



Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council

Forward timetable of consultation and decision making

Finance and performance scrutiny

23 November 2020

Wards affected:

ALL WARDS

COUNCIL HOUSING SERVICES UPDATE REPORT

Report of Director (Community Services)

1. Purpose of report

1.1 To report on the activities of the Council's Housing Service.

2. Recommendation

2.1 Note the report.

3. Background to the report

3.1 The Council's Housing Service sits within the Community Services Directorate and works alongside other key service areas such as Community Safety, Private Sector Housing, Homelessness, Cultural Services and Community Planning. For the purpose of this report the following areas will be considered:

Strategic context

Emerging issues

Tenancy Management and Rents

Anti-Social Behaviour

Housing Assets and Support teams

Housing Repairs and Investment

4. Strategic context

- 4.1 The Council Housing Service is responsible for 3230 council properties and 100 garages. In addition, there are a number of leasehold properties. The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) holds the budget for the service. The HRA Business Plan forecasts over the next 30 years the investment requirements for the service, to ensure council properties are maintained to a decent standard. The introduction of the Social Housing Green Paper in August 2018 alluded to a revision of the Decent Homes Standard. Whilst the specifics are not yet clear, it is widely anticipated that a standard will be imposed which is greater than currently informed by the Decent Homes Standard.

The council has delivered new housing over recent years including a bungalow scheme at Groby and 30 properties at Bennett Close in Hinckley. Current activity includes the acquisition of 11 properties at Middlefield Lane in Hinckley and the demolition and rebuild of Ambion Court sheltered scheme in Market Bosworth.

5 Emerging issues

5.1 Responding to the needs of our customers

One of the biggest challenges to our Housing Service is responding to the diverse range of customer needs. With over 80% of all new tenants having one or more complex need, either personally or within their household, from the commencement of their tenancy, it is imperative that we continue to have services that are flexible and robust enough to meet the changing needs of our customers. With the array of complexities that our officers, within all aspects of the Housing Service are attempting to manage, be it in terms of allocation, management, support or adaptation and maintenance, we are committed to ensuring that our staff have the requisite skills and training to provide person centered solutions as much as is possible.

Our approach to service delivery is one that strives to balance enforcement with support, with an emphasis on early intervention and prevention across service delivery. We have seen an increase in customer engagement which can lead to increased expectation. Traditional housing officer responsibilities have evolved and a more holistic response to meeting our customers' needs is evident across our services, not least as other traditional support services such as social care have seen an increase in their thresholds.

A further consideration, across a range of council services, is in relation to meeting the needs of an aging population. The suitability of our housing stock and housing offer is of critical importance to the health and wellbeing of individuals and the capacity of public services to sustainably support healthy ageing over the long term, and to deliver both improved outcomes and efficiencies.

5.2 Safety and Compliance

Following the Grenfell Fire tragedy in 2018, safety and compliance with legislation remain firm priorities across the social housing sector and for our council housing service. Work is underway to better involve our tenants, be it in terms of providing information about their property or building, providing effective advice and information to reduce their own risks from fire or other hazards, or undertaking targeted work with individuals to reduce any risks which may be associated with their lifestyle; such as hoarding. Additionally, the service continues to deliver existing work programs and explore new ones which ensure that we continue to meet our landlord responsibilities in terms of safety and compliance.

We are currently developing a Fire Safety Strategy to ensure that we remain compliant with legislation.

5.3 Reducing our Carbon Footprint

The borough council has been particularly vocal in recognising its social and ethical responsibility to reduce its carbon footprint and combat climate change. The UK's social housing sector accounts for around 17% of all homes, and as such has a significant responsibility for reducing CO2 emissions. With this in mind, the Housing Service is keen to ensure that future service delivery has full regard to environmental targets.

5.4 Coronavirus

At the beginning of the pandemic many officers within the Housing Service were required to support the work undertaken by the Resident Support Scheme, by providing proactive support to our tenants. Much of the focus of this work involved supporting and assisting vulnerable people. In total 20 officers from the Housing Service undertook additional responsibilities of this nature; to support our most vulnerable residents. Over 3500 proactive telephone calls to our tenants were made to ensure that our tenants remained safe, well and able to access support and provisions as required.

