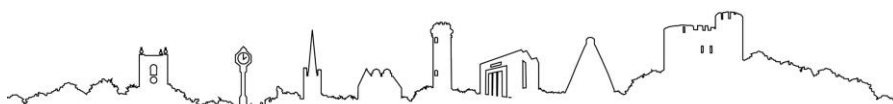


**Meeting of the Housing and Safer Communities
Select Committee**

**Wednesday 13th March, 2024 at 6.00pm
In Committee Room 2, The Council House, Priory Road,
Dudley**

**Agenda - Public Session
(Meeting open to the public and press)**

1. Apologies for absence
2. To report the appointment of any substitute members serving for this meeting of the Committee.
3. To receive any declarations of interest under the Members' Code of Conduct
4. To confirm and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd January, 2024 as a correct record (Pages 5 – 31)
5. Public Forum
6. Review of Private Rented Sector (Pages 32 – 57)
7. Corporate Quarterly Performance Report – Housing and Communities Directorate – Quarter 3 (1st October – 31st December, 2023) (Pages 58 – 86)
8. Progress Tracker and Future Business (Pages 87 – 92)
9. Contractor Management (Pages 93 – 97)



10. To consider any questions from Members to the Chair where two clear days' notice has been given to the Monitoring Officer (Council Procedure Rule 11.8).
11. Resolution to exclude the public and press

Chair to move:

“That the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the ground that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information under Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, for the reasons stated on the agenda.”

Under the provisions of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, the Monitoring Officer has decided that there will be no advance disclosure of the following report because the public interest in disclosing the information is outweighed by the public interest in maintaining the exemption from disclosure.

**Agenda - Private Session
(Meeting not open to the public and press)**

12. [Contractor Management \(Pages 98 – 106\)](#)
(The report contains exempt information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)).

Distribution:

Councillor A Davies (Chair)

Councillor S Bothul (Vice-Chair)

Councillors D Bevan, J Cowell, T Creed, P Drake, I Kettle, K Lewis, J Martin, C Reid and M Webb

Cc: Councillor L Taylor-Childs (Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Communities)



Chief Executive

Dated: 5th March, 2024

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**Minutes of the Housing and Safer Communities
Select Committee**

**Monday 22nd January, 2024 at 6.00 pm
In Committee Room 2
At the Council House, Dudley**

Present:

Councillor A Davies (Chair)
Councillor S Bothul (Vice-Chair)
Councillors D Bevan, J Cowell, T Creed, P Drake, I Kettle, K Lewis, J Martin,
C Reid and M Webb

Officers:

K Jones – Director of Housing and Communities, R Cooper – Head of Financial Services, M Jones – Senior Principal Accountant and K Malpass - Democratic Services Officer (Directorate of Finance and Legal)

Also in attendance:

M Smith – Local Democracy Reporting Service

28. **Apology for Absence**

No apologies were submitted for this meeting of the Committee.

29. **Appointment of Substitute Member**

No substitutes were appointed for this meeting of the Committee.

30. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor J Cowell declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to Agenda Item No. 7 (Community Housing Services – The Neighbourhood Approach) and Agenda Item No. 8 (Review of Housing Finance), as a Council tenant.

31. **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 20th November, 2023, be approved as a correct record and signed.

32. **Public Forum**

No issues were raised under this agenda item.

33. **Annual update on the Safe and Sound Partnership priorities and update on improvements to managing neighbour disputes and anti-social behaviour**

A report of the Director of Housing and Communities was submitted on the Safe and Sound Board (Dudley's Community Safety Partnership) providing an update on the Community Safety Partnership and the ongoing work to improve the management of neighbour disputes and anti-social behaviour.

The Director of Housing and Communities indicated that the Safe and Sound was Dudley's Community Safety Partnership, which was required in statute by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, its subsequent amendments and other relevant legislation. A list of Responsible Authorities and statutory requirements of the Partnership were referred to and outlined in the report submitted.

The work of the Dudley Community Safety Partnership was directed by the Safe and Sound Strategic Board. The structure and Membership of the Board were referred to, together with key priorities identified. The Board had sub-groups which focused on a number of specific priority areas. The Safe and Sound Structure Chart was outlined in Appendix 1 to the report submitted.

Priorities were identified through Dudley Borough's Strategic Assessment and through engagement with communities through "Dudley: Have Your Say", an annual public meeting, surveys and through online consultation. Feedback received from Dudley: Have Your Say" was outlined in the report submitted to the meeting, however, it had highlighted that anti-social behaviour, house burglaries and dangerous driving were the main concerns. Members were informed that the 2023/24 public meeting would be taking place on Monday 19th March, 2024 at Stourbridge Town Hall.

Views obtained from last year's survey had informed the current year's priorities which were outlined at paragraph 11 of the report submitted.

The work of the Board was delivered through its sub-groups and those sub-groups were held to account for their contribution to the Board's aims, purpose and performance. There were currently fourteen sub-groups highlighted below with detailed information on progress and highlights over the last twelve month provided at paragraph 17 of the report submitted. The performance of the sub-groups was reported in to and monitored by the Safe and Sound Board. Work would take place in advance of the 2024/25 annual report to the Committee to ensure that the outcomes and direct impact of the sub-groups was presented within the report.

- Dudley domestic abuse local partnership board (and its Sub-groups which include the MARAC Governance Group (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference for high risk victims of Domestic Abuse), Domestic Homicide Governance Group and the Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls Forum);
- Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategic Group
- Violence Prevention Group
- Dudley Combatting Drug and Alcohol Misuse Partnership
- Modern Slavery Strategic Group
- Rogue Landlord Operational Group
- CONTEST Board – currently being developed
- Prevent Delivery Group
- Protect Delivery Group – currently being developed
- Channel Panel

- Community Cohesion / Tension Monitoring Group (including Hate Crime)
- Road Safety Group – newly developed
- Safer Places
- Youth Justice Services (YJS) Management Board

An overview of the crime data for the 2023/24 period was referred to which highlighted that Dudley remained the safest Community Safety Partnership within the West Midlands Police Force area, with the total recorded crime decreasing during Quarter 2, compared to last year.

Training linked to partnership priorities was available on relevant “help hub” topic pages and information was shared on local services, accessibility, various campaigns throughout the year, advice and reporting requirements. The safe and sound website was updated as appropriate and included specific “help hub” pages.

Funding ringfenced for the Safe and Sound Partnership was referred to, however, the 2024/25 budget was yet to be confirmed. Funding was used to progress work around the partnership priorities. A list of projects funded by the Partnership during 2023/24 were outlined at paragraph 21 of the report submitted.

The Director of Housing and Communities indicated that the restructure of the Housing Service was now complete. During 2023/24 the Anti-Social Behaviour Team had relocated to the Safer Communities section from the Community Housing area of the Housing and Communities Directorate. The move aimed to bring together the work across the overlapping service areas and improve relationships and information sharing with key partners.

It was envisaged that the work would link in, where appropriate, with the work of the Community Safety Team in relation to Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) and would be the base for the new street officer team, a team of four officers working across Dudley’s hotspot areas to prevent, disperse and enforce against anti-social behaviour.

During 2023, the Anti-Social Behaviour Team had worked to clear the backlog of cases within the service and responded to feedback on the services delivered by the Team. Up until September, 2023, the Team continued to struggle due to low staff resources caused by sickness absence and vacant posts, however, following a recruitment exercise, the Team was now starting to move on to a more stable position.

The Team had begun to develop and improve service delivery with a revised policy in place and a new working procedure in progress that would improve service delivery moving forward.

The Anti-Social Behaviour Team and the Community Housing Team had worked collaboratively to develop and agree a new model for managing anti-social behaviour and neighbour nuisance, with Community Housing Officers dealing with the day-to-day issues on estates and the Anti-Social Behaviour Officers managing more complex/higher risk cases. The Anti-Social Behaviour Team had secured a set number of hours of advice from an external independent anti-social behaviour expert. The hours had been used to undertake independent case reviews, in particularly complex cases, to provide advice and training to the Team and to advise on any changes in policy and practice which would improve or enhance service delivery and outcomes.

Community triggers were now known as case reviews and significant work had been undertaken throughout 2023 to update and amend the case review process, which had led to improvements in data capture and information on websites had been revised to reflect the new terminology of Anti-Social Behaviour Case Reviews. A slight increase in Anti-Social Behaviour Case Reviews had been observed during the current year, however, it was predicated that it was due to the publicity around anti-social behaviour legislation from the Government and from additional publicity.

Following the presentation, Members were given the opportunity to ask questions and make comments and responses were provided, where necessary, as follows:-

- (a) Councillor C Reid referred to the ongoing issues associated with the lack of presence of Housing Officers responsible for the Wolverhampton Street area and raised concern by the limited support provided which resulted in housing issues being dealt with by Ward Members. Police contact had improved, and a meeting had been arranged towards the end of January to discuss issues around substance and alcohol misuse, rubbish and fly tipping in the area, which had been reported to the Local Authority. It was essential that Housing Officers were present in communities and recognised by Members and tenants. The Director of Housing and Communities indicated that she would identify appropriate Housing Officers and circulate the information to the Member.

- (b) Councillor I Kettle referred to the volume of litter that was scattered around the Borough, particularly from fast food restaurant packaging. Graffiti remained an issue and it was queried when notices would be erected around the Borough notifying perpetrators of the intention to introduce penalty notices of up to £500. Strategies to educate the public on the impact and consequences of anti-social behaviour and graffiti were essential. The Director of Housing and Communities indicated that whilst matters associated with littering and graffiti did not fall within the remit of the Anti-Social Behaviour Team within the Local Authority, she undertook to raise the issues with appropriate colleagues and provide a response to Members of the Committee.
- (c) Councillor A Davies referred to the implications of litter being left unattended in certain areas of the borough which usually escalated to fly tipping. Reference was made to the lack of Estate Caretakers which had contributed to increased littering and fly tipping and whilst contractor caretakers were employed, additional resources were required to tackle the issues. It was requested what strategies were being considered to improve staffing issues within that service.

The Director of Housing and Communities indicated that the responsibility of litter, graffiti and fly tipping were shared across the Directorate of Housing and Communities. Estate Caretaker roles were currently being covered by agency staff in the short term whilst proposals were being considered to look at redirecting internal resources in the long term. Whilst it was recognised that the role of Estate Caretaker was important and beneficial for communities within the Borough, reference was made to the spending restrictions placed on the Local Authority in terms of recruitment.

- (d) In referring to incidents involving online harm, re-offending and serious organised crime, Councillor I Kettle indicated that investigation and action had previously been slow, which had been unacceptable and worrying. He queried what strategies had been put in place to address online harm and support victims as it was considered that the consequences could potentially be fatal.

The Director of Housing and Communities advised Members that the online harm element of the function was the responsibility of the Community Safety Partnership and would raise the concerns at the next meeting of the Safe and Sound Board at the end of January and request appropriate officers provide more detail in terms of the types of online harm being fed through the Community Safety Partnership and what was being done to tackle the issues. A written response would be provided to all Members of the Committee.

- (e) Councillor J Cowell, in her role as Shadow Cabinet Member for Housing, Communities and Leisure, queried whether she would be invited to future Community Safety Partnership Board meetings as it stated in the Membership structure that the member holding that position was a Member of the Board, however, she had not been invited to any meetings. The Director of Housing and Communities indicated that she would liaise with Police colleagues and ensure that future meeting invites were circulated.
- (f) In referring to the Anti-Social Behaviour Team, Councillor J Cowell queried whether the team was operating at full capacity. The Director of Housing and Communities indicated that Hayley Rowley had been appointed to the position of Head of Service and had reviewed team structures, policies and processes to identify efficiencies. With the new structure now in place and resources suitably positioned to roles to avoid duplication of work, improvements would be observed moving forward. In referring to the exceptional work provided by the Head of Service and her Team, Members requested that their appreciation be provided to the Team.
- (g) In referring to Public Space Protection Orders, Councillor J Cowell queried where those Orders were located, and the impact associated with them. The Director of Housing and Communities indicated that the information should be available online, however, she undertook to investigate the matter and circulate the information to all Members of the Committee. In responding to a question from Councillor J Cowell, the Director of Housing and Communities indicated that the Council's Community Safety Officers, in partnership with the Police were responsible for the delivery of the service. Members were advised that the Community Safety Team were based at Brierley Hill Police Station.

- (h) In referring to the Council's budget position, Councillor P Drake queried the realistic measures that could be put in place to address the anti-social behaviour associated with family breakdown, drug and substance misuse and mental health issues. In responding, the Director of Housing and Communities indicated that as a result of the current spending control's and budget pressures, significant work had been carried out on prioritising statutory and core duties to ensure that the Local Authority was fulfilling its responsibilities. Providing services around the Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care were considered a priority and budgets had been shaped around those services to ensure that appropriate services continued to be delivered at the level expected. Members were advised that Housing Officers supported families with various types of anti-social behaviour issues, however, certain aspects required specialist intervention and complex cases would be referred to appropriate services for professional advice and action.
- (i) Councillor P Drake queried what strategies had been considered around tackling burglaries and to ensure properties were safe, which had been highlighted as a priority for tenants. Reference was made to historical provisions that had been put in place to keep homes safe, however, those provisions had now creased. The Director of Housing and Communities confirmed that any discretionary spend from a housing approach would not be offered whilst spending restrictions to control Council's budgets were in place. Focus would be on the delivery of core duties under various legislation.
- (j) In responding to questions from Councillor K Lewis, the Director of Housing and Communities indicated that the Local Authority had a strong and professional working relationship with the Police, particularly on delivering the community safety agenda and duties delivered by the fourteen sub-groups outlined in the report submitted to the meeting, which all reported back to the Community Safety Partnership. Whilst Members were advised that the Safe and Sound Partnership provided an annual update to the Select Committee, a Police representative would be invited to attend for the next update to respond to specific questions raised by Members.

- (k) In referring in particular to the Road Safety Partnership sub-group, Councillor A Davies queried the requirements of measuring key performance indicators to establish performance and whether the services were being delivered effectively. In responding, the Director of Housing and Communities indicated that the Road Safety Partnership sub-group had been established recently as a result of the increased issues and anti-social behaviour associated with car cruising. Members were advised that all fourteen sub-groups were required to provide quarterly updates on performance of action plans in place and were monitored through the Community Safety Partnership Board.
- (l) Councillor A Davies referred to the importance of collaborative working with external partnerships to ensure that the key objectives of the Safe and Sound Partnership were delivered effectively. Concern was raised that the annual community safety fund received from The Office of Police and Crime Commissioner had not yet been confirmed and queried whether the funding was guaranteed. The Director of Housing and Communities confirmed that whilst the funding had not yet been confirmed, the grant would be provided, and Members would be advised of the details once the grant had been secured.
- (m) In referring to the set number of hours of advice secured for the Anti-Social Behaviour service from an external independent anti-social behaviour expert and the requirements of the additional advice, Councillor A Davies queried whether there were any policy changes required following the training provided. The Director of Housing and Communities indicated that a full review had taken place of appropriate policies and procedures and relevant up to date training had been provided to the team. The intention behind securing expert independent advice was for the expert to advise the service on any updated policies moving forward.

Resolved

- (1) That the content of the report submitted to the meeting and comments made by the Members be noted.
- (2) That the Director of Housing and Communities identify appropriate Housing Officers for the Wolverhampton Street area and circulate the information to Councillor C Reid.

- (3) That the Director of Housing and Communities be requested to investigate timescales involved in erecting notices notifying the public of the consequences of graffiti and associated matters and provide a response to all Members of the Committee.
 - (4) That the Director of Housing and Communities be requested to raise Member issues in relation to online harm at the next meeting of the Safe and Sound Board and arrange for a response to be provided to all Members of the Committee on the types of online harm being fed through the Community Safety Partnership and what was being done to tackle the issues.
 - (5) That the Director of Housing and Communities be requested to forward Members' appreciation to the Head of Anti-Social Behaviour and her Team for the exceptional work provided in communities.
 - (6) That the Director of Housing and Communities be requested to investigate location and impact of Public Space Protection Orders and circulate the information to all Members of the Committee.
 - (7) That the Director of Housing and Communities be requested to invite a Police representative to attend the next meeting of the Select Committee where an update on the Safe and Sound Partnership was provided to respond to specific questions raised by Members.
 - (8) That the Director of Housing and Communities be requested to provide information to all Members of the Committee following the confirmation of the annual community safety fund received from The Office of Police and Crime Commissioner.
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34. **Community Housing Services – The Neighbourhood Approach**

A report of the Director of Housing and Communities was submitted on the work underway to restructure and improve the tenancy and estate management services provided to Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council tenants.

The Director of Housing and Communities indicated that the Neighbourhood model and associated restructure of the Housing Management Services had been implemented to improve services and ensure that Housing teams reconnected with customers, Members and communities. The principles of the Model was to strengthen Dudley's approach to neighbourhood management through an increased presence, with greater local involvement of customers, Ward Members and partner organisations.

