

Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee

10.00am, Thursday, 3 June 2021

Housing Service Improvement Plan – Update

Executive/routine Wards Council Commitments	Executive All
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1. Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that the Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee:
 - 1.1.1 Notes the progress made with the Housing Service Improvement Plan (HSIP) over the last six months and the 2021/22 forward plan; and
 - 1.1.2 Agrees to receive an update report in six months.

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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 Housing Service Improvement Plan (HSIP). The measures set out in the improvement plan aim to significantly improve customer satisfaction, operating performance and reduce costs.

3. Background

- 3.1 On [6 June 2019](#), Housing and Economy Committee received a report on the HSIP. This set out the approach to redesigning the housing service with a specific focus on developing more effective and responsive services for customers.
- 3.2 Further updates on the HSIP have been provided to the Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee on [20 January 2020](#) and [5 November 2020](#).

4. Main report

- 4.1 The HSIP was introduced in 2019 with the aim of increasing customer satisfaction, improving operating performance and reducing costs. The HSIP is particularly focused on developing more responsive and accessible services for tenants, with housing teams working within an operating model that is flexible and fit for the future. The HSIP is driving improvements across a number of workstreams, centred around digital improvements, enhancements to customer communication, service resilience and efficiencies.

Strategic Context and Covid-19 Impact

- 4.2 There are a range of contextual factors which need to be taken into account as we continue to drive service improvement:
- 4.2.1 The impact of Covid-19, in relation to operational service delivery and the longer-term impacts and opportunities that have been identified during the lockdown restrictions;
- 4.2.2 The ambitious commitments of the Housing Service as set out in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan, recognising the impact of the

approved rent freeze for 2021/22 and mitigating options - ensuring the service is organised in the most effective way to deliver the significant planned capital investment over the next 10 years in housebuilding, improving the quality of existing homes and improving the quality of our local neighbourhoods;

4.2.3 The complex and challenging regulatory framework the housing service operates within, and the importance of ensuring robust governance, risk and assurance across the service; and

4.2.4 Ensuring alignment to the Council Business Plan and the wider strategic landscape, including 'Housing to 2040', the Scottish Government's approach to improving Scotland's housing over the next two decades.

4.3 Covid-19 has had an impact on the programme, in terms of delivery but also in shaping the priorities for the HSIP going forward. The last 12 months have reinforced the core objectives of the programme, as well as highlighting the importance of service resilience and agility. Now more than ever, and as the longer-term impact of Covid-19 is better understood, the housing service needs to be organised in the right way to support our tenants effectively. Alignment to the Council Business Plan is central to this and there is now an important opportunity for the service to reflect on lessons learned from the last 12 months; the challenges, opportunities, reaffirmed and emerging priorities; and how the service can respond to best support tenants and officers going forward.

HSIP Workstream Updates

4.4 This report provides progress updates on the HSIP workstreams. The programme faced some delays in 2020/21 due to the disruption of the Covid-19 operating environment. Some key programme resources were temporarily re-aligned to prioritise urgent resilience work and to maintain essential frontline service delivery, resulting in planned programme activities and recruitment being suspended for a five-month period. Since Autumn 2020, there has been an increased focus and assignment of resources across the HSIP workstreams.

4.5 The HSIP is informed by tenant feedback and operational requirements, and a key area of focus is improvements within the repairs service. Work is ongoing to roll out the Total Mobile system, improve the complaints handling process, and develop enhancements to communication platforms. A separate, more detailed update on improvements within the repairs service is presented to this committee. Updates for the other HSIP workstreams are provided below with the forward plan set out in Appendix 2.

Digital Improvement and Innovation

4.6 Maximising digital opportunities that enable our officers to provide a high-quality service to our tenants is central to the programme. ICT dependencies across housing and wider Council systems are critical to programme delivery and remain a key risk to the timescales of the programme. A monthly digital forum was set up in February 2021, bringing together colleagues across Housing, Homelessness, Customer Contact, Digital Services and CGI. A roadmap is being developed

through this forum, tracking delivery timescales for current and future projects and enabling risks, interdependencies and resource requirements to be considered across this portfolio of work.