As a result of the Coronavirus tenant debt levels have increased with many of our tenants advising that they have been adversely affected financially throughout this period. In response, the Rents Team continue to proactively assist and support these tenants to ensure that individual arrangements regarding repayment can be established.

In response to the challenges presented by Covid-19 frontline service delivery has been adapted, across all services, to ensure that both staff and customers remain safe. Non priority visits were immediately suspended and most customer interactions, where appropriate, have until very recently taken place over the phone or by other virtual methods. The sheltered housing Scheme Managers, who are usually based at the sheltered schemes, have worked from home for the majority of their week, providing direct support over the phone, attending the schemes or visiting customers only when essential.

Until very recently only urgent and emergency repairs have been carried out within our tenants' homes. Working practices have been introduced to ensure that we are able to readily identify tenants or household members who are shielding or symptomatic. Repairs operatives attending these properties have been supplied with the appropriate PPE to ensure that they can work safely, and working practices have been introduced to mitigate any risks associated with Covid-19.

As lockdown easements continue to be introduced we have resumed most areas of frontline service delivery, albeit working practices continue to adapt in order to ensure compliance with government guidelines.

The government introduced emergency legislation at the start of the pandemic to ban evictions in both the private and social sector for at least 3 months. This has been extended by a further 6 months to support people over the winter period, should a second wave of the pandemic occur.

6 Council house services

6.1 Tenancy management and rents

The Tenancy Management team is responsible for collection and arrears management, ensuring that tenancy conditions are complied with, supporting people to live independently and working in partnership with the Housing Repairs team to ensure that council properties and housing land are well maintained.

The changing needs of our customers require us to continually provide a service that looks at individual needs. As such, the team is structured to ensure that personalised support can be offered in order to give our tenants the best chance of succeeding within their tenancy.

The rent function balances enforcement with support. The service recognises that in a changing financial climate, and more recently as a consequence of the pandemic, some tenants require personalised support to assist them in paying their rent and managing other essential household bills.

In March 2019, we appointed an Introductory Tenancy Officer. With a focus on early intervention and support, the post holder works closely with all new tenants to ensure that all the relevant support is in place whilst focusing on rent recovery and maintaining independent living. This role works alongside the Tenancy Support Officer who works with secure tenants and assists those with both short and long term needs.

6.2 Rent collection rates

The information below details current rent collection rates. The current rent collection target is 98%. Unfortunately the Coronavirus has increased the figure of current debt.

2019 Month	Percentage of rent collected
January	96.76%
February	97.17%
March	96.59%
April	95.07%
May	91.74%
June	94.53%
July	98.84%
August	96.64%
September	98.30%
October	97.72%
November	97.45%
December	98.11%

2020 Month	Percentage of rent collected
January	97.20%
February	97.44%
March	97.28%
April	95.65%
May	66.27%
June	76.28%
July	76.39%
August	81.41%
September	84.50%

Universal Credit remains an ongoing challenge for many of our tenants as they attempt to manage their money in order to meet their household liabilities, such as their rent. Currently, there are approximately 800 of our tenants with an active Universal Credit claim in place.

7 Anti-social behaviour, housing and the endeavour partnership

The Anti-Social Behaviour team works in partnership with other agencies to serve the public and promote community safety.

Both Anti-Social Behaviour and Housing officers, throughout the service, are integral to the successful operation and delivery of the Endeavour Partnership. The Endeavour Team comprises numerous partner agencies and internal departments working collaboratively to address and resolve issues relating to anti-social behaviour, environmental nuisance, wider community safety and vulnerability concerns. Since its formation, the Endeavour team has successfully responded to many community protection concerns; perhaps, most notably the collaborative approach between the police and the Borough Council has seen an increase in the number of anti-social behaviour sanctions sought to prevent those committing anti-social behaviour from continuing.

Performance on Endeavour is reported through the Community Safety Partnership quarterly meetings and to Scrutiny twice a year.

7.1 Anti-social behaviour cases

Over the last two years the number of anti-social behaviour cases dealt with by the ASB team continues to remain high, as detailed below. There has been a significant increase in reports of anti-social behavior throughout the pandemic. The increase can be directly attributed to concerns regarding breaches of social distancing regulations.

