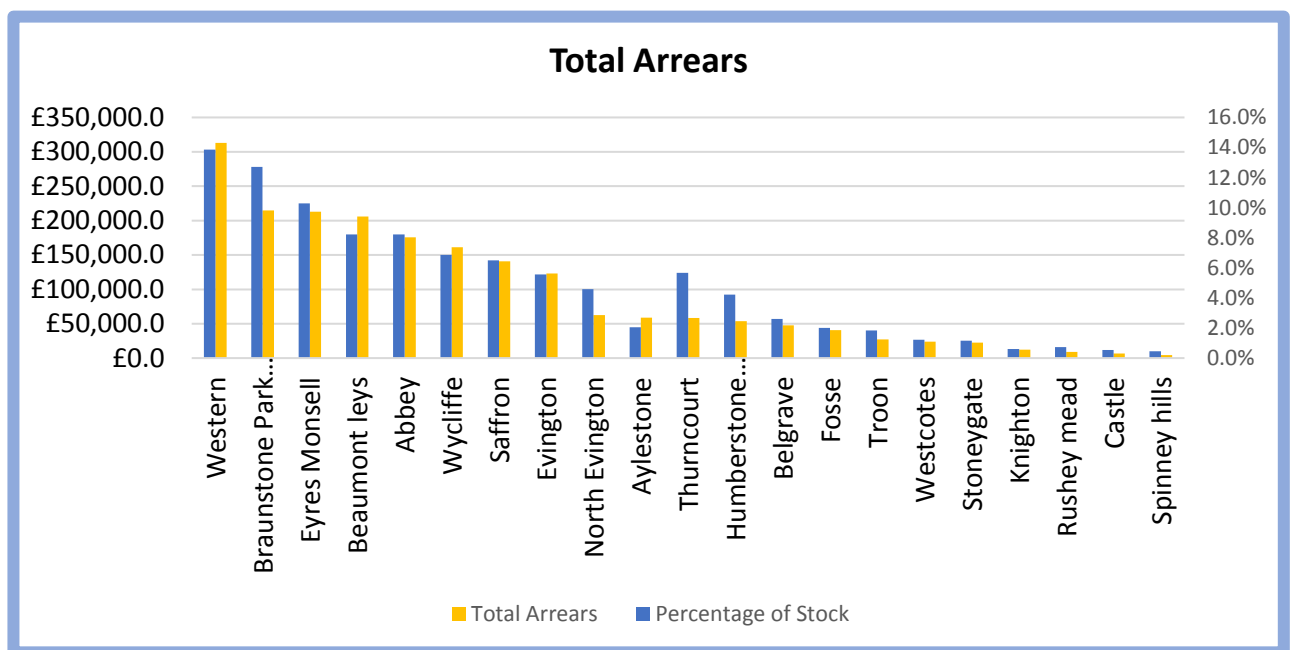
4.14 Table 8 shows the total value of the top 500 cases at year-end 2023/24 was **higher by over 18%** when compared to the same point in the previous year. We are seeing an upward trend on many more tenants not engaging and vulnerable tenants

requiring intensive support. Efforts to engage tenants with complex needs takes a longer period and quite often they build up higher debts in the interim. The team work collaboratively and in partnership with other advice agencies and internal departments to help achieve positive outcomes and resolutions for tenants. At times, these serious cases are also influenced by courts, preventing the team from taking possession actions until such time the court orders.

Arrears by Ward

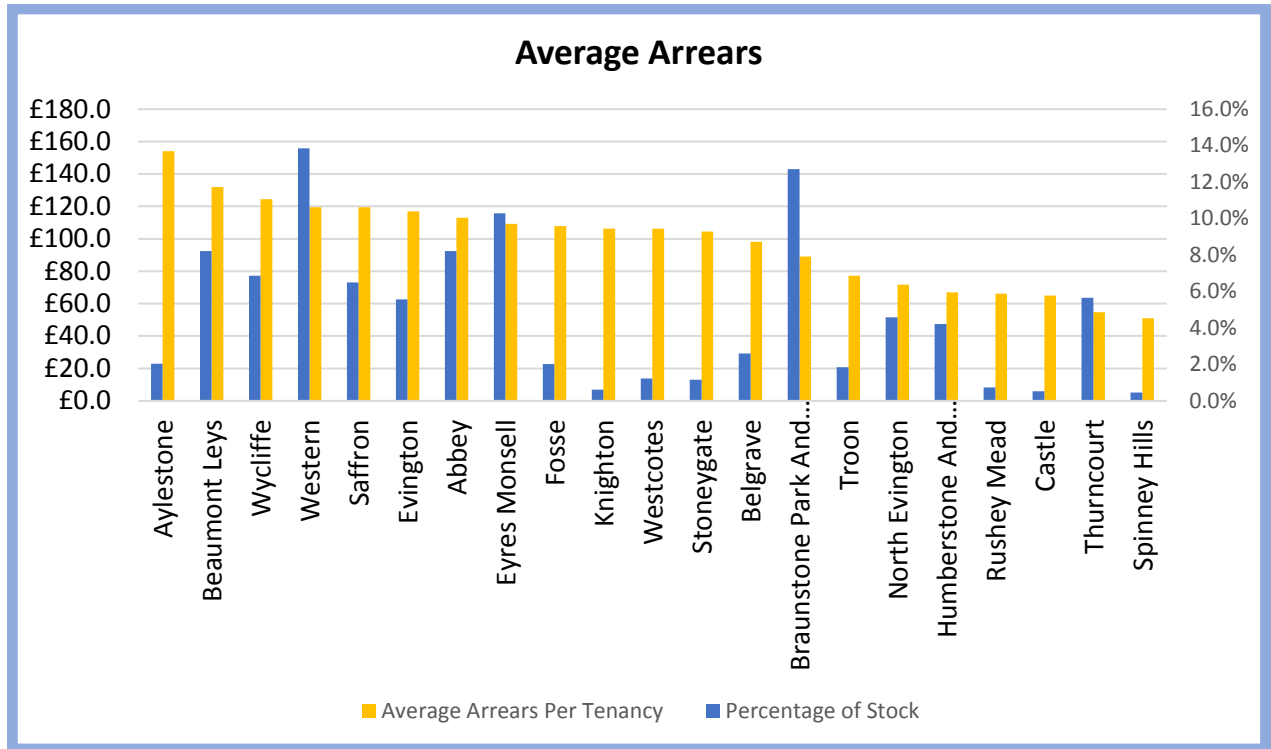
4.15 The graphs presented below show the total arrears and average arrears by ward at end of financial year 2023/24.

Graph 1. Total Arrears by Ward



4.16 The total arrears chart shows that the ward areas with the most stock have the highest arrears values and the arrears are proportionate against the percentage of stock. There are no significant changes compared to the wards in comparison to last year. There is a combination of reasons for rent arrears to fluctuate for example, an increased number of monthly payers that fail to pay their rent on time or, opting to use pay point causing delays in payments reaching rent accounts in time for year-end. Historically, some tenants need persistent reminders and encouragement to pay rent in a timely way and therefore, pockets of staff underperformance or absence related issues where tenants are not being pursued for rent, can lead to negative impacts within ward areas.

Graph 2. Total Average Arrears by Ward



4.17 The average arrears chart presents the total average arrears per tenancy. Areas like Aylestone, Knighton and Westcotes are lower in stock but have higher average arrears value. Despite low stocks sizes even the smallest number of cases with very high arrears can cause the average arrears to spike up. Areas with flats and bedsits can be predominantly occupied by single people. We know that single people are known to have more changes in circumstances on multiple occasions within a year compared to families or tenants of pension age. Changes in circumstances, benefits sanctions or transitioning in between different benefits or employment can cause an increase in rent arrears until such time the situation is resolved. Changes in employment status or zero-hour employment contracts can cause a spike in arrears whilst the tenant adapts to changes in their personal circumstances.

Universal Credit & Rent Management Advisor Support

4.18 Table 9 (below) provides information about Council tenants claiming Universal credit from the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP).