The restructure of the Community Housing Team had now been completed, with a new structure and roles focused on delivering the neighbourhood model. The team consisted of thirty-six Community Housing Officers, supported by a team of eight Community Housing Assistants, with six Team Managers. Know Your Community Housing Team posters were outlined in Appendix 1 to the report submitted.

Community Hubs and surgeries were being introduced across the Borough as part of the Council's commitment to improve communication with tenants. The Brierley Hill and Halesowen Housing Hubs were now open to the public and were located on Chapel Street Estate, Brierley Hill and Highfields Estate, Halesowen. The offices would be open for surgeries on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays between 10.00am and 2.00pm for pre-booked appointments or walk-in enquiries.

Options were being considered for a permanent Housing Hub in Stourbridge, however, surgeries were currently taking place weekly at Stourbridge Library and Baylie Court at a variety of times to meet the needs of tenants with different commitments. Surgeries for North Dudley tenants would be held at North Dudley Family Centre, initially for three hours each week, however, the service would be reviewed and time increased should it be required. Tenants that lived in the central Dudley area, surgeries were held on Tuesdays and Thursdays between 10.00am and 3.00pm at Dudley Council Plus.

For tenants that resided in the south Dudley area, it was planned that a Housing Hub would be located within the office of the Dudley Federation of Tenants and Residents Associated (DFTRA). Further information would be published once arrangements had been finalised.

Since the implementation of the Neighbourhood Model, the Community Housing service had developed a different approach to improve high rise estates by completing four High Rise Living events targeting six high-rise buildings across the Borough. The High-Rise Living Events had been successful and had involved other service areas and key partners. Further events were currently being planned at Chapel Street, Brierley Hill and Highfields, Halesowen.

The Team had also supported the work of other service areas, including door knocking, awareness raising and advice in relation to access for compliance visits and tackling tenancy fraud.

Following the presentation, Members were given the opportunity to ask questions and make comments and responses were provided, where necessary, as follows:-

- (a) Councillor J Cowell referred to the high-rise living events that had recently taken place and indicated that low-rise accommodation and areas within larger estates would also benefit from similar events which would increase and improve customer involvement. The Director of Housing and Communities indicated that the intention of the report was to provide details on initiative and events that had occurred to improve customer engagement. A review of the customer involvement strategy was currently being developed which would focus on improving customer engagement, eliminating duplication and filling any gaps within the service.
- (b) Councillor J Cowell raised concern in relation to the cost involved in producing the Know Your Community Housing Team posters. Whilst the information was considered beneficial, the Team frequently altered and continuously updating and producing posters would create financial strain on the Council's budget. The Director of Housing and Communities acknowledged that there may be changes within the Team from time to time, however, whilst the posters would be reviewed and updated periodically, the intention was to make them available to the public online and only circulated in exceptional circumstances.

- (c) Councillor A Davies referred to the importance of regular updates to the Select Committee on customer involvement and feedback. It was essential that the Strategy was delivering on its key aspirations and customers were seeing improvements. The Director of Housing and Communities reported that the performance impact would be measured frequently and reported as necessary.

Resolved

That the content of the report submitted to the meeting and comments made by Members be noted.

35. Review of Housing Finance

A joint report of the Director of Housing and Communities and Director of Finance and Legal was submitted on the Review of Housing Finance.

In presenting the report, the Head of Financial Services highlighted key paragraphs within the report, and referred in particular to the proposals considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 13th December, 2023, as outlined below:-

- a draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget for 2024/25 in the light of the latest government announcements on housing finance and latest spending and resource assumptions.
- a revised Public Sector Housing capital programme for 2023/24 to 2026/2027.
- rents for council homes with effect from 1st April 2024.

The report provided an update on the position for the current financial year in terms of the HRA and the latest variations expected against the original budget as outlined in Appendix 1 to the report submitted. In line with Government guidance, it was proposed that a rent increase of 7.7% be introduced to partly mitigate the impact of inflationary increases on pay, utilities and the cost of borrowing along with the outcomes of the Stock Condition Survey (SCS). The impact of the proposed increase was outlined in paragraph 16 of the report submitted. Inflationary pressures were expected to continue into 2024/2025, with assumed pay awards of 4% for 2024/2025 and 2% thereafter. Borrowing costs were expected to remain high in the short term and utility prices were assumed to increase in line with inflationary increases.

In February, 2023, Council approved the introduction of service charges at a nominal rate of £5.20 per week. It was now proposed that service charges be introduced at full cost recovery, resulting in a charge on average of £12.46 per week for tenant in homes with communal areas.

The proposed draft HRA budget for 2024/25 to 2026/27 was outlined in Appendix 2 to the report submitted. The budget had been based on implementing the maximum allowed of 7.7% rent increase and service charges at direct cost recovery, which would take effect from 1st April, 2024, building in additional resources to meet inflationary pressures. A number of savings and growth proposals had been prepared and prioritised and had been presented to the HRA budget summit on 22nd November, 2023. Details of the proposals were outlined at paragraph 20 of the report submitted. Proposals had been based on a number of estimates, assumptions and professional judgements, which were subject to continuous review.

In February 2023, a five-year housing public sector capital programme was agreed, which reflected enhanced investment using the HRA's new borrowing flexibility. The five-year capital programme was developed based upon the themes set out within the Council's ten-year Housing Asset Management Strategy (HAMS) approved by Cabinet in October 2019. In light of budget pressures, the five-year programme had been reviewed and the amended approach and options were approved by Cabinet at its meeting in February, 2023.

The proposed capital programme outlined at Appendix 3 of the report submitted summarised current anticipated spend for 2024/25. 2025/2026 and 2026/2027 had been based on what was currently known about investment needs. However, the five-year capital programme would need to be further reviewed following the completion of the SCS, which could inform a change in programmed spend in the first three years. The programmed spend had not currently been profiled for 2027/2028 and 2028/2029 as it would need to be informed by longer term investment needs and the robust and up-to-date property information that the surveys would provide.

Following the presentation, Members were given the opportunity to ask questions and make comments and responses were provided, where necessary, as follows:-

- (a) Councillor C Reid raised concern with the proposal to introduce a £12.46 per week service charge for tenants in homes with communal areas, together with a proposed 7.7% rent increase and 4.99% Council Tax increase, particular during a cost-of-living crisis and feared that an increase in arrears in housing payments would be observed as a result.

The Director of Housing and Communities indicated that decisions in relation to increases in housing services and rent were not taken lightly, however, difficult decisions were essential to manage the HRA. The £12.46 service charge was an average figure and the actual charge applied would depend on the eligible services provided in communal areas, including grounds maintenance, communal clearing and all communal health and safety checks. Eligible service charges would be covered by housing benefit and universal credit payments for those people that were in receipt of full or partial support, which was estimated at 70%. It was predicted that approximately 30% of customers were not eligible for financial support towards their rent and service charge and would potentially struggle to pay the increased housing costs. Initiatives were being considered to provide a transition fund from the 2024/25 financial year where customers that were not eligible for any financial support and were struggling significantly could apply for funding towards service charges. Whilst still in its initial planning stages, Members were advised that the fund would be available for customers to apply for at the start of the 2024/25 financial year.

- (b) In responding to a comment by Councillor C Reid, the Director of Housing and Communities indicated that Dudley was the only housing provider in the area that currently did not charge for eligible service charges in communal areas. However, due to the Council's serious financial pressures, introducing charges for eligible services was essential. In responding to questions from Councillor A Davies, the Head of Financial Services confirmed that approximately £4.8m would be generated each year from service charges and assured Members that tenants in homes with communal areas would see improved services due to the additional investment being provided to maintenance programmes in communal areas outlined in paragraph 20 of the report submitted.

- (c) Councillor J Cowell queried when service charges on different property types would be clarified. The Director of Housing and Communities confirmed that charges would vary from property type and services operated in communal areas. Collaborative work with the Income Team was being carried out and it was assumed that tenants would be notified of the service charge applied and rent increase at the same.
- (d) Councillor J Cowell queried the impact on the HRA as a result of non-payment of service charges and the requirement to go through legal and court action. Whilst accepting that unexpected costs would be unavoidable, the Head of Financial Services stated that consideration was being given to a financial allowance which would be included in the budget to offset against such costs, however, regular monitoring was essential to address any issues arising from the introduction of service charges.
- (e) Councillor J Cowell referred to the difficult process involved when apply for discretionary housing payments and queried whether the method adopted when applying for financial support for service charges would be a simpler process. The Director of Housing and Communities indicated that discretionary housing payments were administered through the Revenues and Benefits Team and adhered to appropriate legislation. Consideration on the model, requirements and eligibility used to support customers that were not eligible for any full or partial benefit was currently being considered, however, the financial support would be available for customers to apply for at the start of the 2024/25 financial year.
- (f) Councillor C Reid expressed concern at the historical failures that had occurred, particularly the costs associated with void turnaround times, which had resulted in increased rent, Council Tax and service charge proposals for tenants. In responding, the Head of Financial Services acknowledged that it was a difficult financial position, part of the budget pressures had been attributed to increased inflation costs, materials, compliance issues, borrowing costs and the national living wage.

The Director of Housing and Communities indicated that traditionally housing rent for Dudley tenants had been low in comparison to neighbouring Local Authorities and with the four-year rent decrease introduced in 2016 for all housing providers, Dudley had accumulated a significant financial loss. Whilst the impact of the proposals on tenants was acknowledged, difficult decisions were essential to maintain the HRA budget moving forward.

- (g) In responding to a question raised by Councillor J Martin, the Head of Financial Services confirmed that work associated with the SCS had created significant expenditure from the HRA account which had not previously been budgeted for, however, it was an essential programme to bring the Local Authority's housing stock in line with Government requirements. Councillor J Martin referred to the budget forecasts of £24.8m for responsive and cyclical repairs (maintenance) and queried why the costs associated with the SCS, management and expertise had been charged under that budget. In responding, the Head of Financial Services indicated that the work delivered on the SCS incorporated management support and whilst it could be perceived as £24.8m would be focused on just repair work, the required costs would need to be covered from the HRA budget.

Councillor J Martin expressed concern that tenants were now required to pay increased housing fees to manage the HRA budget as a result of the previous negligence of management around the requirements of the SCS. Whilst the Director of Housing and Communities acknowledged that Dudley had been behind in carrying out SCS which had resulted in a decision being made to carry out surveys on 100% of housing stock, which had created a significant financial pressure on the current HRA, she indicated that SCS were required to be carried out annually. It was expected that housing providers carried out SCS on approximately 10% of stock annually and costs to the HRA would be spread across a ten-year period.

- (h) In responding to a question raised by Councillor A Davies, the Head of Financial Services confirmed that the costs associated with the requirements to carry out 10% of SCS on housing stock would have been included in the responsive and cyclical repairs (maintenance) budget.

- (i) In responding to a question raised by Councillor J Martin, the Director of Housing and Communities indicated whilst most housing providers followed a 10-year SCS programme, Dudley established that there was a number of properties within the Borough that required a survey being carried out to establish the condition of those properties. Following the announcement of the Secretary of State asking all housing providers to assess housing stock and identify any concerns around damp and mould, Dudley used the opportunity to carry out a more robust assessment of each property and obtain new Energy Performance Certificates to ensure data was up-to-date which would inform robust investment programmes moving forward.
- (j) Councillor J Martin referred to the £98.4m of income generated from rent which was expected to increase to £110.6m by 2026/2027 which would accumulate reserves to the HRA. It was considered that the proposed rent and Council Tax increases and the introduction of services charges was not affordable to the 30% of customers not in receipt of full or partial financial support and would create financial pressure to that category of customers, particularly should the increase impact negatively on the percentage paid for tax payments.

The Head of Financial Services indicated that the figure of £110.6m by 2026/2027 was an estimated figure based on assumptions and professional judgements. The full extent of any remedial work associated with the SCS would not be confirmed until the programme had been completed. The Local Authority had traditionally been a low reserves authority and whilst the impact of increased costs on tenants were acknowledged, it was essential that the HRA budget was financially sustainable. In responding to a question from Councillor A Davies, the Head of Financial Services indicated that any reserves in the HRA budget would be focused on remedial work associated with the SCS.

The Director of Housing and Services outlined the advantages of having robust and up-to-date data on all of the Local Authority's housing stock which would provide accurate and proactive investment programmes moving forward and Members were assured that improvements would be observed by members of the public. Part of the SCS would look at the Local Authority's compliance around the decent homes standard where more robust requirements for landlords would be issued by Government in the near future. It was essential for the Local Authority to be in a position where investment could be provided on any unexpected cost arising from the updated version of the Decent Homes Standard.

- (k) Councillor J Cowell queried whether Savills were fulfilling the requirements of their contract given the insufficient time operatives were present in properties to carry out SCS. The Director of Housing and Communities indicated that Savills were experts in stock condition surveys, however, they were not contracted to report routine repairs or maintenance issues and would request tenants to report such issues through the normal repair/maintenance reporting procedure. Savills specialised in targeted work around housing health and safety rating systems, decent homes standard, Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) and damp and mould assessments. Intelligence received from Savills had highlighted that any issues observed around safeguarding, vulnerability, hoarding and sub-letting, whilst it did not cover the requirements of the contract, operatives would refer such issues back to the Housing Team for appropriate action. In responding to a concern raised by Councillor J Cowell in relation to damp and mould issues not being reported appropriately, the Director of Housing and Communities requested that any concerns received from customers be referred to appropriate officers to enable independent checks to be carried out.
- (l) Councillor T Creed referred to the significant costs associated with the SCS and queried whether housing assessments could be carried out by Community Housing Officers as part of their role. The Director of Housing and Communities indicated that the SCS was a specialist project carried out by operatives that required a surveyor qualification and specific training and expertise.

- (m) In responding to a question raised by Councillor T Creed, the Director of Housing and Communities outlined the role of Housing Officers indicating that officers were responsible for tenancy and neighbourhood management including providing support and advice to tenants on adhering to tenancy conditions, managing noise and neighbour nuisance and maintaining tenancies. Housing Officers would refer concerns associated with damage and property condition to appropriate officers but did not specialise in the requirements of SCS.
- (n) In responding to a question raised by Councillor T Creed, the Director of Housing and Communities indicated that the 10% annual stock condition programme would be reinstated following the completion of the full SCS and the obligations to carry out SCS every 10 years would be fulfilled.
- (o) In responding to a question raised by Councillor I Kettle, the Head of Financial Services confirmed that whilst the Local Authority had entered into a Lender Option Borrower Option (LOBO) that was split between the General Fund and the HRA, the majority of the budget of £17.7m on payable interest was through the Public Works Loan Board, with an interest of between 3% and 5% depending on when the loans were taken out.
- (p) Councillor A Davies queried whether the SCS would be completed by March 2024 as advised. The Director of Housing and Communities reported that the completion date was on target, however, it was envisaged that a number of customers would refuse access to properties which would delay the process whilst legal processes were followed. The process around accessing properties had been refined and reduced to three access attempts following which an Abatement Notice would be served under the Environmental Protection Act around Statutory Nuisance. The requirements of the Notice were referred to, together with the definition of the emergency access procedure where any cases considered as an emergency, operatives were allowed to access the property without permission. Non-urgent cases would be referred to the Court for a warrant. Members were advised that twenty-seven Abatement Notices that expired over the Christmas period had been served which had resulted in all customers allowing operatives access to properties to carry out gas service checks.

Resolved

- (1) That the latest Housing Revenue Account outturn forecast for 2023/24, outlined in paragraphs 5 – 9 and Appendix 1 of the report submitted, be noted.
 - (2) That the proposals considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 13th December, 2023, relating to the Housing Revenue Account budget for 2024/25 onwards, as detailed above, be endorsed.
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36. **Quarterly Housing Performance Report –Quarter 2 (1st July – 30th September, 2023)**

A report of the Director of Housing and Communities was submitted on Quarter 2 of the Corporate Quarterly Performance report for the financial year 2023/24 covering the period 1st July to 30th September, 2023, specifically referring to services within the Housing and Communities Directorate. Further detail relating to directorate service delivery were outlined in the Service Summary Sheets attached as appendices to the report submitted.

The Director of Housing and Communities indicated that the report provided progress against the delivery of the three-year Council Plan priorities and the Future Council Programme.

Dashboard summaries highlighted four corporate quarterly measures for Housing and Community Services, one highlighting “on or exceeding target” with the other three highlighting “below target”. Further information was included in the appendix to the report submitted.

In referring to PI 2027 – Satisfaction on how anti-social behaviour complaints were handled, it was reported that satisfaction had reduced compared to figures reported during Quarter 1. There had been a large turnover of staff and sickness levels had caused concern, which had affected service delivery. A full review of resources, skills, policies and procedures was ongoing to develop a more responsive, customer focused service moving forward. Members were informed that anti-social behaviour cases had been transferred to other officers to manage during the interim period.

In terms of PI 913 – Proportion of homes that did not meet the Decent Homes Standard. It was reported that performance figures in previous years had been based on stock data which may have been incomplete or inaccurate. Data concerns had been the subject of a self-referral to the Regulator of Social Housing and significant progress had been made following the Regulatory Notice issued in April, 2023. An ongoing programme of Stock Condition Surveys (SCS) was currently taking place on all Dudley's housing stock and actual decency levels would be confirmed following its completion during Quarter 1 2024/25.

