

Leicester  
City Council

## **MEETING OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION**

**DATE: TUESDAY, 25 FEBRUARY 2020**

**TIME: 5:30 pm**

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

### **Members of the Scrutiny Commission**

Councillor Westley (Chair)

Councillor Nangreave (Vice Chair)

Councillors Aqbany, Gee, O'Donnell, Pickering and Willmott

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

*A. Thomas .*

For Monitoring Officer

***Officer contacts:***

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*Leicester City Council, 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.

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If you have any queries about any of the above or the business to be discussed, please contact Ayleena Thomas, **Democratic Support on (0116) 454 6354 or email [Ayleena.Thomas@leicester.gov.uk](mailto:Ayleena.Thomas@leicester.gov.uk)** or call in at City Hall, 115 Charles Street.

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# **PUBLIC SESSION**

## **AGENDA**

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#### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

#### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

#### **3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

**Appendix A**

The minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Commission held on 13 January 2020 have been circulated, and Members are asked to confirm them as a correct record.

#### **4. PETITIONS**

The Monitoring Officer to report on the receipt of any petitions received in accordance with Council procedures.

#### **5. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS OR STATEMENTS OF CASE**

The Monitoring Officer to report on the receipt of any questions, representations or statements of case received in accordance with Council procedures.

#### **6. RESPONSIVE HOUSING REPAIRS PERFORMANCE REPORT**

**Appendix B**

The Director of Housing submits a report to the Housing Scrutiny Commission for noting, the purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Division's performance on the completion of responsive repairs to council properties.

The report will also provide an update about the implementation of service changes.

**7. HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY UPDATE** [Appendix C](#)

The Director of Housing submits a report to provide a further update to Members of the Housing Scrutiny Commission on progress in implementing Leicester's Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023, since the last update to Scrutiny in August 2019.

**8. IMPROVED SERVICE OFFER FOR FAMILIES: HOMES NOT HOSTELS** [Appendix D](#)

The Director of Housing submits a report to advise members of the Housing Scrutiny Commission on plans to implement the changes agreed as part of the homelessness strategy; a new service offer for homeless families.

Leicester's fourth Homelessness Strategy was formally agreed May 2018. Since this was formally adopted work has been ongoing to implement the agreed actions / proposals and build on the extensive work already in place.

The Housing Scrutiny Commission are asked for their feedback for the improved service offer for families.

**9. VOID PERFORMANCE REPORT: JUNE 2019 - DECEMBER 2019** [Appendix E](#)

The Director of Housing submits a report to update members of the Housing Scrutiny Commission on Void performance for the second and third quarters of 2019/20.

**10. EMPTY HOMES UPDATE** [Appendix F](#)

The Director of Housing submits a report to update members of the Housing Scrutiny commission on the work that the Empty Homes Team are doing to bring long term private sector homes back into use.

**11. WORK PROGRAMME** [Appendix G](#)

Members of the Commission will be asked to consider the work programme and make suggestions for additional items as it considers necessary.

**12. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS**



Leicester  
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the  
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: MONDAY, 13 JANUARY 2020 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Westley (Chair)  
Councillor Nangreave (Vice Chair)

Councillor Aqbany  
Councillor Gee

Councillor O'Donnell  
Councillor Willmott

In attendance:

Councillor Cutkelvin – Assistant City Mayor, Housing and Education  
Councillor Clarke – Deputy City Mayor, Environment and Transportation

\* \* \* \* \*

**43. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor Pickering.

**44. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Aqbany declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the general business of the meeting that he had family members who were council tenants.

Councillor Westley declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the general business of the meeting that he had family members who were council tenants.

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, these interests were not considered so significant that they were likely to prejudice the Councillors' judgement of the public interests. The Councillors were not therefore required to withdraw from the meeting during consideration and discussion of the agenda items.

**45. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

Minute 29: Apologies for Absence:

Councillor Willmott felt that he had communicated his apologies for absence from the last meeting which were not recorded.

Minute 34: Goscote House and sprinkler installation update:

The Vice-Chair asked a number of questions in relation to the demolition of Goscote House and the need to be reflective. The Director of Housing was requested to provide a briefing for the Vice-Chair to discuss the issues raised in the questions.

AGREED:

that the minutes of the Housing Scrutiny Commission meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2019 be confirmed as a correct record.

#### **46. CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair made the following announcements:

- Due to the clash of several diary events, it was requested that the date of the next Housing Scrutiny Commission meeting be rescheduled.
- It was noted that the proposal to close Border House would be on the next Housing Scrutiny Commission Meeting agenda prior to a final decision being taken.

#### **47. PETITIONS**

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

#### **48. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS OR STATEMENTS OF CASE**

The Monitoring Officer reported that no questions, representations or statements of case had been received.

#### **49. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET (INCLUDING CAPITAL PROGRAMME) 2020/21**

The Director of Housing submitted a report, which considered the proposed Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget for the 3 years from 2020/21 to 2022/23.

In presenting the report, the following was noted:

- Several pressures brought about by government were noted, including the requirement to reduce rents by 1% during 2016-2020, despite this the HRA still delivered balanced budgets. However, further pressures from central government included Right to Buy sales whereby Leicester City Council lost in excess of 400 properties last year, the rollout of Universal Credit and inflationary pressures, reference was made to 4.2.1 table 1.
- The 2019/20 capital programme was £48m, with more than half of this relating to the Council House Acquisition and New Builds Programme. A further £70m was added in November 2019 following Council approval to extend the programme of increasing affordable housing, this would also help to deliver the commitment of quality, energy efficient new homes and acquisitions.

- Appendix B detailed the proposed HRA Capital Programme 2020/21 to 2022/23 and it was noted that there would be an investment of £5m for Public Realm Works including communal areas and estates.
- Reference to Appendix E noted planned Capital works in Council dwellings, it was noted that works were only undertaken after the item was inspected and the repair history for the property was checked ensuring money was only spent where it was absolutely necessary.
- The report recommended that the budget for 2020/21 was set as a balanced budget, continuing the approach of only drawing on reserves to fund time-limited or one-off schemes.

In response to Commission Members' questions, the following issues were discussed and noted:

- In order to see where money would be best spent for housing and estates, district managers had been meeting with Ward Councillors to get information on priorities that would be included in proposals and a satisfaction survey to tenants would be carried out to obtain input of improvement areas.
- The Assistant City Mayor for Housing had offered to do housing briefings with Ward Councillors, for members to provide information as to what the priorities were for their ward areas.
- The Director of Housing clarified the proposed rent and service charges percentage increase in terms of costs. On average a two-bedroom property house with the 2.7% increase converts to approximately £2.76 on average. Service charge increase was pence, the increased hostel rents were to cover additional financial pressures. To not increase the rent and service charges would mean that investment would have to be reduced from the proposed budget. It was noted that 99% of hostel rents were covered by Housing Benefit.
- The core programme remained at a consistent level.
- Talks were in progress with the Sustainability Section of Estates and Building Services regarding proposals to improve energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions from existing properties including installing PV panels, further external wall installation, with the overall aim of reducing carbon emissions and reducing tenants' heating costs.
- Over 340 heat metres had already been installed in properties connected to the District Heating. Consideration would now be given to the other 2000 units on District Heating.
- Increases to loft insulation and the installation of energy efficient boilers would also continue to take place. The district heating scheme was proposed to have further investment to upgrade pumps and heating exchanges in sub stations.
- Time would be spent this year looking into what could replace gas Boilers e.g. hydrogen boilers and ground source heating. In addition, the installation of solar PV panels – possibly with battery storage – would be considered as longer-term solutions to provide renewable electricity for waylighting of communal areas. However, due diligence would need to be first carried out prior to any proposals.
- It was noted that the figures for the demolition of Goscote House were

provisional until a detailed specification could be provided, and procurement completed.

- It was agreed that the Director of Housing would circulate papers to Members of the Commission about the free WIFI proposal and also papers on the social value of Goscote House were requested.

Discussion took place on the feedback provided from the consultation with Tenants and Leaseholders' Forum in relation to rent and service charge proposals which was to;

- I. Increase rents by 2.5% (not the proposed 2.7%)
- II. Increase service charges by 1.7% (not the proposed 2.0%)
- III. Increase the hostel rents by 0.0% (not the proposed 2.0%)

It was proposed that the Commission should support Tenants and Leaseholders' Forum views. Upon being put to the vote the proposal was carried.

Agreed:

1. To note the financial pressures on the HRA and comment on the proposals for delivering a balanced budget.
2. To recommend to Council that the increases proposed by the Tenants and Leaseholders' Forum should be supported.
3. All other aspects of the budget were agreed.

## **50. LEICESTER'S CLIMATE EMERGENCY CONVERSATION**

The Director of Estates and Building Services submitted a report to inform Members about draft proposals for the city's response to the climate emergency, as well as the associated programme of community consultation and engagement entitled "Leicester's Climate Emergency Conversation".

The Chair noted that following the Climate Emergency consultations, this item would be brought back to Housing scrutiny as a matter of priority.