Table 9. Universal Credit Key Performance Indicators

Quarter End 2022/23	Number of UC Cases	% UC Cases in Arrears before UC Started	% UC Cases in Arrears at Quarter End	Total Value of Arrears	Average Arrears per Debtor	No. of APA's*
Quarter 1	6,673	59%	66%	£1,357,569	£307	3,472
Quarter 2	6,845	58%	70%	£1,623,088	£339	3,624
Quarter 3	7,034	59%	52%	£1,065,267	£291	3,923
Quarter 4	7,248	58%	55%	£1,117,858	£282	4,278

*APA = Alternative Payment Arrangements are when the DWP pay the housing Costs directly to the Council from the tenants Universal Credit Housing costs entitlement

- 4.19 By the end of the financial year 2023/24, a total number of **7,248** council tenants were claiming UC equating to **39%** of all current council tenants. This compares to **32%** of council tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit. By the end of the year a total of **55%** of tenants claiming UC were in rent arrears. Universal Credit is credited to tenants a month in arrears which means tenants rent account can display virtual or technical arrears until such time that payment is received.
- 4.20 Table 8 shows when tenants moved onto Universal Credit an average of **59%** of tenants had pre-existing rent arrears on their rent account. This is a common theme when existing benefit claimants transition from one benefit to another, resulting in periods of non-payment of rent whilst the benefit payments are being processed. A tenant's non-compliance with the process can add to rent arrears increasing and backdating of UC can only be granted under very exceptional circumstances.
- 4.21 By year end a total of **4,278** tenants had successful APAs in place. The remaining tenants on UC are either waiting for UC award, paying the council directly using other payment methods, waiting for APA approval or for the first payment to reach their rent account. Again, the delay in payments will result in the account showing rent arrears which contributes to the overall arrears position in the earlier tables.
- 4.22 The team continue working collaboratively with the Department of Works & Pensions and Work Coaches from the local Job Centre Plus to minimise any impact of Universal Credit on rent arrears. Any issues with complex cases or with the joint working arrangements are escalated to the DWP Partnership Manager's for resolution. The team continue to provide an appointment service from the Job Centre Plus where appropriate and if tenants require urgent appointments to support benefit claims.
- 4.23 The DWP granted the council 'Trusted Partner' status which provides access to a Landlord Portal IT system. This has meant the Income Management Team can verify housing costs quickly to prevent delays in UC claims being assessed. The Trusted Partner status also allows the council to apply for Alternative Payment Arrangements (APA's) for vulnerable people who may struggle to pay their rent and any arrears themselves.

- 4.24 The teams **8 Rent Management Advisors** (RMA) are responsible for supporting our most vulnerable tenants, or those with complex needs with claiming and maintaining Universal Credit claims. They have been helping tenants set up e-mail accounts, supporting people to make and manage their UC claims, supporting tenants with backdated payments and reconsideration of welfare benefits and encouraging people to consider digital learning courses. Additionally, they are regularly conducting research and sharing information within the team so we can respond to tenants needs and provide the most appropriate advice.
- 4.25 The RMAs received a total of **1,016 referrals** which is **8% higher** than at the same point in the previous year and **72%** from the total number of referrals had an identified vulnerability disclosed by the tenant. From the **1,016** referrals a total of **970** were accepted (**96%**) and **4%** of referrals were **refused** as they did not meet the criteria for support. A total of **75%** of cases are **now closed** due to the support ending and **14%** of the closed cases failed to engage with RMAs. The current active caseload is **258 cases**.
- 4.26 The cases are separated into two types of support 'Short-Term' usually up to two months and 'Long-Term' up to six months. From the **758** cases that have been closed so far, a total of **81%** of the tenants required **short-term support** in making benefit claims or basic budgeting advice and the remaining **19%** required **longer-term support** to help manage their claims and, to apply for any additional elements within their claim for example, Limited Capability for Work Related Activity. This is worth an extra **£416.19 per month** to tenants, however it can take several months for this to be awarded as tenant would usually be required to complete a Work Capability Assessment (WCA) to qualify for this payment.
- 4.27 The average wait time for the referrals to be allocated was **2 working days** and the average time to make the first contact with the tenant was **1 working day**. This demonstrates a waiting list process did not need to be used, as the team effectively managed the workloads and tenants were offered support without any unnecessary delays.
- 4.28 The referrals were marked within a priority banding high, medium, and low. **High** defines tenants at immediate risk of homelessness i.e., pending evictions which amounted to **33%** from the **970 referrals that were accepted**. **Medium** priority referrals where tenants who were at risk of court possession proceedings equated to **54%** of the referrals. **Low** priority referrals where tenants had low level arrears with no legal action being considered were **13%**.
- 4.29 The team pursue legal action only as a last resort when all opportunities to sustain tenancies have been exhausted. From the 758 closed cases, **16%** of cases were pursued with **legal actions** due to non-engagement or persistent non-payment despite RMA intervention. This demonstrates that **84%** of households were supported with **tenancy sustainment** and any threat of possession proceedings as removed. On current and active cases, it demonstrates there is further scope to provide tenancy sustainment and support. For ongoing eviction cases RMAs provide frequent support and maintain efforts to engage with tenants until such time the eviction is cancelled or goes ahead.
- 4.30 RMA's supported tenants to claim welfare benefits, discretionary housing payments (DHP), backdated payments, reconsiderations, and underpayments. In

the last 12 months a total value of **£310,000k** was achieved by supporting 758 **households**. This amount includes any potential entitlements for the next 12 months for disability related benefits which are awarded for a minimum of 12 months before reviewed. Decisions on mandatory reconsiderations and backdates can take a few months to resolve and reconsiderations on disability related benefits can take even longer for resolutions.

- 4.31 Due to RMA involvement and contributions in rent arrears cases the total value of **reduction in rent arrears** through RMA intervention equated to **£264,395k**. This figure has been drawn out by taking the value of rent arrears at case opening stage and subtracting this from the value at the time of closing the case, resulting in the difference RMA intervention made to the rent arrears.
- 4.32 RMAs measured “Soft Outcomes” to help identify tenants confidence levels *after* their support had ended. It also helped to determine if the tenant felt empowered to be able to manage their claims for benefits without support in the future. An initial assessment gives scores between 1 and 5 based on tenant confidence. When the case is closed the assessment is then carried out again and re-scored to establish any improvement. If the score is higher than when the support initially started, it demonstrates an improvement in tenants’ confidence. Based on the 758 closed cases, **68%** of tenants confirmed they had a **marked improvement** in their level of confidence. The remaining **32%** were tenants who felt their confidence levels **did not improve** or did not engage with the service

DHP’s (Discretionary Housing Payment)

- 4.33 Between April 2023 and March 2024 the team supported tenants to apply for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs). A total **£201,403** was paid in awards for all qualifying Council tenants, this is a **49% decrease in awards** compared to the previous financial year. This DWP grant was substantially reduced compared to previous years which meant the Council had to top up the allocation using the Household Support Fund. The team use DHPs to provide assistance to the most vulnerable tenants to sustain their tenancies and to safeguard them. The support helps alleviate poverty, prevent homelessness, and enables tenants time, to seek alternative accommodations and to better their financial position.
- 4.34 The current years forecast remains bleak as central government continue to reduce funding however, the team have successfully bid for a top up allocation from the Household Support Fund in this new financial year (2024/25) to prevent Council tenants being put at risk of homelessness. The team are waiting for approval of the exact allocation but hoping this will be in region of £950k combined with DHP. DHP are crucial lifelines for tenants and supports reductions in rent arrears. Our aim will be to prioritise and support those experiencing income shock for example, redundancy, reduced hours at work, illness or caring responsibilities which can often lead to sudden financial hardship due to fluctuating incomes. Support will also be offered for those households on low incomes, affected by the cost-of-living crisis and who are struggling to manage day to day expenses due to high inflation.

Household Support Fund (HSF)

- 4.35 Due to the impact of Covid and the cost-of-living crisis, the Government introduced support funds which are being administered by the Council. The fund focusses on

supporting people primarily with fuel, water costs, food, and white goods. Over the last financial year the team referred **5,108** council tenants for this support which equates to **27% of all council tenants**. Many tenants received multiple awards for different things which mean the numbers in the table will not equal the total number of Council tenants that were supported. See Table 10.