In terms of PI 1191 – Average re-let time for standard re-let, it was reported that the average re-let times had increased from 49.26 days in Quarter 1 to 56.74 days in Quarter 2, compared to 65.91 days for the same period last year. However, the re-let time for standard voids continued to vary between property types. Performance for houses identified a decrease from 56.33 days in Quarter 1 to 45.88 days in Quarter 2. For bungalows, there had been a decrease from 51.85 days to 48.84 days, for maisonettes, there had been a decrease from 59.13 to 53.31 days, for all flats excluding sheltered there had been an increase from 41.89 days to 47.05 days and for bedsits, excluding sheltered housing, there had been a significant increase from 28.33. days to 45.1 days. The increase had been most significant across the sheltered housing properties with sheltered flats increasing from 89 days to 186 days and sheltered bedsits increasing from 36 days to 105.8 days, which was attributed to the ongoing review and refurbishment of the sheltered housing stock.

In terms of PI 1899 – Rent loss, it was reported that the cumulative rent loss due to voids remained the same as Quarter 1 at 2.28% which was an increase from 1.95% compared to the same period last year. A breakdown of rent loss for various property types was outlined in the report submitted to the meeting. Whilst improvement programmes were currently being identified to improve figures, rent loss associated with strategic voids would continue and managed through efficient decision making and project management. The end-to-end review on voids continued and current focus within the services was on stock condition, which could potentially see an impact on void loss in the short term as additional checks were undertaken at void stage. Investment decisions had been made on a number of voids during Quarter 2.

Directorate Service Plans featured service improvement actions and were updated each quarter and presented to Members. Directorate Service Summary documents provided a detailed account of services delivered and were highlighted in paragraph 10 and Appendix 2 of the report submitted.

Following the presentation, Members were given the opportunity to ask questions and make comments and responses were provided, where necessary, as follows:-

- (a) In referring to PI 1191 – average re-let for standard re-lets, Councillor A Davies raised concern at the level of time it had taken to re-let various property types, particularly referring to Jack Newell Court. The Director of Housing and Communities acknowledged the concern raised and assured Members that a review to refine procedures to minimise rent loss and void turnaround times was ongoing. In referring particularly to Jack Newell Court, delays to the refurbishment programme had been caused due to issues associated with the Covid pandemic followed by greater demand for contractors and increasing costs of materials and labour.
- (b) In referring to PI 2027 – satisfaction – way anti-social behaviour complaint was handled, Councillor J Martin sought clarification on the number of residents that had been dissatisfied with the service provided. The Director of Housing and Communication indicated that following feedback received from residents, sixty customers had responded to either being dissatisfied or neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Councillor J Martin indicated that customer perception was important especially with a number of housing service charges increasing. It was essential that the Local Authority delivered an efficient service that benefited tenants, communities, Council Officers and Members, however, it was clear that a high percentage of residents had been either dissatisfied or neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the service received.

- (c) Councillor J Martin expressed concern with the high level of staff turnover and long-term sickness absence within the Anti-Social Behaviour Team, which had been a long-term issue and required action to address the issues. The manner in which cases had been transferred from Community Housing Officers to the Anti-Social Behaviour Team remained an issue, which had led to staff leaving the Local Authority or commencing sick leave due to the high level of stress caused. It was essential that Community Housing Officers were supported to feel empowered within their role and deal with low level anti-social behaviour cases earlier in the process rather than matters escalating to more serious and complex cases and it was queried what support was available to maintain staffing levels and deliver services at a standard expected by customers.

The Director of Housing and Communities acknowledged the issues raised and indicated that work to address and improve services had commenced. Services were being redesigned to ensure Community Housing Officers were visible in communities and had capacity to address low level anti-social behaviour complaints allowing more complex cases to be referred to the Anti-Social Behaviour Team for a more specialist approach. The Anti-Social Behaviour Team also dealt with wider resident issues such as neighbour disputes between various types of property ownership and referred to the significant work associated to manage complaints which could potentially escalate to Court action and possibly eviction.

- (d) In referring to the significant improvement required to ensure the effective delivery of the service, Councillor J Martin suggested that neighbouring Local Authorities be approached with a view to adopting best practice initiatives to maximise improvement opportunities. The Director of Housing and Communities confirmed that intelligence sharing exercises did take place with colleagues in neighbouring Local Authorities to establish best practice and together with the support secured from an independent anti-social behaviour expert, and policy and process reviews taking place, Members were assured that improvements would be observed moving forward. In responding to a question from Councillor J Martin, the Director of Housing and Communities indicated that whilst mediation was offered to tackle neighbour disputes, a more robust approach was required to promote the service in a more effective manner.

- (e) In responding to a question from Councillor A Davies, the Director of Housing and Communities confirmed that whilst the Anti-Social Behaviour Team was located within the Safer Communities Service area, the Team was not a sub-group of the Safe and Sound Board and performance and impact would be reported through appropriate corporate quarterly performance indicators.
- (f) Councillor C Reid referred to the 46% of the properties that were attributed to rent loss and queried strategies to improve figures. The Director of Housing and Communities provided a breakdown of the type of properties that contributed to the 46% of rent loss, including high investment need properties, properties that were being held for decant and properties that were being refurbished for sheltered accommodation. It was reported that a decision sheet process had commenced for approval to dispose of properties awaiting investment decision and it was anticipated that the Decision Sheet would be approved in the near future and the positive effect of the decision would be evidenced in future performance figures.
- (g) Councillor I Kettle complimented the Director of Housing and Communities on the work associated with retaining five properties due to issues of fraud and queried the figures associated with fraud within the Borough. The Director of Housing and Communities indicated that whilst the Local Authority was one in a small group of authorities to have retained their Housing Fraud Team, the Team operated with very few officers. The role of the Housing Fraud Team was outlined, with the majority of fraud assessments being carried out following the receipt of Right to Buy applications to ensure tenants were not applying to purchase a council house by deception. The Team also relied on referrals from Members/members of the public reporting possible fraud and also issues being identified through the SCS. Reference was made to a Housing Fraud event that had taken place during October 2023 to raise awareness of housing fraud and encourage customers to report suspicious activity to ensure the Council's housing stock was utilised effectively and by customer need. Members were advised that figures associated with fraud were low, however, accurate figures for the 2023/24 financial year would be circulated to all Members of the Committee.
- (h) Councillor I Kettle requested that appreciation be provided to the Housing Team for the work, support and expertise in tackling homelessness and begging in the Stourbridge area.

- (i) Councillor J Cowell queried the 2.28% attributed to rent loss for Quarter 2 and whilst the information suggested that the figure remained stable compared to Quarter 1, the cash equivalent displayed a significant increase. The Director of Housing and Communities indicated that figures presented in each performance quarter was the total cumulative of rent loss and whilst the percentage figure remained stable, the cost equivalent varied for each quarter depending on the rent collected each month. The indicator was a national performance indicator and used for benchmarking purposes and the Local Authority was unable to change the wording or method of calculation, however, further information would be included in future reports to provide clarity.
- (j) In referring to PI 1191 – average re-let for standard re-lets, Councillor J Cowell queried the impact of damp and mould in void properties. The Director of Housing and Communities indicated that SCS would be carried out on void properties that had not had a survey carried out and should damp or mould issues be identified, work would be completed whilst the property was at void stage unless to undertake the work would cause a significant delay to the re-let process.
- (k) In referring to the four key performance indicators outlined in the report submitted, Councillor A Davies queried when improvements would be observed. Whilst it was accepted that PI 913 – Proportion of homes that do not meet Decent Homes Standard relied on the outcome of the SCS, the Director of Housing and Communities was optimistic that improvements would be observed by the end of the 2023/24 financial year. Improvements around PI 1899 – rent loss would be determined on when the decision sheet was approved and signed, and the timescales involved in selling the properties. In responding to a further question from Councillor A Davies, the Director of Housing and Communities indicated that the properties awaiting investment decision, once disposed of, would not contribute to the performance figures. It was anticipated that those properties awaiting an investment decision would be offered to an external partner as a package to market and sell, which would avoid any unnecessary delays. Delays may be observed around conveyancing, however, it was expected that improvements would be highlighted during Quarter 4.

Resolved

- (1) That the Quarter 2 Corporate Quarterly Performance report covering the period 1st July to 30th September, 2023, and the comments made by Members, be noted.
 - (2) That the Director of Housing and Communities be requested to provide Members of the Committee with an accurate figure of cases associated with housing fraud for the 2023/24 financial year.
 - (3) That the Director of Housing and Communities be requested to forward Members' appreciation to the Housing Team for the work, support and expertise in tackling homelessness and begging in the Stourbridge area.
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37. Progress Tracker and Future Business

In providing an update on the Action Tracker, the Chair indicated that all outstanding responses had now been actioned. He expressed his appreciation to all officers for the work carried out.

Resolved

That the information contained in the Action Tracker and Future Business for the Committee, be noted.

38. Questions Under Council Procedure Rule 11.8

There were no questions to the Chair pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 11.8.

The meeting ended at 8.05pm

CHAIR

Meeting of the Housing and Safer Communities Select Committee – 13th March 2024

Report of the Director of Housing and Communities

Review of Private Rented Sector

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of our Private Sector Housing Team in working in the Private Rented Sector. This report outlines the statutory duties of the team which determines their key roles and responsibilities, the enforcement options available to them, and the challenges they face in their operations. By presenting real-life examples and case studies, we aim to illustrate the practical implications of the team's work in maintaining housing standards and protecting public health.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that Committee Members note the content of the report.

Background

3. The Housing Act 2004 marked a pivotal moment in housing enforcement, introducing a risk-based evaluation system for assessing housing conditions, known as the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). This was further bolstered by the Housing and Planning Act 2016, which introduced additional powers for local authorities to tackle rogue landlords and improve standards in the private rented sector.

Overview of the Private Rented Sector

4. The Private rented sector in the borough accounts for 13.8% of Dudley households (2021) and is the fastest growing sector having increased in the last decade from 9.2% in 2011.

A report by the Building Research Establishment (BRE) estimated that 15% of privately rented homes nationally present a risk to its occupants' health and safety by containing a statutory category 1 hazard.

Private Rented Properties within the Dudley Borough are becoming more unaffordable:

- Median pay of full-time workers living in Dudley Borough is £30,417 per year, below the England figure of £33,208 (2022)
- The median rent (across all property sizes) paid by tenants in Dudley has increased by 7.1% from March 2022 to March 2023.

Average monthly rent within Dudley MBC, showing the comparison between tenures (September 2023 data):

Property type	Bedrooms	DMBC monthly	Average Registered Provider rent	Median private rented	Local Housing Allowance Rate
Low rise flat	1	£329.68	£357.50	£520	£397.88
House	2	£391.08	£420.42	£675	£508.60
House	3	£426.22	£474.54	£825	£593.36
House	4	£458.85	£537.72	£1013	£747.93

The BRE estimates that there are around 2,200 privately rented houses in the Dudley borough that are in multiple occupation (known as Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)). Mandatory licencing of HMOs is required for properties with at least 5 tenants, who form more than one household that share facilities like a kitchen, bathroom, and toilet.

Dudley MBC currently have 133 Mandatory Licenced HMOs, 24 licence renewal applications and 33 new HMO Licence applications.

The numbers of cases (excluding HMO licences) that the Private Sector Housing Team (Dudley) have received so far during 2023/24 are 191 in quarter 1, 252 in quarter 2, and 224 in quarter 3.

As at the end of Quarter 3 2023/24 the Homeless Prevention and Response Team had received 200 referrals with end of assured shorthold tenancy as the main reason for homelessness.

Statutory Responsibilities

5. The team are statutorily responsible for:

- Inspecting accommodation that is in serious disrepair and can pose a risk to its occupants e.g.
 - No heating and no hot water
 - Faulty electrics
 - Inadequate fire detection
 - Damp and mould
 - Investigating drainage issues
 - Dealing with leaks between properties where the offending property is privately rented
- Licensing of privately rented property (HMOs)
- Investigating domestic property related statutory nuisances namely Light nuisance complaints.
- Providing advice to both tenants and landlords about their responsibilities and rights
- Ensuring landlords meet their legal obligations, taking enforcement action where appropriate.

Current Operations

6. The Private Sector Housing team aim to provide a service to all private-sector housing residents who require assistance, advice or guidance on housing-related problems, this includes private rented properties, owner occupiers and Housing Associations.

The team continues to strive to work with partner organisations and adapts to meet the needs of our community to ensure that those living within the borough have access to safe and decent housing that is well managed and maintained to a good condition.

In addition to our statutory functions, the team are also responsible for:

- Inspections of HMOs prior to issuing licences to ensure the standards of these properties goes above and beyond what is legally required.
- Investigating suspected HMOs, using intelligence and BRE data to determine whether a licence is required.
- Investigating complaints surrounding empty homes
- Investigating allegations of illegal eviction and/or harassment
- Undertaking Immigration Inspections.
- Project work and partnership working:
 - Damp and Mould Action plan
 - Life in Lye Project
 - Wolverhampton Street
 - Stalled and Derelict Sites Group

- Rogue Landlords Group
- West Midlands Enforcement Practitioner Group
- Housing Health Switch
- High Rise Cladding Projects
- Team Talks
- Mitigating Poverty
- Safer Places
- Policy review
- Addressing other issues associated with the private rented sector e.g. Overgrown gardens, Boundary disputes and aesthetically poor properties.

HMOs requiring mandatory licences are inspected prior to the issuing of licences to ensure the housing standards within these properties which pose a higher risk are checked. Work is underway reviewing the HMO licencing process to make this more efficient and to include joint working with planning following the introduction of Article 4 Direction. The legislation doesn't allow an application for a HMO licence to be refused on a property that would require planning permission if the property meets the required amenity standards which is sadly where the legislation falls down.

In the case of Empty Homes, we like other local authorities have long term empty properties some going back decades. There are few incentives to offer landlords to bring Empty homes back into use but we work with landlords to encourage them to bring empty homes back into use and to ensure that they are maintained and secure. The council does not currently have a designated Empty Homes Officer and the budget to resolve legal disputes, and introduce Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMOs) and Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs), and these properties therefore often remain empty.

Tenants in the 'sub-standard' private rented sector can be fearful of reprisals or eviction with some having limited understanding of their rights, so many do not report these issues. The sad reality is that there are often repercussions on tenants who complain to the local authority with tenants commonly facing rent increases or Eviction Notices and there is little we can do to prevent these courses of action when the landlord has done so in line with what the law allows.

Following the death of Awaab Ishak, aged 2, who died from a respiratory condition caused by exposure to mould there has been a Government focus on addressing damp and mould within homes. Damp and mould is identified as one of the 29 Hazards outlined in the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) to be assessed when inspecting disrepair within a property. Our goal as a Private Sector Housing Team is to raise

awareness among landlords and tenants about the causes, effects, and solutions of damp and mould, gather information about the prevalence and severity of damp and mould within our private rented properties and take appropriate action to deal with damp and mould complaints and hazards. We are hoping that Governmental review of the HHSRS and associated legislation will provide further enforcement tools to tackle this issue.

In cases such as overgrown gardens, boundary disputes and aesthetically poor properties we do not have the powers to enforce against them so are limited to asking landlords to undertake works with no legal basis to pursue if they chose not to do what has been asked or passing them on to other departments such as waste management, planning, ASB who have different powers they may be able to use.

We are working in a reactive capacity not a proactive service due to our capacity, this is echoed in findings of a study commissioned by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) (2021) for the majority of authorities across the UK. This impacts on our abilities to be able to gain a more comprehensive knowledge of the private rented stock within the borough which would inform strategic decision making and therefore find it difficult to comprehensively enforce private rented sector standards. This leaves the team fulfilling statutory duties and taking enforcement action in cases which need it.

Licencing

7. Currently, within the Dudley Borough, mandatory HMOs are licenced.

A house in multiple occupation (HMO) is a property rented out by at least 3 people who are not from 1 'household' (for example a family) but share facilities like the bathroom and kitchen. It's sometimes called a 'house share'.

You must have a licence (mandatory licence) if you're renting out a large HMO in England or Wales. A domestic property is defined as a large HMO if all of the following apply:

- it is rented to 5 or more people who form more than 1 household
- some or all tenants share toilet, bathroom or kitchen facilities
- at least 1 tenant pays rent (or their employer pays it for them)

In 2018, the scope of mandatory HMO licensing was extended so that properties used as HMOs in England which house 5 people or more in 2 or more separate households will in many cases require a licence regardless of the number of storeys that the property is separated into.

An HMO needs a mandatory HMO licence if it is occupied by 5 or more people, unless it is:

- a Section 257 HMO, ie a building converted into self-contained flats where the works of conversion do not comply with the Building Regulations 1991 or subsequent regulations in force at the time of conversion (or which has not been retrospectively upgraded to comply) and where less than two-thirds of the flats are owner-occupied
- a purpose-built flat situated in a block made up of 3 or more self-contained flats

The number of people includes everyone whatever their age, including babies and children.