- 4.7 Improvements are being delivered to make it easier for tenants to access information and advice on social and other affordable housing in the city and to the process for bidding for homes online. The new EdIndex website went live at the end of January 2021, providing information on how to apply for social housing and other affordable housing options. The new website also includes a 'tool' allowing people to view details of where houses became available and the level of demand for them over the preceding 12 months. This allows applicants to have a clearer picture of supply and demand, helping people make a more informed choice about their housing options.
- 4.8 The website also now provides an 'accessibility tool' to assist applicants with specific needs, such as visual impairment or where English is not their first language, through 'read aloud' and translation functionality. IT software upgrades took place in April 2021 to the Choice system. This upgrade will also support the implementation of an online EdIndex housing application, which is the next phase of the programme of improvements for this area of service. Once fully implemented, applicants will be able to view and update their application with any changes in their household circumstances, and to view their own bidding history. The final phase of the project that will be taken forward with the Homelessness Service will be the development and implementation of an online housing options checker. This will direct applicants to information on potential housing options dependent on their individual household circumstances.
- 4.9 Further digital improvements are at scoping stage with Digital Services and CGI, for development from 2021/22 onwards. This includes options to improve tracking and monitoring of arrears escalation and case management for officers. These improvements would support officers to manage their caseload by providing early alerts of missed rent/arrears payments, reducing the manual processes of producing and reviewing reports and enabling targeted contact by patch officers at the earliest point to avoid tenants getting into debt they cannot afford.
- 4.10 Work is also at scoping stage for enhancements to the way tenant feedback is captured. Digital platforms could allow the Council to automate surveys to tenants at specific interaction points defined by the business. For example, automated surveys could be sent following the tenancy sign-up appointment or once a tenant has moved into a home. This could also allow more tailored performance reports to be produced, highlighting issues and patterns. The monthly digital forum will continue to scope, coordinate and drive forward improvements throughout 2021/22.

Improving Services: Finding and Letting Homes

- 4.11 In addition to digital improvements designed to make it easier for tenants to access services online, work is also being carried out to improve tenant communications. This includes an end-to-end review of the tenancy sign up process, a project which had been scheduled for 2020 but was delayed due to Covid-19. This project will

look at the essential documentation and information to be provided as part of the sign-up process. The traditional tenancy sign-up process involves large volumes of information and documentation being provided during the sign-up meeting, which can be overwhelming for the tenant. This review will refine the process, to ensure it focuses on essential information in an accessible format. Supplementary information will be provided for tenants to review at their own convenience and discuss with their patch housing officer once they are settled into their new home. Information for tenants will also be uploaded online for digital access.

- 4.12 Alongside the review of tenancy sign-up, a review is underway of the revised processes for letting homes that were developed to ensure safe working practices in response to Covid-19. This will consider aspects that worked well and opportunities to embed these to make the process more efficient. This will build on the locality-based working with Housing Property colleagues that has been accelerated during lockdown; this is detailed in the accompanying repairs improvements report to this committee.
- 4.13 A significant piece of work is being undertaken to develop and update processes, staff procedures and training across a wide range of housing management activities, such as Special Lets, Abandoned Tenancies and Houses in Multiple Occupation. Early priorities have been identified through officer feedback. This work will support housing officers and team leaders to confidently undertake the wide range of services and interactions with tenants that are covered through the local housing team. This work also helps to ensure consistency in practice and approach across the city. The documentation is developed with officer involvement and supported with training where required, as outlined at 4.25.
- 4.14 Over the next six months, scoping will begin for a wider collaborative piece of work with other services, looking at how first-time and new tenants can be better prepared and supported to take on and successfully sustain a tenancy. This is intended to maximise opportunities for co-ordinated support before the tenancy starts. For example, this may include working with households to help manage any pre-existing debt and planning to help meet the cost of rent payments and other costs associated with moving into a new home.

Improving Services: Income Collection

- 4.15 The last 12 months have been extremely challenging for our tenants, with many experiencing an unforeseen change in their household circumstances. The impact of this has been seen in the sharp increase in tenants making a claim for financial assistance through Universal Credit (UC). The number of tenants known to have made a claim for UC increased sharply at the start of lockdown in March 2020 and has continued to just under 5,000 tenants as at the end of March 2021. The rent service has been maintained for tenants and every effort continues to be made to assist tenants to meet their rent payment responsibilities and to help them avoid getting into debt they cannot afford.
- 4.16 Improvements have been made to rent payment information available online and to standard rent communications, including arrears letters. This work was informed by

an Edinburgh Tenant Federation (ETF) Tenant Led Inspection in rent communications that was completed prior to lockdown. Revised telephone scripts have also been produced for Council automated phone lines, to enable tenants to request rent statements and payment cards over the phone. Flexible direct debits are continuing to be promoted as the preferred secure payment method and the feasibility of providing a portal to allow tenants to set up their own direct debit online is being explored.