Table 10. Household Support Fund

Description of Assistance Provided	Number of Households
Food	4,871
Utilities	5,108
Water / Sewerage	1,294
Other essential items (white goods)	311
HB / UC advice offered	407
Council Tax advice offered	654

4.36 The Household Support Fund was also used to support tenants in exceptional cases where there was a genuine emergency and where tenants did not meet the qualifying criteria for existing housing support schemes for example, DHP, Housing benefit or Universal Credit. A total of **£500k** was awarded across **572 households** with average awards of **£874 per case and 50%** of the households, had a registered disability. A total of **540 children** were supported across all 572 households.

4.37 A total of **79%** of the tenants had rent arrears only and **11%** that required support with fixed District Heating debts only, the remaining **10%** had combined rent arrears plus, other service charges. Over **99%** of tenancies were at legal action stages for example, a legal notice was served or there was pending court or eviction actions. Through the support that was offered all pending legal activity is now aborted.

4.38 We obtained income and expenditures to maximise incomes and identify hardship. Using this sample of cases, we noted some clear patterns and emerging trends. The biggest factor affecting this group of tenants was low income, unemployment due to ill health, multiple debts combined with significant vulnerabilities and mental health related conditions which were compounded further due to their debt situation. The team were able to offer basic budgeting support and refer tenants for more specialist support to agencies like CiTAL, Community Advice & Law Service, National Energy Action, Turning point and STAR.

Court and Evictions

4.39 The team have continued careful consideration before instigating possession proceedings and ensured all avenues of supporting tenants had been explored in advance of any legal action. Any potential court case was reviewed by management before submissions to courts. Since April 2023, a total of **81 cases** were submitted to court for rental possessions which equates to an **average of 7 cases per month** and this compares to 80 court submissions in the year 2022/23. Pre-Covid, the average court submissions were around **80 cases per month** which represents **92% annual reduction** in possession actions. This demonstrates the teams' efforts in effective prevention and management of rent arrears and the offer

of tenancy sustainment, all of which subsequently removed any threat of possession proceedings.

4.40 Evictions and warrant requests were being pursued only where it was necessary, with a view that ongoing efforts to sustain tenancies continue to be provided until such time an eviction takes place. Tenants were encouraged and provided with ample opportunities to reach reasonable payment solutions to avoid possession orders and evictions. Management scrutinises all potential eviction cases to ensure that all avenues of maximising tenant income and sustaining tenancy have been explored. This includes ensuring that any vulnerability has been identified and the necessary referrals to supporting agencies are considered well in advance of any eviction process being followed. The eviction route is pursued as an ultimate last resort and after all efforts to sustain tenancy has been demonstrated and exhausted.

4.41 In the last financial year, **7 evictions** were carried out for non-payment of rent, and the number remains low compared to pre-Covid levels. This figure compares to **5 in 2022/23** and **7 in 2021/22**. Evictions remain low compared to earlier years despite the economic difficulties experienced over this period, the ongoing welfare reform challenges, and the continued impact due to the cost-of-living crisis. The household make up for majority of the evictions were single people who had abandoned their homes and chose to not continue with their Council tenancy and a small number of childless couples who failed to make regular payments. The team are exceptionally proud of their achievements in ensuring families were supported with sustaining their tenancies.

5.0 Key Challenges & Priorities for Year 2024/25

5.1 The last few years have been incredibly difficult and tough, the team will continue to face significant challenges and pressures in the coming year which are set out below.

Rising Inflation / Cost of Living Crisis

5.2 Rising inflation and costs of fuel and energy, and the ongoing cost of living crisis. The team will also be collecting additional rents due to the 7.7% increases from 1st April 2024 to core rents and 6.7% for service charges. **The rent arrears are expected to rise, and performance is likely to be very unstable.** The team will continue prioritising the use of Discretionary Housing Payments and the Household Support fund enabling assistance with housing costs where tenants are struggling with rent arrears and facing hardship. The Rent Management Advisors will continue their primary focus in supporting tenants with applying for welfare benefits and maximising their incomes.

Restricted Civica Access

5.3 Due to Data Protection issues, the team no longer have full access to the Civica IT system, which was used to support tenants with benefit claims, check the accuracy of benefit entitlements, helping provide documentary evidence to support any benefit suspensions or cancellations amongst many other benefits related assistance. The removal of full Civica access from Housing will cause a **detrimental impact** to the **collection of rent arrears**. There are already significant challenges faced due to external pressures and economical challenges and this change is significantly

compromising the ability to provide effective services. The team will work closely with the Revenues & Benefits Service to develop a service level agreement / single point of contact, which may stop the long wait times in contacting their service, when information is required in support of tenants. The team remain hopeful they can continue making recommendations as part of this agreement on cases that need priority processing or reviewing.

Cyber Incident

- 5.4 The Cyber Incident has caused a small number of tenants to disengage and distrust Council services particularly when providing their bank details to set up direct debits or make card payments towards their rent and service charges. The team aim to continue providing tenants with reassurances and re-build that trust. We are also exploring the possibility of having a separate secure payment line in which officers don't directly seek any card payment information. Furthermore, invest in alternative payment methods like GoCardless facility which enables a collection of instant, one-off payments or automated, recurring payments without the need to chase tenants for payments.

Managed Migration

- 5.5 Managed Migration is approaching its final stages of the rollout of Universal Credit (UC) nationwide. The DWP are gradually moving those claimants still claiming legacy benefits on to UC. They will be notifying the claimants that their benefits are ending and inviting them to make a new claim for UC instead. Impacted tenants include those in receipt of Tax credits, Employment & Support Allowance (Income Related), Income Support, Job Seekers Allowance (Income Related), Housing Benefit or with Tax credits. Tenants in receipt of Pension related benefits are unaffected by this change but all other sickness related benefits will transition across by year 2028-29.

All tenants will be required to make a claim to move on to UC which will be worrying for some, and failure to make the claim in a timely way, might result in existing benefit awards being terminated, tenants losing out on transitional protections and backdates considered under very exceptional circumstances only. This will potentially cause **rent arrears to increase** during the period whilst tenants transition on to UC where they will be waiting 5 weeks to receive their first payments. Many vulnerable tenants will struggle with this change and may not claim in a timely way resulting in increased rent arrears, hardship, and risk of homelessness.

Tenants are fortunate to have Rent Management Advisors who can support them with making claims and to navigate the benefit system however, this is under the provisions that tenants are willing to cooperate and engage with the service. We will be providing training events on "DWP's managed migration" (Move to UC) to the team and wider Housing staff and tenants' associations to ensure they can provide our tenants with the best possible advice and support.

Policy in Practice - LIFT Dashboard

- 5.6 This year, the team will be working closely with Revenues & Customer Support to carry out Welfare Benefit Campaigns using the Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT) Dashboard. The dashboard provides useful insights on our existing benefit cohort

and how their incomes can be maximised, help to tackle any debt and arrears problems, and identify support for families at risk of hardship or homelessness. The team are re-aligning and will offset an Income Officer for a Rent Management Advisor post to increase their capacity, enabling them to focus on this work including supporting tenants with managed migration.

- 5.7 Despite another challenging and tough year ahead, the team continue to be supported to maintain resilience in a forever changing climate. They endeavour to stay focussed and positive, aim to continue delivering high performance and maintaining good standards. Tenant support will remain at the forefront alongside consistency in service to assist tenants with reducing financial burdens, maximise their incomes and referrals for specialist support where appropriate.

6. Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications

6.1 Financial implications

This report sets out the position in relation to net rent arrears for current tenants at the end of March 2024. Not documented in this report are the arrears associated with non-dwelling properties (such as garages and parking spaces), hostel bedspaces and former tenants. The overall gross debt outstanding for all Council tenancies increased from March 2023 to March 2024; a corresponding increase in the provision for bad debt is made to recognise that a proportion of debt will go uncollected.

Stuart McAvoy – Head of Finance

6.2 Legal implications

The report is for information purposes and there are no specific legal implications arising.

Jeremy Rainbow – Principal Lawyer (Litigation)

6.3 Equalities implications

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act; advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; this includes the need to: (i) remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic; (ii) take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it.

Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it, with due regard.

The report provides an update to inform Members of the Scrutiny Commission on the rent arrears progress over the full financial year, from April 2023 to March 2024. There are no direct equality implications arising from this report, however it would be useful in relation to tenants in serious debt to have these monitored by protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act (sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, disability, race, religion or belief, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, age) in order to address any adverse impact and put in place mitigating actions.