A HMO licence is valid for a maximum of 5 years and a separate HMO licence is needed for each HMO that a landlord owns. The legislation surrounding HMO licencing imposes conditions on landlords/ managing agents to make sure:

- the house is suitable for the number of occupants (this depends on its size and facilities)
- the manager of the house, the landlord and/or agent is considered to be 'fit and proper', for example they have no relevant criminal record or breach of landlord laws or code of practice
- certification is supplied relating to safety requirements such as gas safety certificates, electrical safety certificate, fire alarm and emergency lighting certificates where appropriate, electrical appliances (PAT) testing where appropriate.
- appropriate fire detection is installed and maintained.

This will help ensure they are not overcrowded and do not pose risks to the health or safety of occupiers or blight the local communities in which they are located.

HMOs are more likely to be occupied by younger people and those who are more economically disadvantaged who are unable to afford market rent for an individual flat or house. Licencing of HMOs helps to ensure that properties are not overcrowded and do not pose risks to the health and safety of occupiers or blight local communities in which they are located. The growth of HMOs has an impact on the local community, including where inadequate rubbish storage leads to pest infestation and health and safety problems.

Other licencing options available for local authorities to consider are:

Additional Licensing: Additional licensing is when a council can impose a licence on types of HMOs for which licensing is not mandatory. For example, a smaller HMO, which means a property with three or four occupants.

Selective Licensing: Selective licensing applies to any property, whether it is an HMO or not, and allows councils to specify areas down to the specific side of a street that need a licence. Selective licensing for privately rented housing is available if local authorities believe it would reduce or eliminate specific housing problems.

Differences: The main difference between additional and selective licensing is that additional licensing applies to HMOs not covered by mandatory licensing, while selective licensing can apply to all privately rented properties within a defined area.

The pros and cons of implementing licencing schemes within the Dudley Borough include:

Stakeholders	Pros	Cons
Tenants	Improved living conditions: Licensing schemes aim to improve the standard of privately rented homes Protection against rogue landlords: Licensing can help protect tenants from landlords who provide substandard, overcrowded, and potentially dangerous accommodation	Potential increase in rent: Landlords may pass on the cost of licensing to tenants, leading to higher rents
Landlords	Higher rental income: HMOs, which often require licensing, can generate higher rental income due to multiple tenants. Protection against bad tenants: Licensing can provide landlords with more control over tenant behaviour.	Licensing fees: Landlords have to pay for licenses, which can be costly. Increased responsibilities: Landlords have to meet certain standards and comply with additional regulations.

Local Authorities	<p>Control over housing quality: Licensing gives local authorities the power to enforce minimum safety standards in privately rented homes</p> <p>Ability to tackle specific issues: Selective licensing allows local authorities to address problems in specific areas, such as anti-social behaviour, poor housing conditions, high levels of migration, deprivation, or crime</p>	Administrative burden: Implementing and managing licensing schemes can be resource-intensive for local authorities
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Each local authority sets its fees for HMO licencing. Dudley’s current fees for mandatory HMO licences are **£1,019.66 (Seperated into Part 1 Fee = £424.65 to cover costs** of processing the application and **Part 2 Fee = £594.51** to cover costs of Enforcement/Inspections). Private Sector Housing are currently reviewing the HMO licencing process, the current fee will increase in April 2024 in line with a recent hourly rate increase.

Some neighbouring authorities charge additional fees depending on the size of HMOs (number of rooms), for sending paper HMO licence application, for supplying HMO advice, offer 2 tier fees depending on whether a landlord is part of an accredited landlords association, some charge less for renewals.

Estimating the costs associated with additional licensing for HMOS and/or selective licensing can be challenging. With selective licencing, once an area is identified the data can be obtained to understand numbers of private rented affected within the particular area/ streets or postcodes. Knowing the number of properties that would be affected by additional licences is much more difficult as there is no notification requirement for such HMOs. The intention is that fees charged should cover the scheme however this is not always the case.

Here are a few factors that might contribute to the cost:

1. **Administration:** This includes the cost of processing applications, maintaining a register of licensed properties, and issuing licenses.
2. **Inspection:** Costs relating to inspections of properties and equipment needed

3. **Enforcement:** Costs related to ensuring compliance with license conditions, which may involve property inspections and follow-up actions.
4. **Legal:** Costs associated with potential legal proceedings against landlords who fail to comply with license conditions.
5. **Communication and Support:** Costs related to informing landlords about licensing requirements and providing support throughout the application process.

Local authorities must consult on the proposed designation for at least 10 weeks with those who are likely to be affected by the additional/selective licensing scheme. This includes residents, landlords, tenants, and any other person likely to be affected. A stock condition survey usually forms a valuable part of the evidence needed to support the area(s) to be designated to provide insight into housing conditions in the area, which is one of the criteria to be considered when making a designation.

Schemes within neighbouring authorities

Birmingham City Council have a selective licensing scheme covering 25 of Birmingham's 69 wards which came into effect in June 2023, they also have an Additional Licencing Scheme to cover smaller sized HMOs.

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough have an additional licence scheme that came into effect in July 2022 that covers HMOs occupied by 3 or more persons comprising two or more households, and HMOs as defined in Section 257 of the Act.

Wolverhampton City Council have previously operated a selective licencing scheme but it's term has ended.

Coventry City Council have an additional licence scheme that came into effect in May 2020.

Worcester City Council have an additional licence scheme that came into effect in September 2020 and a further additional licencing scheme that came into effect in September 2023.

Warwick have proposals currently undergoing consultation.

Challenges

8. There are several challenges impacting the work of private sector housing teams and housing enforcement:

Funding Constraints

- Budget cuts have led to the loss of specialist officers within the sector and with it the loss of specialisms and knowledge.
- Resources and the time taken to progress cases to completion is an impediment to the ability to hold landlords to account.
- Demand for private rented accommodation is at a peak and the need for advice relating to termination of tenancies and the protections that come into effect when a notice has been served have increased demands on our service.
- Works in default budgets are limited therefore not allowing us to undertake works in instances where landlords don't, won't or can't.
- Costs and time needed to improve ICT infrastructure.

Changes in Government Policy

- The UK government has proposed several reforms to improve the private rented sector for tenants and landlords. These reforms include the abolition of Section 21 'no fault' evictions, strengthening council's enforcement powers, and introducing a new requirement for councils to report on enforcement activity.
- Proposed changes to HHSRS (Housing Health and Safety Rating System): combining some of the hazards to reduce the total number from 29 to 21. Changing the current banding system by adding a third category to be colour coded so that a "traffic-light" system can be used.
- The Renters' (Reform) Bill was introduced to Parliament in May 2023, aiming to deliver safer, fairer, and higher quality homes for tenants.
- The vast range of legislation (Appendix 1) makes enforcement more complicated and determining the most appropriate legislation extremely challenging.

Emerging Challenges in the Housing Sector

- The housing sector is facing significant financial pressures due to high inflation impacting operating costs for private sector housing providers, including costs related to maintenance, utilities, and property taxes.
- Rental costs, repair and building material costs, cost of living crisis and availability of labour impacts both landlords and Private Sector Housing.
- Pressures to monitor and licence Houses in Multiple Occupation including those that are not currently required under the Mandatory Licencing Scheme.
- An increase in the need for advice and assistance in relation to landlord and tenant matters associated with cost of living, retaliatory

evictions, and proposed changes to the rental market both nationally (renters Reform Bill) and locally (Article 4 declaration).

- Benchmarking challenges.
- Increased enquiries and complexity (Appendix 2) both directly from tenants and via MPs, Councillors, Complaints, Service Requests, Data Access Request, Partner Agencies, Internal departments etc.

This growth of the sector coupled with legislative changes and evolving complexity of cases needs a robust and proactive approach to housing enforcement and highlights the importance of effective enforcement in maintaining housing standards and protecting public health.

Conclusion

9. Responding to changes in the private rented sector, targeting and managing resources is extremely challenging during this difficult time. To date there is not a clear direction from central government and the legislative changes that have been implied in recent years makes it difficult to plan ahead. Without more robust legislation and penalties when works are not undertaken by landlords or budgets for works in default to be completed, private rented tenants continue to live in properties where high risk, Category 1 Hazards exist.

Finance

10. There are no direct financial implications associated with this report

Law

11. This report details the various statutory obligations that the Council has with regard to private sector housing and the powers that it has to take enforcement action. The Council will need to take steps to ensure that it can comply with its statutory obligations.

Risk Management

12. The risk of not meeting the Council's statutory duties in relation to private sector housing in managed and mitigated through the Directorate risk register

Equality Impact

13. Ensuring statutory duties for private sector housing are met has a positive impact upon all residents living in the private rented sector in Dudley, including those with protected characteristics. Sub-standard housing

conditions in the private sector impacts upon the health and wellbeing of children and young people living in the homes and, while they have not been directly consulted upon in relation to this report, the work of the private sector housing team impacts positively upon children and young people living in privately rented homes.

Human Resources/Organisational Development

14. There are no direct HR implications associated with this report

Commercial/Procurement

15. There are no direct commercial or procurement implications associated with this report

Environment/Climate Change

16. There are no direct environmental implications associated with this report

Council Priorities and Projects

17. As part of our response to external reviews and audits, the council is focussing on an Improvement and Sustainability Programme. The current council plan, which was due to run until March 2025, will be paused to allow a new one-year plan to be developed.

The new plan will have emphasis on improvement and financial sustainability. Reviewing our council plan priorities will help us to focus on setting a sustainable budget while protecting essential services and communicating those priorities to our residents, communities, and staff.

The new plan which will be effective from 1st April 2024, will be formally approved at Cabinet on 20th March and Council on 15th April.



Kathryn Jones
Director of Housing and Communities

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Appendices

- *Appendix 1 – Legislation*
- The Housing Act 2004
 - Notices: Improvement Notice, Suspended Improvement Notice, Prohibition Order, Suspended Prohibition Order, Hazard Awareness Notice, Emergency Remedial Action & Prohibition Orders, Demolition Orders, Clearance Orders,
 - Empty Dwelling Management Orders, Compulsory Purchase Orders
- Part 2 of the Housing Act 2004 (Houses in Multiple Occupation)
- HMO Licencing Offences:
 - Operating an unlicensed HMO;
 - Allowing an HMO to be occupied by more persons than a licence allows;
 - Breach of licence condition; and
 - Supplying incorrect information in a licence application.
 - Rent Repayment Orders (RRO)
 - Interim and final management orders
 - Final management orders
 - Temporary Exemption Notices
- The Management of Houses in Multiple Occupation (England) Regulations 2006 – General Management of HMOs
- Housing and planning act 2016
- Civil Penalties
- Rent Repayment Orders
- Banning Orders
- Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949
 - Buildings Act 1984
- Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982
- Protection From Eviction Act 1977
- The electrical Safety Standards in the Private Rented Sector (England) Regulations 2020
- Environmental Protection Act 1990
 - Statutory Nuisance Provisions
 - Abatement Notice
- The Deregulation Act 2015
- The Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (Amendment) Regulations 2022
- The Immigration Act 2014

- The Tenant Fees Act 2019
- The Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) (England and Wales) Regulations 2015
- The Redress Schemes for Lettings Agency Work and Property Management Work (Requirement To Belong To A Scheme Etc) (England) Order 2014

- *Appendix 2 – Case Examples*

1. In some recent work I have been involved with in Lye. I visited a family in a property that had several housing defects, but the tenants would not give me permission to contact the landlord to address the property condition issues. They were worried about being thrown out; they are paying a lower rent to other they knew and were not entitled to benefits so their housing options are more limited than those with recourse to public funds. They were concerned that they would be made to move away from their community because they said the landlords know each other and they won't get offered another property.
2. A complaint was received from an owner occupier living in a typical 2 bed semi-detached property within the borough with a ground floor rear extension which mirrors that of the neighbour that they adjoin. The neighbouring attached property is empty and has been for a number of years. Damage to the flat roof is causing water to leak and cause damage to the owner occupiers' property. Investigation of the owners of the empty property points only to the address itself and intelligence has been unable to provide any alternative contact information as to where to contact the owner or if they have passed away etc. A statutory nuisance has been identified and Notice has been served however there has been no response or works undertaken. The budget is not available for us to undertake works in default to get the problem remedied. The owner occupier can look to attempt to claim against the neighbouring properties home insurance but in this case there is no one to contact to be able to obtain there details.
3. When visiting a property to undertake an inspection following receipt of a complaint, all rooms are inspected and defects identified within a property are assessed in line with the Housing Health and Safety Rating System Guidance and where necessary e.g. Category 1 and or high Category 2 Hazards are identified, the landlord is written to with details of the works to be completed. A tenants' original concerns were relating to the kitchen being tired and the carpets being heavily worn and that no improvements had been made to make it more modern 'looking' since the tenancy had begun in 2012. The disrepair did not meet the threshold to require landlords to take action, but other defects identified by officers that didn't cause concern to the tenant could legally require action. The tenant was not inclined to allow the landlord access to undertake the works as they were not the things that she wanted fixing. This was very time consuming

with time being spent mediating between landlord and tenant where the relationship has broken down and as in this case it is commonplace that eviction proceedings are already in progress. This makes it difficult to take enforce action or pursue Civil Penalties or prosecution when Notices are not complied with because the landlord has evidence of being declined access despite several attempts to complete the work and this would likely be considered by Tribunal or Court as a reasonable defence.

- *Appendix 3 – Extract of Neighbouring Authorities Licence Fee's from their websites.*

Birmingham

Licence Fees for on-line applications 2022 to 2023

Type of Fee	HMO Occupants 5 Persons	HMO Occupants 6 to 11 Persons	HMO Occupants 12+
Persons Part A (application fee)	£420	£470	£515
Part B (licence fee)	£705	£745	£785
Total	£1125	£1215	£1300

Fees for optional HMO services 2022 to 2023

Description	Fees
Fee Paper application to send	£20
Paper application to process	£65
Advice visit	£200

Bromsgrove District Council

The HMO licence is usually issued for a period of up to 5 years and the fee is **£133.35 per person.**

Coventry

Licence fees			
Higher Rate New Application - New application for a one-year licence where the HMO has been found to be operating unlicensed for more than 12 weeks	£625.00	£1,185.00	£1,810.00
Standard New Application - New application for a one-year* licence where: i) The HMO was acquired and/or began operating as an HMO within the previous 12 weeks; or ii) The licence expired before a valid renewal application was completed; or iii) Change of existing licence holder. *May be eligible for longer licence in cases of i) or iii) if licence holder holds other	£625.00	£635.00	£1,260.00

HMO licences with us and all relevant criteria are met at time of application			
New application – Two-year licence where all eligibility criteria are met	£625.00	£275.00	£900.00
New application – Five year licence where all eligibility criteria are met	£625.00	£190.00	£815.00
Standard Renewal - Renewal of a licence	£625.00	£165.00	£790.00

Optional charges for other services available	
HMO licensing advice (per visit) – optional visit to determine whether the property is suitable to be licensed and advise on requirements for property to be used as an HMO.	£260.00 plus VAT (£312.00)
Charge for printing and posting Paper HMO Applications.	£33.00
Charge for additional Paper HMO Applications.	£11.00

Dudley

Total Fee = £1,019.66

Part 1 Fee = £424.65

Part 1 Fee is to cover the costs of processing the application – Invoiced once application processed and entered on to case management system

Part 2 Fee = £594.51

Part 2 Fee is to cover costs of Enforcement/Inspections – Invoice sent once draft licence is issued (usually within a couple of days of the draft as this comes from Debtors rather than Private Sector).

Herefordshire

Details	Fee
Basic application fee for a 5 year HMO licence	£1227.51

Discounts

Discount details	Percentage discount
Applicants that are (or have applied to be at the time of licence application) accredited under the Midland Landlord Accreditation Scheme (MLAS) (or equivalent)	5% discount

Where the landlord is a member of one or more recognised landlord associations	5% discount
Renewal of HMO licence	15% discount

HMO licence fee quick reference guide

Number of units	Total
Basic fee	£1227.51
5% (association members or accreditation)	£1166.13
10% (association members and accreditation)	£1104.76
15% (re-licensing)	£1043.38
20% (re-licensing + 1 additional discount)	£982
25% (re-licensing + 2 additional discounts)	£920.63

Sandwell

HMO Licence fees from 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024

First application for an HMO licence	
First payment	£601.44
Second payment	£336.58
Total	£938.02
Renewal Licence Fee	
First Payment	£465.58
Second Payment	£202.07
Total	£667.65

The proposed Licence Holder may claim any of the following discounts for being a member of the following landlord organisations or for second and subsequent properties.

Membership of MLAS (Midland Landlord Accreditation Scheme) or has received any training/professional qualifications in housing and/or housing management (to be provided) (initial application)	£165.00
Membership of National Residential Landlords Association (NRLA) or similar organisations	£55.00
Discount for second and subsequent properties	£55.00

Shropshire

Licence Type	Current Fee (£)
HMO up to and including five bedrooms	1,145
Additional bedroom Fee (per Room)	163.00

Solihull

Pay the non-refundable fee

Once your case reference number has been provided you will be required to pay the **£915** non-refundable fee.

