

To: Deputy Leader and Members of the Resources Board

Councillors Symonds, Barnett, Chapman, Clews, Davey, Humphreys, Parsons, Simpson, Stuart, Taylor, Watson and Whapples

For the information of other Members of the Council

For general enquiries please contact Democratic Services on 01827 719226 or via email – democraticservices@northwarks.gov.

For enquiries about specific reports please contact the Officer named in the reports.

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RESOURCES BOARD AGENDA

19 JUNE 2023

The Resources Board will meet on Monday 19 June 2023 at 7.00pm in the Council Chamber at The Council House, South Street, Atherstone, Warwickshire.

The meeting can also be viewed on the Council's YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/user/northwarks

AGENDA

- 1 Evacuation Procedure.**
- 2 Apologies for Absence / Members away on official Council business.**
- 3 Disclosable Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests.**

4 **Public Participation**

Up to twenty minutes will be set aside for members of the public to put questions to elected Members.

Members of the public wishing to address the Board must register their intention to do so by 9:30am two working days prior to the meeting. Participants are restricted to five minutes each.

If you wish to put a question to the meeting, please register by email to democraticservices@northwarks.gov.uk or telephone 01827 719221/719226/719237.

Once registered to speak, the person asking the question has the option to either:

- (a) attend the meeting in person at the Council Chamber.
- (b) attend remotely via Teams; or
- (c) request that the Chair reads out their written question.

The Council Chamber has level access via a lift to assist those with limited mobility who attend in person however, it may be more convenient to attend remotely.

If attending remotely an invitation will be sent to join the Teams video conferencing for this meeting. Those registered to speak should dial the telephone number and ID number (provided on their invitation) when joining the meeting to ask their question. However, whilst waiting they will be able to hear what is being said at the meeting. They will also be able to view the meeting using the YouTube link provided (if so, they made need to mute the sound on YouTube when they speak on the phone to prevent feedback).

- 5 **Minutes of the Resources Board held on 13 March 2023** – copy herewith, to be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION AND DECISION (WHITE PAPERS)

- 6 **Resources Board - Scope and Services** – Presentation by the Corporate Director – Resources
- 7 **Internal Audit and Corporate Fraud – 2022/23 Progress Report** – Report of the Corporate Director – Resources

Summary

This report allows the Board to monitor the progress of the Council's Internal Audit function against the agreed plan of work for 2022/23. It also summarises the work undertaken by the Council's Corporate Fraud Officer during 2022/2

The Contact Officer for this report is Jane Heppel (719374)

- 8 **Disabled Facilities Grants – Housing Assistance Policy – Report of the Director of Housing**

Summary

This report submits a reviewed Housing Assistance Policy for the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants to the Board for its consideration and agreement.

The Contact Officer for this report is Angela Coates (719369)

- 9 **Policy – Dealing with Damp & Mould in Council Properties – Report of the Director of Housing**

Summary

This report presents a policy statement which provides a clear direction for services when they are dealing with damp and mould conditions in the Council's landlord stock.

The Contact Officer for this report is Angela Coates (719369)

- 10 **Members' Allowance 2022/23 – Report of the Corporate Director - Resources**

Summary

The purpose of this report is to advise Members of the allowances paid for 2022/23. The Council also has a duty to publish the amounts paid to Members under the Members' Allowance Scheme.

The Contact Officer for this report is Nigel Lane (719371)

- 11 **Asset Management Plan for the Council's Landlord Stock – Report of the Director of Housing**

This report presents a refreshed Asset Management Plan for the Council's Landlord Stock for comment and consideration.

The Contact Officer for this report is Angela Coates (719369)

STEVE MAXEY
Chief Executive

NORTH WARWICKSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES BOARD

13 March 2023

Present: Councillor Symonds in the Chair

Councillors Bell, D Clews, T Clews, Davey, Dirveiks, Hancocks, D Humphreys, Morson and M Parker

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Chambers and Simpson

47 **Disclosable Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests**

None were declared at the meeting.

48 **Minutes of the Resources Board held on 30 January 2023**

The minutes of the Resources Board held on 30 January 2023, copies having been previously circulated, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

49 **Treasury Management Strategy Statement, Minimum R24venue Provision Policy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy for 2023/4**

The Corporate Director – Resources outlined the Treasury Management Strategy, Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement and Investment Strategy for 2023/24.