It is important that officers continue to offer early appropriate professional support and guidance to tenants to reduce rent arrears. Tenants will continue to face significant challenges and pressures in the coming year due to the ongoing rising inflation, rising costs of fuel and energy, and the cost-of-living crisis and as central government continue to reduce funding. The work carried out by the Rent Management Advisors in relation to supporting vulnerable people some of whom will have complex needs helps to impact positively on people from across all protected characteristics.

Equalities Officer, Surinder Singh, Ext 37 4148

6.4 Climate Emergency implications

There are no significant climate emergency implications directly associated with this report.

Aidan Davis, Sustainability Officer, Ext 37 2284

HSC Briefing Report

House Building and Acquisitions update

Lead Member Briefing: 17th. June 2024
Housing Scrutiny Commission: 11th. July 2024
Lead Director: Chris Burgin.

Lead director: Chris Burgin

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: potentially all
- Report author: Simon Nicholls, Head of Service
- Author contact details: 395273
- Report version number: v.1

Summary

The Council has an ambitious commitment to deliver 1,500 more new council, social and extra care homes during the current manifesto period. Delivery during the preceding four years was heavily reliant on our ongoing acquisition programme due to the time it takes to get a new build programme up and running the COVID impact and the challenges the construction industry continues to face with rising prices and skills shortages.

This main focus of this report will be our current new build council house pipeline and our ongoing acquisition programme. The main changes since the last report was presented to the commission are:

- Contracts have been signed for the delivery of 38 new council homes at Saffron Velodrome, the contractors take possession of the site on the 1st.July 2024.
- The demolition contractor is on site at Forest Lodge Education Centre (FLEC)
- The refurbishment contractor is on site at Hydra Walk
- The commissioning of consultants to review 26 Local Plan sites.
- Securing Home England Funding for 50 acquisitions
- Securing Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) funding for 27 acquisitions
- The reduction in the proposed number of Retained Right to Buy Receipt (RTRB)funded acquisitions.
- The removal of the proposed 2 Extra Care schemes from the delivery table

The second half of the report talks more generally about the other delivery routes we intend to use to meet the manifesto target of 1500 new affordable homes for Leicester.

This report also sets out the issues and risks affecting its achievement.

Recommendations

That the Housing Scrutiny Commission note the content of this report.

3. Supporting information:

Current new build council house pipeline:

Scheme	24/25	25/26	26/27
Saffron Velodrome	38		
Lanesborough Road		37	
Phase 2b	2	16	
Phase 3		44	
Southfields/Newry		53	
Stocking Farm		50	
FLEC		33	
Totals	40	233	

Saffron Velodrome: 38 New homes

Saffron Lane was tendered, and the contract awarded to Robert Woodhead Construction, unfortunately they went into voluntary liquidation soon after starting on site. A new tender exercise has just completed and resulted in the appointment of a contractor called Lovells, they take possession for the site on the 1st. July 2024. with a planned completion date of July 25.



Image of proposed street scene



Layout plan.

Lanesborough Road: 37 New homes

Robert Woodhead's was also due to deliver Lanesborough Road but were unable to because they went into voluntary liquidation. We are currently agreeing a new delivery route for this site and the phase 2b sites that follow. Badger surveys are currently underway ahead of an agreed procurement route because they can only be carried out at certain times of the year and missing this opportunity will potentially delay a start on site date.



Layout plan





Phase 2b

18 New homes across 4 sites:

These sites were also going to be delivered by Robert Woodhead's.

Hydra Walk was reprocured on its own and is currently on site and due to complete in July 2024

The other 3 sites will be packaged with Lanesborough Road for delivery.

- Hydra Walk (2 homes)
- Rockingham Close (3 homes)
- Austin Rise (8 homes)
- Whitteney Drive (5 homes)

Phase 3

44 New homes across 6 sites

- Cranstone Crescent (3 homes),
- Tatlow Road (2 homes),
- Somers Road (3 homes).
- Tilling Road (18 homes),

- Glazebrook Square (10 homes),
- Dysart Way (8 homes).

The consultancy business case has been completed and we are in the process of appointing the design team to deliver these sites. The delivery of these sites is subject to securing planning permission and completing a successful financial viability assessment.

Forest Lodge Education Centre (FLEC) 33 New homes

The demolition of the former school buildings is now complete. A full planning application has been submitted and the expected start on site date is June 25





Ariel photograph of site



Proposed layout

Stocking Farm: 50 new homes

This is an exciting and complex redevelopment of the area that includes existing residential units, shops, garages and community facilities. An extensive stakeholder engagement exercise has taken place and demolition of the garages and Best One shopping complex has been completed. The scheme has secured Planning Permission and we expect to go out to tender summer 24.



Aerial picture of the existing site



Layout plan



Visual of proposed scheme

Scheme	Tender return date	Start on site	Completion
Saffron Lane	comp	July 24	July 25
Southfields and Newry	Sept 24	Jan 25	June 26
Stocking Farm	Sept 24	Jan 25	June 26
FLEC	Dec 24	Feb 25	April 26

Funding for new build schemes

Currently the funding for all of our new build schemes includes a percentage of Retained Right to Buy Receipts (RTBR), this precludes us from using other external funding sources, however the amount of unallocated RTBR is reducing and this is impacting on the number of acquisitions we can buy, see below. We are now funding all our feasibility work from HRA funds to enable flexibility to agree the funding route at a more appropriate time. We will be exploring the use of external funding for all future new build schemes to free up RTBR to increase the number of acquisitions we can buy.

Acquisitions:

The number of properties we can buy using right to buy receipts (RTRB) is governed by the number of new build houses that are built using retained right to buy receipts and the amount of RTBR we have available to use.

For 22/23 and 23/24 the Council were permitted to retain 100% of the receipts from the sale of properties through Right to Buy. These receipts must be spent within 5 years and can be used to fund up to 40% of eligible capital expenditure. We call this retained right to buy receipts (RTBR). However, in the recent budget the chancellor moved away from 100% retention, back to the arrangements pre-2022, albeit now permitting receipts to fund up to 50% of the capital costs (up from 40% in 23/24). If we choose to fund 50% of costs using RTB receipts, then this will reduce the overall funding we have available to deliver acquisitions.

To encourage Councils to use RTBR for building rather than buying properties, the Government introduced a cap on the number of property acquisitions. In 23/24 and 24/25, for each house that is built using RTBR we are permitted to buy one, also using RTBR. Historically we have been very successful using our RTBR to maximise the number of acquisitions; an assessment of the amount of RTBR funds we have available for the next two years indicates that there are limited RTB receipts available and that we are expected to have to limit our acquisitions to 130 across the next 2 years.

Positively we can also buy houses using other forms of funding and in 23/24 we will have purchased 50 units with Homes England Funding and 27 by bidding to The Department of Levelling Up. We will continue to explore other funding streams as they become available.

The following table shows the number of acquisitions we expect to be buying every year for the next 4 years and their funding stream:

	23/24 (actuals)	24/25(pipeline)	25/26	26/27
RTBR	67	58	72	65
Homes England	50	20	20	20
LAHF	27	33		
other				
totals	144	113	92	85

The majority of our programme is buying single 2/3 bedroomed former council houses. This meets the demand for family accommodation and the homes fit back easily into our planned and responsive works programmes.

We do consider larger acquisitions, we completed on the ZIP building in 23/24 and Citygate House in 24/25 and we have the following in the pipeline, which are currently being assessed:

Purchase and development of a piece of land behind 100 Welford Road.

A block of 187 flats on the former Sainsburys site, Belgrave Road.

The redevelopment of The Leys site in Beaumont Leys. Officers were unsure how to progress this development so a meeting was held on site with all three ward councillors to discuss and agree a way forward. It was agreed that the existing building should be demolished, and new family homes built on the site.

The refurbishment contractor is due to start at Hospital Close in July with the first of 135 new council homes being occupied in January 2025.

Temporary Accommodation Project

To manage the pressures that the council are facing housing families and singles in temporary accommodation it has been agreed that a substantial investment, £45m, will be made available to both purchase and lease additional units of accommodation. These units will be owned and managed in the general fund and not HRA. 225 units will be bought and 125 will be leased.