Duncan Bell, Corporate Environmental Consultant gave a presentation on the Climate Emergency. The following was noted:

- The Council declared a Climate Emergency in February 2019 to address the urgent action required to prevent global heating from exceeding 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.
- Consultations were now in progress in various formats including an online questionnaire, community discussions, one day workshops for adults and young people, primary school discussions, a physical pack and use of the Council's new moderated online discussion platform: Dialogue.
- Following the consultations, feedback from the public would inform the development of a draft action plan for the Council's response to the emergency, which would be adopted in 2020.

In response to concerns of the Commission:

- Potential ways in which we could work with the private sector to

encourage them to achieve carbon reductions would include using the selective licences scheme.

- It was encouraged to lobby central government to do more and the Chair requested that Commission Members and Assistant City Mayor, Councillor Cutkelvin wrote to their local MP's and inform them of the Climate Emergency consultation.
- The Director of Housing noted that plans to be more carbon neutral had already started and this would be demonstrated in phase 2 housing plans.

Agreed:

1. That the progress made since the climate emergency declaration, including the consultation and engagement programme currently underway be noted.
2. Commented on the proposals for discussion, including their implications for the city and for the Council;
3. That all Councillors to help to publicise the Climate Emergency Conversation through their role as Ward Councillors and inform their local MP's; and
4. Following the consultations, this item be brought back to Housing Scrutiny as a matter of priority.

## **51. WORK PROGRAMME**

The Housing Scrutiny Commission work programme was noted.

## **52. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS**

There being no other items of urgent business, the meeting closed at 7.04pm.



# Report to Housing Scrutiny Commission

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## **Responsive Housing Repairs Performance Report**

Housing Scrutiny Commission: Feb 2020

Lead Member: Councillor Cutkelvin

Lead director: Chris Burgin

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### **Useful information**

- Ward(s) affected: All
- Report author: Ian Craig, Head of Service
- Author contact details: Ext 37 5211
- Report version number: v 1



- 2.5 Between April and December 2019 the repairs service completed 77.3% of repairs on the first visit and 87.1% of repairs within target time.
- 2.6 A total of 68 repairs related complaints have been made in 2019-20 (April to December), equating to 0.10% of overall repairs.
- 2.7 The current primary channel of access to the service is through the telephone by calling 0116 4541007 (option 1), Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm. Outside of these hours' customers call 0116 2549439. Between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019, the Call Centre received a total of 92,795 calls.
- 2.8 The online service of 'My Account' is also currently available to report repairs online 24 hours a day.
- 2.9 Front line staff such as Housing officers are also able to take reports of repairs.
- 2.10 Appointments are offered between the following times:
- Morning appointments between 8am and midday
  - Afternoon appointments are between 12pm and 4pm.
- 2.11 There are 3 different categories of repairs.

Category	Description	Timescale
Priority 1	Emergency Work	to be completed within 24Hr
Priority 2	Routine Repairs	to be completed within 10 working days
Priority 3	Programmed Repairs	Surveyed within 10 working days and completed within 8 weeks to 12 months according to job

Examples of priority 1 repairs are:

- Total failure of electrical power and/or lights
- Serious water leak
- Total loss of heating

Examples of priority 2 repairs are:

- Minor repairs to windows or doors
- Repairs to kitchens
- Ceiling repairs

Examples of priority 3 repairs are:

- Repairs to paths
- Repairs to guttering
- Repairs to communal areas

2.12 Tenants can access the Repairs handbook online which gives them detailed information about their property, the council's responsibilities and their own responsibilities.

### 3. Responsive Repairs Performance

3.1 Four key indicators evaluate the success of the repairs service. These are:

- Percentage of repairs completed on first visit
- Number of Repairs which are outstanding and out of category
- Percentage of Day to Day repairs carried out within target time
- Percentage of repairs which lead to a complaint

More detailed performance information against each is set out in 3.2 to 3.5 of this report.

Indicator	DoT	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20 YTD
Percentage of repairs completed at first visit – excluding external works	Higher is better	80.6%	89.3%	87.6%	77.3%
Number of repairs which are out of category	Lower is better	1,851	813	753	652
Percentage of repairs completed within target time	Higher is better	84.3%	85.7%	88.4%	87.1%
Percentage of repairs reported where a complaint has been received	Lower is better	0.5%	0.33%	0.21%	0.10%

#### 3.2 Percentage of repairs completed on first visit

For Quarter Three (October to December), the percentage of jobs completed on first visit has been calculated at 75.9%. This compares with figures of 76.1% and 80.1% for Quarters One and Two respectively. The stretch target was set at 92.0%.

Several operational challenges were identified around reaching this target during the review period. Most of these issues have been addressed, however there are still improvements to reach. These include better planning of work and rigorous challenges to ensure that we maximise completion on first visits.

#### 3.3 Number of Repairs which are outstanding and out of category

Latest data shows the number of outstanding repairs at 652. This figure does not include any gas or communal heating repairs, or any repairs being completed to void properties.

A break down by area is provided in Appendix 2.

### **3.4 Percentage of Day to Day repairs carried out within target time**

In Quarter Three of 2019-20 (October to December), 86.7% of repairs were completed within target time, compared against 87.1% and 87.5% for Quarters 1 and 2 respectively. The stretch target for 2019-20 was set at 92.0%.

In relation to the out of category jobs, Management meet monthly to see what measures are needed to improve performance and address out of category jobs including setting Repair Managers targets, prioritising resources to ensuring that these jobs are completed. Some of these jobs are not completed within category because of tenant's availability and convenience regarding arranging appointments.

### **3.5 Percentage of repairs which lead to a complaint**

Tenant's complaints about the repairs service have matched the significant reduction in historic outstanding jobs and these have remained consistently low in 2019-20.

The latest target set for 2019-20 was to achieve below 0.5%; this performance was exceeded in every single month between April and December 2019. The current year-to-date performance is calculated at 0.10%.

### **3.6 Performance in 2019/20**

3.7 Between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019 a total of 66,281 repairs have been completed.

3.8 87.1% of these repairs were completed within the target time and 77.3% of repairs undertaken have been completed on the first visit. This is a reduction from the first 2 quarters; however, the service has experienced difficulties in recruiting trade operatives i.e. Electricians and at this moment we have 6 Vacancy's. This has been a testing time for the service, which included the need to move operatives on to help carry out work needed to enable the elections to go ahead. We also a further 2.5 vacancy's for Team Leaders which we are looking to recruit to. We have been out on more than 2 occasion to fill both Team Leaders and Electricians. When these posts are filled it should help to improve the first visit completion rate. In addition, the service is focusing on challenging staff to complete their work on the first visit where possible.

3.9 Latest data shows a total of 652 repair jobs remained outstanding and out of category. This figure does not include gas or district heating repairs or voids. The service is working to reduce this to the set target of 300 and has such will be introducing guidelines to Works

Planners on time allowed to complete second appointments bringing consistence and better monitoring of performance amongst staff.

Further measures have been put into place to ensure that team leader record all site visits in their outlook dairy this will enable the service to monitor numbers of site visits and communication between Team leader and operatives around performance and Health and safety issues

3.10 Tenant complaints about the repairs service have continued to reduce now standing at 0.10% of all repairs completed.

## **4. Service Changes**

### **4.1 Channel Shift**

4.1.1 The Northgate IT system has now been running since January 2016 the next stage for day to day repairs is to introduce channel shift to provide tenants the opportunity to make their own arrangements in appointing repair work at their property. This will improve services for tenants, specifically improving communication with tenants and flexibility around appointments.

4.1.2 To achieve the introduction of online reporting it was necessary to change the existing mobile working solution. This work is now complete, the new Mobile working system was introduced in early 2019 work has been ongoing to bed the system in including addressing teething issues.

This implementation will enable much more effective online services for the repairs service, including tenants booking their own repairs alongside pictorial repairs related information to aid tenants select the correct repair details.

### **4.2 Customer Satisfaction Monitoring**

4.2.1 Customer Satisfaction monitoring has been introduced and the business is working through embedding this as part of its standard procedures ensuring it is embedded with staff. This will eventually enable the business to collect more timely data and respond to this quickly where there is dissatisfaction.

### **4.3 Communal Area Planned Maintenance**

4.3.1 A programme of planned maintenance has now been introduced across the 1,035 internal communal areas. This will make the service more efficient and effective allowing early notification of works being carried out to tenants and reducing ad- hoc responsive repairs.

4.3.2 In addition an inner-city program of cutting back overgrown shrubbery and metal fence painting, including general repairs as commenced in the St Peters and St Matthews area involving several internal agency's Neighbour Improvement team, Grounds Maintenance

And the Repairs Metal works these is to be rolled out across the city

#### **4.3.3 Area Planned de-scaling**

4.3.4 A programme of planned di-scaling of soil pipes in towel blocks is to be launched March 2020 this will help prevent blockages and reduce significant damage and disruption when occurs to customers.