Recommended:

- a **That the clauses, set out in paragraph 3.5 of the report of the Corporate Director – Resources, be adopted; and**
- b **That the proposed strategies for 2023/24 be approved.**

50 **Internal Audit Plan 2022/23 and Counter Fraud Activity**

The Corporate Director – Resources set out the proposed Internal Audit Plan for 2023/24 and updated the Board on the work of the Counter Fraud Officer.

Resolved:

That the Internal Audit Plan, attached as Appendix A to the report of the Corporate Director -Resources, be approved and the work of the Counter Fraud Officer be noted.

51 **Website Upgrade**

The Chief Executive provided Members with an update regarding the Council's website and sought approval from Members to hosting the website externally and a supplementary estimate for the growth of revenue.

Resolved:

- a That the website be hosted externally; and**

Recommendation to Executive Board:

- b That the revenue growth be approved.**

52 **Exclusion of the Public and Press**

Resolved:

That under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business, on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by Schedule 12A to the Act.

53 **Irrecoverable Debts**

The Corporate Director – Resources provided Members with details of debts which were considered to be irrecoverable.

Resolved:

That the debts detailed in Appendix A to the report of the Corporate Director – Resources, as set out below, be approved for write off:

- a Total Irrecoverable Housing Overpayment Debts £17,731.33;**
- b Total Irrecoverable Non-Domestic Rates Debts totalling £243,232.34; and**
- c Total Irrecoverable Council Tax Debts totalling £15,908.91.**

54 **Sundry Debtor Irrecoverable Debts**

The Corporate Director – Resources advised Members of debts which were considered to be irrecoverable.

Resolved:

That the debts totalling £5,852.91, as detailed in paragraph 4.4 of the report of the Corporate Director – Resources, be written off.

Councillor C Symonds
Chair

Agenda Item No 7

Resources Board

19 June 2023

**Report of the
Corporate Director - Resources**

**Internal Audit and Corporate
Fraud - 2022/23 Progress
Report**

1 Summary

- 1.1 The report allows the Board to monitor the progress of the Council's Internal Audit function against the agreed plan of work for 2022/23. It also summarises the work undertaken by the Council's Corporate Fraud Officer during 2022/23.

Recommendation to the Board

That progress against the approved Internal Audit plan at Appendices A and B be noted.

2 Progress Against the Internal Audit Plan for 2022/23

- 2.1 The Internal Audit Plan for 2022/23 year was approved by the Resources Board in June 2022. A copy of the Plan and the progress to date is attached at Appendix A.

- 2.2 The work of the team over the last two years has been affected due to significant staff turnover and retirements. This left just one staff member to carry out audits during 2022/23.

- 2.3 A summary of work completed by the Senior Auditor and the associated findings is shown in Appendix B. Where areas for improvement are identified an action plan is agreed which sets out the changes that will be introduced, the responsible officer and the target date for completion. Follow-up reviews are undertaken to ensure that agreed actions have been implemented and, where necessary, they will revise the internal audit opinion to reflect the change in the overall control system.

Due to the retirement of the former Corporate Director (Resources) and the resignation of the Corporate Director – Streetscape, agreed action plans for certain follow-up audits due in 2023/24 will need to be reassigned i.e:

- Civic Silver and Security
- Cesspool Emptying
- Corporate Governance – 2nd Follow-up

will require re-assigning to their replacement officers.

3 Counter Fraud Activity

3.1 The current Counter Fraud Officer has been employed by the Council since June 2018. This is a shared role with Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council (NBBC), with the Officer spending 40% of their time investigating fraud allegations at NWBC and 60% at NBBC. The types of fraud allegations investigated include:

- Right to Buy.
- Tenancy fraud such as sub-letting and abandonment of the property.
- Allegations of false housing applications.
- Council Tax and housing Benefit.
- Single Persons Discount and Non-Domestic Rate fraud.

3.2 The Counter Fraud Officer has continued to use a pro-active approach to investigations. For the financial year 2022/23, this has resulted in 97 fraud investigations. As a result, there have been numerous financial overpayments raised, cases of fraud prevented, 4 local authority properties have been recovered and 7 fraudulent housing applications have been prevented. The Officer has also reviewed a further 36 Right-to-Buy applications, with around 40% having either had a visit or telephone interview to investigate issues arising. As a result, 3 applications have been denied.

3.3 The Officer has identified cashable savings to the public purse of £79,258.93 and notional savings of £529,430.59. The former is mainly in relation to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Fraud.

4 Report Implications

4.1 Risk Management Implications

Failure to provide an effective Internal Audit Service may adversely affect the level of internal control operating within the Council and will attract criticism from external assessors.