There are discounts for MLAS, NLA and RLA members:

- **MLAS:** £732
- **NLA/RLA:** £824
- **Membership of both organisations:** £641

You will need to provide proof of your organisational membership when you apply.

Further fees may be included depending on different aspects of your HMO:

- an additional let or person over 7: £36.50
- application for a subsequent licence resulting from the change of the licence holder: £183
- inadequate application resulting in the Council reviewing information: £123

Stoke-on-Trent

A full break down is provided in the document fees and charges table below.

N.B please note the charging structure has been revised. We now charge in bands to reflect the size of the property

Property Size	Charges - Part 1	Charges - Part 2	Total
Up to 6 bedroom property	£309.00	£402.00	£711.00
7 to 10 bedroom property	£309.00	£425.00	£734.00
11 to 20 bedroom property	£309.00	£470.00	£780.00
21 to 30 bedroom property	£309.00	£516.00	£825.00
31+ bedroom property	£309.00	£561.00	£870.00

Additional Fees

Finder's fee - This is the fee for unlicensed HMO's that the authority finds. Currently this is set at £227.00 and the fee has been revised to £240.00

Refunds

£200.00 refund where following an inspection it is found that the property is not required to be licensed. This amount relates to the costs of drafting and issuing the licence.

Discounts

£50.00 reduction for subsequent applications submitted within three months of your first application (from the total licence fee).

Telford and Wrekin

Our current HMO Licensing fees which came into effect on 1 August 2023 are as follows: a HMO with up to 5 bedrooms - £1,312.53. a HMO with 6 - 10 bedrooms - £1,426.46. a HMO with 11 or more bedrooms - £1,526.37.

Walsall

Number of persons accommodated	1st stage fee	2nd stage fee	Total
5 - 6	£740.00	£250.00	£990.00
7 - 8	£945.00	£320.00	£1,265.00
9 - 14	£1,375.00	£450.00	£1,825.00
15-19	£1,530.00	£505.00	£2,035.00
20 - 24	£1,680.00	£565.00	£2,245.00
25 - 29	£1,850.00	£620.00	£2,470.00
30	£2,025.00	£670.00	£2,695.00
Each additional person	£80.00	-	£80.00

Fees for first HMO application - non-accredited landlord			
Number of persons accommodated	1st stage fee	2nd stage fee	Total
5 - 6	£930.00	£310.00	£1,240.00
7 - 8	£1,135.00	£375.00	£1,510.00
9 - 14	£1,660.00	£555.00	£2,215.00
15 - 19	£1,780.00	£595.00	£2,375.00
20 - 24	£1,960.00	£650.00	£2,610.00
25 - 29	£2,160.00	£720.00	£2,880.00
30	£2,360.00	£780.00	£3,140.00
Each additional person	£80.00	-	£80.00

HMO Licence

The full fee is applicable for new HMOs or where the licence holder has not held a licence at the property before i.e. if the property is sold to a new owner or there is a change of licence holder. It is based on the number of occupiers, after the initial licence, further licences are charged at renewal rate. Occupiers refers to all people living in the property.

Number of Occupiers	Stage 1 Fee	Stage 2 Fee
5 Occupiers	£723.00	£241.00
6-12 Occupiers	£837.00	£279.00
13-20 Occupiers	£959.00	£319.00
21+ Occupiers	£1,107.00	£369.00

HMO Licence Renewal

This is the fee for a subsequent licence, which will be held by the same named person on the same property.

Number of Occupiers	Stage 1 Fee	Stage 2 Fee
5 Occupiers	£550.00	£183.00
6-12 Occupiers	£632.00	£211.00
13-20 Occupiers	£728.00	£242.00
21+ Occupiers	£837.00	£279.00

Other Applicable HMO Licensing Charges

	Fee	Purpose
Late Licence Application	£139.00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New applications - Where the Council is aware that an HMO is due to become occupied by 5 or more persons, but the landlord/agent fails to submit a licence application by the time it becomes so occupied. Renewal applications- Where a licence application is received by the Council after the expiry date of the existing licence.
Late Documents Charge	£70.60	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A charge will be made if any documents/application fee have not been received within 14 days of being requested by the Council.

	Fee	Purpose
Additional copying of documents	£6.90	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requests for copies of safety certification we hold or further copies of the licence due to the original being misplaced.
Miscellaneous payment	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you have under paid a licence fee, you will be asked to pay the difference using this method.

Wolverhampton

Fee 1 - Application processing and determination fee		
Covers costs relating to the processing of an application for an HMO up to 6 bedrooms, up to and including the decision to grant or decline.		£806.00
Add on costs Fee 1 Application processing and determination fee		
7 to 10 bedroom		£27.00
11 to 20 bedroom		£77.00
21 to 30 bedroom		£128.00
31 to 40 bedroom		£178.00
41 to 50 bedroom		£228.00
For each incremental 10 bedrooms ie up to 60, 70, 80, 90 rooms etc.		£50.00
For each disused room in the HMO building not forming part of HMO but within the building.		£5.00
Commercial areas within HMO building?		£22.00
Fee 2 - Licence scheme operation and enforcement fee		
Covers all costs after granting of the licence, including costs during the life of the licence and costs associated with enforcement of the scheme.		£500

City Life Lettings and Private Sector Housing Fees 2023/24	2022/23 £	2023/24 £	Price change £	% Increase
Fees for Mandatory Licensable HMOs (five+ occupants) - NEW application				
Units of Accommodation				
Up to 5	1,354.00	1,449.00	95.00	7.0%
6 to 8	1,368.00	1,464.00	96.00	7.0%
9 to 15	1,383.00	1,480.00	97.00	7.0%
16 to 23	1,413.00	1,512.00	99.00	7.0%
24 and above	1,443.00	1,544.00	101.00	7.0%
Fees for Mandatory Licensable HMOs (five+ occupants) - RENEWAL Application *				
Units of Accommodation				
Up to 5	1,246.00	1,333.00	87.00	7.0%
6 to 8	1,260.00	1,348.00	88.00	7.0%
9 to 15	1,275.00	1,364.00	89.00	7.0%
16-23	1,306.00	1,397.00	91.00	7.0%
24 and above	1,336.00	1,429.00	93.00	7.0%
Fees for all Other Licensable HMOs (additional licensing)				
Units of Accommodation				
2 to 4	987.00	1,056.00	69.00	7.0%
5 to 7 (section 257 HMO's only)	1,040.00	1,113.00	73.00	7.0%
8 and above (section 257 HMO's only)	1,128.00	1,207.00	79.00	7.0%
Fees for all Other Licensable HMOs (additional licensing) - RENEWAL Application* (applicable from 1st Sept 2020)				
Units of Accommodation				
2 to 4	884.00	946.00	62.00	7.0%
5 to 7 (section 257 HMO's only)	937.00	1,003.00	66.00	7.0%
8 and above (section 257 HMO's only)	1,024.00	1,096.00	72.00	7.0%
Other Fees				
Reminder letters for missing documents or annual certificates (first reminder is included in the cost of the licence; per letter)	62.00	67.00	5.00	8.1%
Emergency inspections for incomplete applications (charge per inspection until the property is licensed)	85.00	92.00	7.00	8.2%
Pre-application advice including inspection (charges apply to both types of licences)	60.00	60.00	0.00	0.0%
Missed inspection or inspection cancelled less than 24 hours prior to appointment	65.00	70.00	5.00	7.7%
Penalty fee for unlicensed HMO (charged in addition to the licence fee listed above and any fees for notices and enforcement proceedings)	174.00	188.00	14.00	8.0%
Immigration inspection (per visit)	60.00	64.00	4.00	6.7%
Licence checking and data entering service	55.00	59.00	4.00	7.3%
Worcester City Lettings Agency				
Worcester City Lettings - Introductory lets	250.00	250.00	0.00	0.0%
Worcester City Lettings - Managed Lets - New tenant sign-up fee	250.00	250.00	0.00	0.0%
Worcester City Lettings - Managed Lets - Monthly management fee	8%	8%	0.00	0.0%
Worcester City Lettings - Private Sector Leasing - Monthly management fee	12%	12%	0.00	0.0%
Worcester City Lettings - Legionella Risk Assessment	30.00	30.00	0.00	0.0%

List of Background Documents

Office for National Statistic (2021) How life has changed in Dudley: Census 2021.
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E08000027/>

Dudley MBC (2023) Data from M3/Assure HMO licences and BRE data
<https://www.dudley.gov.uk/residents/housing/housing-options/private-housing/>

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/bulletins/privaterentalmarketssummarystatisticsinengland/april2022tomarch2023>

Meeting of the Housing and Safer Communities Select Committee on 13th March 2024

Report of the Director of Housing and Communities

Corporate Quarterly Performance Report - Housing & Communities – Quarter 3 (1st October 2023 to 31st December 2023)

Purpose

1. To present the Quarter 3 Corporate Quarterly Performance report of the financial year 2023/24 covering the period 1st October 2023 to 31st December 2023 and is aligned to the refresh of the 3-year Council Plan 2022-2025 and the impacts of this following the LGA Peer review.

In addition, further data relating to directorate service delivery are included as appendices to the report. This quarter concentrates on Housing and Communities Directorate.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that the Housing and Safer Communities Select Committee review the contents of this report and that any identified performance issues are referred to the relevant Cabinet Member and Service Director.

Background

3. The quarterly performance reports provide our strategic executive board with progress against the delivery of the 3-year Council Plan priorities and our Future Council Programme:
 - Dudley the borough of opportunity
 - Dudley the safe and healthy borough
 - Dudley the borough of ambition and enterprise

- Dudley borough the destination of choice

The council plan cycle is 3 years, directorate service plans are revised annually against the council plan. Reviewing and revising plans allows us to be responsive to developing priorities as well as ensuring we are delivering against the current plan. It is from these plans that our core corporate key performance indicators are reviewed and collated by our directors and heads of service, the councils strategic executive board issue final approval for the quarterly/annual reporting process.

Council Plan Suspension

As part of our response to external reviews and audits, the council is focussing on an Improvement and Sustainability Programme. The current council plan, which was due to run until March 2025, will be paused to allow a new one-year plan to be developed.

By suspending the Council Plan, this means there has been a revision to the current performance management arrangements and current quarterly corporate performance management reporting will cease at Q3 2023/24 with no further performance reports presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee or Select Committees for the remainder of this financial year.

A further report will be presented to the board providing information on the new Council Plan priorities and reporting arrangements in the coming months.

Key Performance Indicators and Summary

4. Overall, there are 38 key initiatives/actions and 5 Corporate KPI's (4 quarterly and 1 annual) being reported on for Housing and Communities. Annual performance measures will be reported at year end.
5. Q3 Performance Summary

The table below shows the performance summary against target for the quarterly corporate performance measures for Housing and Communities:



Overview: Number of Corporate key performance indicators (KPI's) due for reporting this quarter:

Housing & Communities	★ 0	🟡 0	🔴 4
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In relation to the short-term trend, for Housing and Communities, there are 2 improved, 0 consistent and 2 worsening trends.

The below Corporate reported performance measures provides a snapshot of where areas of concern (below target) are being monitored closely within the Directorates.

The below target performance measures are reported within our management teams at both service and strategic levels to ensure understanding of the issues and assurances that appropriate actions are being taken to address the issues.

6. Housing and Communities:

- **PI.2027 Satisfaction – way your anti-social behaviour complaint was handled?**

Despite a low response rate, the performance figures for Q3 are disappointing and further analysis is underway in the team to try and determine the reasons for continuing levels of dissatisfaction and to inform any further action that is required to improve customer experience and satisfaction.

The performance figure reported relates to satisfaction from October to December 2023. A customer satisfaction survey was completed in January 2024 to collate performance data required by the Regulator of Social Housing as part of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures. This customer satisfaction survey includes satisfaction with the landlord's approach to handling anti-social behaviour and satisfaction was reported at 65%, compared to 46% when the same survey was completed in August 2023. It is hoped that this is indicative that the improvements which are being implemented in the service are starting to have a positive impact upon customer experience, but this will continue to be monitored.



Risks associated with continued customer dissatisfaction include reputational damage and a lack of confidence that reporting issues will lead to an appropriate resolution.

Assurance: evidence that actions are in place and having an impact

More robust way in collecting results, ASB Team is speaking with customer as soon as case is closed. Aim is to record much higher return rate in Q4 and following this. Taking the ASB Teams delivery into consideration we have shown improvements across the board.

- **PI.913 Proportion of homes that do not meet the Decent Homes Standard**

The Q3 outturn is 4.87%. Utilising current available Savills SCS data for circa 12164 property surveys which equates to 57.62% of the stock. Where CAT 1 hazards have been identified and are a straightforward decency failure then extrapolating across all the portfolio it has been estimated 95.13% of the stock is compliant to decency standard.

As such time as Keystone is overwritten with full SCS information Jun 24 and the move to Northgate Assets is complete then extrapolating of data will not be required. The full extent of decency failures and then upload to Northgate Assets will not be known until completion of SCS Jun 24.

Assurance: evidence that actions are in place and having an impact

Severe CAT1 failures are being dealt with as a repair and issued and completed in line with our repair timelines. Programme being set for all other failures as they come through off the SCS It is perceived that levels will stay constant.

- **PI.1191 Average re-let time for Standard Re-Lets**

Average relet times for standard relets have shown a decrease from 56.74 days in Q2 to 55.46 in Q3. This is below the same period last year when the figure for Q3 was 66 days. The relet time for standard voids continues to vary between property types. Performance for



houses shows an increase from 45.88 days in Q2 to 57.12 days in Q3. For bungalows there has been a slight increase variation from 48.84 to 48.69 days. For maisonettes there has been an increase from 53.31 to 61.27 days. For all flats excluding sheltered there has been an increase from 47.05 days to 50.86. Bedsits excluding sheltered have shown an increase from 45.1 days to 52.45.

There has been a significant decrease across the sheltered housing properties with sheltered flats decreasing from 186 days to 74, and sheltered bedsits decreasing from 105.8 to 98.2 days. This can be attributed to the ongoing review and refurbishment of our sheltered housing stock.

Assurance: evidence that actions are in place and having an impact

All teams involved in the void process continue to review and refine procedures working together to minimise rent loss and void turnaround times.

Work is ongoing to review and refurbish our sheltered housing stock across the borough.

- **PI.1899 Rent Loss - % of potential receipts lost (dwellings)**

The total cumulative rent loss in Q3 equates to £1,744, 261.40. The cumulative rent loss due to voids shows an increase from 2.28% in Q2 to 2.36% in Q3. This is an increase from 1.94 for the same period last year.

£270,209.99 is directly attributable to void loss where we are carrying out improvement programmes in our sheltered stock or decanting people to facilitate them (65 properties). £48,939.60 is attributable to properties being used for decant or held for future decant (not as part of the sheltered improvement programme) (17 properties).

£413,157.29 is attributable to 134 properties awaiting an investment decision. Therefore a total of £732,306.88 of rent loss in Q3 (42% of rent loss) is attributable to properties that were at these statuses at the end of the quarter.



As a result of delivering our Asset Management Strategy we will continue to have a certain level of rent loss associated with strategic voids, which will be managed through efficient decision making and project management. We also recognise that routine voids therefore account for over 58% of rent loss, this is an increase from 54% in Q2. There is a significant opportunity to increase our income by improving processes and performance.

Assurance: evidence that actions are in place and having an impact

The end to end voids review continues. With the current focus within the service on stock condition we may see an impact on void loss in the short term as additional checks are undertaken at void stage. Investment decisions will continue to be made.

7. Key Initiatives / Actions Monitoring

The Directorate Service Plans feature service improvement actions that are updated each quarter to monitor progress. At Q3 2023-24, for Housing and Communities, of the 38 actions reported, 15 were completed, 18 were ahead or on target and 5 behind target.

8. Key activities / awards and accreditations

In addition, inclusive to the report, Directorate Service Summary documents provide a detailed account of service delivery for the quarter period. Some key highlights from both directorates are outlined below, for a more detailed account, please refer to the appendix – Q3 Service Summary Sheets for further information.

9. Housing and Communities:

- **Housing Customer Service**

The Customer Service Team have embedded new working practices including weekly updating of Complaints and MP/Member Enquiries with Heads of Services, this is leading to increased performance on response times. The team is also spending time with Heads of Services and Team Managers in streamlining response times. The team are reviewing



performance measures and examining better ways to present performance data.

- **Community Housing**

The neighbourhood model is now fully embedded. Community Housing Officers and Assistants are getting to know their residents and areas, building good relationships with both residents and stakeholders, and working with other Housing Teams to ensure our residents can feel safe and heard in their homes.

Work on reducing the number of illegal occupiers/trespassers continues and we have been successful in rehousing or resolving a large number of cases.

The team is working very closely with our colleagues in Compliance to ensure access into our property is gained for gas and electrical inspections and work.

Door knocking exercises continue to take place regularly with Community Housing Officers visiting customers to discuss and raise the profile of the Savills stock condition surveys and make appointments on behalf of residents.

We are working closely with our colleagues in Street Scene to review all sites currently maintained with a view to removing or adding sites and agreeing a standard service across all areas.