#### **4.4 Apprentices**

4.4.1 The Housing Division continues to invest in apprentices and is now starting the process of recruitment for the 2020 intake. This will consist of 7 multi-skilled apprentices following a core trade programme. In 2018, we started focusing on core trade apprenticeship programmes and recruited 4 Electrical apprentices. In 2019 we recruited a further 19 apprentices in a variety of core trades. Once the 2020 apprentices have been recruited, we will have a total of 30 apprentices, all of whom will be completing single-trade programmes with an element of 'multi-skilling' included in their programme.

4.4.2 This March 4 Property Maintenance Apprentices are due to complete their programmes and opportunities are currently being made available for them to secure work with the Council after the successful completion of their apprenticeships.

#### **5. Next Steps**

6.1 Channel shift - The introduction of online booking of appointments will enable tenants to book an appointment online directly and to choose a suitable appointment slot.

6.2 The service is still driving forward with improvements to bring about better service performance and ownership within the workforce.

6.3 Introduce a pilot to encourage high performance and accountability with better planning of time allocated to work jobs, to help towards a more effective and efficient customer service in helping reduce waiting times for works to be carried out.

6.4. Other ongoing service and operational improvements continue. These are focused around, improving our operating processes in being Customer focused and flexible to the tenants needs.

- Enhancing communications around materials, deliveries to homes so our tenants understand what is happening all the time in the repairs process.
- We also continue to challenge our fleet usage to make sure we are using it effectively and challenge our supply and delivery of materials to the Housing Service as part of a review under the Corporate Technical Services Review.
- Vehicles fitted with more modern internal racking to ensure that storage in vehicles is maximised and materials are available to complete as many repairs first time. Delayed due to contact issues with bidding contractors.
- A managed stores service that provides materials for repair works is being procured during 2020 and is expected to be introduced starting Oct 2020
- Introduction of de-scaling programme for soil and vent pipes in high rise dwellings 2020 still some delay due to specialised vehicle being delayed

- We are looking to improve overall productivity by providing guidelines for estimated completion times for the Work Planners to enable them to more effectively plan their work.

**9. Background information and other papers:**

**10. Summary of appendices:**

- Appendix 1 – Project key Performance Indicators
- Appendix 2 - Number of Repairs which are outstanding and out of Category by Type

**11. Is this a “key decision”?**

No

**Appendix 1 – Key Performance Indicators**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>2017-18</b>	<b>2018-19</b>	<b>2019-20 Target</b>	<b>2019-20 YTD</b>
Percentage of repairs completed at first visit – excluding external works	89.3%	87.6%	92.0%	77.3%
Number of repairs which are out of category	813	753	300	652
Percentage of repairs completed within target time	85.7%	88.4%	92.0%	87.1%
Numbers of repairs related complaints	296	190	n/a	68
Percentage of repairs reported where a complaint has been received	0.33%	0.21%	< 0.5%	0.10%

**Appendix 2 – Number of Repairs which are outstanding and out of Category by Type  
December 2019**

Function 1	Out of Cat	Function 2	Out of Cat	Function 3	Out of Cat
Rob Pallatt		Tony Waterfield		Aidy Farmer	
Carpentry	9	Bathrooms	81	DPC / Timber Treatment	0
Manufactured Joinery	0	Kitchens	46	Damp / Condensation	0
W&D Glazing	50	Drainage	3	Communal Internal	0
W&D Repairs	250	Wet Trades	59	External Ground Work	1
Communal Elec	6	Social Services	0	External Heights	0
Internal Elec	146			G&T Sites	0
				Metalwork	1
				Painting	0
				Signworks	0
<b>Function 1 Total</b>	<b>461</b>	<b>Function 2 Total</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>Function 3 Total</b>	<b>2</b>
				<b>Repairs Totals</b>	<b>652</b>

# Housing Scrutiny Commission Report

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## **Homelessness Strategy Update**

Housing Scrutiny Commission: 25<sup>th</sup> February 2020

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Assistant Mayor for Housing: Cllr Elly Cutkelvin

Lead director: Chris Burgin

## Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All
- Report author: Justin Haywood, Service Manager – Housing Solutions & Partnerships
- Author contact details: justin.haywod@leicester.gov.uk
- Report version number: 1.0

### 1. Purpose

- 1.1 To provide a further update to Members of the Scrutiny Commission on progress in implementing Leicester's Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023, since the last update to Scrutiny in August 2019.

### 2. Summary

- 2.1 Leicester's fourth [Homelessness Strategy](#) was formally agreed May 2018 and coincided closely with the inception of the Homelessness Reduction Act, which came into force on 3rd April 2018. The Homelessness Reduction Act significantly increased the depth and breadth of local authorities' statutory homeless duties. Most notably it added two new duties; the 'Prevention Duty' and 'Relief (recovery from homelessness) Duty'.
- 2.2 As a result, the workload of our front-line officers and the Service has increased significantly, and the government have provided some temporary funding to acknowledge these increased burdens upon local authorities. It is important that this funding continues to be made available by central government if they expect local authorities to continue to achieve the level of prevention and support currently being delivered. They have provisionally informed LAs that the funding will be extended to cover at least 2020/2021.
- 2.3 The Strategy factored in new pressures, and an updated landscape, and makes it clear that this is not a council endeavour alone, as tackling homelessness requires significant partnership working to address the root causes of homelessness, and provide the level of support and advice needed to those affected.
- 2.4 As such, Leicester and key partners are undertaking an ambitious programme of work to tackle homelessness locally. Work has been ongoing to implement the agreed actions / proposals and build on the extensive work already in place.
- 2.5 Shown below is the latest progress made since the last update (September 2019 to February 2020) across the key strategic aims:
1. Anyone at risk of homelessness is aware of and has access to the services they may need to prevent it.
  2. Provide suitable accommodation and support options for people who are, or who may become homeless.
  3. Reduce rates of repeat homelessness amongst single people.
  4. Provide the right support and services so that no person needs to sleep rough in Leicester.

### 3. Progress report

#### **3.1 Strategic Aim 1: Anyone at risk of homelessness is aware of and has access to the services they may need to prevent it**

3.1.1 Homelessness Prevention, formally good practice, is now part of the statutory duty. The duty requires an authority to provide help and advice to prevent homelessness for households in their district. We work together with applicants to create and carry out a personalised housing plan.

3.1.2 Prevention solutions remain high for households who approach us with a threat of homelessness. The Service achieves this by offering a multitude of interventions, aiming first for sustainment of current accommodation and, failing that, a new accommodation solution before homelessness occurs. Interventions include:

- Negotiation with family and friends, lenders, and landlords;
- Referrals and signposting to partner agencies and specialist advice;
- Private Rented Sector solutions through financial help and incentive schemes;
- Housing Register priority;
- Advice about other housing solutions such as Shared Ownership, where appropriate

3.1.3 Since the last update, the advice and assistance available to customers has improved further with the opening of a digital gateway - a mobile application has been developed (MyHome) which allows customers, should they wish, to get information and advice on their housing situation 24 hours a day without approaching the service, and to self-refer themselves into the service if the situation is serious.

This does not replace any face-to-face or telephone advice services. It is an additional service for those than can, and want to, self-serve online. Users are able to enter the housing problem they are experiencing and answer a few questions and the MyHome app will provide clear advice, contacts for further information and refer to the council's housing options service; dependent on the problem. Customers facing homelessness will also be able to use the app to manage their Personalised Housing Plan if they later make a formal homeless application, including keeping in touch with, and sending documents to, their case worker.

3.1.4 Overcrowding is known to be a key driver in family exclusions, which remain in themselves a leading reason for homelessness. The council are currently developing a holistic strategy to reduce overcrowding in the city. One key step already taken within the period was to make changes to the Allocations Policy to allow the most overcrowded households to be given a Band 1 priority.

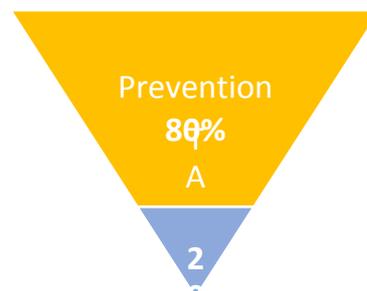
#### **3.2 Strategic Aim 2: Provide suitable accommodation and support options for people who are, or who may become homeless**

3.2.1 If prevention does not work, or if applicants seek help when they are already homeless, there is a range of support available to work with the customer to help them recover as quickly as possible.