Officers within the team use the tiered approach to deal with ASB in accordance with other districts across the county. Cases that are not resolved using the tiered approach can progress to legal sanctions. The number of cases that lead to legal action are detailed below.

Year	Total ASB reports across the borough	HBBC only
01/4/17-31/03/18	1305	706
01/04/18-31/03/19	1237	683
01/04/20 to 01/09/20	662	476

Intervention	2017/18	2018/19	2020 to date
Advice letter	136	136	93
Warning letter	133	133	107
Injunction	3	4	9
Acceptable Behaviour Contract (signed)	9	20	0
Closure Order	6	5	4
Community Protection Warning	57	62	22
Community Protection Notice	14	12	4
Notice seeking possession (for ASB ground)	13	21	
Eviction	3	2	0

7.2 Young people

The Anti-Social Behaviour team have always strived to be proactive and prevent ASB from occurring through early intervention. In recent months one of our officers has been dedicated to dealing with young people involved in ASB. Whilst it should be noted that this resource is only temporary, in doing so, partnership working with the schools in the area has improved and the team continue to work closely with officers in the Community Safety team to deliver workshops in school around anti-social behaviour and community safety.

8 Housing assets and support teams

8.1 Sheltered and Supported Housing Services

The sheltered housing service provides 11 schemes across the borough offering independent living to older people. This support includes all sheltered properties having emergency pull cords and panic button pendants which connect, via an intercom, to an experienced member of staff 24 hours a day, who can raise the appropriate help. This may be simply offering reassurance; it may be requesting that a friend, neighbour or family member visit, a doctor, paramedic, the police or the fire service. The service is a safety net in effect, providing a comforting reassurance that someone is always there, which is particularly comforting to those who have no friends or family, or their loved ones live a distance away. Officers carry out needs and risk assessments, both for the tenant and their home, and are able to signpost concerns, risks and vulnerabilities to ensure each person is as supported as they can be to be able to remain safe and independent in their home. Officers regularly reinforce fire safety advice and put personal evacuation plans in place for each person, highlighting where perhaps there is a vulnerability in someone being able to hear a smoke alarm, and installing adaptations to overcome those difficulties.

Prior to the pandemic the service hosted regular social activities for tenants including activities such as movie nights, takeaway evenings with dancing, day trips to the coast and pancake breakfasts. In order to keep both our staff and our tenants safe, through the pandemic, these social activities have been temporarily suspended. Additionally, the communal areas at each scheme have been temporarily closed.

The Scheme Managers, although predominantly working from home to comply with government directives, have maintained daily telephone contact with all residents throughout. Without doubt the measures and controls put in place by the team have contributed to the continued safety of our residents during the pandemic.

The service has a set of standards which are monitored and reviewed by the Sheltered Housing Working Group (SHWG) a group of volunteer residents from sheltered and supported schemes who meet bi-monthly. These include;

- Ensure that tenants have equal and fair access to sheltered housing services regardless of their gender, race, age, religion or sexual orientation. And that staff will at all times be sensitive and non-judgemental and actively encourage anti-discriminatory practices.
- Give all new tenants a full introduction to the scheme within five working days, including services available, role of the Scheme Manager/Support officer and fire safety procedures.
- Ensure that each sheltered housing scheme is covered by a Scheme Manager working Monday to Friday. Or when the Scheme Manager is off site that tenants have access to the emergency control centre, 24 hours a day, 365 days per year.
- Produce a support plan for all new tenants within six weeks of moving in, and review it on a regular basis but at least every twelve months and carry out the agreed actions within the agreed timescales.
- Carry out regular scheme checks including:
 - Inspections of the communal areas daily ensuring they are clean and free from hazards.
 - Weekly test of the fire alarm and fire alert points
 - Weekly test of communal pull cords and emergency points
 - Six monthly testing of tenants emergency alarm equipment including pendants, lifeline and door entry equipment.
 - Bi Annual health and safety inspection of sheltered housing schemes.
 - Ensure that the communal areas are maintained to a high standard of cleanliness and that communal gardens are attractive and cultivated on a regular basis.
 - Actively encourage, and provide opportunities for tenants to provide feedback on the services they receive, but more specifically, through regular scheme meetings, surveys, suggestion boxes.

