

Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee

10.00am, Monday, 20 January 2020

Housing Service Improvement Plan: update

Executive/routine	Routine
Wards	All
Council Commitments	<u>39</u>

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that the Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee:
 - 1.1.1 notes progress made with the Housing Service Improvement Plan (HSIP) and that the programme is projected to exceed the first-year savings target; and
 - 1.1.2 agrees to receive an update report in six months.

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Report

Housing Service Improvement Plan: update

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report provides an update on the work being taken forward as part of the HSIP. The measures set out in the improvement plan aim to significantly improve customer satisfaction, operating performance and reduce costs.
- 2.2 Based on tenant feedback, the programme has prioritised the repairs and improvements workstreams. The initial phases of the Total Mobile rollout are improving efficiency through the introduction of automated appointments. Development of mobile working will make the service more modern, accessible and responsive to the needs of tenants.
- 2.3 Wider improvements are underway to the re-let and new tenancy process; estates management; digital enhancements and the development of new services to improve quality of life and reduce living costs for tenants.

3. Background

- 3.1 On [30 August 2018](#), the Housing and Economy Committee considered a report on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget strategy. The report highlighted increasing financial and operational pressures on the Housing Service.
- 3.2 On [21 February 2019](#), the Council approved the five-year HRA Budget Strategy 2019/20 to 2023/24. In addition to this, Council approved a draft 2019/20 capital budget, five-year capital investment programme and 30-year Business Plan. The strategy set out three objectives:
 - 3.2.1 expand and accelerate the development of affordable and low-cost housing;
 - 3.2.2 continue to modernise existing Council homes and neighbourhoods; and
 - 3.2.3 transform front line services to tenants to tackle inequality and reduce their cost of living.
- 3.3 The budget process identified a number of operational and financial pressures which included performance flatlining and dipping in some areas, a decline in

- customer satisfaction and a projected deficit from 2022/23 and the need to mitigate this by reducing annual expenditure by 10% over the next four years.
- 3.4 On [21 March 2019](#), the Housing and Economy Committee approved the 2019/20 HRA capital programme for investment of £108.954 million in new homes, existing homes (including external fabric and estates) and services. This was a 35% increase on the previous year's approved capital programme and is the largest annual capital investment programme to date in Council homes.
- 3.5 On [6 June 2019](#), the Housing and Economy Committee received an update on the HSIP. The report set out the approach to redesigning the Housing Service with a specific focus on developing more effective and responsive services for customers. The approach to improvement complements the significant planned investment in tenants' homes and estates, whilst significantly improving customer satisfaction, operating performance and reducing costs.

4. Main report

- 4.1 The Housing Service Improvement Plan aims to significantly improve customer satisfaction, operating performance and reduce costs over a three-year period. The HSIP has six improvement workstreams prioritising service improvements in repairs and maintenance alongside rent collection, lettings, estate management, housing quality and housebuilding. Appendix 1 sets out the workstreams and timetable for delivering improvements.
- 4.2 Improvement projects within the repairs service have been an early priority, to address legacy systems issues and inefficient processes which are having a detrimental impact on performance, customer satisfaction, and cost. It is recognised that the most frequent reason for tenants to contact the Housing Service is to request a repair and therefore the potential to improve the tenant experience, whilst simultaneously delivering a more efficient service, is significant.
- 4.3 Increased mobile working can deliver cost efficiencies and increase customer satisfaction. The Total Mobile system will be used to support mobile working across the Housing Service. The first phase of Total Mobile; introduced in September 2019, automated appointments and invoicing systems. Initial implementation issues were encountered with the way data was transferred over to the system and dispatched into operative diaries, requiring manual intervention to reschedule a number of appointments.
- 4.4 A system upgrade was carried out in early January to improve the functionality and accuracy of job allocations at the point of booking, by factoring in more robust information on travel time and length of appointment. This is addressing the issues some tenants experienced with operatives being unable, or late, to attend appointments as a result of issues with the appointment system.