- 3.2.2 The success levels for applicants at this stage is high. The Service achieves this by offering a variety of housing options to applicants, including the housing register, sign-posting to separate RP housing lists, Private Rented Sector solutions through financial help and incentive schemes, advice about other housing solutions such as Shared Ownership, where appropriate, and ensuring any support required to sustain solutions is made available.
- 3.2.3 With regard to the housing register specifically, this period saw the introduction of Allocations Policy changes that enable some homeless households (based on vulnerability and circumstances leading to homelessness) to achieve a Band 1 priority, leading to a higher level of lets to homeless applicants (82% increase in lettings).
- 3.2.4 The city council intends to deliver about 1,500 new affordable homes over the next four years, including developing sites to provide the estimated 640 additional Extra Care supported living spaces needed over the next 10 years. We have so far acquired 224 new properties that will be made available to those on the Housing Register. Further acquisitions are ongoing to achieve the target set.
- 3.2.5 With regard to the private rented sector solutions, recent piloted changes to landlord incentive schemes have resulted in a significant increase in PRS tenancies available for let to homeless households. The next immediate step is to formalise the changes and launch re-badged schemes with appropriate publicity. Longer term plans include building on successes in the sector, and conducting research to determine if Leicester may benefit from creation of a social-lettings-agency, and if so - what might that look like?
- 3.2.6 LCC plans to roll out selective licensing across Leicester’s private rented sector, which is aimed at improving the overall quality of accommodation. This needs to be carefully managed in terms of relationships with landlord, especially those who partner with us to prevent homelessness. As such, Housing are included in the Selective Licensing Project Board.
- 3.2.7 Importantly, the Council’s duties at this stage also includes providing temporary accommodation to families and vulnerable single-person households.

3.2.8 Accommodation for families

3.2.9 During the period, only 20% of families presenting as homeless or at risk of homelessness went on to need temporary accommodation (TA). In most cases where families seek assistance from the council when they are at risk of homelessness they do not actually become homeless.



3.2.10 On average, each quarter there are 55 new families requiring temporary accommodation.

3.2.11 We have been able to maintain a 100% record of ensuring all families placed in B&B do not exceed 6-weeks’ occupancy, which is a legal requirement upon LAs. Furthermore, most families have been moved on from B&B within a very short period of time – days not weeks.

3.2.12 During the period, progress has been made on consideration of a new model of family temporary accommodation to support the “Homes not Hostels” vision. The council aims to provide self-contained temporary accommodation, when there is no alternative, which allows families to live as normal a family life as possible, whilst they find suitable settled accommodation for their family.

### 3.2.13 Accommodation for singles

3.2.14 Progress continues to be made towards creating a range of different options for single-person households.

3.2.15 Current tendering exercises have focussed on expanding the accommodation pathway, making sure to include a selection of ‘step down’ accommodation options as well as shorter-term temporary accommodation. A new pathway is being developed to ensure that applicants are able to access the support they need at the level most appropriate for them.

3.2.16 New eligibility criteria to be implemented in Spring 2020 to support this new pathway. The new eligibility criteria gives clearer priority for temporary accommodation to individuals who have the most complex support needs. The eligibility criteria was consulted upon as part of the homelessness strategy and the time is now right for implementation.

3.2.17 Progress has been made within the period to develop Housing First initiatives with East Midlands Housing Association, and Action Homeless have also made progress with their own Housing First offer.

### 3.2.18 Prison releases, and accommodation for offenders

3.2.19 From 1<sup>st</sup> July new contracts were set up with Adullam Housing Association who are a long-standing provider of accommodation support services for offenders locally. Specialist services help us support criminal justice agencies locally by ensuring the safety of the public and reduce reoffending rates.

3.2.20 The number of specialist accommodation units available for offenders has increased from a total of 20 units to a total of 30 units. This accommodation includes a range of support levels and licence agreement terms, including ‘step down’ accommodation to assist Offenders to move on into independent accommodation.

3.2.21 We have also been working closely with probation services during the period. The National Probation Service are making a financial contribution towards providing this accommodation service and are co-locating probation staff alongside this contracted provider.

3.2.22 Fortnightly housing options surgeries have been introduced at Leicester Prison from June 2019. Working with Leicester Prison a new referral pathway has been introduced so individuals who are likely to be homeless on release can get early help and support.

3.2.23 To further develop partnership arrangements, workshops have recently been held with Probation, Prisons, CRCs, and other partners to look at how the Offender housing pathway can be optimised. Further meetings are planned next month.

### 3.2.24 Hospital Discharges

3.2.25 The referral and pathway set up with the NHS's Housing Enablement Team has been reviewed in partnership and improvements have been made to ensure LCC are alerted earlier, and can take action more swiftly.

### 3.2.26 Accommodation for young people

3.2.27 The Joint working group established with children's services to develop a joint commissioning exercise continues to make progress. This will consider the supported accommodation needs of 16-25-year olds in the city. The driver behind the joint commissioning exercise is to allow LCC to provide a better range of options for young people.

3.2.28 Strategy actions relating to younger persons will be aligned with the ongoing placement sufficiency work.

3.2.29 Recent co-production meetings have led to much improved pathways for care leavers, and a more effective '16/17yr old procedure'.

### 3.2.30 Housing-related Floating support

3.2.31 A recent re-tendering exercise for improved floating support services for Leicester has closed to submissions at the end of January, and is currently under evaluation.

## **3.3 Strategic Aims 3 and 4: Reduce rates of repeat homelessness amongst single people & provide the right support and services so that no person needs to sleep rough in Leicester**

3.3.1 During the period, work has continued with local partners and charities, and we continue to fund and support various initiatives in the community, including day centres and specialist case workers (navigators). Rough sleeping has reduced by around 30% during the period.

3.3.2 Safe Space at Andover Street continues to be an important part of our offer to this cohort. This offers an additional 10 bed spaces for rough sleepers. Individuals who do not want to access accommodation-based support services can access this service nightly for a safe space to sleep overnight and leave in the morning.

3.3.3 2019/20 RSI funding of £350k was secured previously from Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). This included funding for 20 additional hostel beds at Action Homeless and additional staff supporting rough sleepers. This, along with the funding secured from the successful bid to MHCLG for Rapid Rehousing Pathway funding (£211k) was evaluated.

3.3.4 LCC continue to bid for as much funding as possible to support this group, and we have recently been advised that we have been successful in securing £566,783 for the 20/21 fiscal. This will allow continuation of the good work, and continued reduction of rough sleeping and repeat homelessness within Leicester.

- 3.3.5 Work to set up donation points across the city was completed, as part of the fundraising Charter working group, involving Bid Leicester. The public can donate to charities support the homeless and assist in providing additional services such as the winter shelter. The first phase of pay points went live in October and by the beginning of January the points had collected donations totalling £4,975.
- 3.3.6 No.5 drug and alcohol recovery centre received almost 8,000 visits since opening. This service is run by Inclusion Health Care with support from peer-led recovery service Dear Albert. It provides services from organisations including substance misuse treatment service Turning Point, the Department of Work and Pensions, Restorative Justice and Inclusion Healthcare itself which provides GP services for socially excluded and vulnerable and homeless people.
- 3.3.7 Housing Scrutiny Members were previously advised that we have achieved an exciting and promising partnership with St. Mungo's to open a recovery college for homeless clients within the Dawn Centre. St Mungo's have been recruiting and getting ready to launch, and we now have an Official launch happening within April 2020.



## Housing Scrutiny

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**Improved service offer for families:  
Homes not hostels**

25<sup>th</sup> February 2020

Assistant City Mayor: Cllr Cutkelvin

Lead director: Chris Burgin

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## Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All but especially Abbey (where Border House is located)
- Report author: Caroline Carpendale
- Author contact details: [caroline.carpendale@leicester.gov.uk](mailto:caroline.carpendale@leicester.gov.uk)
- Report version number: draft

### 1. Summary

- 1.1 Leicester's fourth Homelessness Strategy was formally agreed May 2018. Since this was formally adopted work has been ongoing to implement the agreed actions / proposals and build on the extensive work already in place.
- 1.2 This report advises members of the Housing Scrutiny Commission on plans to implement the changes agreed as part of the homelessness strategy; a new service offer for homeless families.

### 2. Supporting information

#### Proposals from the Homelessness Strategy

- 2.1 As part of the homelessness strategy the proposals made regarding homeless families were:
  - For families who are facing homelessness, we will work to accommodate them in independent accommodation and only use temporary accommodation when they require additional support.
  - All temporary accommodation for families commissioned by the council will be self-contained.
  - We will support children's services to provide suitable accommodation when parenting assessments are required.

#### Current emergency accommodation for families (Border House Hostel)

- 2.2 This hostel was initially opened in 1970 and has been extended since. There are 26 bed rooms across 10 houses / flats on the main site. There are also 17 2-bed flats on Bridlespur Way. At the main hostel site, the living space available to families whilst they are accommodated is limited and families can share kitchen, lounge and bathroom facilities with other families. They also share use of free launderette facilities with other families and there is very little room to store personal belongings. This type and layout of accommodation leads it to feel very institutional.
- 2.3 The council's service analysis team looked at the services provided by the family support service and of the Border House Hostel reported (June 2018) *"The accommodation is basic and there is a lack of storage for possessions. Sharing with another family is destabilising and can feel threatening as there is minimal control over the space that service user's children are living within."*

- 2.4 There was also a recent fire service audit that identified a number of improvements required. All improvements have been made to ensure the safety of residents staying at Border House hostel, however to make this building fit for purpose for the future would require significant investment. Whilst we have worked to keep Border House up to a satisfactory standard and make improvements the structure and layout of this building it is not conducive with the aims and objectives to provide homeless families with self-contained accommodation.
- 2.5 National research ('This is no place for a child' The experience of homeless families in emergency accommodation. Shelter November 2015) found:
- Families do not have the space to live their lives – to play, study, or relax. Nor a place of safety where they can grow and develop.
  - Disruption to their family routines (travel to work / school / support networks)
  - Impact on children's and parents mental and physical health and child development
  - Impact on school and education
- 2.6 Border House currently offers families access to an on-site creche (Corner Club) and offer shared space for families to minimise impacts on families whilst staying in the hostel. By providing families with their own self-contained properties dispersed across the city, this will minimise disruption to family life. They will be able to more easily maintain access to their existing schools, GPs, childcare services etc. Families placed in temporary accommodation homes will be provided with support to maintain and access services available in the local community.