Other affordable housing delivery routes

The main purpose of this report is to set out our new build delivery pipeline and acquisition programme but to meet the manifesto commitment of 1500 new affordable homes the following delivery routes will also be used:

- Known schemes being delivered by others, including Extra Care and Supported Living schemes.
- Planning gain affordable housing

Known schemes being delivered by others.

The following are 100% affordable housing schemes we know are likely to be delivered during the course of the manifesto period by registered providers in the city. The report in July 23 included the delivery of two new Extra Care Schemes and one Supported Living Scheme which have now been removed due to an unsuccessful procurement exercise, they are not now expected to complete in the current manifesto period.

Site	24/25	25/26	26/27
Abbey Park Road former bus depot site – phase 1	71 on site now	47	
Phase 2		100	
Meadows Way - Loughborough Road	on site now	100	
Blackberry Street	16	15	
Barkby Thorpe Road	13	5	
Totals	100	267	

Planning gain affordable housing

The following table is a summary of the affordable housing to be delivered through planning gain linked to the development process. Planning Gain affordable housing is secured as a planning condition and is typically 30% of the total number of homes being built. The developer normally works with a registered provider who will own and manage these units. Typically, the Council will nominate the tenants on 100% of the first lets.

Ashton Green is the single biggest development currently in the city and will be delivering the majority of the planning gain affordable units we expect to be delivered during the manifesto period.

Development	23/24	24/25	25/26	26/27
Ashton Green				
AG Phase B	20	29	9	23
AG Phase C			20	20
AG Phase D				
AG Phase E				
totals	20	29	29	43

The development of non-strategic local plan sites for new council housing:

There are 26 council owned non-strategic local plan sites that have been identified as suitable for the delivery of affordable housing, however these cannot be progressed ahead of the adoption of the Local Plan. Initial design and feasibility work has been commissioned to enable us to progress these sites as quickly as possible once the Local Plan has been adopted. It is anticipated that we will deliver some sites ourselves but will also work with other registered providers. The projected delivery figures for these sites have not been included in this report.

Delivery Summary including current pipeline.

Delivery phase	23/24	24/25	25/26	26/27	Grand Total
Current Housing Pipeline		40	233		273
Section 106– Planning Gain	12	29	29	43	113
Known future delivery by others, 100% affordable schemes		100	267		367
Additional Brownfield Sites			187*	55***	242

Total New Builds	12	169	716	98	995
Allowable acquisitions (RTRB)	95	58	65	65	283
Acquisitions – other funding streams	50	53**	20**	20**	143**
First Homes Early Delivery (FHED)	8				8
Temporary Accommodation project		225	125		350
Grand Total	165	505	926	183	1779

** subject to funding.

*former Sainsburys site

*** land to rear of 100 Welford Rd.

Risks and issues to delivery:

- The lack of available sites for residential development, the majority of the sites are currently subject to the Local Plan process.
- A decrease in Planning Gain Affordable Housing, with only Ashton Green showing any significant delivery.
- The risks to the delivery of the 183 new Extra Care units.
- Changes to the RTBR rules and the lack of available RTBR will impact on our ability to buy more houses.
- Significant increases in actual and predicted costs for the delivery of schemes and the impact this has on viability and delivery.
- The new build and acquisition programmes are reliant of the use of RTBR for funding.

4. Details of Scrutiny

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5. Financial, legal and other implications

5.1 Financial implications

£230m has been added to the HRA capital programme for affordable housing since November 2019, for the acquisition and building of new dwellings.

Given that sub-market rent is charged for affordable housing, its development relies on capital subsidy. Typically, this takes the form of retained Right to Buy receipts, but can also be through Homes England grant, along with other more recent grants which the government has made available.

High inflation on build costs combined with a freeze on Local Housing Allowance rates means that identifying schemes which are financially viable for affordable housing has been increasingly difficult; an increase in the LHA rates from April 2024, along with an increase in the proportion of capital costs which can be funded from RTB receipts means that financial viability of schemes will now be less of an issue. However, it also means the RTB receipts won't stretch as far and fewer replacement homes will be built/acquired as a result. A financial assessment will need to be undertaken for each scheme proposed within this report to estimate the likely impact on HRA finances.

Stuart McAvoy – Head of Finance

5.2 Legal implications

While there are generally no legal implications to note, the following provides some general guidance.

As a statutory housing authority, the Council has general powers under the Housing Act 1985 (sections 9 and 17) to acquire land and property for housing purposes and to construct new properties on land within its ownership. The Act also gives the Council powers (under section 32) to dispose of land and property for housing purposes. Any potential acquisition, new build or disposal referred to in this report would therefore be permitted within the remit of the 1985 Act.

The Council's Constitution and Scheme of Delegation contains the internal framework of decision-making for acquisitions and disposal of property.

While the Housing Act provides powers for housing purposes, Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 imposes an obligation on local authorities to dispose of land for "the best consideration that is reasonably obtainable in the circumstances". However, the Council is permitted to dispose of land for less than best consideration in certain circumstances under the 2003 General Disposal Consent ("the GDC"). The disposal must be one which will secure the economic, social or environmental well-being of the area in question. If a property is sold at

less than best consideration, the undervalue for the purposes of the GDC must not exceed £2m. In that instance, Secretary of State consent would need to be obtained. The provision of new housing is generally recognised as falling within the remit permitted by the GDC.

The right to buy is a long-established legal right for Council tenants and, as advised in this report, the Council is permitted to utilise a percentage of the RTB receipts for the purpose of acquiring or constructing replacement housing properties. The limits and conditions referred to in this report relating to those receipts are generally set by Government but it should also be noted that the Council has a general fiduciary duty to act in the best interests of the residents of Leicester.

Individual properties acquired using the RTB receipts tend to have been previously owned by the Council (and which had previously been sold under the RTB legislation). As a result, the Council will already have some knowledge of the history of the property. However, whilst that is the case, a full due diligence exercise is undertaken through Estates and by Legal Services. Properties not previously owned by the Council have, on occasion, also been acquired using the RTB receipts but this is not the current practice.

There are references throughout the report to “open space” properties being utilised for housing. This gives rise to other legal procedural requirements such as the obligation to publish a notice of intention to dispose of open space. These notices can often give rise to objections from the public and these objections need to be taken into account when taking decisions whether to dispose or not.

Any land referred to in this report that is owned by the Council but which is not currently held for housing purposes must first follow an internal “appropriation” process. These internal appropriations must be treated as disposals and have the same legal obligations imposed on them as mentioned above.

Legal Services continue to work closely with other services to advise and action all acquisitions and disposals in order to achieve the targets referred to herein

5.3 Climate Change and Carbon Reduction implications

Housing is one of the largest sources of carbon emissions in Leicester, responsible for 33% of the city’s carbon footprint. Following the city council’s declaration of a Climate Emergency in 2019, and its ambition to achieve net zero carbon emissions for the city and council, addressing the emissions from housing is vital to the council’s efforts to reduce carbon emissions. This is particularly important where the council has the greatest level of control and influence over housebuilding and acquisition, including those schemes included within this report.

As such, consideration should be given to all opportunities to ensure that housing delivered within the city is low carbon and energy efficient, either within new build projects or as part of refurbishments. Potential measures could include the use of sustainable materials and construction practices, installation of efficient insulation,

lighting and low carbon heating systems and the fitting of renewable energy systems such as solar PV panels and heat pumps. These measures would also reduce energy bills and improve the level of comfort for occupants. Any development will nonetheless be required to follow policy CS2 of the Adopted Leicester Core Strategy and relevant building regulations.

A toolkit is also being developed to support the achievement of reduced carbon emissions in future council capital construction and renovation projects.

Aidan Davis, Sustainability Officer, Ext 37 2284

5.4 Equalities Implications

When making decisions, the Council must comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) (Equality Act 2010) by paying due regard, when carrying out their functions, to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a 'protected characteristic' and those who do not. In doing so, the council must consider the possible impact on those who are likely to be affected by the recommendation and their protected characteristics.

Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

The report provides an update on House Building and Acquisitions. Provision of good quality affordable homes for local people that help to address evidenced housing needs in the city both in terms of lack of availability and suitability are likely to have positive impacts in terms of the aim of the PSED to advance equality of opportunity for people from across all protected characteristics. By providing affordable housing where peoples' needs are met in a community setting there is also potential to better foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The impact of the lack of decent, affordable and secure housing goes far beyond reducing the amount of money households have to live on; this also has a wider social impact. The cost of housing is directly related to housing quality and standards. For many, being unable to afford decent housing means having to live in poor quality homes unfit for habitation or overcrowded conditions to reduce costs, to the detriment of physical and mental health.