- 4.5 The automation of appointments is designed to enable operatives to be deployed to jobs in a more efficient way. Better management of in-house resources is reducing reliance on subcontractors, delivering cost savings and a more responsive service to tenants. Since the rollout of Total Mobile, the number of jobs allocated to subcontractors for the main trades (gas, plumbing and electrical) has reduced significantly. Due to the passage of time between works carried out and invoicing, the reductions in expenditure are expected to start materialising over the next quarter.
- 4.6 Total Mobile Phase Two began at the start of November, alongside a full process review of gas safety checks and the repair and re-let process for empty homes. Improvements delivered through Phase Two will help to reduce instances of no access for gas checks by building in the tenant's confirmation of appointment into the process. Phase Two also includes enhancements to tenant contact channels, with the introduction of text messaging expected by Spring 2020. This will enable tenants to be kept updated on appointments, with reminders sent the day before and when the operatives are on their way.
- 4.7 Phase Two also introduces enhanced and additional electronic forms for operatives, reducing the inefficiencies of paper-based working. Previously, operatives were required to return to the office to carry out their paperwork. Phase Two is enabling this work to be carried out remotely, making the process more efficient, maximising productivity and improving the quality and retention of documentation. It will also enable operatives to schedule follow-on appointments from site, making the overall process work more efficiently. Further improvements to systems, contract management, and back-office functions are being delivered to drive efficiencies, improvements and savings. Phase Two is anticipated to complete by summer 2020. Phase 3 of Total Mobile, programmed to commence in summer 2020, will enable housing officers to access a range of services via a mobile device. Work will also be taken forward on a self-service repairs' portal for tenants.
- 4.8 The quality control process for re-lets is being reviewed as part of the empty homes project detailed below. The current quality control process for all repairs includes 40 recorded Team Leader site visits per trade, per month (around 10% of all jobs), in addition to various unrecorded visits from Team Leaders and Quality Control officers as part of the normal run of business. Monthly contract management meetings are also held with all subcontractors (c.50 meetings a month). A monthly Contract Management Board reviews all live contracts and any ongoing issues. The Board identifies where any additional contract visits are required, for example if there have been complaints or dips in output/performance. Otherwise, visits are carried out on a regular basis across all contracts as part of routine contract management.

Improving Services: Finding, letting and sustaining tenancies

- 4.9 In early 2020, work will be taken forward to further improve the re-let and tenancy process. Work is underway to scope the potential introduction of welcome packs for

tenants, which could include basic household essentials and information on local services and activities. Helping tenants settle into their new home can support tenancy sustainment and have a positive impact on tenant wellbeing. Improving tenant satisfaction with the quality of their home when they move in has been identified as a key area for improvement. This dovetails with a scrutiny project recently undertaken by the HRA Scrutiny Group (HRASG), a tenant working group who meet regularly with Council officers to scrutinise the operation of the HRA. Further information is provided on this at 7.3 and 7.4.

- 4.10 Improvements to the empty homes repairs process are also underway to enable homes that require minimal repair and improvement works to be turned around more quickly. Work is underway to scope and pilot a multi-disciplinary response to accelerate the re-let process whilst also bolstering quality controls and assurance. This means that tenants will be able to move into their home more quickly and enhanced quality checks should improve tenant satisfaction with the quality of their home when they move in. The pilot will be monitored closely with a view to embedding successful improvements as business as usual, to drive improvements and efficiencies in the longer-term.
- 4.11 Housing officers are now able to order new decoration packs for tenants who are able and interested in carrying out simple home improvements such as painting. This is a cost-efficient measure to empower tenants to take ownership and to feel at home in their new tenancy.
- 4.12 In addition, the management of arrears cases that are progressed to court action stages was brought back into the housing service from the Corporate Debt Recovery team over the summer of 2019. The overall approach to rent collection is to collect the essential rental income in to the HRA but also to intervene as early as possible when arrears arise to assist tenants to remain in their homes and reduce the risk of homelessness wherever possible. Court action does, however, remain an essential enforcement route where tenants have failed to engage and meet their rent payment responsibilities.
- 4.13 This service is now embedded within the housing management teams, enabling closer monitoring and control of the increased complexity of arrears cases arising from the introduction of Universal Credit full service rollout. The relocation of this service has also facilitated alignment with other areas of improvement in the rent service, including increased take up of flexible direct debits and work underway with the Sheriff Court to improve the management of cases in court. It also ensures continued close links to the localities in helping to identify any additional support needs for tenants and enabling them to remain in their homes wherever possible. Further improvements are being taken forward to streamline processes and manage the volume of cases.
- 4.14 Over the coming months, digital improvements will be carried out to improve the accessibility and interface of the housing webpages. This includes the introduction

of online housing application forms. This workstream had been delayed due to ICT dependencies but is now expected to be delivered by summer 2020.