### **Proposed Service Offer**

- 2.7 In cases when temporary accommodation is provided, we want this to be self-contained, so this is as much like a home as possible (homes not hostels). Also, that this meets the accommodation and support needs of the family and as short a time is spent in temporary accommodation as possible whilst families are supported to find a suitable settled home.
- 2.8 The proposal will be to secure 1-3 bed accommodation either from council or other stock commissioned from provider(s). It is intended to have an initial stock of 45 dwellings and if these were all to be council stock, this would mean 0.16% of the existing housing stock would be used for temporary accommodation.
- 2.9 The properties, which will be fully furnished, will be dispersed across the city to enable consideration for households who have strong reasons to remain in a particular area for employment, education or support networks.

### **Support for families**

- 2.10 Each family staying in self-contained temporary accommodation will receive visiting support from a new family transitions service, who will work to ensure all their support needs are addressed. The families transitions team will work

closely with other agencies to ensure the family receives the tailored support needed to meet the needs of each family member, making resettlement more achievable and providing a more stable future for the children and the entire family unit.

2.11 This service would be able to provide support to families to:

- set up and maintain a home
- maintain children's access to education and health care
- manage safety and security of their accommodation
- maintain their health and wellbeing
- develop their life skills, such as cooking, cleaning and budgeting skills
- apply for benefits
- signposting to education, training and employment support services
- signposting and support to access childcare and children's support services
- access other services
- get advice and advocacy in connection with housing or tenancy matters

2.12 The families transitions team won't provide:

- counselling
- childcare
- parenting support

However, the team will signpost and support families to access these services in the community. We will work closely with adults & children's social care services to ensure parents and children are able to continue to or access support in the local community, including local children centres. This will help to ensure that children and families are supported in their local communities, reducing disruption to children and their parents.

#### **How will this be done?**

2.13 As of January there were 73 homeless families accommodated at the council operated Border House main site and Bridlespur Way and through paid nightly self-contained temporary accommodation.

2.14 There will be a transition period to move from the existing temporary accommodation provided at Border House. This will be done through a phased approach.

- Phase 1. LCC temporary accommodation will no longer be shared between families. At this point there will be a total of 68 properties available.
- Phase 2a. As each homeless family moves on from Border House (main-site) hostel this will no longer be used, and the Corner Club will close. This decision will only be taken when suitable alternative accommodation and support is available for each family. At this point there will be a total of 58 properties available at Bridlespur Way and through paid nightly temporary accommodation.

Phase 2b. On-going commissioning of 45 properties of 1-3 bed.

Phase 3. Continuous monitoring and reviewing ways to achieve higher levels of prevention and higher move-on rates from temporary accommodation with the aim of minimising the use of temporary accommodation.

- 2.15 The numbers of families requiring temporary accommodation throughout this period will be closely monitored so appropriate action can be taken to manage demand and supply and the impacts of the decommissioning and commissioning plan will be carefully monitored and gradually implemented to ensure that it does not negatively impact upon families who are homeless.

### **Staffing implications**

- 2.16 These changes will require changes in staffing who support the Border House hostel & Corner Club (currently established 26 staff / 20.2 FTE). It is likely that a reduced number of staff will be required to support the future model of temporary accommodation and support.
- 2.17 During the first stage in decommissioning reductions in staff will come from deleting 3 vacancies. This would leave 23 staff / 17.2 FTE.
- 2.18 Many hostel staff work at both the family and singles temporary accommodation. To deliver improved services to single people and couples who are homeless additional staffing may be required. Existing staff will be utilised to minimise any potential redundancies. Vacancies across the service will be ringfenced for any staff affected by this proposal.
- 2.19 There will also be the new visiting support service for families in temporary accommodation. This also would mitigate any potential redundancies.
- 2.20 Consultation with staff and trade unions will take place in line with the council's organisational review policy.

### **3. Details of Scrutiny**

- 3.1 As part of the homelessness review & strategy consultation a full consultation exercise was undertaken asking for feedback on the draft strategy, including proposals. There was a public consultation questionnaire on the Council's webpages and this was promoted to groups / individuals with an interest in homelessness.
- 3.2 A special Homelessness Reference Group, which was a partnership group of any stakeholders providing services for homeless people in the city, was held to discuss the proposed strategy and proposals.
- 3.3 The homelessness review & strategy was shared with the Housing Scrutiny Commission for their feedback and they have been provided with two update reports on delivery of the strategy since it's adoption.

- 3.4 The use of temporary accommodation for families and the type of accommodation used has been researched looking at best practice guidance and comparator information from similar size authorities.
- 3.5 Based upon analysis of families accessing temporary accommodation there are very few families that require a high level of support in an accommodation-based service. Support will be assessed upon an individual basis and there will still be a provision of properties to meet the needs of crisis presentations and those who require more intensive housing related support.
- 3.6 Scrutiny are asked for their feedback for the improved service offer for families.

## Housing Scrutiny Commission

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Void Performance report: June 2019 - December 2019

Assistant Mayor for Housing: Cllr Elly Cutkelvin

Lead director: Chris Burgin

Date: 25<sup>th</sup> February 2020

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**City Mayor**

## Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: all
- Report author: Simon Nicholls
- Author contact details: simon.nicholls@leicester.go.uk
- Report version number: v.1

### 1. Summary

Void performance in the second and third quarters of 2019/20 has stayed pretty steady and has not been as good as we had hoped considering the encouraging start we had in quarter 1. However, we are now seeing signs of an improvement with void times reducing and we are confident that this will be maintained and reflected in the yearend figures.

It should be noted that the number of vacant properties we have had to deal with so far this year is 12% higher than this time last year, encouragingly the void rent loss figure for this financial year will be better than last year even though we have had an increase of the number of vacant properties.

### 2. Purpose of report

To update members of the Housing Scrutiny Commission on Void performance for the second and third quarters of 2019/20.

### 3. Supporting information including options considered:

The table below shows 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter 19/20 performance against 19/20 1<sup>st</sup>.quarter performance.

Measure	Target	Quarter 1 19/20	Quarter 3 19/20	Current
Routine Voids*	45 days average	50.6 days	65	61.1
Long term voids	90 days average	138.4 days	123.1	129.4
All voids	Maximum 90 days average	86.92	92.6	69.5
No. Voids Held	Less than 2% (421)	248	285	261
Total annual rent loss	No greater than £825k	£265k	£673(year end estimate£823k	
Ready to let to Occupation**	10 days	5.4 days	4.8	4.5

\*This figure is the number of days void from the end of one tenancy to the start of the

next including weekends.

\*\*This figure is the number of working days between when the property is ready to when the new tenancy starts.

### **Routine voids**

Are those properties that require a comparatively lower level of work prior to being re let.

### **Long term voids**

Are those properties which require a higher level of repair before it can be re let, the reasons maybe:

- Damp proof work, wood worm treatment.
- Asbestos removal (licenced)
- Structural repairs
- Major adaptations
- Fire damaged properties
- The property is being used as an office, by a resident's group or the police
- Projects (such as the tower blocks)
- New meters and supplies.
- Pest control.
- Rewires, new capital kitchens and bathrooms

### **All voids**

This is the term used when talking and reporting on all voids regardless of if they are routine or long term.

### **Number of voids held**

This is the number of vacant properties we hold at any one time; this should be less than 2% of the total stock and excludes decants

### **Total annual rent loss**

This is the amount of rental income we have lost as a result of a property being empty and is based on a daily rate, the longer the property is empty the greater the amount.

There are two weeks over the Christmas period that are defined as rent free, this means that December is traditional a low month for void income loss. The average weekly rental figure is: £69.97 (range £53.64 - £116.48)

### **Total annual council tax loss**

We become liable for paying council tax on void properties at a daily rate as soon as the property has been empty for 1 calendar month. There are exceptions around this but this is the case in the majority of cases. We work closely with Council Tax to ensure this information is correct and it is audited quarterly.