The latest Home Review satisfaction feedback is as follows:

In summary for Q3, the results are :-

- 94.5% satisfaction Community Housing Officer being polite and courteous
- 92.1% satisfaction Community Housing Officer listening to tenant
- 92.7% satisfaction Community Housing Officer answering questions/queries
- 95.1% satisfaction Community Housing Officer showing respect
- 91.5% satisfaction with home review visit
- 59.7% satisfaction with our estates services



The feedback demonstrates high levels satisfaction in our service delivery however it does emphasise the importance of partnership working with those services that have a significant impact on the appearance of our estates.

- **Housing Maintenance**

The Housing Maintenance Team have commenced the remodelling of the maintenance delivery service to create greater operating efficiencies that will enable demonstrable value for money, whilst enhancing the service to customers.

Finance

10. There are no direct financial implications in receiving this report

Law

11. There are no direct law implications in receiving this report

Risk Management

12. As part of the new risk management framework approved at audit and standards committee, risk reporting does not sit within performance reporting processes, each directorate developed a risk register for monitoring purposes. However, performance and risk management work in partnership to ensure directorate performance and risk management are monitored accordingly, providing assurance directorates work towards our council priorities.

Equality Impact

13. There are no special considerations to be made with regard to equality and diversity in noting and receiving this report.

No proposals have been carried out.

No proposals have been made, therefore does not impact on children and young people.



Human Resources/Organisational Development

14. There are no specific direct human resource issues in receiving this report. In terms of the Council's sickness level and the management of attendance, the People and Inclusion team continues to work with Directors and Heads of Service to assist and provide support in tackling those areas identified as having high levels of sickness.

Commercial/Procurement

15. There is no direct commercial impact.

Environment/Climate Change

16. The Council has declared a Climate Emergency and is working to address Climate Change and achieve our Net Zero target by 2030. The Council Plan also acknowledges the importance of climate change through the 'safe and healthy borough' priority, which through the golden thread is monitored through performance reporting.

Council Priorities

17. As part of our response to external reviews and audits, the council is focussing on an Improvement and Sustainability Programme. The current council plan, which was due to run until March 2025, will be paused to allow a new one-year plan to be developed.

The new plan will have emphasis on improvement and financial sustainability. Reviewing our council plan priorities will help us to focus on setting a sustainable budget while protecting essential services and communicating those priorities to our residents, communities, and staff.

The new plan which will be effective from 1st April 2024, will be formally approved at Cabinet on 20th March and Council on 15th April.

K. Jones

Kathryn Jones
Director of Housing and Communities



Contact Officer: Tom Day – Performance Management Officer
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Email: tom.day@dudley.gov.uk

Appendices
Housing & Communities Directorate Service Summary Sheet Q3 2023-24



Corporate quarterly performance management report **2023-24**

Quarter 3 (1 October to 31 December 2023)

Extract of Housing & Communities Directorate

Introduction

This Quarterly Corporate Performance Management Report highlights performance for the period 1 October to 31 December 2023. It provides specific information related to corporate performance indicators and key initiatives/actions that link to outcomes in the Council Plan 2022-25. Measuring indicators and actions allows us to monitor progress towards our Borough Vision 2030.

This extract of the full Q3 report relates to the performance measures of the Housing & Communities directorate.

Council plan 2022-25

The Council Plan sets out our priorities and objectives, mapping out our journey to achieving the aspirations of Future Council and the Borough Vision. The plan is refreshed every three years with the current plan being effective from 1 April 2022.

In addition to the Future Council programme at the heart of the plan, the four priorities of the current council plan are:

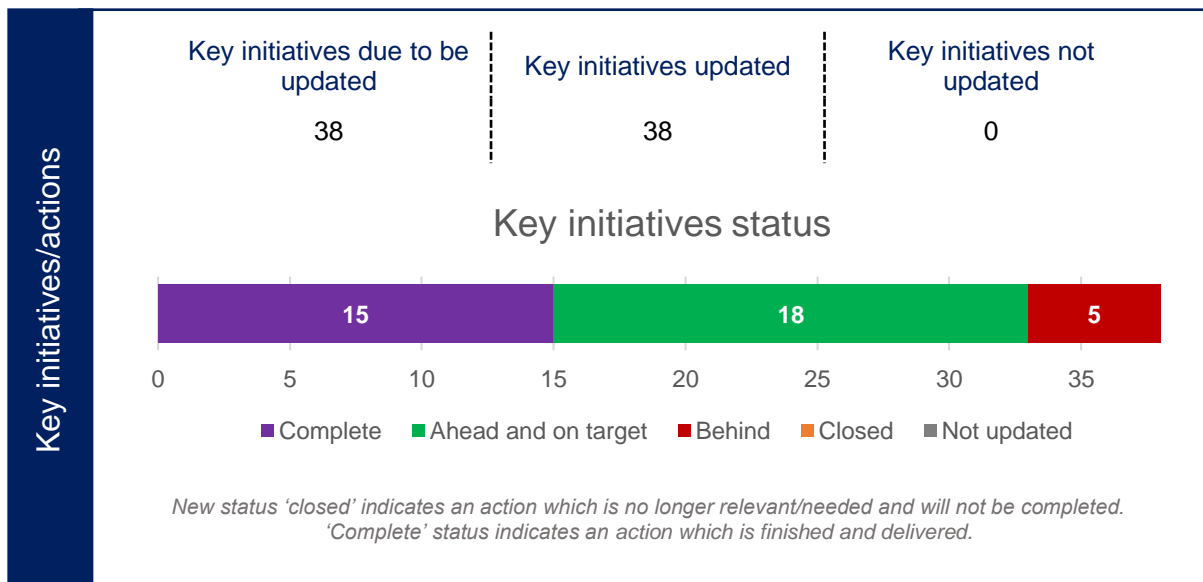
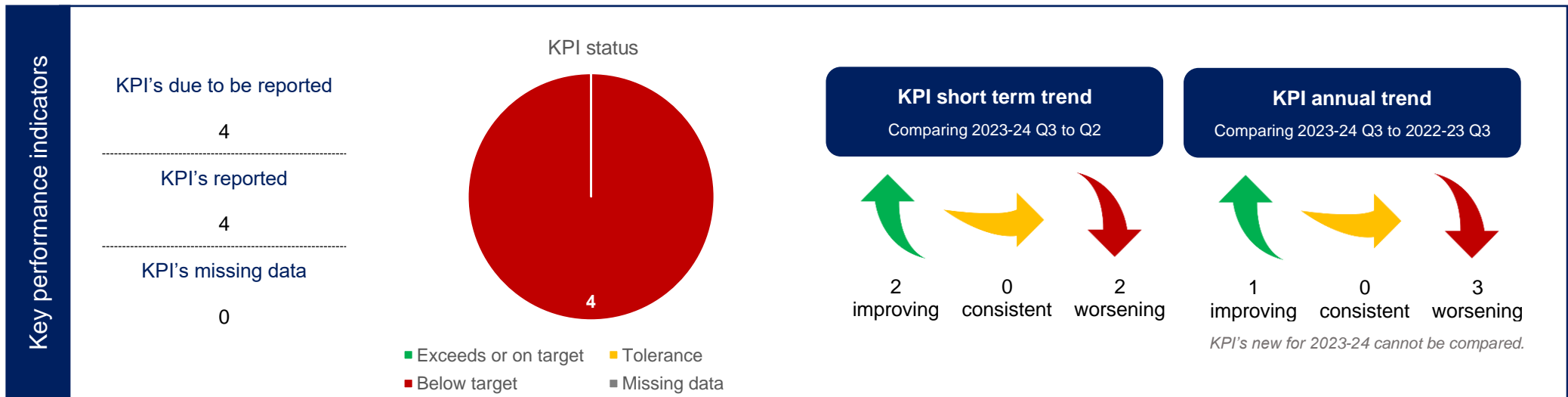
- The borough of opportunity
- The safe and healthy borough
- The borough of ambition and enterprise
- The destination of choice

Further information on the Council Plan can be found on the [dudley.gov.uk council plan pages](https://www.dudley.gov.uk/council-plan-pages)



Housing & Communities overview

The following pages provide a dashboard overview for the directorate of Housing & Communities. They show the status of corporate key performance indicators and of key initiatives/actions being delivered. KPI scorecards are used to report and monitor performance outturns for the given quarter along with exception commentary for those measures below target.



Council plan links

The table below provides a breakdown of key initiatives and corporate KPI's by directorate for this financial year including any not due to be reported this quarter.

Council plan priority	Key initiatives	Corporate KPI's
Dudley the borough of opportunity	4	0
Dudley the safe and healthy borough	11	1
Dudley the borough of ambition and enterprise	3	0
Dudley borough the destination of choice	6	4
Future council	14	0
Total	38	5

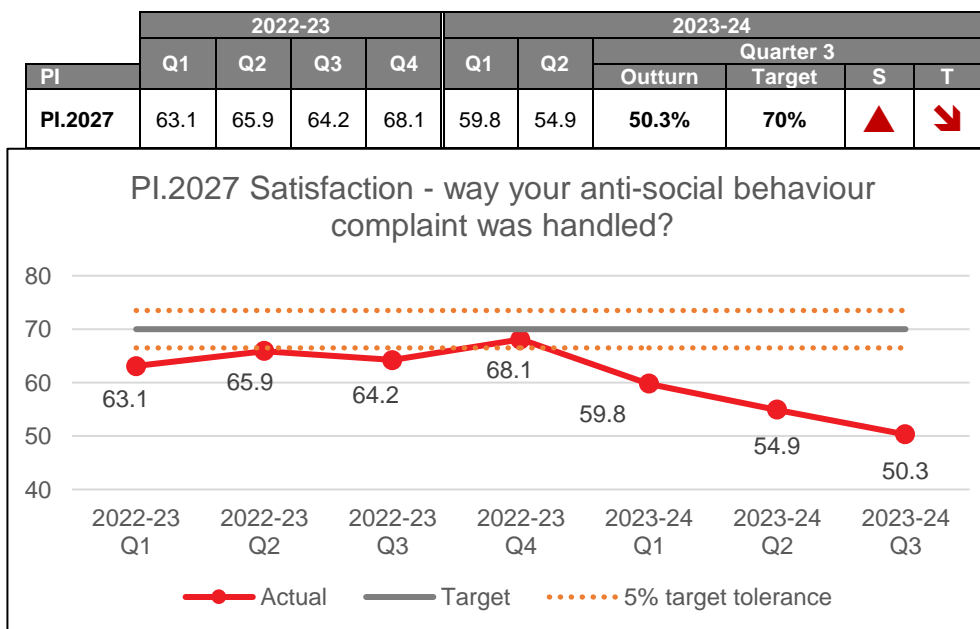
Housing & Communities scorecard

	Performance Indicator	2022-23				2023-24							Benchmarking comparator data
		Qtr. 1 outturn	Qtr. 2 outturn	Qtr. 3 outturn	Qtr. 4 outturn	Qtr. 1 outturn	Qtr. 2 outturn	Qtr. 3 outturn	Target	Score	Short term trend	Annual trend	
Safe & healthy	PI.2027 Satisfaction - way your anti-social behaviour complaint was handled?	63.1%	65.9%	64.2%	68.1%	59.8%	54.9% (73 / 133)	50.3% (110 / 219)	70%	▲	▾	▾	60.7% (HouseMark Median 2021/22)
Destination of choice	PI.913 RP01 Proportion of homes that do not meet the Decent Homes Standard	0.41%	0.46%	0.97%	0.58%	8.04%	5.31% (404 / 7,068)	4.87% (582 / 12,164)	0%	▲	↗	▾	Local measure
	PI.1191 V&L05 Average re-let time for Standard Re-lets.	61.7 days	65.91 days	66 days	60.23 days	49.26 days	56.74 days	55.46 days	40 days	▲	↗	↗	36 days (HouseMark Median 2021/22)
	PI.1899 Rent loss: % of potential rent receipts lost (Dwellings) Non-Acct PI	1.92%	1.95%	1.94%	1.97%	2.28%	2.28% (£1,126,382)	2.36% (£1,744, 261)	1.8%	▲	▾	▾	1.42% (HouseMark Median 2021/22)

Short term trend compares current quarter with previous quarter within the same year. Annual trend compares the same quarter between years.

Housing & Communities exception commentary

PI.2027 Satisfaction - way your anti-social behaviour complaint was handled?



Performance: what is the data telling us?

Taking everything into account, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way your anti-social behaviour complaint was handled?

This cumulative result represents all residents and shows 110 residents were satisfied out of 219 who responded to this question.

Impact: what are the issues/risks for service delivery?

Despite a low response rate, the performance figures for Q3 are disappointing and further analysis is underway in the team to try and determine the reasons for continuing levels of dissatisfaction and to inform any further action that is required to improve customer experience and satisfaction.

The performance figure reported relates to satisfaction from October to December 2023. A customer satisfaction survey was completed in January 2024 to collate performance data required by the Regulator of Social Housing as part of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures. This customer satisfaction survey includes satisfaction with the landlords approach to handling anti-social behaviour and satisfaction was reported at 65%, compared to 46% when the same survey was completed in August 2023. It is hoped that this is indicative that the improvements which are being implemented in the service are starting to have a positive impact upon customer experience, but this will continue to be monitored.

Risks associated with continued customer dissatisfaction include reputational damage and a lack of confidence that reporting issues will lead to an appropriate resolution.

Assurance: evidence that actions are in place and having an impact

More robust way in collecting results, ASB Team is speaking with customer as soon as case is closed. Aim is to record much higher return rate in Q4 and following this.

Taking the ASB Teams delivery into consideration we have shown improvements across the board with the continuous changes we are making.

PI.913 RP01 Proportion of homes that do not meet the Decent Homes Standard

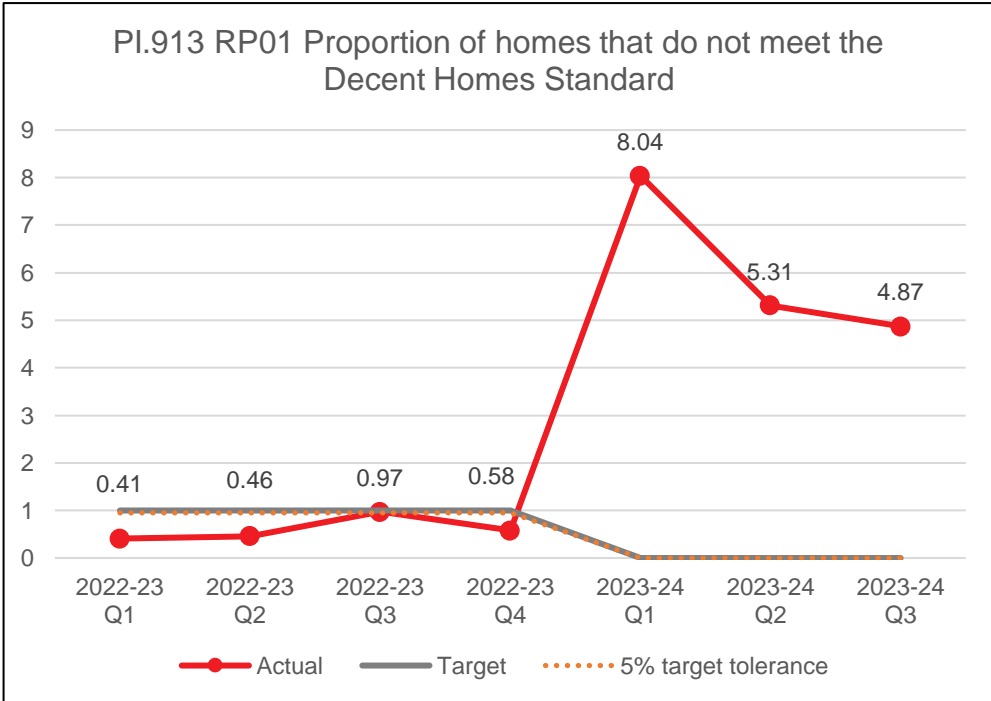
PI	2022-23				2023-24					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Quarter 3			
							Outturn	Target	S	T
PI.913	0.41	0.46	0.97	0.58	8.04	5.31	4.87%	0%	▲	➔

Performance: what is the data telling us?

Utilising current available Savills SCS data for circa 12,164 property surveys which equates to 57.62% of the stock.

Where CAT 1 hazards have been identified and are a straightforward decency failure then extrapolating across all the portfolio it has been estimated 95.13% of the stock is compliant to decency standard.

As such time as Keystone is overwritten with full SCS information Jun 24 and the move to Northgate Assets is complete then extrapolating of data will not be required.



Impact: what are the issues/risks for service delivery?

The full extent of decency failures and then upload to Northgate Assets will not be known until completion of SCS Jun 24.

Assurance: evidence that actions are in place and having an impact

Severe CAT1 failures are being dealt with as a repair and issued and completed in line with our repair timelines. Programme being set for all other failures as they come through off the SCS.

It is perceived that levels will stay constant.