It is important that new housing is well designed and can contribute to a good quality of life and meet the diverse needs of residents. Accessible and inclusive design will support the general aims of the PSED.

Equalities Officer, Surinder Singh, Ext 37 414

5.5 Other Implications (You will need to have considered other implications in preparing this report. Please indicate which ones apply?)

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6. Background information and other papers:

7. Summary of appendices:

8. Is this a private report (If so, please indicated the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)?

Yes/No

9. Is this a “key decision”?

Yes/No

10. If a key decision please explain reason



***Environmental Budget &
Public Realm Work
2024/2025***

Housing Scrutiny Commission: 11 July 2024

Assistant Mayor for Housing: Cllr Elly Cutkelvin

Lead Director: Chris Burgin, Director of Housing

Report Author:

Gurjit Minhas – Head of Service, Housing Division

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report outlines how the Environmental Budget and other investment will fund improvements on estates across the city in 2024/2025. The environmental budget schemes that have been proposed for this year have been suggested by tenants and local ward Cllrs at the overall cost of £200k.
- 1.2 The annual budget for Environmental Works is usually set at £750k. However due to pressures on the HRA Budget the level of funding was set at **£200k** last year and remains at the same level for this coming year 24/25. This equates to £66k for each housing district.

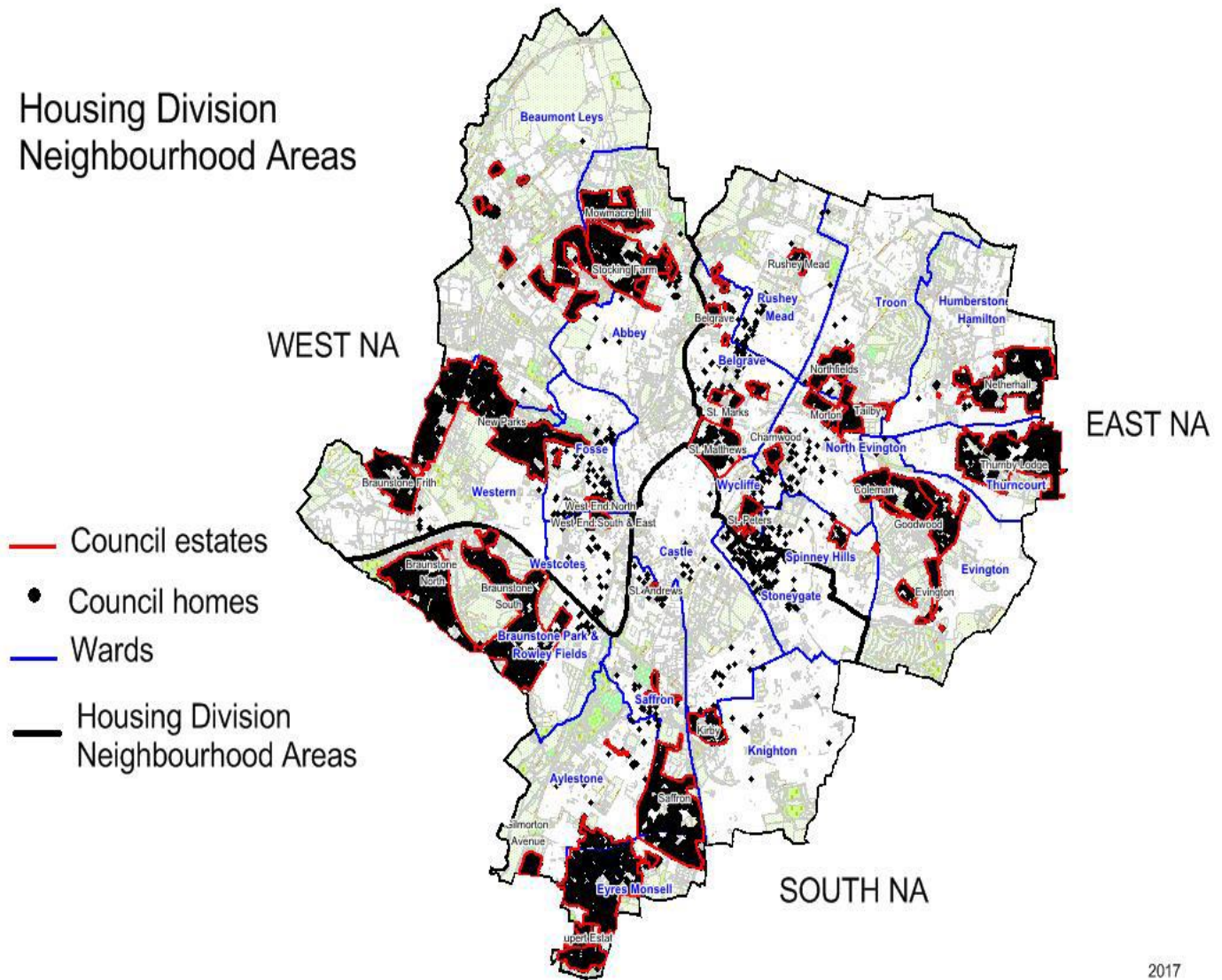
2. Background

- 2.1 Over the years the Environmental Budget has been used to invest in estates, to improve parking, green areas, measures to reduce anti-social behaviour and to generally make the environment safer and improve the quality of life for residents, making them places where people want to live.
- 2.2 Housing staff have carried out local consultation and engagement exercises to identify what people like about their local area and what they would like to see improved. Housing staff are also involved in highlighting improvements based on their local knowledge of issues on estates and key priorities for the service.
- 2.3 Some of the initiatives for this coming year have been highlighted on estate walkabouts, at ward meetings or service requests from tenants. Consultation was carried out with ward Cllrs and opportunities provided to them to put forward proposals, Cllrs have also had overall sight of all the proposals for their district.

3. Environmental Budget Schemes:

3.1 The schemes cover the city's three district management housing areas, East, West and South:

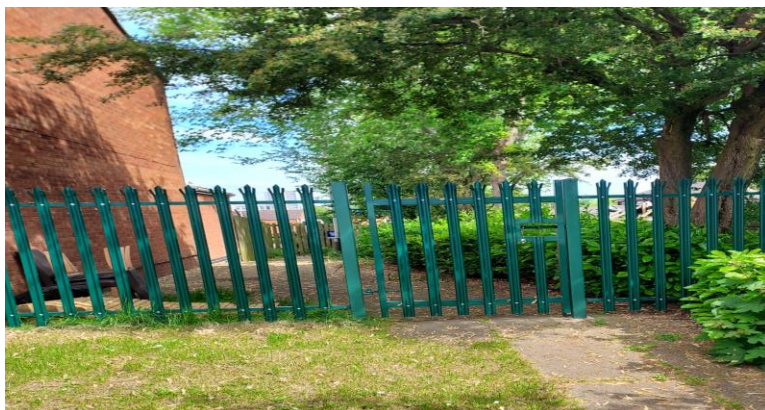
Housing Division
Neighbourhood Areas



2017

3.2 What we did last year - Below some of the successful schemes completed from last year's £200k budget:

3.2.1 Flora Street we installed metal gates as suggested by local tenants and Cllr Cassidy in Fosse Ward:



3.2. 2 Additional green teamwork across the city



3.2.3 As there was some underspend due to the Green Team not being fully staffed, the budget has been reprofiled to improve the Burn's flats in New Parks, investing in the bin and recycling areas, improving bin chutes and painting inside blocks. Much of this work has been identified by local tenants and ward Cllrs, Cllr O'Neil, Cllr Dempster and Cllr Cole who are very supportive.



3.3 This year's proposals:

3.3.1 Consultation in the West

The District Manager, Mandy Smith wrote to all ward Cllrs in the West, in February 2024 asking for suggestions. At that time Cllr Waddington came forward with a couple of proposals. Due to limited feedback housing staff suggested proposals identified on estate inspections.