- 4.17 In preparation for court action resuming in March 2021, a review of court cases was completed to manage the cases being returned to court effectively and to adapt processes in line with revised operational requirements for the Sheriff Court. These changes include the switch to electronic handling of court documents, a new process for checking court cases to ensure continued compliance with legal requirements and training for staff. Aligned to homeless prevention actions agreed for the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan, any new Notices of court action served due to arrears are reviewed by a multi-disciplinary team to find solutions and prevent further action and increased risk of homelessness in the period before the notice becomes valid. Current Scottish Government Covid-19 measures have increased this period to six months. Taking into account the full set of household circumstances, the multi-disciplinary team can include Family and Household Support, the Advice Shop, Children and Families, Health and Social Care, and Homelessness Services. The team ensure all support options have been re-visited and a range of different approaches fully explored to support the household to engage or re-engage.
- 4.18 Operational 'quick win' improvements continue to be driven forward to make the rent collection process as smooth and efficient as possible. For example, a 'library' of translated rent letters has been set up for all officers to access, removing the inefficiencies of duplicated work across different localities.

Improving Neighbourhoods

- 4.19 Consultation with tenants has shown a strong desire for investment in neighbourhood improvement and the impact of lockdown has further highlighted the importance of the local environment and access to high quality, well managed spaces. The HRA budget strategy assumes significant and joined-up capital investment over the next 20 years in existing homes, new homes and estates with a new approach needed to the long-term management of estates to protect capital investment, improve customer satisfaction and resident engagement in estate regeneration.
- 4.20 Estates Management has been a key area of focus for the HSIP over the last six months, with a project lead seconded to the programme in November 2020 to drive this forward. The purpose of this workstream is to develop an improved way of delivering the key services that contribute to the cleanliness and maintenance of greenspace in neighbourhoods where the Council has a high volume of tenancies and land ownership. It will also consider how we can improve our responsiveness in these areas to tackling key issues including graffiti, dog fouling and fly tipping, which are consistency identified by tenants and residents as the main factors which

impact on satisfaction with their neighbourhood as a place to live. Any new model of delivering services must simultaneously demonstrate capacity for value for money, improved service performance and increased satisfaction.

- 4.21 Wider work across the Council will also impact positively on estates management. This includes ongoing work with the Family and Household Support service in their management of anti-social behaviour issues and neighbour disputes, and the communal bin review which is being taken forward by Waste Services throughout 2021/22, as reported to Transport and Environment Committee on [22 April 2021](#).
- 4.22 Detailed work has taken place to review current service provision and explore options for a future service delivery model that is more integrated, local and responsive to the needs of communities. This will involve changes to how we align some of our existing staff resources working in Parks and Greenspace, Waste and Cleansing and Housing to neighbourhoods, as well as identifying opportunities for those teams to be locally based with access to the right equipment and facilities to enable them to work efficiently. There has been initial engagement with staff from across services in Place to gather their input to this workstream and further engagement will take place with staff, Trade Unions, tenants' groups and elected members. A phased approach to implement this new way of working is expected to commence in Autumn 2021.
- 4.23 Wider work on neighbourhood improvements has included an initial review of the current process for Neighbourhood Environment Projects (NEPs) funded through the HRA Capital budget. The NEPs budget has been the primary vehicle for enabling local communities to identify estate improvement projects for a number of years, with the focus of capital investment until now having primarily been on improving the internal condition of tenants' homes. While many of the projects delivered through the NEPs route have been successful and have brought benefits to the community, it is an overly resource intensive process both for the communities engaging with it and the officers supporting it, with a lot of work involved in scoping projects that ultimately are not prioritised. Additionally, while some communities have actively engaged with the process, in some parts of the city there has been low participation.
- 4.24 The HRA Budget Strategy 2021-2031 approved by the Council in February 2021 set out a holistic area-based approach to investment that will focus on buildings and the wider neighbourhood, to create places where people want to live that keep them safe, secure, healthy and connected. The £2.8bn capital investment strategy will act as a catalyst for wider area improvements and support the delivery of Council commitments on affordable housing and net zero carbon by 2030. With this shift towards greater emphasis on investment in estates, there is an opportunity to adapt the approach to involving communities in helping to shape the change and improvement they want to see in their neighbourhood, that supports wider regeneration ambitions for the city and has a greater impact on the quality of life of those that live there. Rather than allocating a relatively small annual budget to each local area for communities to prioritise projects, there is an opportunity to engage with tenants and residents on the improvements they want to see delivered across

estates and to work in partnership to secure external funding aligned with Council investment. Engagement will be carried out over the summer with tenants' groups, Neighbourhood Networks and elected members to explore how communities can be best supported to influence how the investment in their local neighbourhoods is prioritised.

