



## Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council

Forward timetable of consultation and decision making

Finance and Performance Scrutiny      16 December 2024

Wards affected:      All wards

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### Council Housing Services Update report

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Report of Director (Community Services)

#### **1. Purpose of report**

1.1 To inform Members of key activities and performance within the Council Housing Service including Anti-Social Behaviour, Rents, Tenancy Management, Housing Repairs and Older Persons' services.

#### **2. Recommendation**

2.1 That Members note and acknowledge the proactive work and key achievements outlined in the report.

#### **3. Background to the report**

- 3.1 The Council Housing Service currently manages 3,211 properties, widely dispersed across the borough with concentrations in Hinckley, Burbage, Barwell and Earl Shilton. The service provides 354 units of sheltered housing accommodation across 11 schemes, providing accommodation for the over-60s or those over 55 with a support need.
- 3.2 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 and this equates to total planned investment from 2024 to 2033 of £70 million.
- 3.3 There are a number of specialist teams within the Council Housing Service which include Rent, Anti-Social Behaviour and Tenancy Management, Housing Repairs and Older Persons' services, working alongside wider housing services that sit outside of the HRA, including Private Sector Housing

and Housing Options. This report focuses on the activities of housing services that sit within the HRA.

- 3.4 Between 2018 and 2023, key achievements included adding 70 new affordable homes, redeveloping Ambion Court for sheltered housing, and making major upgrades to our housing stock (e.g. electrical, heating, windows, and roofs) to achieve and maintain 100% compliance with the Decent Homes Standard. The council advanced its net-zero goal for 2030 and maintained a balanced financial position.
- 3.5 The HRA Investment Strategy sets out the strategic priorities for the service over the next four years which include adding 57 affordable homes, maintaining the Decent Homes Standard, achieving EPC C ratings by 2035 (2030 for fuel poor households) to improve energy efficiency, supporting independent living, enhancing ICT and staffing, and ensuring compliance with new social housing regulations. Tenant safety and satisfaction are central services objectives, with 89.4% of tenants currently reporting satisfaction with the safety of their home.
- 3.6 Recent compliance improvements include consistently high levels of electrical, legionella, gas, asbestos, and fire safety testing. To decarbonise our housing stock, the council secured funding for energy efficiency projects, installing external wall insulation on 149 properties and is planning upgrades for 220 more. Damp and mould policies have been revised, with rapid response protocols introduced for reported issues. The Council is also leading on a damp and mould project, under the Lightbulb governance structure, in collaboration with each of the district and borough councils within the County.
- 3.7 Due to rising demand for council housing, the council is exploring development opportunities while preparing to meet new standards from the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023, aiming to enhance tenant involvement and improve service delivery, whilst maintaining and improving our recent 82.5% tenant satisfaction ratings.

### **3.8 Housing Demand**

- 3.9 Demand for council housing remains high and we have seen significant increases in people applying to join the housing register over recent years. The table below shows the number of housing applications received each year and the number of confirmed applications on the housing register.

**Table 1- Number of housing applications received each year/confirmed applications on the housing register**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total number of housing applications initiated (NB the majority of these are not completed by the applicant)</b>	<b>Number of successful housing applications per year</b>	<b>Number of applicants on the housing register</b>
<b>2021</b>	2704	576	717
<b>2022</b>	2693	582	895
<b>2023</b>	2674	856	1021
<b>2024 – as of 31.10.24</b>	2222	823	1365

3.10 To meet this continuing demand, our ambition is to increase our housing stock by pursuing development and investment opportunities. In 2023/24 we have expanded our stock to include;

- 3 new build properties in Stoke Golding
- 9 new build properties in Hinckley

3.11 Work is underway to identify future opportunities to increase our housing supply whilst ensuring investment in existing accommodation remains a priority.

#### **4. Key service delivery within the Council Housing Service**

##### **4.1 Sheltered and Supported Housing Services**

4.2 The sheltered housing service supports independent living for older adults across 11 schemes, equipped with emergency pull cords and panic pendants that connect residents to staff 24/7 via the control centre. This ensures help is available, whether for reassurance, contacting family or neighbours, or arranging emergency services. The service is especially valuable for those without nearby family, providing a reliable safety net.

4.3 Staff conduct needs and risk assessments for tenants and their homes, referring any concerns to appropriate services to help residents remain safe and independent. Reducing social isolation is also a priority, with various

social activities organised to foster community and connection among residents, as highlighted in a recent newsletter (Appendix A).