Improving homes and neighbourhoods

- 4.15 Another key priority for tenants is improving the look and feel of homes beyond their own front doors. This includes both the common areas within stairs and also out into the estates and surrounding areas. Long-term challenges with mixed tenure and land ownership issues have presented difficulties with carrying out maintenance and improvement works. This has resulted in some blocks and surrounding areas looking tired and overlooked. Addressing this effectively will necessitate close partnership working and a collaborative approach with other service areas, particularly Waste, Transport and Environment.
- 4.16 The detailed scope of the Estate Improvement workstream is currently being developed, taking into account the current delivery of services such as stair cleaning and estates clearance, community initiatives, use and maintenance of open areas, and a more holistic approach to tackling big issues through placemaking and area master planning. Active involvement from the local community, coupled with a focus on education and behavioural change, particularly for widespread issues such as fly tipping and dog fowling, will be integral to successful regeneration.
- 4.17 A door entry installation programme is already underway, around 200 blocks will be upgraded in 2019/20. In addition to this, small scale upgrades, where owner consent is not required to take forward works, will also be undertaken in early 2020/21, including stair painting, upgrades to flooring and improved lighting in common stairs. The detail of this will be set out in the 2020/21 Capital Investment Programme report to Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee in March 2020, following consultation with tenants and elected members.
- 4.18 Procurement is underway for a single supplier to undertake garden works for homes being re-let, grounds' maintenance and clearance due to issues such as fly-tipping, and property protection for Council homes and new build/capital improvement sites. This will deliver efficiencies in contract management and performance improvements through revised key performance indicators being set for the contract. This is also expected to have a positive impact on the standard of estates and streamlining the final stages of getting external areas of homes tidied for re-let. The contract is expected to be reported to Finance and Resources Committee in March 2020 for approval.

Improving Services: New Services

- 4.19 In addition to improving core housing management services, work continues to progress on the delivery of new services aimed at reducing living costs and improving quality of life for our tenants.
- 4.20 Five new Housing Assistants posts have been created within the Housing Service. The role helps provide support to teams and creates a career pathway within the

service, particularly for housing apprentices who seek to stay in the organisation and continue their development. The first wave of the housing apprenticeship programme has resulted in five individuals securing full-time posts within the organisation; two taking up alternative employment or further training and two continuing with the apprenticeship programme. The next wave of recruitment for the programme is underway and continues to involve targeted marketing for tenants and their families. Five new apprentices will be recruited by summer 2020 into a rotational programme between the housing management and local housing teams.

- 4.21 The implementation of the Mixed Tenure Improvement Strategy is underway, including establishing a mixed tenure delivery team, revising the Scheme of Assistance to provide more practical and financial support options to owners and landlords, as well as using the HRA capital investment programme as a catalyst for improvement.
- 4.22 The broadband programme is progressing, with phase one focusing on securing super-fast, reliable fibre infrastructure to Council homes, at no cost to the Council or tenants. Work to deliver full fibre infrastructure to Council homes began in November 2019, with a pilot project in Morden. The Council is engaging with fibre infrastructure providers in a way which retains flexibility for future Internet Service providers (ISPs), whilst managing and minimising the disruption to tenants and the Council estate. It is important that Council homes are included in the rollout to ensure that tenants can benefit from fibre connectivity, both now and in the future.
- 4.23 Full fibre infrastructure creates opportunities for telecare facilities which have the potential to help older, vulnerable and less physically able tenants stay in their homes and maintain their independence for as long as possible. It also has significant potential to improve the way the Housing Service manages its assets and supports mobile working for housing officers and repairs operatives.