## The void journey

In 2016 we set up a Housing Scrutiny Void Task Group. Members of the group visited void properties and tracked their progress through the various process we follow to get them to 'The Letting Standard', at the time members found this a useful way of understanding the numerous process a void property goes through. I have taken an extract from the 'ultimate void' process to highlight to current members the number of stages a typical void property goes through from receiving the termination form the existing tenant to the new tenant moving in. I hope you find it useful:

**182 Thurcaston Road 58300018200**

KEY DATES AND INFORMATION FOR 182 THURCASTON ROAD					
Day	Date	Days	Service	Key Information	Notes
	29/04/2016		Housing Management	Notice received	Short notice period. Death?
	09/05/2016	1	Housing Management	<b>Void Start Date (Key received)</b>	
Mon	09/05/2016	1	Voids Technician	Carry out void inspection, EPC survey completed	
Mon	09/05/2016	1	Asbestos	Asbestos survey carried out	Asbestos were only given the front door key but needed access to all areas.
Mon	09/05/2016	1	Voids Technician	A total recharge of £679.50	
Tues	10/05/2016	2	Asbestos	Asbestos survey completed and updated on to Northgate	
Tues	10/05/2016	2	GBW	Ticket raised for new UPVC door	
Wed	11/05/2016	3	PLT	To CBL Advert	
Wed	11/05/2016	3	GBW	Shed door surveyed	work can be done after occupancy.
Fri	13/05/2016	5	Supervisor	Stores called to advise door has gone through	
Mon	16/05/2016	8	GBW	Door Delivered	
Wed	18/05/2016	10	PLT	Property allocated and offered	
Thurs	26/05/2016	18	PLT	Property refused	Didn't like area
Thurs	26/05/2016	18	Design	Rewire whilst void	
Fri	27/05/2016	19	PLT	Property allocated and offered	
Tues	31/05/2016	23	GBW	UPVC Door completed	
Fri	03/06/2016	26	Design	Rewire completed	Should have been RTL on this date.

Tues	07/06/2016	30	Voids Supervisor	Outstanding removal of Asbestos floors	Could have been completed earlier if those face fitted were available.
Wed	08/06/2016	31	Voids Supervisor	Extra spec work finished	
Thurs	09/06/2016	32	PLT	Property refused	Didn't like area
Thurs	09/06/2016	32	Housing Management	Keys returned to Housing office	
Fri	13/06/2016	33	PLT	Property allocated, offered and accepted.	
Sun	12/06/2016	35	Housing Management & Allocation	<b>Void End Date</b>	
Mon	13/06/2016		Housing Management & Allocation	New Tenant Arrived in property	

### Current issues affecting void times:

#### Key management:

This has always been a time stealer, tenants hand deliver their keys to certain locations across the city and they have to be collected, this is repeated for almost all of the functions that need to happen, some functions happen concurrently, like the actual inspection and the EPC but most others are carried out by different specialist teams. The actual movement of keys can add several days to the void time, the example in the table above shows the number of time keys are moved.

#### Recruitment:

There are always vacancies in the Void Team due to the number of people, the turnover and the time and difficulty we have recruiting appropriately trained staff. We have just recruited 3 new operatives which meant that we were fully resourced for a short time, however, the situation is constantly changing, and this is not the case now. To bridge the gap we do employ agency workers and we have also issues void repairs to contractors

#### Volume of void properties

The number of void properties is on the increase this year, for the same period last, the number of lets is 12% higher, however in spite of this we have forecast an improved rent loss figure.

#### Condition they are returned in

This is something that Scrutiny members were keen to explore when the Q1 report was presented, as before we continue to see properties returned back to us in a poor condition both internally and externally which has an impact on the time it takes for the property to be bought back into use. A project has started to look at the Tenancy Management function with a view to addressing this issue moving forward, I hope to be

able to bring you more news on this in subsequent reports.

#### Completing capital works

We continue to suffer delays due the completion of capital works in void properties. We carry out a lot of electrical rewires and kitchen refurbishment, this could be because we made the decision to defer the refurbishment to the void period to lessen the impact on the current tenant or the current tenants declined to have the work carried out at the time. When a property is void it is a good time to do these types of works as they can be very disruptive, but it does add to the time the property is empty. Our own craft staff do carry out some of these works but rewires and some kitchen refurbishments are issued out to contractors.

We are also experiencing contractor delays, the volume of work we are issuing

## 4. Details of Scrutiny

### Report for HSC

## 5. Financial, legal and other implications

### 5.1 Financial implications

None sought – for information only

### 5.2 Legal implications

None sought – for information only

### 5.3 Climate Change and Carbon Reduction implications

None sought – for information only

### 5.4 Equalities Implications

None sought – for information

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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## Housing Scrutiny Commission

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### **Empty Homes Update**

Assistant Mayor for Housing: Councillor Elly Cutkelvin

Date: 25<sup>th</sup> February 2020

Lead director: Chris Burgin

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## Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: Citywide
- Report author: Simon Nicholls/Carole Thompson
- Author contact details: simon.nicholls@leicester.gov.uk
- Report version number: V1

### 1. Purpose of report

To update members of the Housing Scrutiny commission on the work that the Empty Homes Team are doing to bring long term private sector homes back into use.

### 2. Supporting evidence

- During 2019/20 we continue to maximise our efforts on reducing total number of private sector properties empty over 18 months 5 and 10 years.

QUARTERLY COMPARISON OF TOTAL VACANTS AS AT 31/12/19							
Description	Baseline as at 31.03.19	Q.1 as at 30.06.19	Q.2 as at 30.09.19	Q.3 as at 31.12.19	Q.4 as at 31.03.20	Trend since last Quarter	Cumulative Trend
Active Caseload	287	298	297	299		Up by 2	Up by 12
Total Vacant over 18 Months	319	324	314	313		Down by 1	Down by 6
Sub Total Vacant over 5 Years	50	54	51	53		Up by 2	Up by 3
Sub Total Vacant over 10 Years	7	7	8	8		Unchanged	Up by 1

The Council Tax database is our primary data source of information for newly vacant properties.

Each month the figure changes depending on the numbers becoming vacant compared to the number being bought back into use. As part of the process we identify those that are unsuitable for residential use, misreported or 2<sup>nd</sup> homes

Data analysis is carried out on a monthly and quarterly basis for misinformation (MI), second homes and non-priority housing. If the original reason is no longer valid and properties have become empty again, these are added back onto our caseload. This exercise ensures the quality of data held by the empty homes team is as accurate as possible with only genuinely empty properties added to our active caseload. Whilst this is a desk top exercise initially officers have to visit these properties to identify if they are actually occupied or not, Council Tax are then notified so they can update their records and pursue the resident for non-payment of council tax etc.

The Empty Homes Officer role primary

## 2.1 Working Smarter

Empty homes officers are all highly experienced with good skills and local knowledge which is shared within the team. We are flexible, negotiate with owners on a wide range of individual and varied property situations, no matter what each empty property presents. We are committed to continually working with each owner to ensure properties are returned into occupation.

This involves:

- contacting all owners at an early stage;
- providing advice & support and information about their options;
- further information is available on the empty homes' website at: <https://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-community/housing/privately-owned-empty-homes/>
- owners can also complete the on-line e-statement of intentions form;
- agreeing Undertakings with timescales to bring the properties back into occupation;
- practical assistance through leasing schemes.

## 2.2 Leasing options include:

- HomeCome/lease
- LeicesterLet or
- Renting through private agents

## 2.3 Outcome of Council Intervention Apr 16 to Dec 19:

The outcome of council intervention has brought a total of 806 properties back in to use, though clearly others have become vacant.

## 2.4 Over 5 Year Empties Forecast for 2019-20:

The forecast for reducing over 5-year empties is set at 45.

Although we have claimed 8 properties as occupied 11 properties that were 4-years empty have become 5-years empty. 5-Year empties currently stand at 53 and includes 8 properties over 10-years empty. Even with a concerted effort from the team, bringing down the number of 5-year empties has proved to be elusive. A snap shot of reasons why these properties are empty is App

**2.5 Comparison of Total Active Caseload (Apr 2016 to December 2019):**

The total active caseload has reduced noticeably when compared to the baseline in 2016. 18-month have reduced by 17%. Over 5-year empties have fallen by 28% with 10-year empties falling by 58%. See Appendices B, C & D tables 11 and 12.

**2.6 Over 5 Years Empty Letter**

Most properties between 5-9 years empty are sent a “5-Year Empty Letter”, owners 6 months to improve and occupy properties otherwise a report will go to the Executive seeking approval for proceeding with a CPO. This measure has proved successful in reducing the over 5-year empties which are currently at 53. Many of these properties have an owner in care, the property is at probate or works are in progress. We continually review progress or monitor for change of circumstance on an ongoing basis.

**2.7 Over 10 Year Empty Letter**

Many of our properties empty over 10 years change owners, multiple times. Every time there is a new owner the process must start again at stage 1 because the CPO is against the owner not the property. Most owners are sent our “10 Year Empty Letter” (like the 5-year empty letter) giving them 6 months to improve and occupy these properties. This is an ongoing process. We have had great success in reducing the number of over 10- year empties down to 8.

Where we are unable to negotiate terms for the purchase of properties by agreement or are unable to locate owners, we will continue to use Compulsory Purchase Powers (CPO) to bring long term empty properties back into use

**2.8 CPOs Approved by the Executive:**

During the last year the Executive have approved 3 CPOs.

As at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019 a total of 120 cases have been approved for Compulsory Purchase Orders to date.