#### **4.4 Control Centre Services**

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

4.6 There are currently 2850 connections to the Control Centre, 1030 live within council properties and 1820 private lifeline customers. To meet the challenges of the national infrastructure project to move the telephone network from analogue to digital by January 2027 the council has been upgrading our customers' lifelines to the latest digital equipment, to ensure there is no disruption to their service. In 2024/25 we will also be migrating our call handling systems to the latest digital cloud-based systems, ensuring our systems continue to be reliable and the most up to date.

#### **4.7 Lifeline and Assistive Technology Services**

4.8 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.

4.9 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. These include fall detectors, smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and flood sensors. Alarms can also be used to deter bogus callers and support victims of domestic violence. Our skilled Assistive Technology Officer can assess customers' needs and provide advice on appropriate packages of support. During the period 2023/24 a total of 293 lifelines were installed and an additional 17 falls detectors and 6 smoke detectors.

4.10 Customers are offered a 6-week trial, after which a small weekly charge for a lifeline package, including monitoring and response service is payable. We also offer a free service to customers who have a terminal illness and/or are receiving end of life care.

4.11 During 2023/24 due to increased pressures on the NHS our staff have supported and offered reassurance to an increasing number of older vulnerable people who have experienced lengthy waiting times for ambulance attendance.

#### **4.12 Tenancy Management and Rent**

- 4.13 The Tenancy Management team provide the landlord function for the housing service and 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.
- 4.14 The Cost of Living Crisis continues to impact many of our tenants and effective signposting and support are key to ensuring that our tenants have wider support to meet their tenancy requirements. Supporting people to maximise their benefit entitlement and income, or access other grant opportunities is essential, especially given that many of our tenants continue to be affected by other economic impacts such as rising fuel costs. Enforcement continues to be a last resort for the team, and is only pursued when there is no alternative, preferring informal arrangements with most of those tenants in rent arrears with us.
- 4.15 Over the last 6 months a rent performance review has been undertaken due to concerns regarding performance. This has been especially necessary following a reduction in permanent resourcing. Process and procedures have been reviewed to ensure that the team is operating effectively and to ensure that the best possible outcomes are delivered to tenants. Work is currently underway to merge the rent and tenancy management functions, returning to generic housing officer roles. This is necessary to maximise resource, and it is hoped that it will also improve the customer journey ensuring a more comprehensive service to all customers.

**Table 2 provides key performance information in relation to rent collection.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Overall percentage of rent collected</b>
<b>2021</b>	<b>85.98%</b>
<b>2022</b>	<b>83.87%</b>
<b>2023</b>	<b>82.39%</b>
<b>2024- to September 2024</b>	<b>84.98%</b>

Rent collection rates are currently below target (97%). Additional capacity is currently being scoped out and is a defined priority within the HRA investment Strategy. At the end of the financial year 23/24 the current tenant arrears levels were reported at 6.25% of the annual rent debit. It is hoped that the revision to procedures coupled with the additional capacity through additional resourcing will reduce this significantly.

#### **4.16 Endeavour/Anti Social Behaviour**

- 4.17 The Endeavour Partnership is a collaborative initiative involving Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) officers, Housing officers, and various internal and external services and partners to tackle community safety issues. This partnership

addresses anti-social behaviour, environmental nuisance, and broader community safety and vulnerability concerns. By combining resources and expertise from police, housing, and environmental protection and wider services, the partnership has successfully enhanced responses to local community protection issues.

- 4.18 One of the most impactful aspects has been the coordinated approach between the Borough Council and local police, leading to effective intervention against individuals engaged in anti-social behaviour. Table 4 sets out the number of interventions undertaken by the ASB team over recent years.

**Table 3- Total number of reports of ASB**

Year	Total ASB reports across the borough	HBBC only
01/04/20-31/03/21	1216	827
01/04/21-31/03/22	1123	672
01/04/22-31/03/23	1088	579
01/04/23-31/05/24	1288	816

- 4.19 The ASB team applies an incremental approach to managing cases. Sanctions range from informal interventions, such as advice or warning letters, to legal action that could, ultimately, result in eviction or closing a property for a specified period of time. Cases that are not resolved using the tiered approach can progress to legal sanctions. The number of legal and non-legal sanctions used by the ASB team are detailed below. It should be noted that although the ASB officers sit within the Housing Service officers investigate all complaints of anti-social behaviour, not just those reported by or involving council tenants.

