

## Housing Recovery and Improvement Programme Update (October 2024)

**Meeting:** Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee

**Date Of Meeting:** 8 October 2024

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Will the decision be open for call in?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

### 1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update on progress against the Housing Improvement Programme and to provide an opportunity to scrutinise the actions being taken. The desired outcome is that through increased scrutiny and oversight, residents will benefit from an improved service and the risks around building safety will be reduced.

### 2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is requested to:

**RESOLVE THAT** the report be noted.

### 3.0 Proposal & Outcome

3.1 The Committee is invited to note the update on progress against the Housing Improvement Programme since the last report in July 2024.

3.2 The desired outcome is that through regular scrutiny and oversight, residents will benefit from an improved service and the risks around building safety will be reduced.

### 4.0 Background

4.1 Following the statutory government intervention and the issuing of a Section 114 Notice, the Council had established an Improvement and Recovery Plan. In response to the Housing Regulatory Notice issued in December 2023, the Executive approved a fifth theme to focus on Housing recovery and improvement.

4.2 The objective of the Housing Recovery and Improvement theme is to ensure the service is compliant with all the housing regulatory standards, delivering an efficient, reliable, and modern service that meets our statutory requirements, and supports strong neighbourhoods and communities for our residents.

4.3 The programme is made up of seven workstreams:

- Homes and Safety
- Finance
- Tenants and Communities

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- Data and Insights
- Resident Engagement and Consultation
- Tools and Ways of Working
- Staff and Developing Culture

### 5.0 Options Considered

- 5.1 Following the decision by the Executive in December 2023, the Housing Improvement Programme is an established workstream forming part of the Council's Improvement and Recovery Plan (IRP).
- 5.2 The Housing Improvement Programme could be reported to the Committee less frequently. However, given the importance of this area of work and the risks around non-compliance, regular progress updates to the Committee are considered the most appropriate option.

### 6.0 Process

- 6.1 A Housing Improvement Programme Board has been established, which is chaired by the Strategic Director – Communities and attended by workstream leads and the lead commissioner for the Housing Improvement Programme, Mervyn Greer. The first programme board was held in February 2024 with meetings held monthly.
- 6.2 Highlight reports are presented monthly to the Council's Improvement and Recovery Board. The two workstreams of most significance for Improvement and Recovery Board oversight are Homes and safety, following referral to the regulator, and Finance, due to the importance of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) in whole Council budget setting.
- 6.3 In addition, since the Regulatory Notice was issued, senior officers have been meeting monthly with the Regulator of Social Housing. Each month, officers provide the Regulator with an update on progress in completing the fire safety actions, monthly key performance information on compliance (August 2024 figures included as Appendix 2 to this report) and the monthly highlight report.

### 7.0 Progress Update

- 7.1 Understandably, programme delivery so far has prioritised the highest risk area of building safety as part of the '**Homes and Safety**' workstream. Many projects in this workstream continue to see good progress, with the status remaining at Amber.
- 7.2 There has been a particular focus and progress on remedial actions highlighted in the Fire Risk Assessments (FRA). The Council has one contractor underway with remedial works at the Council's sheltered housing schemes and 25 general needs blocks. A number of housing management actions to reduce fire safety hazards have also been completed. The Council has now appointed a consultant, Bailey Partnership to project manage and quality assure the fire safety remedial works, including the procurement of contractors to complete the remaining remedial works. The procurement of suitably qualified contractors has been slower than anticipated and therefore, further contractors are unlikely to be mobilised until early in 2025. This will slow down completion of remedial works and reduce associated capital expenditure in 2024/25 with the works expected to extend into 2025/26.
- 7.3 A new compliance system, C365, has now been rolled out to track completion of fire safety actions and potentially other areas of compliance. This will now ensure that delivery of fire safety actions is auditable and assurance data can be provided. As at 17 September 2024, there were 1,611 outstanding fire safety remedial actions, compared to 3,790 original actions in 2023.