4.2 Links to Council's Priorities

4.2.1 The audit programme is aligned to both the priorities of the Council and the requirements of external assessors.

The Contact Officer for this report is Jane Heppel (719374).

Background Papers

Local Government Act 1972 Section 100D, as substituted by the Local Government Act, 2000 Section 97

Background Paper No	Author	Nature of Background Paper	Date

Internal Audit Plan 2022/23

System Reviews	Timing of Review
Cleaning (HRA)	<i>Completed see Appendix B</i>
Community Centres	<i>Completed see Appendix B</i>
Procurement	<i>Completed see Appendix B</i>
Contaminated Land	<i>Completed see Appendix B</i>
Environmental Protection – Food Hygiene & Inspection	<i>Completed see Appendix B</i>
Leaseholder Management	<i>Completed see Appendix B</i>
Commercial Properties and Industrial Units *	<i>Carried forward into 2023/24</i>
Follow-up Reviews	
Insurance	Follow up carried out
Corporate Governance	Follow up carried out – requires a 2 nd Follow-Up in 2023/24
Partnerships and Shared Services	Follow up carried out
Cesspool Emptying	Due in 2023/24
Civic Silver and Security	Due in 2023/24

Summary of Internal Audit Findings – 2022/23 Audits

Community Centres

Audit Scope

To review the operating effectiveness of certain key expected controls, to mitigate key risks for the hiring out of the Council's Community Centres / Sheltered Scheme Communal Rooms [CCC / SSCRs] to voluntary and certain private groups.

Audit Findings

A '**Significant Assurance**' was given. The key expected controls are being applied in a consistent and sound manner in relation to the Council's hiring out of its Community Centre Sheltered Scheme Communal Rooms.

Cleaning (HRA)

Audit Scope

To establish the adequacy of the working arrangements and controls in place for the Housing Revenue Account estate cleaning works, undertaken by the Council's Neighbourhood Warden team, in communal spaces in flats, both internal and external, and communal rooms.

Audit Findings

A '**Significant Assurance**' was given. The key expected controls are being applied in a consistent and sound manner in relation to the Council's HRA Cleaning of its estate by its in-house Neighbourhood Wardens team.

Contaminated Land

Audit Scope

The overall scope was to ensure that the Council's Commercial Environmental Protection Team's arrangements for identifying and dealing with contaminated land in the Borough comply with the Council's legal obligations under the Environmental Protection Act [EPA] 1990 and the Contaminated Land (England) Regulations 2012.

Audit Findings

A '**satisfactory**' assurance was given. The key expected controls for the Council's arrangements (as an enforcing authority) for identifying and dealing with contaminated land in the Borough were operating as required. However, the Contaminated Land Inspection Strategy and the fees and charges published on the Council's website needs updating.

Procurement

Audit Scope

To review the operating effectiveness of certain key expected controls, to help mitigate key potential risks to the Council in relation to its procurement arrangements.

Audit Findings

A '**Satisfactory Assurance**' level was given. There is a need to update the Contract Standing Orders to reflect recent changes in staffing and the UK's exit from the European Union and to recommence periodic quality assurance checks on procurement activity undertaken. Work is already underway to streamline the compilation and maintenance of the annual contracts register and this needs to ensure that all requirements under the Transparency Code are complied with. Consideration is being given to the benefits of making a master list of corporate contracts available for senior officers.

Environmental Health – Food Hygiene & Inspections

Audit Scope

To assess the operating effectiveness of controls in place to mitigate key risks to the Council's 'Food Hygiene and Inspection' duties in relation to registered food business premises operating in the Borough of North Warwickshire, in accordance with the Food Safety Act 1990 (as amended), Food Safety and Hygiene (England) Regulations 2013, other applicable food hygiene legislation and regulations and compliance with the Food Law Code of Practice 2021 issued by the Food Standards Agency [FSA].

Audit Findings

A '**Satisfactory Assurance**' was given. The main factors preventing a 'substantial' assurance at the time of the audit in early 2023, were:

- Due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions imposed by central government during 2020/21 through to 2022/23 and the need for social distancing, certain food premises hygiene inspections had to be postponed by the Food Safety Officer [FSO] Team. The FSO team had to be redeployed, tasked with the enforcement of Coronavirus Regulations. This was typical of the national position affecting local authorities throughout England. This resulted in a backlog of food premises awaiting a routine hygiene inspection. In recognition of this, the Food Standards Agency [FSA] updated its **Covid-19 Local Authority Recovery Plan** on 14th July 2022, providing a framework for re-starting the delivery system in line with the Code of Practice, targeted at new and higher risk and/or non-compliant food establishments.