Staff Communication, Wellbeing and Training

- 4.25 The continuation of a blended working model with the majority of staff across housing management primarily working from home has presented both challenges and opportunities. Work is continuing to support staff to work safely and effectively, recognising the impact the last 12 months have had on officers and the tenants they are supporting. Equally, there have been some unforeseen benefits of new ways of working, which need to be captured and built on over the coming months.
- 4.26 Officer communication has been maintained through regular online team meetings, wider team briefings and 1:1s. Opportunities for staff input and engagement with HSIP activities have been established through staff surveys and working groups on a range of topics, including estates management and mixed tenure management. In addition, a staff newsletter has been developed to provide officers across the service with regular updates, operational information and guidance, as well as team news and good news stories. 'Housing Highlights' is now an established platform for sharing information, and the publications are uploaded online for officers to refer back to. This is circulated regularly, and the distribution has been extended to include other service areas including Homelessness and Customer Contact, enabling key updates to be shared more widely.
- 4.27 The reduction in face-to-face engagement between housing officers and tenants has been challenging and some officers are feeling the impact of this over time. For example, carrying out difficult conversations over the phone whilst working at home, rather than in an office environment with peer support on hand, can be an isolating experience for officers. The wide range of Corporate resources and activities on colleague wellbeing are regularly promoted to officers to reinforce the support and tools available. Additional work is being progressed to supplement this, tailored to the role of the Housing Officer. A 'Health and Wellbeing at Work' virtual event was held in March 2021 for colleagues in the North East locality, as a continuation of work started in this locality prior to lockdown. The session focused on how officers had been managing during lockdown and the principles of 'Be Well to Work Well'. Discussions on the day and evaluation feedback from colleagues who attended will inform future sessions and wider roll out.
- 4.28 A significant piece of work is progressing to develop refreshed training for staff across housing management. This has been informed by a training needs analysis exercise which identified priority topics, such as tenancy assignation and succession. This work is dovetailing with the development of procedural documents and supplementary materials, such as letter templates and guidance notes. As traditional face-to-face group learning is restricted at present, alternative training methods are being explored, including the Council's online learning platform and use of online team meetings.

Tenant Engagement

- 4.29 The Council has an extensive programme of consultation and engagement with tenants, including annual surveys, focus groups, working groups, and resident and community meetings. The HSIP aims to further enhance tenant engagement opportunities. In response to Covid-19, arrangements have been put in place to ensure tenant engagement can continue in a safe and accessible way. This has included setting up an online tenant working group focused on service improvement.
- 4.30 The tenant focus group programme has also moved online. The topics covered in the focus groups are linked to the HSIP workstreams and the feedback from the sessions are captured as part of the programme. The focus groups provide an important opportunity to involve a wider group of tenants and to explore topics in more detail. Recent sessions have looked at neighbourhood improvements and repairs. Monitoring takes place to identify any inclusivity barriers for tenants who are unable to participate digitally, with mitigating measures being explored, including opportunities for 1:1 telephone feedback and the potential for tenants to access devices locally.
- 4.31 Further detail on tenant engagement is set out at section 7.

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 January 2022.

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 has a ring-fenced annual budget for the HSIP to fund vital improvement activities. This is regularly monitored to ensure costs are contained within budget.
- 6.2 On [18 February 2021](#), the City of Edinburgh Council approved a composite motion from the Conservative, Green and Liberal Democrat groups for there to be no rent rise in 2021/22. On [18 March 2021](#), the Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee received a report setting out the financial impact of the approved one-year rent freeze. The report set out four mitigating options: increase income in future years; reduce revenue expenditure; reduce Capital investment; or elongate the Capital programme. A further update on the HRA Business Plan will report to this committee in August 2021, setting out these options in more detail. These options will inform the review and consultation with tenants on the 2022/23 budget, 10-year capital investment and 30-year business plan.
- 6.3 The HSIP already assumes an ambitious reduction in operating expenditure. Including the savings of £3.4m already achieved in 2019/20 through Treasury

Management efficiencies, the HSIP seeks to deliver £14.3m (c.12%) in savings by 2025/26. It is therefore not realistic to assume that a further reduction in revenue expenditure could be achieved through efficiencies alone.