**Table 4 sanctions progressed**

Intervention	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Advice letter	138	92	55	193
Warning letter	172	70	69	144
Injunction	2	0	1	3
Acceptable Behaviour	12	9	8	23

Contract (signed)				
Closure Order	6	6	8	5
Community Protection Warning	62	30	21	10
Community Protection Notice	12	9	5	8
Notice seeking possession (for ASB ground)	21	17	6	12
Eviction	2	0	0	2

4.20 Eviction remains a last resort and the ASB team is continuously seeking alternative options to resolve issues. Following recent changes in staff with the ASB team, after several experienced officers have retired, the team has now recruited an ASB assistant apprentice who can support the team with wider service delivery. Appendix B provides a recent anti-social behaviour case study.

#### **4.21 Housing Repairs and Investment**

4.22 The Housing Repairs and Investment service 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, cyclical contracts, aids and adaptations, investment works and asset management.

#### **4.23 Responsive Repairs and Void Work**

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

1. Emergency repairs within 24 hours (including Out of Hours repairs within 4 hours)
2. Non-Emergency repairs  
(Urgent repairs - within 5 working days, Routine repairs - within 20 working days, Planned repairs - within 60 working days)

4.24 Other external contractors support where specialised work is required, e.g. 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.

- 4.25 During 2023/24 the council's IRT alone completed 9738 general repairs reported by tenants including repairs such as leaking taps and gutters, electrical faults, plastering repairs etc. We also brought 180 empty properties up to our agreed standard to get them ready for re-letting. The number of general repairs carried out by IRT in 2022/23 was 9064. This increase is likely due to a greater focus on damp and mould issues, the age of the properties which increases the likelihood of disrepair and subsequent tenant expectation.
- 4.26 The authority's ability to recruit and retain staff has improved with the implementation of market supplements. The IRT currently have no vacant posts. Approximately 239 jobs are currently out of target.

**Table 5 Performance from April 2023 to March 2024 for In-House**

Priority	Number of jobs	Target %	Performance %
Emergency	1109	100	100
Non-Emergency	8629	85	82.88

#### 4.27 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 as of 31/3/24 was 100%.
- 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 532 properties and 1 Sheltered accommodation complex.
- 5 year Electrical testing programme - This work is currently completed by Farrendale Ltd, who completed 615 tests in 2023/24 as well as communal lighting in sheltered and common areas.

#### 4.28 Aids and Adaptations

The council undertakes work to enable its tenants to live independently 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. For extensions we would look to tender the work.

In 2023/24:

- we converted 49 bathrooms into level access shower rooms



- we installed 1 over bath showers
- Installed a larger bath to 1 property
- Improved the access to 17 properties for tenants with reduced mobility
- Adapted 1 kitchen to be accessible for wheelchair use
- Fitted stair lifts to 14 properties
- Installed 1 Through floor lift
- Installed 3 Clos-O-Mat Toilets
- Installed vehicular hardstanding & a dropped kerb to 1 property
- 2 Internal alterations to include widening of doors and wall removal
- 3 Level threshold doors
- 1 Automated door entry system
- 2 Ground floor bedroom extensions inc. level access shower rooms
- 130 Minor adaptations such as grab rails, keysafes, handrails, half step

#### 4.29 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:

- 87 upgrades to electrical installations
- 89 Boilers/heating distribution system renewals with A Rated boilers
- 82 distribution system only renewals
- Renewal of windows to 104 properties & doors to 104 homes
- Replacement of 79 roofs.
- 83 kitchen refurbishments
- 37 bathroom refurbishments

#### 4.30 Right to Buy and Leasehold Management

The Council has a statutory responsibility to administer a Right-to-Buy scheme, this has entitled 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. Recent legislative reform has reduced the discounted rate substantially (further information is contained in section 5.1).

**Table 6-The rate of RTB sales over the last 4 years**

Year	Number of completions
2020/21	19
2021/22	24
2022/23	26
2023/24	14
Total number of sales	86

The Council manages 143 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.

#### **4.31 Performance and Service development**

The Performance and Service Development team supports both managers and staff, across the housing service, to ensure that the service continues to develop and meet the needs of its customers. Over recent months, the team have been supporting the service with team specific dashboards, to monitor performance. The team also leads on resident involvement, tenant scrutiny and systems administration. Appendix C provides the latest addition of the Housing Hub, which is communication sent to all tenants twice a year regarding our housing service. The team is currently leading on work to ensure that the housing services meets the consumer standards set out by the Social Housing Regulator. These standards cover a range of issues including, the quality of housing, the management of housing and the way tenants are treated.