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- 7.4 An overall review of all areas of compliance has been undertaken by Ark Consultancy with findings and recommendations currently under review.
- 7.5 A programme of Decent Homes work is underway for 2024/25 with all workstreams being on track to deliver this year. A 100% stock condition survey has commissioned from Ridge and Partners with site inspections commencing in August 2024. This will give the Council more up-to-date and robust data on the future investment needs of its housing stock and associated cost, which will support longer-term planning. The results and analysis are expected in March 2025. As at 18 September 2024, surveys had been completed on 11% of the Council's housing stock (353 properties) with 39 visits where there was no access (on first attempt) and 9 cases where the contractor was refused access.
- 7.6 The '**Finance**' workstream has been focused on developing the 30-year Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan, covered elsewhere on the agenda. Consultants, Housing Finance Associates Ltd, have provided an initial HRA Business Plan model and work has commenced to review different scenarios to achieve a viable long-term plan. The HRA Business Plan will be presented to Council in December 2024 for consideration. An HRA working group has been established internally with agreed workstreams, including the capital programme, recharges, and service charge recovery.
- 7.7 As part of the '**Resident Engagement and Consultation**' workstream, the focus has been on holding a number of summer drop in engagement events in the community throughout August to inform the development of a Resident Engagement Strategy. Future focus remains on strengthening our tenant volunteers and focus group offering and preparation for 2024/25 TSM collection, including the next tenant satisfaction survey.
- 7.8 The '**Tenants and Communities**' workstream continues to be impacted by challenges in terms of staffing vacancies. Nevertheless, there has been continued improvement in terms of rent collection and void turnaround times. A working group is in place to review and develop new policies and procedures and this work is planned over the next 6-9 months. A detailed review of service delivery against regulatory standards is planned over the coming months. A rent standard review has taken place and subsequent data cleansing close to completion with a Rent Setting Policy being drafted. This review identified some small-scale overcharging, but key activities are in place to rectify these by March 2025. In recognition of the continued challenges around staffing vacancies, the status of this workstream has moved to Red.
- 7.9 The '**Data and insights**' and '**Tools and Ways of working**' workstreams have to date delivered the C365 compliance system and are now moving into the Capita upgrade phases with phase 1 beginning in October 2024. The review of existing data and processes continues as part of this project to ensure the new system meets current needs. Work has begun on developing a performance dashboard and benchmarking with peers via Housemark. There is an increased focus on performance reporting within the service to support service delivery and meet regulatory standards.
- 7.10 The '**Staffing and Culture**' workstream has focused on building engagement with staff on where they want the service to be in the next year. Monthly all housing staff meetings continue to take place and staff have been consulted on future content and feel. The workstream continues to focus on improvements and contributing towards delivery of policies and procedures which will directly impact on efficiencies, empower staff to deliver quality services and ensure compliance with regulatory standards.
- 7.11 The full highlight report for the Housing Improvement Programme for August 2024 is included as Appendix 1 to this report.

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### 8.0 Implications

#### Legal

8.1 None arising from this report.

#### Resources (including finance)

8.2 A full-time Housing Improvement Programme Lead has been appointed to oversee delivery of the programme. There are no further resource implication arising from this report.

#### Consultation, Equality Impact Assessments

8.3 This programme includes a workstream for Resident Engagement and Consultation as described above.

8.4 The results of the recent Tenant Satisfaction Survey will be used as a baseline for measuring the effectiveness of the programme, with surveys to be conducted annually.

8.5 The Resident and Landlord Panel also receives regular verbal updates on the programme.

#### Risks and Mitigations

8.6 The risks associated with delivering the Housing Improvement Programme are monitored monthly through the board with the 'top 5' risks reported to the Improvement and Recovery Board.

8.7 A risk-based approach has also been used to prioritise the focus of resource and activity across and within workstreams.

### 9.0 Supporting Documents

#### Appendices

9.1 Appendix 1 provides the August Highlight Report.

9.2 Appendix 2 covers the monthly Key Performance Information (KPIs) reported to the Regulator for Social Housing.

#### Background Documents

9.3 None

#### Version Control

Version Number	Author	Changes
0.1	KH	First draft (18/09/24)
0.2	LS	Updated draft (24/09/24)

REPORT ENDS