Programme Governance

- 4.24 A Programme Management Office (PMO) has been established to support the delivery of the HSIP, with a dedicated Programme Manager appointed in November 2019. The PMO will organise, coordinate and oversee the day-to-day running of the programme, and will report to the HSIP Programme Board on a monthly basis.
- 4.25 The HSIP Programme Board comprises senior officers from across the Housing Services and the other service areas with key dependencies including; Localities, Finance, Customer, Human Resources and ICT. The Board provide strategic direction and guidance; problem solving and enablement within their respective service areas; a decision-making forum and escalation route; and monitoring and scrutiny of programme delivery and progress. The programme also reports into the monthly Corporate Leadership Team Change Board.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 A six-monthly review including an update against the key workstreams, will be provided to Housing Homelessness and Fair Work Committee in June 2020.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 The HRA is funded from tenants' rents, fees and service charges for services provided to tenants and assets held on the HRA account. The HRA is financially stable for the next three years, but it will become increasingly difficult to sustain large scale investment in new and existing homes without delivering cost efficiencies in service delivery.
- 6.2 Over the next five years, more than £870 million will be invested in new and existing homes to deliver Council commitments. To ensure the HRA remains in a strong position a 10% reduction in expenditure (£11.2 million) is targeted by 2022/23.
- 6.3 To manage this overall savings target, interim milestones have been set out for each year leading up to 2022/23. The phasing of the savings is not critical; however, any earlier savings would have a positive effect.
- 6.4 A savings target of £1.2 million was set for 2019/20; actual savings are projected to be more than double the target (£3.4m). This improved position follows a review of in-year debt management. This was part of a wider review of the debt portfolio, which has resulted in a positive material change in debt servicing costs going forward. The improvement workstreams set out in this report will deliver further operational efficiencies.
- 6.5 The investment required to make the necessary improvements to support the HSIP has been factored into the HRA business plan and will be reviewed annually. Any shortfall would have to be mitigated through a combination of increases in income and/or a re-phasing or reduction in planned capital investment
- 6.6 Progress will continue to be reported to Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee bi-annually.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 The Council has an extensive programme of consultation and engagement with tenants, including surveys, focus groups, tenant panels, tenant led service inspections and resident and community meetings. There is also a dedicated annual budget consultation exercise designed and delivered in partnership with tenants through the Rent Matters Working Group. It also regularly benchmarks against other affordable housing providers and regularly engages with best practice networks, in a culture of scrutiny strongly connected to performance management.

- 7.2 The Housing Revenue Account Scrutiny Group (HRASG) recently completed a scrutiny project on tenants' satisfaction with the standard of homes when moving in. The HRASG is a tenant working group which aims to review how the HRA operates and scrutinise aspects of service performance from a tenant perspective to ensure good value for HRA spend on services and investment.
- 7.3 The group reviewed the Standard of Let and learned about the process to make property ready to let, by visiting homes that were ready to let and interviewing housing officers and team leaders. The group also carried out survey and focus groups with new Council tenants to understand the reasons for dissatisfaction, as well as benchmarking Council's performance and financial data with comparable social landlords.
- 7.4 The group met with housing service managers to present their findings and recommendations, which include reviewing the content of the Standard of Let and tenancy information/ welcome packs and improving communications between housing officers and perspective/ new tenants. These recommendations will feed into the HSIP going forward.
- 7.5 This engagement programme has been further expanded and enhanced through the HSIP. An overarching communications plan recognises the importance of ongoing dialogue to help keep tenants and staff onboard with the change programme and of ensuring they are involved in shaping improvements. To facilitate this, the focus group programme has been expanded, with groups to be held monthly with tenants and staff.
- 7.6 City-wide tenant surveys will continue to be held annually to monitor changes in perception and overall satisfaction. The next survey is due to take place in spring 2020.
- 7.7 Additionally, housing officers will continue to offer an annual conversation with every tenant in their patch, providing additional insight into tenant satisfaction, as well as helping to build relationships and a culture of trust. All of this helps to build a detailed picture of tenant experience/ perception, which can be tracked over time.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 HRA Budget Strategy 2019/24, Finance & Resources Committee, [1 February 2019](#).
- 8.2 [2019/20 HRA Capital Programme](#), Housing & Economy Committee, [21 March 2019](#).
- 8.3 [Housing Service Improvement Plan](#): Update Housing & Economy Committee, 6 June 2019.