### **5. Future challenges and opportunities for the Housing Service**

#### **5.1 Legislative change**

5.2 Key changes to the Right to Buy (RTB) program were introduced in the Autumn Budget, aimed at reducing the loss of social housing stock and supporting councils' ability to replace sold homes. A reform to the reduction in RTB discount sees a return to pre 2012 discount levels, reducing the maximum discount to £16,000-£38,000 depending on location. Current maximum discounts are £102,400- £136,400 depending on location. By lowering these discounts, the government aims to curb the depletion of affordable housing.

5.3 Additionally, local authorities can now retain 100% of the proceeds from RTB sales, a shift from the prior requirement to share a portion with the Treasury. This policy change is intended to enable councils to reinvest funds directly into new social housing projects, potentially helping to offset the high demand for affordable homes.

5.4 The Government have also recently confirmed additional funding of 500 million into the Affordable Homes Programme for 2025/26 which the council hopes to take advantage of to meet housing need.

#### **5.5 Decarbonisation and energy efficiency improvements**

5.6 A key priority for the council is to decarbonise by 2035 (2030 fuel poor households). The Housing Service continues to maximise opportunities to access grant funding to enable us to make improvements to our stock. Previously we successfully obtained £1.4m of grant funding via the Social

Housing Decarbonisation fund which enabled us to improve the thermal efficiency of 100 of our council properties. In 2023/24 46 properties benefitted from improvement measures. A further 70 properties are planned to be complete in 2024/25. The Social Housing Decarbonisation fund has been superseded by the Warm Homes fund and the council is in the process of preparing to submit a further funding bid. If successful, this could provide funding to improve the thermal efficiency of another 220 properties over the next 3 years.

- 5.7 The service maintains a fabric-first approach to improving the performance of our stock, so that we can progressively minimise the use of fossil fuel consumption by our tenants and the associated financial costs whilst meeting wider carbon neutral targets. We now have confirmed the EPC information for all our housing stock, and through our Asset Management work we are prioritising a programme to ensure compliance with EPC C, starting with properties below this certification. Currently 1987 of our stock meet EPC C or above (62%).

## **5.8 Social Housing Regulation**

- 5.9 The Social Housing Regulation Act 2023 introduced several key changes to the way social housing is managed including increased regulation, new consumer standards, time limits for addressing hazards, new qualification requirements, and the introduction of Awaab's Law. The Housing Service has been working hard to show compliance with this regulation and can expect the Regulator of Social Housing to inspect the service within the next 4 years.

- 5.10 To ensure compliance, a series of thematic working groups are now in place with a whole service action plan ensuring that all requirements of this regulation are evidenced or in progress. More specific updates in terms of key aspects of this regulation have been reported to both the Executive and Scrutiny Commission, and included the Charter for Tenants, the Housing Services Communication Strategy and an overview of tenant engagement and scrutiny opportunities.

- 5.11 The service is required to collect and publish tenant satisfaction measures (TSM's) as part of the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard Consumer Standard. The first published TSM results for 23/24 show that the services performance in relation to the tenant perception measures is above the upper quartile figure across all measures. This reflects the continual efforts, hard work, dedication and commitment of the staff in the service who ensure that our services and our interactions with tenants are first rate

## **6. Exemptions in accordance with the Access to Information procedure rules**

- 6.1 Open session

## 7. Financial implications (CS)

- 7.1 The services mentioned in this report are all budgeted for and reported to members as part of the quarterly monitoring process. Any future changes to budgets will require approval in accordance with financial procedure rules.

## 8 Legal implications (ST)

- 8.1 None

## 9. Corporate Plan implications

This report aligns to the following corporate objectives;

### People

- Enable and inspire older people to make the most of later life
- Support vulnerable people and those who are most in need
- Help people to stay healthy, be active and feel well

### Place

- Improve the quality of existing homes and enable the delivery of affordable housing.

## 10. Consultation

- 10.1 None

## 11. Risk implications

Management of significant (Net Red) risks		
Risk description	Mitigating actions	Owner
Failure to introduce sufficient energy efficiency improvements will have financial and wider wellbeing impacts for out tenants	Energy efficiency improvements to be progressed.	MS
Increased financial hardship likely for many residents in relation to rising living costs	Welfare support offer extended Key partnership work progressing	MS

## 12. Knowing your community – equality and rural implications

- 12.1 Housing services are delivered borough wide. Services developments continue to ensure that our services are accessible to all.

## 13. Climate implications

- 13.1 The Housing service continues to work towards key climate change targets. Decarbonisation of all HRA assets is a priority for our service whilst ensuring that fuel poverty is minimised.

## 14. Corporate implications

14.1 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
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Background papers: None

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