Mandy collated all the proposals and consulted with all the District Cllrs again in April 2024, the feedback received was from Cllr Westley, Cllr Bhatia and Cllr Orton all highlighting that Beaumont Leys ward should get an equal share of the funding. Cllrs were also invited on patch walks. The West District proposals are listed below:

- **Western Ward:**
 - **Dupont Gardens** – Continuation of security gate project, identified by Leicester Safer Partnership 4 years ago, Cllrs have previously supported - **£43,330**
 - **Liberty Road** = parking 4 spaces – identified by Tenants Association and housing staff on estate walk - **£36,000**

- **Fosse Ward**
 - **Comet Close** – install bollards to prevent ASB identified by Cllr Waddington - **£4,245**
 - **Tudor Close** – Metal mesh fencing identified by resident and Cllr Waddington - cost - **£7,307**

- **Abbey Ward**
 - **Kinley Road** – Paint all metal railings - identified by housing staff on estate inspection - **£23,668**
 - **Thurcaston Road** – knee rails identified by housing staff on estate inspection, - **£9,135**

- **Beaumont Leys Ward:**
 - **Portmore Close** - Paint all internal area, including drying rooms and ceilings, all ward Cllrs supportive - **£4,340**
 - **Gresley Close** – Bins Stores identified by housing staff on estate inspection all ward Cllrs supportive - **£20,146**
 - **Oransay Road** - – Bins Stores identified by housing staff on estate inspection all ward Cllrs supportive - **£30,176**
 - **Paterson Close** – install bike rack identified by housing staff on estate inspection all ward Cllrs supportive - **£565**
 - **Amadis Road** – remove shrubs and level identified by housing staff on estate inspection all ward Cllrs supportive - **£1,550**

- **Westcotes Ward**
 - **Andrews Close & Norfolk Walk** – Removing moss from walls identified by housing staff on estate inspection - **£4,916**

3.3.2 Consultation in the East

The District Manager, Kirsty Jacques wrote to all ward Cllrs in the East, in February 2024 advising the **£66k** could be used for weed spraying, additional cleaning and low level ground maintenance across the district. This suggestion was based on the high number of enquires raised by tenants and Cllrs about these types of issues. Kirsty also asked for Cllrs for their suggestions. Cllr Bonham, Cllr Joel (Humberstone Ward), Cllr Haq (Evington Ward), and Cllr Dave (Rushey Mead Ward) all responded to advise they were supportive of Kirsty's proposal. Patch walks with Cllrs have also taken place and no further proposals were put forward by ward Cllrs in the East.

- **All of East District**
 - Weed spraying, increased cleaning of communal areas and low level grounds maintenance - **£66,000**

3.3.3 Consultation in the South

The District Manager, Paul Lewis wrote to all ward Cllrs in the South, in March 2024, and has been on patch walks and has met with Cllr Cassidy and Cllr Cutkelvin (Saffron Ward) face to face to gather feedback on proposals. Cllr Kitterick (Castle Ward), Cllr Whittle (Knighton Ward), Cllr Halford (Braunstone and Rowley Fields ward) and Cllr Porter (Aylestone Ward) all responded with feedback. The following proposals have been put forward this year.

- **In Saffron, Braunstone and Eyres Monsell:**
 - **Saffron, Braunstone Eyres Monsell** - Bungalow external PIR lighting - **£10,000** - Supported by Cllr Clarke and Cllr Pickering
- **Saffron Ward**
 - **Meadow Gardens** - Community Growing Project - **£18,874** - this is part of a city wide initiative extension of last year's project - supported by ward Cllrs
 - **Meadow Gardens** – Communal path widening for mobility scooters and raised planters - **£19,481** – supported by ward Cllrs
- **Braunstone and Rowley Fields**
 - **Wyatt Close** - Clear path to Highway Spinney and trim trees, proposed by Cllr Halford
- **Aylestone Ward**
 - **Hopyard Close** – Additional parking for residents proposed by Cllr Porter
- **Castle Ward**
 - Lancaster Road – replacing walls in this area proposed by Cllr Kitterick, a joint programme proposal for Housing, Transport and Conservation

4. Prioritisation

As in the previous year to prioritise the proposals we have put them through the impact assessment table below and the suggestion is that we progress those with a score of 3 or higher to keep us within the £200k budget.

4.1 Prioritisation

District/ Ward	Project	Cost	Support from Ward Cllr	Need for investment	Impact on Crime & Disorder	Climate Change	Cost of living/ Housing Crisis	Staffing	Priority - Score
West									
Western	Dupont Gardens – replacing security gates	£43,330	Low	Low	High	Low	High	Low	2
Western	Liberty Road, parking 4 spaces	£36,000	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	0
Fosse Ward	Comet Close – Bollards	£4,245	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	3
Fosse Ward	Tudor Close -Metal Mesh Fence	£7,307	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	3
Abbey	Kinley Road paint rails	£23, 688	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	0
Abbey	Thurcaston Road	£9,135	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	0
Beaumont Leys	Portmore Close – Paint internal areas	£4,340	High	High	Low	Low	High	Low	3
Beaumont Leys	Greasley Close - Bins Stores	£20,146	High	High	High	High	Low	Low	4
Beaumont Leys	Oronsay Close – Bin Stores	£30,176	High	High	High	High	Low	Low	4
	Paterson Close – bike rack	£565	High	Low	High	High	High	Low	4
	Armadis Road – tidy shrubs	£1,550	High	Low	Low	Low	Low	High	2
Westcotes Ward	Andrew Close Remove Moss	£4,916	Low	Low	Low	Low	High	Low	1

4.1 Prioritisation

District/ Ward	Project	Cost	Support from Ward Cllr	Need for investment	Impact on Crime & Disorder	Climate Change	Cost of living/ Housing Crisis	Staffing	Priority - Score
East									
All East Wards	Weed Spraying/Low level Maintenance/ Increased cleaning	£66,000	High	High	High	Low	High	High	5
South									
Eyres Monsell/ Braunstone /Saffron	Bungalow lighting for 3 wards	£10,000	High	High	High	Low	Low	Low	3
Saffron Ward	Meadow Gardens – Food growing	£18,874	High	High	Low	High	High	Low	4
Saffron Ward	Meadow Gardens – Path widening	£19,481	High	High	Low	High	High	Low	4
Braunstone / Rowley Fields	Wyatt Close – Clear path to spinney	TBC	High	Low	Low	Low	Low	High	2
Aylestone Ward	Hopyard Close – Additional parking	TBC	High	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	1
Castle Ward	Lancaster Road – replace wall	TBC	High	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	1

4.2 Based on the scoring of 3 and above the following proposals are to be taken forward this year:

West District:

- **Fosse Ward**
 - **Comet Close** – install bollards to prevent ASB identified by Cllr Waddington - **£4,245**
 - **Tudor Close** – Metal mesh fencing identified by resident and Cllr Waddington - cost - **£7,307**

- **Beaumont Leys Ward**
 - **Portmore Close** - Paint all internal area, including drying rooms and ceilings, all ward Cllrs supportive - **£4,340**
 - **Gresley Close** – Bins Stores identified by housing staff on estate inspection all ward Cllrs supportive - **£20,146**
 - **Oransay Road** - – Bins Stores identified by housing staff on estate inspection all ward Cllrs supportive - **£30,176**
 - **Paterson Close** – install bike rack identified by housing staff on estate inspection all ward Cllrs supportive - **£565**

Total = £66,779

East District

- **All Wards in the East**
 - Weed spraying, increased cleaning of communal areas and low level grounds maintenance – Total **£66,000**

South District

- **In Saffron, Braunstone and Eyres Monsell:**
 - **Saffron, Braunstone Eyres Monsell** - Bungalow external PIR lighting - **£10,000** - Supported by Cllr Clarke and Cllr Pickering

- **Saffron Ward**
 - **Meadow Gardens** - Community Growing Project - **£18,874** - this is part of a city wide initiative extension of last year's project - supported by ward Cllrs
 - **Meadow Gardens** – Communal path widening for mobility scooters and raised planters – supported by ward Cllrs **£19,481**

Total – £48,355

4.3 This comes to a total of **£181,134**. There is an underspend of **£18,886** in the South and it has been agreed that this will be used to fund additional high priority work identified in the south district throughout the year.