9. Appendices

9.1 Appendix 1 – Six monthly Action Plan.

Appendix 1: Six monthly Action Plan (Jan 2020 – Jun 2020)

Action Point	Action	Target Date	Lead Team	Comments	Status
Repairs and Maintenance	<p>Aim: Our tenants receive efficient and high-quality repairs at times that are convenient to them. We need to communicate more effectively with our customers throughout the process and resolve issues quickly when we get it wrong. We need to provide our staff with better systems and tools to help them deliver a service they can take pride in.</p> <p>Outcome: Improved satisfaction with the repairs service, improved operating performance and reduced costs.</p>				
1.	A full process review of gas safety checks and the repair and re-let process for empty homes	Jan 2020	Housing Property/ Housing Management & Development	A full process review to inform improvement projects being taken forward	G
2.	Total Mobile Phase 2 – Including gas safety checks and empty homes. Enhanced tenant contact channels, with the introduction of text messaging.	June 2020	Housing Property/ Customer/ICT	Improvements delivered through Phase Two will enable tenants to be kept updated on appointments, with reminders sent the day before and when the operatives are on their way. It will also help to reduce instances of no access for gas checks by building in the tenant's confirmation of appointment into the process.	A
3.	Total Mobile Phase 2 - Enhanced and additional electronic forms for operatives, reducing the inefficiencies of paper-based working.	Jul 2020	Housing Property/ Customer/ICT	Phase Two is enabling this work to be carried out remotely, making the process more efficient, maximising productivity and improving the quality and retention of documentation. Operatives will also be able to schedule follow-on appointments from site. Further improvements to systems, contract management, and back-office functions are being delivered to drive efficiencies, improvements and savings.	G
4.	Customer resolutions – pilot project to be taken forward with the Customer Contact	Feb 2020	Housing Property/ Customer	Resolution of complex contacts from customers, placing greater emphasis on	



Action Point	Action	Target Date	Lead Team	Comments	Status
	centre aimed at resolving tenant complaints quickly, efficiently and to the tenant's satisfaction			resolving customers concerns at point of contact. Pilot will be reviewed and evaluated with potential for wider roll-out across the service.	
Finding and Letting a Home	<p>Aim: To make finding a suitable home as straightforward as possible. Ensuring when homes become empty they are repaired quickly and to a high standard.</p> <p>To improve the overall experience of new tenants when they move into their home and to ensure they have successful and sustainable tenancies we will work closely with our housing associations partners to improve systems and processes for accessing available homes and with tenants to ensure changes to the service are fit for purpose.</p> <p>Outcome: Tenant satisfaction with their homes when they move in improves and the time taken to let a home reduces.</p>				
1.	Review of the end to end empty homes repair and re-let process.	Feb 2020	Housing Management & Development/ Localities/ Housing Property	Work is underway to scope and pilot a multi-disciplinary response to accelerate the re-let process whilst also bolstering quality controls and assurance.	G
2.	Review of tenant sign up pack and tenant handbook.	Feb 2020	Housing Management & Development/ Localities	This work will inform the new tenancy starter pack, which could include basic household essentials and information on local services and activities to support tenancy sustainment and have a positive impact on tenant wellbeing.	G
3.	Complete the initial ICT build for move to an on-line EdIndex Application form.	Jun 2020	Housing Management & Development/ ICT/ Customer	This project had been delayed due to ICT interdependences. Project is monitored and reported through the EdIndex Management Board.	A
4.	Undertake user testing, including applicant testing of a form for an on-line applicant account for EdIndex and 'Key to Choice' website.	July 2020	Housing Management & Development/ EdIndex Partners	This project had been delayed due to ICT interdependences. Project input for EdIndex landlords will be through the operational practitioner group. Implementation of live system will follow once essential user acceptance testing is completed.	A
Paying Rent	<p>Aim: Make paying rent as straightforward as possible and help tenants avoid getting into debt. Maximise the rental income collected so that investment in improving services and our homes and estates is maintained.</p> <p>Outcome: Fewer tenants have rent arrears and have help when they do.</p>				