8.2 Control Centre Services

This service is responsible for the 24hr call control and monitoring centre, providing services to predominately older residents via emergency pull cord alarms, lifeline alarms and assistive technology. The Control Centre also acts as the Councils out of hours service and deals with calls relating to homelessness, Environmental Health calls, and Housing Repairs.

- 8.3** Of the approximate 2,700 people receiving support from the Control centre service, over 1970 are over 60. There are currently 1471 private lifeline customers and a further 1229 council tenants utilising this service. Further breakdown of the demography is below:

Age Range	60-69	70-79	80-89	90-99	100+
No. Of	472	602	625	266	5

Clients					
% Of Clients	24%	30.5%	31.7%	13.5%	0.3%

8.4 Lifeline and Assistive Technology Services

Assistive technology provided by the service offers a peace of mind service to private customers in their own home, again promoting safety and independence. A Lifeline, which is a small intercom installed in a client's home, is activated via a small panic button pendant. This can be worn all around the home and in the garden, and should a person have a trip or fall, a medical emergency, or any concern, they can activate the Lifeline from wherever they are, and speak to an operator in our 24 hour control centre. Additional monitors and sensors are also available which link to the Lifeline which can monitor customers with a variety of support needs safety in their home and provide immediate alerts when required. Our Assistive Technology Officer is able to assess customer's needs and provide advice on appropriate packages.

8.5 Service Improvement and Resident Involvement

The Service Improvement Officer and Housing Assets Support Teams Manager are responsible for supporting work around service improvement and resident Involvement which includes the Councils tenant participation forum 'Together for Tenants', Tenant Scrutiny, working groups, setting up and supporting residents groups, focus groups and consultation exercises. Priorities and specific actions are contained within the Resident Involvement Strategy. https://www.hinckleybosworth.gov.uk/downloads/download/1173/resident_involvement_strategy

Customer feedback, surveys, benchmarking data and service reviews are used to continually improve services, ensuring that we continue to meet both our legal responsibilities and customer expectations. The Service Improvement Officer is responsible for developing the ways in which tenants can provide their comments and feedback on the services they receive this includes, social media and e-mail forums. During the pandemic the team have developed virtual methods to continue to safely and effectively engage with our tenants.

8.6 Right to Buy and Leasehold Management

The Council has statutory responsibilities to administer a Right to Buy scheme, this entitles some tenants with a minimum of 3 years tenancy to buy their council property at a discounted rate of up to 70% off the market value.

The rate of RTB sales over the last 4 years is as follows:

Year	Number of completions
2016/17	42
2017/18	41
2018/19	26
Total number of sales	109

The Council manages 125 leasehold properties these are former council flats sold under the Right to Buy scheme. The council is responsible for repairs to the building and external cyclical repairs, the buildings are also insured by the council. Charges for repairs and insurance are recharged proportionately to Leaseholders annually.

9 Housing repairs and investment

The Housing Repairs and Investment Team is responsible for the repairs, maintenance and investment for the council's housing stock. The service has a number of work-streams which include;

- Responsive and void repairs
- Cyclic contracts
- Aids and adaptations
- Investment works
- Asset Management

9.1 Responsive Repairs and Void Work

Responsive repairs are primarily completed by the Council's 'In-house Repairs Team' (IRT) working primarily to four targets:

- Emergency repairs within 24 hours (including Out of Hours repairs within 4 hours)
- Urgent repairs within 5 working days
- Routine repairs within 20 working days
- Programmed routine repairs 60 working days

Other external contractors support where specialised work is required, eg drainage.

We also have a contractor supporting the in-house team to complete work to bring our empty homes up to our lettable standard, ready for the next tenant to move in.

During 2018/19 we completed 14,858 general repairs reported by tenants including repairs such as leaking taps and gutters, roof leaks, electrical faults, plastering repairs etc. We also brought 218 empty properties up to our agreed standard to get them ready for re-letting. We are seeing an increase of approximately 1000 general repair jobs year on year since 2016.