**2.9 CPO Forum:**

Bi monthly forums are held with Legal Services and Estates and Building Services to review and progress compulsory purchase cases and those undergoing negotiated purchase and sale at auction. The empty homes team also receives advice on CPO cases with complex or individual issues. The forum has proved to be invaluable for joined up thinking, deciding ways forward for complex cases and for sharing information.

- 2.10 Cases currently with Legal Services:**  
There is a total of 6 properties with Legal Services at various stages of compulsory purchase.
- 2.12 Negotiated Purchase:**  
During the last year there 1 negotiated purchase has completed.
- Valuations for negotiated purchases by the council are usually lower than the purchase price paid when the property is sold at auction. This means that the council is not losing out.
- 2.15 Council Tax Liability:**  
From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013 some council tax exemptions have been abolished and then replaced with a locally set discount premium unless the Valuation Office assess the property as uninhabitable. All empty properties will receive 100% discount for one month only and will then be liable for full charges. From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 properties empty over two years will become liable for an additional 100% premium and from April 2020 over 5-years empty will be charged three times the council tax of occupied homes.
- 2.16 Keeping Council Tax Informed**  
Following site visits the empty homes officers provide evidence confirming whether empty or occupied to enable Council Tax to update their records so the information held on their database is vastly improved in accuracy and keeps in line with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).
- 2.17 Council Tax Charging Orders**  
The team works closely with Council Tax liaising on the best way to recover council tax arrears which can often be thousands of pounds. Once an empty property reaches the stage where we are considering CPO, a management decision will be made on who will pursue it. Council Tax now have a system in place to recover council tax arrears by using Enforced Sale or a Bankruptcy Orders.
- As a last resort the Empty Homes team will continue to progress the CPO. The Empty Homes Team liaise closely with Council Tax to ensure that any property being pursued for CPO with council tax arrears has a Charging Order against the property to reclaim any outstanding arrears from the owner's compensation.
- 2.18 New Homes Bonus:**  
The New Homes Bonus is a grant paid by central government to local councils to reflect and incentivise housing growth in their areas. It is based on extra Council Tax revenue raised for new-build homes, conversions and long-term empty homes brought back into use. There is also an extra payment for providing affordable homes.

### 2.19 **Comparison of how other Local Authorities perform:**

The information provided is not a benchmarking comparison. Each Local Authority has their own reporting mechanisms. Leicester's stats are from Council Tax data source and excludes properties which do not fall under the Empty Homes remit whereas we do not know the source of the other information provided or how it is made up.

Another difference is that Leicester City Council targets long term properties empty over 18 months because we find the majority of these are genuinely empty. We have evidence to show there is less abortive work by targeting long term empties over 18 months rather than 6 months when we find that approximately half of those empty over 6-month become occupied without council intervention.

Please note there has been insufficient time to request 2019-2020 information from other Local Authorities.

### 2.20 **Second Homes (2<sup>nd</sup> Homes):**

There is an ongoing concern that second homes often mask empty properties.

Council tax regulations split unoccupied properties into:

- "vacant" (unoccupied and unfurnished) and
- unoccupied and furnished (including second homes)

A second home is considered to be "in use" as a 2<sup>nd</sup> home so there is no need for legislation to bring it into use as it is not "empty". There is also no need to exclude or include it from Local Authority powers and legislation because taking action is not relevant.

Local Authorities have powers around the amount of Council Tax charged and the normal powers that apply to the condition of "in use" housing such as dangerous structures, overgrown gardens etc but there are no powers to intervene with "use" as a second home as mentioned before. The legislation around abandonment would not apply either unless there were clear or stated evidence of abandonment should owners walk away from any interest in their property.

### 21.1 **Council Tax's Definition of Second Home:**

- Furnished property that is no-one's main residence because they live elsewhere
- Furnished and unfurnished homes ie a property is substantially unfurnished or furnished with a bed, chair furniture in situ like a holiday home.

Second homes are the cause of much frustration because if a property presents as boarded-up, inaccessible, overgrown gardens, numerous complaints are being received. It can bear the hallmarks of an empty property

but will be outside our remit if Council Tax have classified it as furnished and no-one's main home. Therefore, Empty Homes Team cannot add these to our caseload

### **3. Details of Scrutiny**

**Report prepared for Housing Scrutiny Commission.**

### **4. Financial, legal and other implications**

#### **4.1 Financial implications**

By bringing properties back into use, the Council benefits financially through increased collection of Council Tax and additional income through the New Homes Bonus.

Stuart McAvoy – Principal Accountant (37 4004)

Please note there has been insufficient time to request input from the Principal Accountant for this report

#### **4.2 Legal implications**

The Council is entitled to acquire land and property for the purpose of providing housing in accordance with Sections 9 and 17 of the Housing Act 1985 (as amended). This includes acquisition by or if considered appropriate by the use of compulsory purchase powers. As explained in this Report the Council will need to ensure that any acquisition or other action (including use of Compulsory Purchase powers) is in accordance with the Council's adopted Empty Homes Strategy and is compliance with both the legal basis and criteria for compulsory purchase (including published guidance).

John McIvor, Principal Lawyer, ext. 37-1409

Please note there has been insufficient time to request input from the Principal Lawyer for this report.

### **4.3 Climate Change and Carbon Reduction implications**

Where refurbishment work is carried out to empty properties to bring them back into use, this provides an opportunity to improve the energy efficiency of the property – for example through insulation, draft proofing, replacement lighting or new heating systems. Where this is possible, it has the potential to reduce the carbon emissions when families move into the homes. By reducing the need for new housing to be built, the service also helps to reduce the ‘embodied’ carbon emissions from manufacture of the construction materials.

Duncan Bell - Senior Environmental Consultant (37 2249)

Please note there has been insufficient time to request input from the Senior Environmental Consultant for this report

### **4.4 Equalities implications**

In carrying out its duties, the council must comply with the public-sector equality duty (Equality Act 2010) by paying due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.

Bringing empty homes back into use can help to meet demand for affordable housing in the city and potentially households on the housing register, and provide housing for people in need of a home. Empty homes brought back into use can help to meet the diverse housing needs of all sections of our communities

The benefits of returning an empty home into use can impact on the wider community, homes that are lived in help to support safer communities.

The impacts of returning empty homes into use would be positive on people from across all protected characteristics.

Surinder Singh Equalities Officer 37 4148

Please note there has been insufficient time to request input from the Equalities Officer for this report

## **5. Background information and other papers:**

Department for Communities & Local Government website

Leicester City Council Revenue & Benefits – New Homes Bonus Return

LCC Empty Homes Team e-files

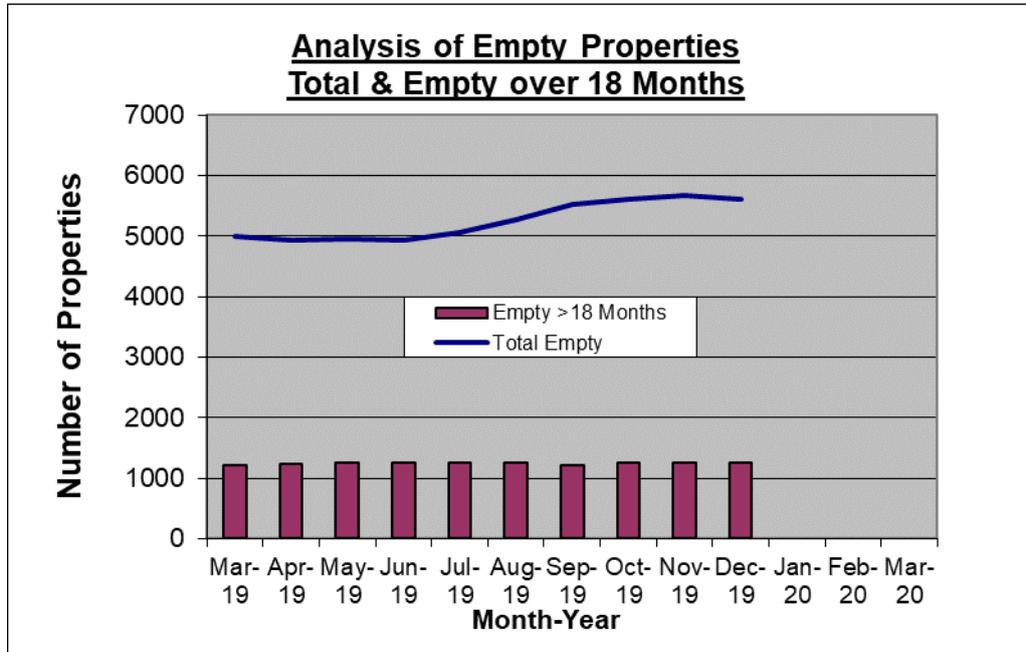
LCC Citywide Empty Homes strategy

Climate Change, Environment Team

Derby City Council, Empty Homes Information Request

Nottingham City Council, Empty Homes Information Request  
Sheffield City Council, Empty Homes Information Request