5. Other Housing Estate Improvement Work

- 5.1 The Neighbourhood Improvement Team helps to bring people back into employment, by offering 6 to 12-month work placements. The housing division invests **£235k** to provide this opportunity to 10, Neighbourhood Improvement Officers. The team works across the city carrying out work such as clearing communal garage sites, edging path and walkways, cutting back overgrown trees, hedges and bushes that can be a hazard in public areas. At the request of housing officers, the team will clear and tidy gardens of vulnerable tenants who are unable to do it themselves.
- 5.2 The Housing Division contribute over **£1,01m** towards the estate warden service. Teams work on housing estates across the city clearing rubbish, fly tipping and maintaining the estates to keep them tidy.
- 5.3 The Housing Division contribute **£1,16m** to the grounds maintenance service to look after housing areas across the city, this involves mowing all the grass on housing land, cutting back shrubs and maintaining greenery.
- 5.4 Cllr Cutkelvin has been involved in identifying parks on or near council housing estates in Saffron, that need improving so residents have access to good quality green space. Residents are leading these projects and are involved in planting and maintaining the park on a regular basis. A project is currently underway for Tick Tock Park which will be funded through the transfer back of ward funding which has previously been used for HRA environmental work.

6. Public Realm Works Project

6.1 The St Matthews and St Peters Public Realm Works Project was set up in 2020 following a commitment by the City Mayor to invest £5m to improve both estates. Extensive consultation with residents has been carried out throughout the life of the project. There has also been ongoing involvement of ward councillor's and tenant's associations to help shape improvements on both estates.

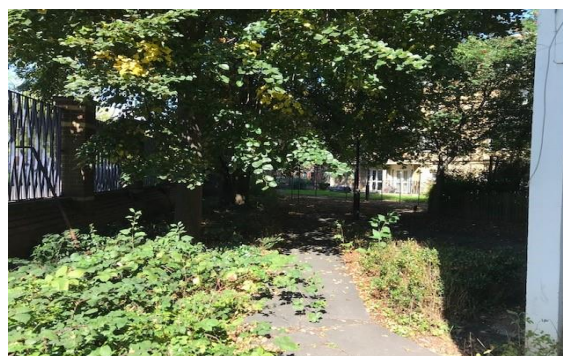
6.2 In St Matthews we have completed a **£1.2m** project to transform court yards, improve parking and create safer spaces. The scheme, focusing on Ottawa Road and the corner of Edmonton Road, involved removing old brick garages and bin stores and replacing them with new parking bays, new street lighting and railings. Landscaping in communal areas has taken place to improve the overall appearance of the area.

Before



After

Before



After



Feedback from one resident in Ottawa Road ***“Thank you for giving me a garden I can enjoy”***

6.3 We have also employed additional green and estate warden teams on both estates to maintain and keep the vegetation cut back and the estates clean and tidy. The additional resource in this area was for the life of the project, which is now coming to an end in March 2024. The work will now be picked up by the ground’s maintenance and estate warden teams that have service level agreements with Housing Service across the city. We will have spent an additional **£742k** on estate maintenance work over the 3 years. This work has been well received by residents and made a substantial difference to the appearance of the estates.

Before



After



6.4 Garage Demolition

On the St Peters estate we have introduced resident only parking and are demolishing garages on Jupiter and Pluto Close to create more parking, including more accessible parking for residents with disabilities. This work is being carried out now and will be completed June 2024 and cost **£330k**. We have also put in an additional bid for funding for **£200k** to renew the Atlas Close ball court area for improvement works.

Feedback from one resident with disabilities in St Peters “**car park space needed, it’s impossible to find parking nearby**”.

6.5 Due to the unexpected cost of the District Heating Project, **£1.4m** has been transferred to support the cost of installing meters from the Public Realm Work Budget on the St Peters and St Matthews estates.

6.6 So far out of the £5m budget we have allocated **£3.98m** and have **£1.025m** remaining which has led us to reconsider some of the remaining options. From further consultation with the ward Cllrs, Cllr Aqby and Cllr Dawood and the Tenants and Residents Association Chairs, Jean Williams from St Matthews and Shaukat Seedat from St Peters, the following has been agreed.

- Demolition of Vostock Garages to create more residential and managed parking on St Peters estate.
- Use the remainder of the funding for the continuation of the additional Green and Estate Warden Team for St Peters and St Matthews for the next couple of years.

6.7 The above proposals are in line with the consultation feedback we have had previously from residents. St Peter’s residents have in the majority supported safer and more managed parking and we have had really positive feedback from residents on both estates about the estate warden and grounds maintenance work.

6.8 It has also been agreed with the ward Cllrs we will promote the improvement work carried out on both estates and showcase this at the office’s of the Tenant’s Association and other local community facilities.

7. Consultation next year

7.1 With the environmental budget being at a reduced level this year and last year, consultation has been led by the District Managers via e-mail or through estates visits. It is proposed for future years as funding returns to normal levels the Head of Service will lead the consultation and will facilitate meeting with ward Cllrs to gain their input.

8. Financial, legal and other implications

8.1 Financial implications

The total cost of the schemes identified within this report is £ 200k. The HRA Capital Programme for 2024/25 includes £200k for Communal and Environmental work. The schemes are not anticipated to have a significant impact on revenue costs for the Council.

8.2 Legal implications

There are no specific legal implications arising from this report.

Jeremy Rainbow – Principal Lawyer (Litigation)

8.3 Climate Change and Carbon Reduction Implications

A number of schemes identified within this report may have carbon emission-related impacts. These should be addressed to mitigate any emissions from works, including through applying the council's sustainable procurement guidance for growing media, electricals, and chemicals, as relevant to each project. This should include use of the guidance around herbicides and pesticides in the chemicals document, in relation to the proposed weed-spraying works, to avoid negative environmental impacts. The loss of trees should also be avoided in work on green spaces and, if not possible, they should be replaced in line with the council's Tree Strategy. As noted in the report, positive climate change impacts are also considered as part of the prioritisation process for projects. Several of the schemes may have a positive environmental impact, including through supporting walking & cycling, enabling local food growing and carrying out planting as part of landscaping works.

Aidan Davis, Sustainability Officer, Ext 37 2284

8.4 Equalities Implications

Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which means that, in carrying out their functions, they have a statutory duty to pay due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.

Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

The report outlines how the environmental budget will fund improvements on estates across the City in 2024/2025.

There are no direct equality implications arising from the report, however works that improve security for residents and visitors should lead to positive impacts for people from across a range of protected characteristics, such as garage demolition leading to the provision of additional parking including disabled parking bays for residents, weed spraying and cleaning of communal areas and grounds maintenance and tackling anti-social behaviour.

Sukhi Biring, Equalities Officer, 454 4175

Housing Scrutiny Committee

Work Programme 2024 – 2025

Meeting Date	Item	Recommendations / Actions	Progress
11 July 2024	Housing Overview Housing Regulator Rent Arrears Annual Report House Builds & Acquisitions Update Environmental Budget & Public Realm Works 2024-25		
27 August 2024			
12 November 2024			
7 January 2025	<i>Suggested items tbc:</i> <i>Housing Revenue Account Budget Proposals 2025/26</i> <i>General Fund Budget Proposals 2025/26</i>		

18 March 2025			
22 April 2024			

Forward Plan Items (suggested)

Topic	Detail	Proposed Date
Apprenticeship Programme & Women in Construction		
Channel Shift Update		
Damp & Mould – PRS Online Portal	It was highlighted at meeting on 19 September 2023 that portal is in development and agreed to come back to update the Commission.	
Disabled Facilities Grant & Adaptations	Commission requested to be updated on development of adaptations strategy.	
District Service Performance		
Enhanced Rough Sleeping Provision	OSC requested at the meeting on 11 January 2024 that the Housing Scrutiny Commission consider further.	
Environment Budget Update	Commission to be updated following consultation with ward councillors.	11 July 2024

Homelessness Strategy		
Housing Allocations Policy		
Housing Capital Programme Update	The Commission requested that they receive regular updates on progress regarding new build developments.	11 July 2024
Housing Crisis Action Plan	Commission requested to be kept updated on action plan.	
Housing Safety		
Housing Support		
Local Plan		
Migration Update		
Overcrowding Strategy Update		
Private Rented Sector Strategy Update		
Repairs, Gas & Voids Performance		
Selective Licensing		
Service Charges		
Supported Housing Proposals		
Tenant Involvement Proposals		
Who Gets Social Housing		