PI.1191 V&L05 Average re-let time for Standard Re-Lets

PI	2022-23				2023-24					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Quarter 3			
							Outturn	Target	S	T
PI.1191	61.7	65.9	66.0	60.2	49.2	56.7	55.46 days	40 days	▲	➔

Performance: what is the data telling us?

Average relet times for standard relets have shown a decrease from 56.74 days in Q2 to 55.46 in Q3. This is below the same period last year when the figure for Q3 was 66 days.

The relet time for standard voids continues to vary between property types. Performance for houses shows an increase from 45.88 days in Q2 to 57.12 days in Q3.

For bungalows there has been a slight increase variation from 48.84 to 48.69 days.

For maisonettes there has been an increase from 53.31 to 61.27 days.

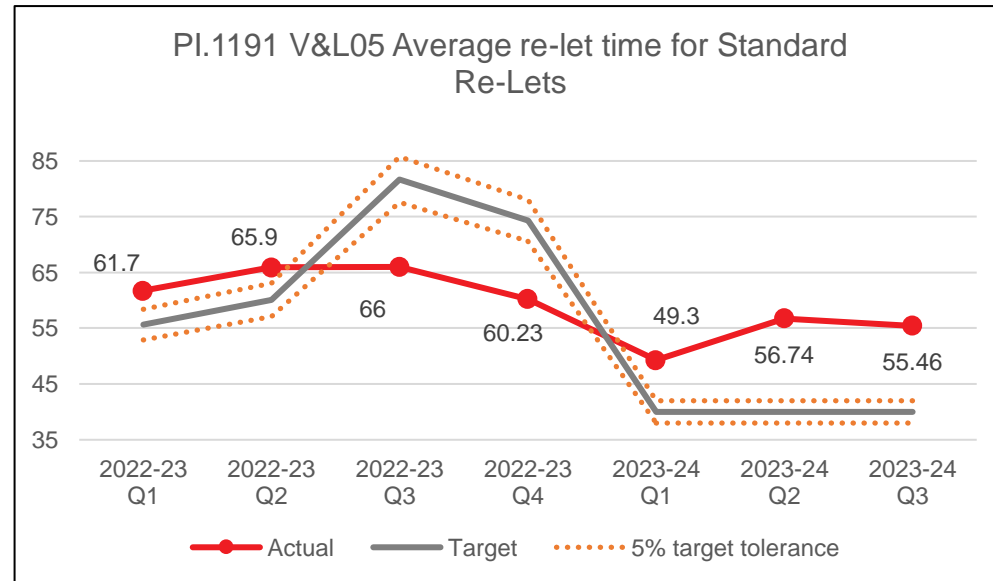
For all flats excluding sheltered there has been an increase from 47.05 days to 50.86.

Bedsits excluding sheltered have shown an increase from 45.1 days to 52.45.

There has been a significant decrease across the sheltered housing properties with sheltered flats decreasing from 186 days to 74, and sheltered bedsits decreasing from 105.8 to 98.2 days. This can be attributed to the ongoing review and refurbishment of our sheltered housing stock.

Assurance: evidence that actions are in place and having an impact

All teams involved in the void process continue to review and refine procedures working together to minimise rent loss and void turnaround times. Work is ongoing to review and refurbish our sheltered housing stock across the borough.

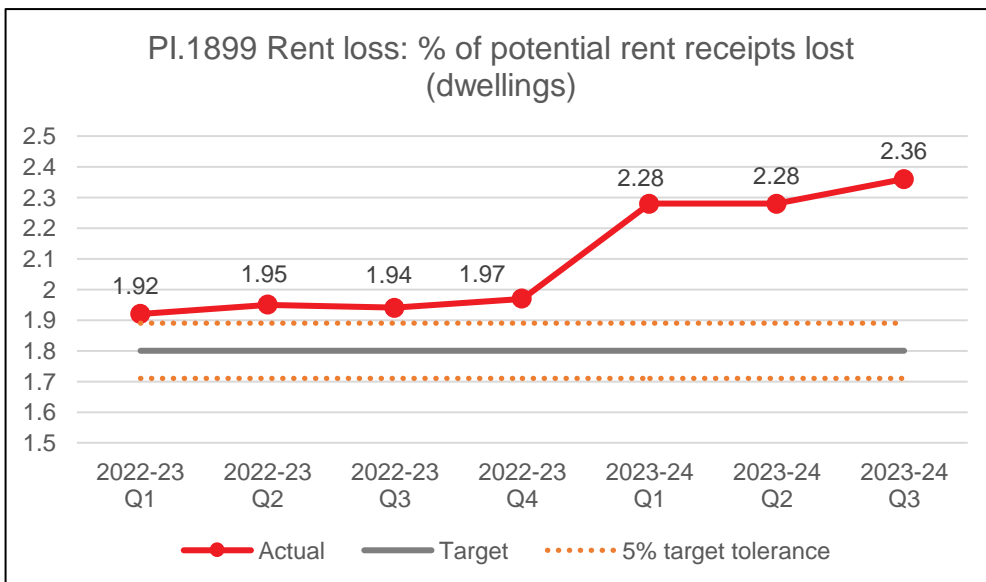


Impact: what are the issues/risks for service delivery?

Loss of revenue. Impact on reputation.

PI.1899 Rent loss: % of potential receipts lost (dwellings)

PI	2022-23				2023-24					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Quarter 3			
							Outturn	Target	S	T
PI.1899	1.92	1.95	1.94	1.97	2.28	2.28	2.36%	1.8%	▲	▼



Performance: what is the data telling us?

The total cumulative rent loss in Q3 equates to £1,744,261.40.

The cumulative rent loss due to voids shows an increase from 2.28% in Q2 to 2.36%. This is an increase from 1.94 for the same period last year.

£270,209.99 is directly attributable to void loss where we are carrying out improvement programmes in our sheltered stock or decanting people to facilitate them. (65 properties)

£ 48,939.60 is attributable to properties being used for decant or held for future decant (not as part of the sheltered improvement programme) (17 properties)

£413,157.29 is attributable to 134 properties awaiting an investment decision.

Therefore a total of £ 732,306.88 of rent loss in Q3 (42% of rent loss) is attributable to properties that were at these statuses at the end of the quarter.

Impact: what are the issues/risks for service delivery?

As a result of delivering our Asset Management Strategy we will continue to have a certain level of rent loss associated with strategic voids, which will be managed through efficient decision making and project management.

We also recognise that routine voids therefore account for over 58% of rent loss, this is an increase from 54% in Q2. There is a significant opportunity to increase our income by improving processes and performance.

Assurance: evidence that actions are in place and having an impact

The end-to-end voids review continues. With the current focus within the service on stock condition we may see an impact on void loss in the short term as additional check are undertaken at void stage. Investment decisions will continue to be made.



Service Summary Sheet

Directorate	Housing and Communities		
Year	2023-24	Quarter	Quarter 3 performance reporting (as at quarter ended 31/12/2023)
Benchmarking with local authorities/nearest neighbours Please consider if a <u>Delivering Better Outcomes proforma</u> should be completed also.			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenant Satisfaction Measures - The Housing Strategy and Performance Teams are approaching local and neighbouring stock holding councils and partner Registered Providers to determine if there is an appetite to develop a local benchmarking/good practice group – a number of organisations are interested and willing to share their data and experiences. Initial meeting to be set up in Q4. • Customer Service Team – is continuing to liaise with other Housing Authorities in obtaining good practice around Complaint Customer Services and improved Complaint Handling processes. Work with Wolverhampton Homes around process mapping and performance reporting has proved valuable. • Housing Training Team – are continuing to work with Chartered Institute of Housing to become members of established LA Network Groups. In addition Dudley Housing Training Team to lead on organising a West Midlands Councils Benchmarking Training Session on imminent Professionalism Agenda in Quarter 4 to which Chartered Institute of Housing to be invited. 			
Overview of service delivery Include any issues / risk			
<p>Housing Customer Service Team The team have embedded new working practices including weekly updating of Complaints and MP/Member Enquiries with Heads of Services, this is leading to increased performance on response times. The team is also spending time with Heads of Services and Team Managers in streamlining response times. The team are reviewing performance measures and examining better ways to present performance data.</p> <p>Housing Training Team The team are continuing to develop their understanding of the ‘Professionalism Agenda’ which is due to be implemented from 2024/25. The team have been in discussions with the Chartered Institute of Housing about the changes to be brought in. Furthermore, the team have developed a ‘Qualifications Database’ to record current qualifications for all Housing staff in anticipation of the requirements under the Professionalism agenda.</p>			

Housing Finance

Quarter 3 housing finance rent arrears continues to see a reduction in debt outstanding. Arrears stood at £2,160,672 which is down by 6.88% on the previous year.

Our preferred payment method is direct debit (collection - £23,934,229.25 with 44.85% of tenants paying via this method) and we allow our tenants to spread their rent arrears across the year when paying via this method. It is important to note that this impacts on the level of debt that we are carrying which stands at £235,962 against £178,442 for 22/23 so there is further work for us to do on this area of collection.

Rent debt outstanding excluding direct debit is down 10.14% on last year.

We benchmark against our neighbouring authorities, see table below:

Organisation	Level of Arrears	Average Debt
Birmingham City Council	£20,090,908	£353.53
Dudley MBC	£2,160,673	£105.93
Sandwell MBC	£6,092,542	£213.77
Wolverhampton Homes	£2,455,783	£121.88
Walsall Housing Group	£3,117,648	£145.24

Challenges in the forthcoming year

DWP have announced that managed migration will be implemented in 24/25 with all migration notices being issued by December 2024. We have approximately 3,300 tenants who will be subject to the move and we are working closely with our Welfare Rights Team to provide support and advice to ensure that tenants are able to migrate successfully and understand the importance of paying their rent.

See below the planned migration (please note, DWP have already brought forward Tax Credit Claimants by 3 weeks and it is anticipated that this program may change):

Target Date	Benefit Group
19 th February 24	Tax Credits Only
April 2024 - June 2024	Income Support
April 2024 onwards	Tax Credits with Housing Benefit
April 2024 onwards	Housing Benefit only
July – September 2024	Employment Support Allowance with Child Tax Credits
September 2024 onwards	Job Seekers Allowance
To be confirmed	All other ESA Claimants

2024/25 is a 53 week rent year, for our tenants who are claiming universal credit, (just shy of 9,000 tenants) this will mean that they will need to find the additional weeks rent as universal credit legislation only allows payments over 52 weeks.

Information has been included in the Your Borough Your Homes next edition and we will continue to work with our tenants throughout the year.

Community Housing Teams

The neighbourhood model is now fully embedded. Community Housing Officers and Assistants are getting to know their residents and areas, building good relationships with both residents and stakeholders, and working with other Housing Teams to ensure our residents can feel safe and heard in their homes.

Work on reducing the number of illegal occupiers/trespassers continues and we have been successful in rehousing or resolving a large number of cases.

The team is working very closely with our colleagues in Compliance to ensure access into our property is gained for gas and electrical inspections and work.

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Housing Options & Support

Sheltered

- Jack Newell Court: Following a major refurbishment all tenants who had been decanted out of the scheme have now moved back into their new, modern and spacious homes. They celebrated their return with a Christmas Party.
- Church View: All tenants have moved to their preferred suitable alternative accommodation and the building has now been closed due to no longer being viable.

- Grange Court: Formal consultation has been completed with tenants regarding the potential closure of the scheme due to non-viability. All tenants have viewed and selected their preferred suitable alternative accommodation.

Community Safety Team

The community safety team continue to support and co-ordinate the work of Safe and Sound, Dudley's Community Safety Partnership and its subgroups, in addition to 'leading' on a number of work streams

Communications

A significant amount of communications continue to take place through CAPA with monthly plans for our social media channels and a regular e-bulletin going out to a growing distribution list (currently **2,900** subscribers - **up 513** from last quarter). These bulletins are also sent to the Council's General News topic list.

Key Highlights in Q3 include:

- Topics covered in this quarter's plans:
 - Darker nights
 - Domestic abuse
 - Halloween and bonfire safety
 - Christmas safety messages
 - modern slavery
 - illegal money lending
 - hate crime
 - Nitrous oxide
 - online safety
 - community cohesion
 - ACT
 - Safe places
- 16 days of action campaign delivered
- Phase two review of website and site map produced for upgraded site
- Communications action plan approved by board
- Safer Dudley (Think First) campaign planned for implementation in Feb 2024
- Initial literature produced and communications planned for Dudley Have your Say – the CSP's annual statutory public meeting and survey

The top 3 viewed pages on the website in Q3 were: Darker nights; Online safety and Domestic abuse

2 conferences have been organised to take place in Q4, one focussed on online Harms and community safety which will include a range of presentations around the online Safety Act, online grooming and exploitation (adults and children) online relationship abuse including stalking and sexual abuse, illegal money lending, frauds and scams, money mules, online hate crime and radicalisation and cybercrime.

The second conference is focussed on Domestic Abuse and VAWG and will include a range of presentation by our local service providers.

The online harms conference only has 4 spaces remaining at time of writing, with the domestic abuse/VAWG one being fully booked.

Domestic Abuse

- The DA Board continues to implement the DA Act and progress actions identified from the needs assessment and Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs).
- The updated DA strategy has been agreed by the DA board and is awaiting final sign off for the lead member for housing and communities. The recommendations from this strategy and several of our recent and ongoing DHRs have informed the new DA board action plan.
- There continues to be a risk around amount of active DHR's in terms of capacity and funding.
- A local MARAC governance group continues to meet to support the restructure of MARAC regionally.
- The 'refreshed' DA and VAWG forum met in Q3 and the meeting was well received by all in attendance.
- The Domestic Abuse training offer continues to be promoted widely and continues to develop further modules and resources – these can be accessed at: <https://blackcountrywa.thinkific.com/pages/dudley-safe-and-sound>

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

- The VAWG group continues to meet and progress their work plan.

Modern Slavery

- The community safety team continue to support modern slavery work in the borough and regionally, with 2 significant work streams progressing locally around modern slavery and the care sector and consent for the NRM process.
- The team also continue to support the exploitation work streams of DSPP.

Violence prevention

- Work in relation to the implementation of the serious violence duty continues and we are on track in respect of this.

Prevent

- Work continues in respect of the Prevent duty.
- Chanel Panel continues to meet to discuss relevant cases.

ASB

- Work is ongoing around new PSPOs for the borough, around public places and open spaces, and anti-social vehicle usage.
- Work is on-going within the borough to reduce the risk of harm as a result of car cruising with a zero tolerance approach being adopted by DMBC and Police partners. CCTV is being installed at one of our hotspot locations.

Hate Crime and Community Cohesion

- A new TOR and strategy have been developed for the Hate and Cohesion Delivery Group and are awaiting sign off from the group.
- An event is being planned to launch the 'refreshed' group.

ASB

The ASB Team have triaged a total of 437 complaints that have come into the service through the period of October through to the end of December 2023. 198 of these cases have been accepted as ASB cases and have been allocated to ASB Officers for investigation. 130 have been assigned to Community Housing Officers to progress as either tenancy management issues or categorised as 'low level' ASB. 109 reports have been logged as information only which are one off incidents, not ASB and/or referred to other agencies.

As we have implemented new policies and procedures in this time the ASB Team have worked hard to instil these new ways of working and have been able to contact all 437 complainants on the day they initially reported their concerns. This means that initial advice and action plans have been implemented on day one. We are hoping that by taking this approach that over time confidence in the service will increase.

As a result of this we have increased our presence in the Community and in the month of December 2023, completed 75 visits to Complainants and Subjects to resolve ASB at an early stage, a fundamental in ASB Case Management, this a significant rise from the previous month.

To compliment the above figures we have seen a small rise in satisfaction against the 5 areas we record in Customer satisfaction from Q2 to Q3. We hope that this trend will continue. This is as follows;

- *How easy was it for you to contact us to report your initial complaint?*
Q2 – **66%** Satisfied or Very Satisfied Q3 – **70%** Satisfied or Very Satisfied
- *How well would you rate our initial advice and explanation of how we could help you?*
Q2 – **60%** Satisfied or Very Satisfied Q3 – **65%** Satisfied or Very Satisfied
- *How informed and updated were you about the progress of your complaint?*
Q2 – **49%** Satisfied or Very Satisfied Q3 – **52%** Satisfied or Very Satisfied
- *Taking everything into account, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way your anti-social behaviour complaint was handled?*
Q2 – **45%** Satisfied or Very Satisfied Q3 – **50%** Satisfied or Very Satisfied
- *Taking everything into account, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the outcome of your anti-social behaviour complaint?*
Q2 – **36%** Satisfied or Very Satisfied Q3 – **52%** Satisfied or Very Satisfied

As the above shows performance has improved in each of these questions. Despite a low return rate on surveys, out of the 147 customers surveyed on 40 provided feedback; 27%.

The ASB Team have only recently implemented a new process that once the case is closed the survey will be completed either immediately by an Assistant or as soon as possible following the closure. It is believed that with this new process returns rates will be much higher and results will truly reflect the work that is being carried out, highlighting areas of good practice and/or areas that require improvement. We hope that this will allow us to pick up dissatisfaction earlier and take steps to address it.