- 6.4 Work is ongoing to analyse the extent of unforeseen expenditure due to Covid-19. Significant adjustments have been made to services to comply with government guidance and protect tenants and staff, including adjustments to buildings to manage social distancing, staff training, equipment and materials, staff shielding and absence due to ill health, allowances for extra time for cleaning, repairs and maintenance and facilitating social distancing. The financial outturn for the HRA for 2020/21 will be reported to Finance and Resources Committee in August 2021. Due to the impact of Covid-19, HSIP savings for 2020/21 and 2021/22 will be tracked as a combined target, to allow for more meaningful monitoring and to ensure savings are attributed to lasting change as opposed to any short-term reductions in spend.
- 6.5 As part of the HSIP, more focused in-depth reviews of HRA budgets and budget monitoring arrangements are being undertaken, alongside a consolidation of HRA cost centres where appropriate. This work is focusing on priority areas, which include re-charges and third party spend, as well as operational pressures such as the HRA contribution to the management of Bonfire Night at a local level.
- 6.6 Progress on the HSIP will continue to be reported to Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee bi-annually. The revised 2021/22 HRA budget will be reviewed and revised in response to the latest Covid-19 restrictions and government guidance. Updates will be reported through regular monitoring reports to Finance and Resources Committee at Periods 3, 6 and 8.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 The Council has an extensive programme of consultation and engagement with tenants, including surveys, focus groups, working groups, and resident and community meetings. Methods of engagement have been adapted in response to the challenges of Covid-19, adapting to online and telephone methods where required.
- 7.2 City-wide tenant surveys continue to be held annually to monitor changes in perception and overall satisfaction. The next survey is due to take place in summer 2021. There is also a dedicated annual budget consultation exercise designed and delivered in partnership with tenants.
- 7.3 In addition to the annual rent consultation and tenant survey, the housing service is in regular contact with tenants and has a wealth of information on tenant satisfaction and priorities from a variety of sources. During lockdown, housing officers mobilised to carry out welfare calls with their tenants to ensure that contact was maintained. Repairs customer satisfaction surveys have also been reinstated through the Contact Centre to allow satisfaction to be tracked and monitored on an ongoing basis.

- 7.4 The HSIP aims to further enhance tenant and staff engagement, recognising that ongoing dialogue is key to ensure tenants and staff are involved in shaping improvements. This has included setting up a new online tenant group to focus on service improvement.
- 7.5 As part of the current Service Level Agreement with ETF work is underway to jointly develop a revised Tenant Scrutiny Framework. The scrutiny framework will support the delivery of the Tenant Participation Strategy objectives and will detail roles and responsibilities of all key partners; accountability structures; how tenant's views are gathered and how these influence decisions taken in relation to housing service including HSIP.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 Housing Service Improvement Plan Update; Housing and Economy Committee, [6 June 2019](#).
- 8.2 Housing Service Improvement Update; Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee, [20 January 2020](#).
- 8.3 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget Strategy 2021/22; Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee, [5 November 2020](#).
- 8.4 Housing Revenue Account (HRA): Impact of a One-Year Rent Freeze; Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee, [18 March 2021](#).

9. Appendices

- 9.1 Appendix 1 - HSIP Key Activities delivered to date.
- 9.2 Appendix 2 - HSIP Forward Plan.

Appendix 1: Summary of key activities delivered to date (excluding Repairs workstreams which are reporting separately)