Current performance from April 2019 to February 2020

Priority	Number of jobs	Target %	Performance %
1	884	100	99.55
2	3634	100	99.89
3	3014	91.5	97.28
4	1738	91.5	98.33

9.2 Cyclical maintenance

This is work of a recurrent nature that is undertaken at regular intervals and includes:

- Annual Gas and solid fuel servicing - HBBC currently has a 3 star agreement with PH Jones to deliver the servicing and repairs to commercial and general dwelling gas, solid fuel, oil, heating appliances, together with Air Source Heat Pump, renewable heating installations. Our obligation under the Gas safety and Use Regulations is to ensure that all of our stock gas installations are serviced and checked for safe operation every 12 months. Compliance over the last 12 months, ending 31/12/19, was 99.46%.
- Undertaking monthly inspections and repair of fire prevention equipment within the sheltered schemes and blocks of flats.
- 6 Year Painting programme - This work is completed by the In-house Repair Team (IRT) who last year painted the outside of 525 properties.
 - 5 year Electrical testing programme - This work is currently completed by Matthews & Tannert Ltd, who completed over 455 tests last year as well as emergency lighting in sheltered schemes and communal areas.

9.3 Aids and Adaptations

The council undertakes work to enable its tenants to live independent in their homes for as long as possible. This could be by way of installing grab rails, ramps or level access shower rooms. Or, in extreme cases extending properties. The IRT complete smaller works whilst our contractor completes larger jobs. For extensions we would look to tender the work.

In 2018/19:

- we converted 47 bathrooms in to level access shower rooms
- we installed 5 over bath showers
- Improved the access to 10 properties for tenants with reduced mobility
- Adapted 1 kitchen to be accessible for wheelchair uses
- Fitted stair lifts to 10 properties
- Installed 1 Clos-O-Mat Toilet
- 2 hardstandings / dropped kerbs

- 3 Internal alterations to include widening of doors and wall removal
- 3 Level threshold doors
- 1 Installation of bath to meet the needs of a disabled child
- 1 removable wooden steps
- 180 Minor adaptations such as grab rails, keysafes, handrails, half step

9.4 Planned investment works

These works are completed to enable the council to reach and remain at the Decent Home Standard for its housing stock. The works are completed as planned programmes, ensuring value for money by replacing components just before the end of their predicted life span. They are also completed in groups of properties requiring work of the same type and by specialist contractors.

Last year we delivered:

- 379 upgrades to electrical installations
- Boilers/heating system renewals with A Rated boilers
- Replacement of 10 solid fuel heating systems with renewable technology in a 'non gas' area by the installation of an air source heat pump
- Replacement of Communal Boiler at one of our sheltered schemes.
- Renewals of windows/doors to 164 homes.
- Replacement of 130 roofs.
- 131 kitchen replacements and 63 bathrooms renewals.

9.5 Asset Management

The service has a team of surveyors who undertake the inspection of properties to authorise required works or dilapidation reports. In addition to this they help manage major work projects funded by the Housing Revenue Account, such as the remodelling of existing properties and the building of new homes.

9.6 Implications of the pandemic

At the beginning of the pandemic the repairs team were only permitted to carry out essential or urgent repairs in order to stop the spread of the virus. This restriction has now been lifted and full service delivery, including the resumption of planned works, has recommenced.

10. Exemptions in accordance with the access to information procedure rules

10.1 Open session

11. Financial implications (IB)

11.1 Budgets for the repairs service, the HRA and the HRA capital programme are reported to this committee on a quarterly basis.

- 11.2 The financial impact resulting from the challenges mentioned in the report will need to be referred for approval in accordance with financial procedure rules.

12. Legal implications (FA)

- 12.1 None arising directly from this report.

13. Corporate plan implications

- 13.1 The housing service contributes to all three Corporate Plan priorities of People, Place and Prosperity.

14. Consultation

- 14.1 None

15. Risk implications

- 15.1 None arising from the report.

16. Knowing your community – equality and rural implications

- 16.1 The service regularly consults with tenants through the various structures detailed in 8.5.

17. Climate implications

The Housing Service continues to develop service delivery to ensure compliance with environmental targets.

18. Corporate implications

- 18.1 By submitting this report, the report author has taken the following into account:
- Community Safety implications
 - Environmental implications
 - ICT implications
 - Asset Management implications
 - Procurement implications
 - Human Resources implications
 - Planning implications
 - Data Protection implications
 - Voluntary Sector