Action Point	Action	Target Date	Lead Team	Comments	Status
1.	Enhancement to Northgate Rent ICT systems fully implemented.	Mar 2020	Housing Management & Development/ ICT	Modules changes to improve tracking of scheduled payments and workflow system to manage rent actions. Go-live date has ICT dependencies with other projects and service improvements.	A
2.	Implementation of revised rent charging periods.	April 2020	Housing Management & Development/ ICT	Implementation of change as part of annual year end project subject to outcome of consultation.	G
3.	Online direct debit set up	April 2020	Housing Management & Development/ ICT	Currently tenants can only set up Direct Debits via telephone, work underway to scope online set up functionality.	G
Estate Management	<p>Aim: Develop a coordinated approach across Council services, to provide effective estate management so that tenants live in places that are clean, well-managed and safe. Whether that is the common stair, the shared garden or the surrounding environment within which they live. Ownership and management of buildings and estates is proportionately shared with other owners and private landlords.</p> <p>Outcome: Tenants are proud of the areas they live in.</p>				
	Scope the Estate Improvement workstream, taking into account the current delivery of services such as stair cleaning and estates clearance, community initiatives, use and maintenance of open areas, and wider placemaking and area master planning.	Feb 2020	Housing Management & Development/ Localities/ Waste/Transport/ Environment	Addressing this effectively will necessitate close partnership working and a collaborative approach with other service areas, particularly Waste, Transport and Environment.	G
	Develop a programme of small-scale upgrades, where owner consent is not required to take forward works, to be included in the 2020/21 Capital Programme report to this Committee in March 2020	March 2020	Housing Management & Development/ Localities	The programme will be developed in consultation with tenants and elected members and will include door entry system upgrades, stair painting, upgrades to flooring and improved lighting in common stairs.	G
	Procurement completed for Framework for estate related services (includes securities, garden clearance etc).	Apr 2020	Housing Management & Development/ Localities/ Procurement	Existing contracts being managed to align with a common commencement date. Subject to approval by Finance & Resources Committee in March 2020.	G
	<p>Aim: Existing homes are brought up to modern standards. We are investing more in tenants' homes, buildings and estates than ever before, but we need to ensure that our investment delivers the improvements that tenants want and supports owners to meet their responsibilities for share of repair costs and they are able to contribute to investment in improvements to buildings and common areas they share with our tenants.</p>				

Action Point	Action	Target Date	Lead Team	Comments	Status
	Outcome: Tenant satisfaction with the quality of their home and estate improves.				
1.	Secure Door Entry Project in 200 blocks during 2019/20.	Mar 2020	Housing Property/ Localities/ Housing Management & Development	Council will require agreement from 1 or 2 owners in around 50% of blocks to meet the required majority agreement to progress with installations.	G
2.	Mixed Tenure Services Manager in post	April 2020	Housing Management & Development/ Localities/ Procurement	Manager will be responsible for development of the service model. Subject to financial business case being approved by Finance & Resource Committee in Jan 2019.	A
3.	Revised Scheme of Assistance to support HRA investment in mixed tenure blocks.	April 2020	Housing Management & Development/ Finance	Subject to financial business case being approved by Finance & Resource Committee in Jan 2019.	A
Housebuilding	Aim: To build new affordable homes to help tackle the city's acute housing shortage. We need to ensure that, working with contractors, we can find more efficient ways of building homes, whilst at the same time continuing to provide homes of a high standard that meet the needs of our tenants throughout their lives.				
	Outcome: Reduction in overall development costs and increased customer satisfaction with new homes				
1.	Complete review of Design Guide.	Dec 2019	Development & Regeneration	Review will focus on incorporating greater standardisation and reflect tenant feedback on their new homes.	G
2.	Award new Council housing contractor framework – Lot 2.	Jan 2020	Development & Regeneration	Lot 1 awarded in Sept 2019. Lot 2 will further minimise use of external frameworks and payment of access fees.	G
3.	Piloting the delivery of Gold Standard homes at Craigmillar and maximising opportunities for collaborative learning linked to Passivhaus.	Jun 2020	Development & Regeneration	The output of this work will be a blueprint for delivering energy efficient, affordable homes that require little energy for space heating or cooling (passive principles).	G