Workstream	Activity	Benefits
Finding and Letting a home	Decoration Packs available for new tenants through their Housing Office to help with the cost of decoration.	Cost-efficient measure to empower tenants to take ownership and settle into their new tenancy.
	Pilot project for a revised process for turnaround of repairs for empty homes.	Pre-lockdown pilot which has helped inform locality-based working model to improve the repairs and handover for re-let of empty homes with Housing Property and Housing Management staff.
	Scoping of tenant welcome packs proposal.	Proposals developed for a welcome pack to be made available to tenants when they move into their home, which could provide basic cleaning items and the option to access essential household items. Project was delayed due to Covid-19, now subject to final costings and agreement.
	Development of updated Tenant Handbook.	Draft document in final stages of revision to reflect changes in service and information for tenants arising from the response during Covid-19 pandemic and other improvements.
	Tenant HRA Scrutiny group project on Standard of Home when tenants move in.	Recommendations around communication and consistency across the city are feeding into the HSIP and informing service provision.
Income Collection and Tenancy Sustainment	The management of court action arrears cases brought back into the housing service.	This allows greater scrutiny of the increasingly complex arrears cases arising from the introduction of Universal Credit full-service rollout, and greater opportunity to intervene as early as possible when arrears arise.
	Promotion of Direct Debit payment option.	Provides a more flexible and secure payment method for tenants. This can be amended more easily following changes in circumstances.
	Implementation of revised rent charging periods, with rent free fortnights removed 2020/21.	This change aligns rent charging periods more closely with monthly UC payments and salaries for tenants in employment, assisting tenants with household budgeting and debt prevention
Improving your Neighbourhood	Single supplier appointed to undertake garden clearance works for homes being re-let, grounds' maintenance, response to issues such as fly-tipping, and property protection for Council	Efficiencies in contract management and longer-term performance improvements through revised key performance indicators being set for the contract.

Workstream	Activity	Benefits
	homes and new build/capital improvement sites.	
	Estates Management workstream scoped and project lead appointed.	Clarity on aims and objectives. Dedicated resource to drive this workstream at the pace and scale required.
	Data gathering and in-depth analysis of current approach to delivery of estates management services.	Clear understanding of current arrangements, which involves a range of services and suppliers
	Engagement exercises with staff from housing and other Council services to capture feedback on current approach to estates management.	Views captured from across housing and wider Place services about what currently works well and opportunities for a more integrated approach.
	Engagement with tenants to capture feedback on neighbourhoods and current approach to estates management.	Focus group discussion held to explore the topic in greater detail. Supplements the extensive existing tenant feedback on neighbourhoods.
	Initial colleague engagement on the current NEPs process.	Views captured on what works well to inform development of a new approach to supporting communities to influence how the investment in their local neighbourhoods is prioritised. Further engagement to follow in the summer of 2021.
Digital Improvements	New EdIndex website.	Provides information on how to apply for social housing and other affordable housing options, and provides a tool for applicants to search for information on supply/demand for homes to help them understand what is available in the areas they are interested in.
	Ongoing work with providers for full fibre infrastructure to Council homes.	The fibre rollout to Council homes supplies each home with a superfast fibre connection. The infrastructure projects with CityFibre and Openreach allows the tenant to choose from over 600 internet service providers, ensuring flexibility and the option to find the best price on the market.
	Housing/ICT Operational Working Group established.	Brings together colleagues from relevant service areas to track delivery timescales for current and future projects, and consider risks, interdependencies and resource requirements.

Workstream	Activity	Benefits
Financial/ Value for Money	Ongoing deep-dive reviews of HRA Revenue cost centres and budget monitoring arrangements.	Review and re-alignment of spend and cost centres to support future financial monitoring.
	Ongoing review of third party spend and HRA re-charge arrangements.	Review to ensure arrangements are up-to-date and delivering value for money.
	Further analysis of operational demands, including seasonal pressures such as Bonfire Night.	Identifying opportunities for partnership working and advanced planning to mitigate financial impact on the HRA.
	Ongoing analysis of benchmarking data.	Enabling a full understanding of how operational and overhead costs are accounted for by peer organisations, to help ensure benchmarking is reasonable and well-informed.
Tenant Engagement	Tenant Survey 2020.	Annual survey to gather feedback on a range of issues from 1,000 tenants across the city. Informs the HSIP and service priorities, as well as supporting the HRA Budget Consultation process.
	Tenant Focus Group Programme.	Opportunity for tenants to share their views in a safe space discussion which is independently facilitated. Enables wider tenant views to be captured and more in-depth feedback on a range of topics. Feedback helps shape HSIP.
	Dedicated HSIP mailbox set up for tenant correspondence.	Provides another communication channel for tenants to share feedback or note interest in further participation.
	Regular improvement updates provided in tenant newsletter (Tenant Courier).	Newsletter delivered a minimum of twice a year to every tenant. Key communication channel to keep tenants updated and to encourage participation.
	Service improvement working group set up.	Opportunity for a group of tenants to have an active role in the programme. Workplan under development with the group, expected to include regular updates, testing of planned improvements, monitoring, and focused sessions on topics of interest.
Staff Communication, Wellbeing and Training	Quick Win Project – Staff Engagement (short-term project led by a Housing Officer).	Opportunity for wider staff involvement. Informed the approach for a staff newsletter and helps to shape ongoing staff engagement.
	Housing Highlights staff newsletter.	Regular staff newsletter providing service updates, guidance and good news stories. Keeps staff informed and builds a sense of connectivity in the current working environment.