The ASB Team has also refined work with the Community Housing Teams providing support and training on how to deal with complaints. This includes monthly workshops where CHO's and Team Managers can discuss cases with an assigned ASB Officer to that area. Furthermore, a procedure/manual is in the developmental stage that will further provide ASB Officers and Council staff with a guide on how DMBC handles and tackles ASB in the borough.

Street Officers

Two street officers, to help to prevent and respond to ASB, are now in post. A further two are due to start at a later date. The officers will be patrolling our hot spots and responding to requests from colleagues and the public.

Outreach Officers

We have two officers in post, responding to all reports of rough sleeping. Officers work with rough sleepers, proving advice and support, to help them find immediate shelter and longer term accommodation.

The team have been active throughout the cold weather period and in partnership with the homeless service have ensured that during winter everyone is in.

This scheme has been running for two years and has shown positive results in reducing rough sleeping and will now be working with the new street officer team to increase coverage and to pool resources.

ASB OOH Service - Response Officers

A team of six staff members respond to reports of ASB during the hours of 6pm – 2am every night of the year. Officers have attended addresses within the borough where ASB had been reported as in progress, have patrolled areas and continue to respond to an average of 4 calls per night.

This is an established team who work with all various teams within Dudley MBC and will be working together with both the new street officers and the outreach team to provide for a wider response service.

Site and Enforcement Officers

The team continue to successfully manage illegal incursions in the borough. Illegal occupants have been swiftly removed, with a group of 6+ vans removed most recently in a joint operation with police and bailiffs.

The team is managing Oak Lane and in doing so are undertaking a series of improvement works and implementing additional safety measures.

Homeless Prevention

There has been an increase in demand, approaches to the service have doubled. In Q2 there were 1245 approaches to the service (applications taken). Q3 is currently showing a similar figure 1207, although data is as yet unconfirmed.

We have seen an increase in the discontinuations of NASS accommodation and we expect this to increase, we have been working jointly with the Resettlement and Inclusion Team, and achieved some good outcomes.

Other issues and further implications for the service; lack of resources, including affordable housing solutions.

We have historically been able to keep TA figures low, and we never exceed 6 weeks in B&B. We will continue to try and maintain this, but there is a significant risk given the housing stock issues that we currently have.

Although the numbers are increasing and we have not increased the number of staff to deal with the number of applicants, we have met the demand by re-training current staff to deal with single applicants and make some basic statutory decisions.

On a positive note the team continue to work hard and provide an excellent service to our customers and Dudley residents. They are a dedicated team. There have been days that we have exceeded 25+ on duty presenting as roofless and then staff also working the out of hours service which continues to be exceptionally busy.

Resettlement & Inclusion

The Resettlement and Inclusion Team have been very busy following the recent hotel closures and increase in Home Office decisions on asylum cases. We have supported refugees from a variety of countries which include Afghanistan, Syria, Sudan, Iraq, Iran, Yemen, Kuwait, Libya, Eritrea and Ethiopia.

We are also approaching 2 years of supporting people on the Dudley Homes for Ukraine scheme. The government has extended the scheme for a 3rd year. This now means residents in Dudley can host arrivals on the scheme for a maximum of 3 years and continue to receive monthly 'Thank You Payments'. We recently announced a property assistance scheme last year, offering to help those leaving their Homes for Ukraine host properties with securing their very own private rented accommodation. We launched the scheme using the government funding we received for Homes for Ukraine. The assistance scheme runs alongside the Dudley Homes for Ukraine project and was announced to help reduce the risk of homelessness. Help includes financial assistance towards upfront rent payments, rent deposits and furniture.

Housing Maintenance

The Housing Maintenance Team have commenced the remodelling of the maintenance delivery service to create greater operating efficiencies that will enable demonstrable value for money, whilst enhancing the service to customers.

Asset Management and Development and Building Safety

The Building Safety and Compliance team have set up the following key activities to ensure greater transparency of building compliance:

- Developed an overall Control and Assurance Plan for the Compliance Reporting Programme. The control plan evidences the robust rationale, validation and roles and responsibilities for compliance reporting.
- Introduced weekly and monthly reconciliation of our certificate and asset data improving the accuracy of our asset data.
- The introduction of a new single BS&C asset management team who manage and validate all compliance certification.
- The implementation of C365, the chosen compliance data management system. This has included the set-up of the big six compliance categories to improve compliance monitoring and validation. All available certification has been loaded into C365 to provide transparent and robust compliance monitoring.
- The team have undertaken a significant overhaul of the contract supply chain to standardise and improve delivery from the contractors. Improvements in contractor billing processes have allowed greater challenge and improved contractor cost recovery.
- Developed monthly spend profiling and tighter controls over purchase orders and validation processes.
- Developed a full suite of Building Safety and Compliance documentation that form the revised policies and management plans.
- Implemented a new “No Access” process in partnership with the Housing Team. The No access process has been trialled where we have been unable to gain access to conduct gas safety inspections. The process will be rolled out right across our housing stock and enable us to drive down non-compliance.

The Asset Management and Development team are working on the following key tasks:

- A full review of the Disrepair process in line with Section 11 protocol, aiming to have an alternative dispute resolution route in place dealing with tenant compensation where necessary, mitigating solicitors' costs.
- Phase three of the SCS exercise has been successfully rolled out with a focus on SCS no access properties jointly managed with our compliance section with the use of internal surveying team & Community Housing Officers. Real successes but this is resource hungry, and we are looking to prioritise where we have limited to no repair requests or at the other end of the spectrum where we perceive we have too many attributed to the property.
- Jack Newell and Woodhouse Court schemes completed, work on closing down final accounts ongoing which may lead to final claim for damages ratified via external forensic quantity surveyor.

- The asset team have been managing the asset viability process of every void property which exceeds the threshold of viable investment. Circa 120 properties identified to be disposed of by end of 23/24.
- Core specification group to review specifications across New Build, Regen identifying any lessons learnt on Jack Newell and Woodhouse for consistency in delivering the Swan Street development.
- Recently 8 properties have been acquired, purchased via offsetting 'Right to Buy' receipts and have been successfully let with a further 11 acquisitions within the legal process due mid Feb.

Service achievements

Report of any external accreditation, awards, positive publicity, during the past quarter

Customer Service Team – good progress is being made since the adoption of new processes in Complaint Handling and MP/Member Enquiries. Response times have been reduced and greater ownership of complaints and enquiries is being taken by officers and managers.

Homelessness Prevention Strategy Update – has been completed and consulted upon and should be signed off by Cabinet Member in Q4.

Opportunities for improvement

Information relating to service complaints / compliments and learning from these

Any additional information relating to performance

Housing and Safer Communities Select Committee
Progress Tracker and Future Business

Subject (Date of Meeting)	Recommendation/action	Responsible Officer/Area	Status/Notes
Programme of Meetings and Business Items for 2023/24 – 20 th July, 2024	<u>Agenda Item No. 6(2)</u> That the Director of Housing and Communities be requested to provide Members of the Committee regular updates on progress on the stock condition survey.	Director of Housing and Communities	Ongoing – regular updates to be provided
	<u>Agenda Item No. 6(5)</u> That the Director of Housing and Communities, supported by the Democratic Services Officer, be requested to consider the possibility of providing Members the opportunity to allow more detailed scrutiny of the housing stock within the Borough.	Director of Housing and Communities/ Democratic Services Officer	Consideration at the agenda setting meeting on 25 th October, 2023 and agreed to included in the 2024/25 Annual Scrutiny Programme to allow for a more in-depth scrutiny of the item.

	<p><u>Agenda Item No. 6(6)</u> That the Director of Housing and Communities be requested to incorporate a community safety element to each report programmed for the Committee for the municipal year.</p>	Director of Housing and Communities	Ongoing
<p>Progress Tracker and Future Business – 13th September, 2023 and 20th November, 2023</p>	<p><u>Minute No. 12(3)</u> That an update be provided to Members of the Committee at a future meeting on information in relation to private rented housing.</p>	Director of Housing and Communities	Report on agenda for the Select Committee meeting on 13 th March 2024
	<p><u>Minute No. 12(4)</u> That an update be provided to Members of the Committee at a future meeting on the work associated with the Stock Condition Survey programme that Savills was currently undertaking on all Council housing stock.</p>	Director of Housing and Communities	Report to be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee

Annual update on the safe and Sound Partnership priorities and update on improvements to managing neighbour disputes and anti-social behaviour – 22 nd January, 2024	<u>Minute No. 33(2)</u> That the Director of Housing and Communities identify appropriate Housing Officers for the Wolverhampton Street area and circulate the information to Councillor C Reid.	Director of Housing and Communities	Contact made by Housing Officer on 23 rd January 2024 to introduce herself to Cllr Reid and an e-mail sent from The Director of Housing and Communities on 29 th February 2024
	<u>Minute No. 33(3)</u> That the Director of Housing and Communities be requested to investigate timescales involved in erecting notices notifying the public of the consequences of graffiti and associated matters and provide a response to all Members of the Committee.	Director of Housing and Communities	Response to be provided to Members of the Committee.
	<u>Minute No. 33(4)</u> That the Director of Housing and Communities be requested to raise Member issues in relation to online harm at the next meeting of the Safe and Sound Board and arrange for a response to be provided to all Members of the Committee on the types of online harm being fed through the Community Safety Partnership and what was being done to tackle the issues.	Director of Housing and Communities	Response provided to Members of the Committee on 5 th February 2024.

	<p><u>Minute No. 33(5)</u> That the Director of Housing and Communities be requested to forward Members' appreciation to the Head of Anti-Social Behaviour and her Team for the exceptional work provided in communities.</p>	<p>Director of Housing and Communities</p>	<p>Complete</p>
	<p><u>Minute No. 33(6)</u> That the Director of Housing and Communities be requested to investigate location and impact of Public Space Protection Orders and circulate the information to all Members of the Committee.</p>	<p>Director of Housing and Communities</p>	<p>Response provided to Members of the Committee on 5th February 2024</p>
	<p><u>Minute No. 33(7)</u> That the Director of Housing and Communities be requested to invite a Police representative to attend the next meeting of the Select Committee where an update on the Safe and Sound Partnership was provided to respond to specific questions raised by Members.</p>	<p>Director of Housing and Communities</p>	<p>Police representative to be invited to a future meeting.</p>

	<p><u>Minute No. 33(8)</u> That the Director of Housing and Communities be requested to provide information to all Members of the Committee following the confirmation of the annual community safety fund received from The Office of Police and Crime Commissioner.</p>	Director of Housing and Communities	OPCC funding of £125k received in February 2024
Quarterly Housing Performance Report –Quarter 2 (1 st July – 30 th September, 2023) – 22 nd January, 2024	<p><u>Minute No. 36(2)</u> That the Director of Housing and Communities be requested to provide Members of the Committee with an accurate figure of cases associated with housing fraud for the 2023/24 financial year.</p>	Director of Housing and Communities	Response provided to Members of the Committee on 29 th February 2024
	<p><u>Minute No. 36(3)</u> That the Director of Housing and Communities be requested to forward Members’ appreciation to the Housing Team for the work, support and expertise in tackling homelessness and begging in the Stourbridge area.</p>	Director of Housing and Communities	Complete

Future Business 2023/24

<u>Date of Meeting</u>	<u>Work Programme</u>	<u>Responsible Officer/Area</u>	<u>Notes</u>
13 th March, 2024	Review of Private Rented Sector	Kathryn Jones	Report
	Contractor Management	Kathryn Jones	Report
	Quarterly Corporate Performance Report	Richard Cartwright	Report
	Action Tracker and Future Business	Karen Malpass	Report

Meeting of the Housing and Safer Communities Select Committee – 13th March 2024

Report of the Director of Housing and Communities

Contractor Management

Purpose of report

1. To provide an update to the Select Committee on the work currently being undertaken to review contracts and contractor management within the Housing Directorate.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that the Committee **note** the following: -
 - The review of Contractor management is still underway with an expected outcome due in April 2025, with the implementation of a new approach and strategy to the procurement and management of contractors.
 - A further report will be brought to the Select Committee towards the end of 2024 setting out the final outcomes of the project.

Background

3. Since being appointed, the Interim Strategic Lead for Property Maintenance (SLPM) has been overseeing a review of contract and contractor arrangements within the Housing directorate, to ensure robust and effective measures and arrangements.
4. The scope of the review has been to:
 - Review Current Contract Arrangements
 - Ensure that working practices and spend limits are within contract requirements.

- Ensure compliance with best practice for procurement of contracts.
 - Reduce the number of contracts and contractors currently being utilised.
 - Enhance current management arrangements of suppliers and contractors.
 - Ensure appropriate governance over all areas of contract and contractor management.
 - Review financial controls to ensure spend is controlled, budgets are met and the appropriate approvals are put in place.
5. The review of the contract and contractor arrangements is ongoing and will conclude with the implementation and commencement of a new procurement strategy for Place contractors, which will be supported by the necessary and associated management and budget controls. It is anticipated that the new arrangements will commence in April 2025.
 6. The decision was taken for an independent procurement specialist to carry out soft market testing in the Midlands area to assess what solutions and resources were available. This piece of work is still underway with a recommended strategy for the procurement of future maintenance and asset management services expected to be presented in the next 3 months, with an expected go live in April 2025.
 7. Historically, the management of all contracts within Housing had been led by one Head of Service. To enable a greater level of focus and to be led by staff with a greater understanding of the particular area of work, the responsibility for management of the contracts, budgets and associated contractors will be split and assigned to the relevant Head of Service.
 8. The Strategic Leads for Assets & Building Safety, and Property Maintenance have introduced the following to strengthen the current approach to Contractor Management:-
 - Allocated clear roles and responsibilities to the contract management team.
 - Automated ordering and routine admin tasks and processes where possible and appropriate.
 - Introduced standardised contracts using templates and monitoring documents.
 - Diarised the annual meeting cycle for all monthly Contract catchups and Core Group meetings.
 - Agreed methodologies and approaches for undertaking ordering, specifications, variations and account settlement.
 - Introduced tighter control on contractor variations.
 - Sourced and in the process of procuring a 3rd party assurance professional “Morgan Lambert” to provide oversight and assurance on contractor performance and compliance.
 - Reset the performance arrangements against each contractor to measure management KPI’s and delivery against SLA’s.

The Corporate Procurement team have recently rolled out a Contract Management Code and Contract Management Plans to be followed for contracts dependant on their categorisation as Bronze, Silver or Gold. Additionally, contract management training is available to all officers involved in the management of contracts.

9. The Corporate Procurement team have recently recruited a Procurement Business Partner (PBP) to support Housing Procurement, including leading on the delivery of the recommended strategy for the procurement of future maintenance and asset management services. In addition, the PBP will support Contract Management across the Directorate.

Finance

10. The steps taken so far have had a positive impact on the spend from the Housing Revenue Account.
11. A follow up report will be presented to the Select Committee later in the year, with a full breakdown of the financial success associated with this project.

Law

12. Legal advice may be required on contract management matters if agreements need to be varied.

Risk Management

13. The Corporate Risk Register recognises the risk that the Council may be unable to set and/or manage its budget so as to meet its statutory obligations within the resources available.
14. The forecasts and proposals in this report improve the outlook on contractor spend and management.

Equality Impact

15. The proposals take into account the Council's Policy on Equality and Diversity and Equality Impact Assessments will be completed as required where changes to service provision are proposed.
16. This report sets out improvements to the management of contracts and contractors. The changes that are being implemented won't directly impact customers, but the ramifications have the potential to impact services in a positive way as more financial resources will be available for investment in housing services.

Human Resources/Organisational Development

17. The project primarily focuses on the contracts and contractors utilised by the council. However, any reduction in the usage of contractors will impact the demand levels within the housing maintenance internal staffing resources. There is currently available capacity in resources within the maintenance service and this piece of work will contribute positively towards demonstrating better value for money of internal costs.

Commercial/Procurement

18. As set out in the body of the report, a specialist asset and maintenance procurement consultancy has been appointed to carry out soft market testing and to produce a combined procurement strategy for the Place Directorate. This body of work is underway with an anticipated completion date of April 24. The piece of work is being undertaken with colleagues within the Corporate Procurement Team.

In the last 12 months a number of new procurement policies and processes have been introduced by the Corporate Procurement Team that are still in the process of being embedded across the Housing Directorate. The PBP for Housing will work with the Housing Procurement team to ensure procurement and contract management best practice is embedded across the Directorate.

Environment/Climate Change

19. Individual projects and major schemes are assessed for their environmental impact before they commence. The Council is committed to addressing United Nations Sustainable Development Goals including those relating to poverty, health and wellbeing and reducing inequalities. The procurement of future contracts will ensure that the council's goals for sustainability are factored into the contracts where appropriate.

Council Priorities and Projects

20. This report relates to our statutory functions as a social housing landlord and will contribute to the health, wellbeing, and safety of our tenants. The report supports our aims for Housing summarised in the Council Plan:
 - the provision of excellent services for tenants
 - offering high quality housing
 - supporting vulnerable people

K. Jones

Director of Housing and Communities

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Appendices / List of Background Documents: None