**Analysis of Empty Properties showing trend from 31.03.19 to 31.12.19**



**QUARTERLY COMPARISON OF TOTAL VACANTS AS AT 31/12/19**

<b>Description</b>	<b>Baseline as at 31.03.19</b>	<b>Q.1 as at 30.06.19</b>	<b>Q.2 as at 30.09.19</b>	<b>Q.3 as at 31.12.19</b>	<b>Q.4 as at 31.03.20</b>	<b>Trend since last Quarter</b>	<b>Cumulative Trend</b>
Active Caseload	287	298	297	299		Up by 2	Up by 12
Total Vacant over 18 Months	319	324	314	313		Down by 1	Down by 6
Sub Total Vacant over 5 Years	50	54	51	53		Up by 2	Up by 3
Sub Total Vacant over 10 Years	7	7	8	8		Unchanged	Up by 1

### Baseline Comparison

Workstream	<b>31/03/16 Baseline</b>	31/03/17	31/03/18	30/09/19	31/12/19	31/03/20	2016-19 % Reduction
18 Months	<b>378</b>	345	292	319	313		17%
5 Years	<b>74</b>	66	52	50	53		28%
10 Years	<b>19</b>	15	7	7	8		58%

**Comparison of Vacant Properties From 2016-2019  
for Stage 0s, 18 Months, 5 and 10 Years**

Quarterly from 2016-2019	JUN 16	SEP 16	DEC 16	MAR 17	JUN 17	SEP 17	DEC 17	MAR 18	JUN 18	SEP 18	DEC 18	MAR 19	JUN 19	SEP 19	DEC 19	MAR 20
<b>Total Vacant over 18 months</b>	361	363	382	345	354	348	338	292	313	307	329	319	324	314	313	
<b>Stage 0 only - Number where contact yet to be made with owner</b>	123 *	121 *	106 *	50 *	56 *	56 *	48 *	4	24	21	31	32	26	17	14	
<b>Number vacant over 10 years</b>	17	16	14	15	16	13	12	7	6	6	8	7	7	8	8	
<b>Number vacant over 5 years (including those over 10 years).</b>	73	70	75	66	64	58	56	52	50	51	54	50	54	51	53	

\* The majority of Stage 0 properties have had scheme referral letters so first contact has been made

## ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

### Outcome of all CPOs agreed by Executive as at 31.12.19

<b>Outcome of CPOs</b>	<b>Pre- April 2019</b>	<b>Apr – Jun 2018</b>	<b>July – Sep 2018</b>	<b>Oct – Dec 2018</b>	<b>Jan – Mar 2019</b>	<b>Mar 2019 To Dec 2019</b>	<b>Total</b>
Total Number of CPOs agreed by the Executive.	<b>117</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>			<b>3</b>	<b>120</b>
Withdrawn before Public Inquiry i.e. Occupied	<b>50</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>		<b>6</b>	<b>56</b>
Withdrawn before Public Inquiry i.e. Restarted, Misinformation, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Home	<b>20</b>					<b>0</b>	<b>20</b>
Public Inquiry held - Order Confirmed by DCLG/LCC	<b>8</b>					<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>
Public Inquiry held - Order Not Confirmed by DCLG/LCC	<b>3</b>					<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>
Written Representation - Order Confirmed by DCLG/LCC	<b>6</b>					<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>
Written Representation - Order Not Confirmed by DCLG/LCC	<b>4</b>					<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>
Non- contested CPO's Confirmed by DCLG/LCC	<b>13</b>					<b>0</b>	<b>13</b>
Non- contested CPO's Not confirmed by DCLG/LCC	<b>0</b>					<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

### 5-9 Year Empties Percentage Breakdown of Reasons

Reason	No	%
Owner in Care	4	9%
Works in Progress	20	44%
Assessing Structural Problems	1	2%
Property for sale	5	12%
Property Sold Subject to Contract	1	2%
EHT Confirming Let	1	2%
New Owners – Restarted at Stage 1	2	4.5%
Owner is long term sick	2	4.5%
Legal Issues	3	7%
Probate	2	4.5%
CPO Notices 1-3 being served	1	2%
LCC Possession	1	2%
Following CPO Transferred to HRA	2	4.5%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 10-Year Empties Percentage Breakdown of Reasons

Reason	No	%
Owner in Care	1	12.5%
Works in Progress	5	62.5%
Property for sale	1	12.5%
Claim HIMO as Misinformation	1	12.5%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Examples of How Other Local Authorities are Performing

As at 31/03/19	Examples of Other Local Authorities			
	Leicester	Derby	Nottingham	Sheffield
Benchmarking				
Over 18 Months Empty	319	Not available	505	Not available
Over 5 Years Empty	50	Not available	318	Not available
Over 10 Years Empty	7	Not available	145	Not available
No brought back into occupation	205	83	109	8
Active caseload	287	256	543	Not available
No Approved by the Executive/Cabinet	3	Not available	1	1

**Note:**

Please note benchmarking comparison is due to be updated again after 31/03/20.

The information in the tables 13-15 is not a benchmarking comparison as at 31/03/19;

- Each Local Authority has their own reporting mechanisms;
- Only Leicester City Council has the remit to bring back into use properties identified as empty over 18 months;
- Most of the other Local Authorities target properties empty over 6 months.
- Due to lack of resources, Derby City Council could only provide the number of cases on their active caseload and those brought back into occupation.
- Sheffield City Council could only provide the number brought back into occupation and how many were approved by their Cabinet.



HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME 2019/20			
MEETING DATE	MEETING ITEMS	LEAD OFFICER	ACTION AGREED
<b>Meeting Date</b> <b>5 August 2019</b>  <b>Agenda Date:</b> <b>24<sup>th</sup> June 2019</b>  <b>Deadline for papers</b> <b>24<sup>th</sup> July 2019</b>  <b>Papers despatch:</b> <b>26<sup>th</sup> July 2019</b>	Housing Manifesto commitments  Rent arrears report – Year-end report  Empty Homes update report  Homelessness Strategy progress report  Tenants’ forum notes/report  Work programme	Chris Burgin  Charlotte McGraw  Simon Nicholls  Caroline Carpendale	
<b>Meeting Date</b> <b>7 October 2019</b>  <b>Agenda Date:</b> <b>27 August 2019</b>	Progress update on delivery of new Housing (Housing Company/Acquisitions)  Voids & Lettings Report – Year-end report  Repairs performance and update Report  Channel Shift/ IT update  Tenants’ forum report  Work programme	Simon Nicholls  Simon Nicholls  Ian Craig  Charlotte McGraw	

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<p><b>Meeting Date</b> 4 November 2019</p> <p><b>Agenda Date:</b> 14 October 2019</p> <p><b>Deadline for papers</b> 23 October 2019</p> <p><b>Papers despatch:</b> 25 October 2019</p>	<p>Progress report for Goscote House &amp; Sprinklers update</p> <p>Safety Compliance</p> <p>Preparing for winter</p> <p>Housing Capital Programme update</p> <p>Planning for delivery of Manifesto</p> <p>Tenants' forum notes</p> <p>Work programme</p>	<p>Simon Nicholls/Suki Supria</p> <p>Simon Nicholls</p> <p>Martin Clewlow</p> <p>Simon Nicholls</p> <p>Chris Burgin</p>	
<p><b>Meeting Date</b> 12 January 2020</p> <p><b>Agenda meeting</b> 9 December 2019</p> <p><b>Deadline for Papers</b> 2 January 2020</p> <p><b>Papers despatch:</b> 3 January 2020</p>	<p>HRA Budget</p> <p>Climate emergency</p>	<p>Chris Burgin</p> <p>Duncan Bell</p>	
<p><b>Meeting Date</b> 25 February 2020</p> <p><b>Agenda Date:</b> 4 February 2020</p> <p><b>Deadline for papers</b> 13 February 2020</p> <p><b>Papers despatch:</b> 17 February 2020</p>	<p>Repairs performance and update Report</p> <p>Homelessness update &amp; Overcrowding project update</p> <p>Voids &amp; Lettings Report Qtr 2</p> <p>Empty homes update</p> <p>Tenants' forum notes</p> <p>Work programme</p>	<p>Ian Craig</p> <p>Caroline Carpendale</p> <p>Simon Nicholls</p> <p>Simon Nicholls</p>	

<p><b>Meeting Date</b> 20 April 2020</p> <p><b>Agenda Date:</b> 30 March 2020</p> <p><b>Deadline for papers</b> 6 April 2020</p> <p><b>Papers despatch:</b> 8 April 2020</p>	<p>Rent arrears report</p> <p>Goscote House redevelopment</p> <p>Sheltered Housing project update</p> <p>District Service Priorities &amp; performance including ASB service performance</p> <p>DFG/Adaptations report</p> <p>Tenants' forum notes</p> <p>Work programme</p>	<p>Charlotte McGraw</p> <p>Simon Nicholls</p> <p>Simon Nicholls</p> <p>Suki Supria</p> <p>Ian Craig</p>	
<p>57 <b>To be allocated</b></p>	<p>Update on discretionary funding</p>	<p>Alison Greenhill</p>	

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