Workstream	Activity	Benefits
	Quick Win Project – Staff Training Needs Analysis (short-term project led by a Housing Team Leader).	Opportunity for wider staff involvement. Identified training needs and priorities across the housing management staff group. Informs the ongoing training plan.
	Staff focus groups and working groups on a range of topics including mixed tenure, neighbourhoods and repairs.	Opportunity for officers across the service to share their experiences, feedback and suggestions. Independent facilitator encourages the open sharing of views. Feedback helps inform the HSIP.
	Pilot Wellbeing sessions at North East Locality.	Opportunity for the staff group to reflect on the challenges of the frontline housing role in a safe space environment and build on the principles of 'Be Well to Work Well'. Pilot session will inform scope for wider rollout.
	Housing Apprentices	Programme developed to provide entry level posts into a career in housing. Of first 10 Modern Apprentices taken through the programme, seven are now in full-time posts within the Council and three moved on to alternative employment or further training. Planning is underway for a further intake of apprentices.

Appendix 2: HSIP Forward Plan for 2021/22 (excluding Repairs Improvement which are reporting separately)

Workstream	Activity	Target Date	RAG	RAG Comments
Finding and Letting a home	Initial data gathering and documentation review for tenancy sign-up. Scoping for wider changes to processes, reflecting on approach under Covid-19 restrictions, and ICT enhancements, such as packs for Housing Officers.	July 2021	Green	On track
	Development of processes and procedures across a range of housing management functions.	Ongoing	Green	On track
	Initial scoping of collaborative work to support tenancy readiness.	September 2021	Yellow	Dependencies with a range of service areas
Income Collection & Tenancy Sustainment	Feasibility assessment for implementing an online direct debit portal for tenants to set up rent payments.	June 2021	Green	On track
Improving your Neighbourhood	Evaluation of officer feedback to date on current NEPs process.	April 2021	Green	On track
	Estates Management preferred option proposals following further engagement with tenants' groups, staff, Trade Unions and elected members.	August 2021	Yellow	Progressing, subject to development of engagement plan
	Engagement with tenants' groups, Neighbourhood Networks and elected members to develop an improved approach to supporting communities to influence how investment is prioritised in local neighbourhoods.	August 2021	Yellow	Progressing, subject to development of engagement plan
Digital Improvements	Updated Housing/ICT Roadmap developed.	May 2021	Yellow	Progressing, subject to ICT Dependencies
	Online EdIndex housing application.	December 2021	Yellow	Progressing, subject to ICT co-dependencies and software upgrades
	Online housing options checker - follows implementation of online application.	April 2022	Yellow	Progressing, subject to ICT co-

Workstream	Activity	Target Date	RAG	RAG Comments
				dependencies and software upgrades
	Preferred option identified for workflow system to improve tracking and monitoring of arrears escalation and case management for officers.	June 2021		Progressing, subject to ICT Dependencies
	Preferred option for enhanced tenant engagement platform.	August 2021		Progressing, subject to ICT Dependencies
Financial/ Value for Money	2020/21 outturn including analysis of Covid-19 impact on HRA budgets.	August 2021		On track
	Review of HRA Budgets and Budget Monitoring.	Ongoing		On track
	Analysis of HSIP savings for 2020/21 and 2021/22.	March 2022		Progressing, subject to ongoing identification and profiling of savings
Tenant Engagement	Tenant Survey 2021.	September 2021		On track
	Working Group and Focus Group programme.	Ongoing		On track
Staff Communication, Wellbeing and Training	Refreshed training across Housing Management topics, aligned to development of process and procedures.	Ongoing		Resources to be reviewed to ensure progress at desired pace
	Evaluation of Wellbeing Workshop pilot at North East.	April 2021		On track
	Forward plan for wider rollout of Wellbeing Workshops.	June 2021		Resources to be reviewed to ensure progress at desired pace