The ability of the Council's FSO team to address these backlogs was being further constrained by the one FTE staff vacancy during 2022/23. Thus, inspection visits or other interventions at lower risk category (D and E rated) food premises in the Borough were understandably sometimes taking place later than their scheduled inspection due date, in line with the FSA Covid -19 Local Authority Recovery Plan.

- The Council's reporting to the Community & Environment Board of two local performance indicators relating to food premises hygiene inspections had to be suspended due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and associated restrictions. Consequently, the FSO team were following the national '**Food Standards Agency Recovery Plan**' [FSA-RP] which for local authorities [LA] in England covered the period 1st July 2021 to 31st March 2023.

Going forward, the Foods Standards Agency, as detailed in its **FSA 22-06-17 Local Authority [LA] Performance Update**, is proposing the development of a new Key Performance Indicator framework, due to its view that "the Local Authority Monitoring System [LAEMS] to capture food law enforcement activity is outdated. This is part of a wider 'Local Authority Data Collection Project', to develop KPIs for two new delivery models (food hygiene and food standards) for rapidly changing business landscapes, using best practice as laid out by the National Audit Office, to develop a robust method of comparing performance, drive improvements and identify and share good practice."

- A few other minor improvements to strengthen control were also recommended and actions agreed as result of the audit review.

Leaseholder Management

Audit Scope

To review the operating effectiveness of certain key expected controls in place, to help mitigate certain potential risks to the Council in relation to its Housing Revenue Account [HRA] 'leaseholder property management' [LM] arrangements. *Note this audit excluded coverage of the Council's commercial properties and industrial units, which is to be covered in 2023/24.*

Audit Findings

A '**Significant Assurance**' was given.

New guidance via the **Leasehold Reform (Ground Rent Act 2022: Guidance for Leaseholders, Landlords and Managing Agents**, was published by central government on 23rd June 2022. Essentially, this Act "puts an end to ground rents for most **new** long residential leasehold properties in England and Wales". It states that "From 30 June 2022, landlords of regulated leases must not require a leaseholder to make a payment of prohibited rent". The peppercorn limit generally only applies to new residential leases that were granted after commencement of the Act, that is leases granted on or after 30 June 2022. If you bought a new (regulated) lease after this date you will not be faced with financial demands for ground rent."

At NWBC, the Financial Services Manager [FSM] confirmed no new residential lease agreements had been entered into on, or after, 30th June 2022 by the Council, as a landlord.

A few cases identified whereby annual service charges and ground rents for leaseholder properties were in arrears, with recovery action in progress. A few other minor actions to strengthen control were agreed with the FSM.

Assurance Level	Definition
Significant	There is a sound system of internal controls that are being consistently applied
Satisfactory	There is basically a sound system of internal controls although there are some minor weaknesses and/or there is evidence that the level of non-compliance may put some minor system objectives at risk.
Limited	There are some weaknesses in the adequacy of the internal control system and/or the level of non-compliance puts some of the system objectives at risk.
No Assurance	Control is weak leaving the system open to significant error or abuse and/or there is significant non-compliance with basic controls.

Agenda Item 8

Resources Board

19 June 2023

Report of the Director of Housing

Disabled Facilities Grants – Housing Assistance Policy

1 Summary

This report submits a reviewed Housing Assistance Policy for the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants to the Board for its consideration and agreement.

Recommendation to the Resources Board

- a That the revised Housing Assistance Policy be considered; and**
- b That the new funding arrangements for grant provision set out in the Policy be approved**

2 Consultation

- 2.1 The HEART Partnership Board has considered the revised Policy and is recommending that it be approved by all partner Authorities. The Policy provides for a positive approach to ensuring that residents who need home adaptations can access the help that they require.

3 Background

- 3.1 The HEART shared service was established in March 2017. A new partnership agreement is in place from 1 April 2023 and has an initial 5 year term. The HEART contract is between the 5 Warwickshire Districts and Boroughs and Warwickshire County Council. Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council is the host for the service.

- 3.2 The aim of the Business Case for the **Home Environment Assessment and Response Team (HEART)** service is:

“To provide customers with the advice and information to help them make the right choice, and provide practical help to deliver the right housing solution when they want it”

and the vision for the shared service is:

“To be the service of choice for advice, assistance and interventions to adapt or improve the home environment to enable activities of daily living and protect and improve the health, safety and wellbeing of residents to prevent, reduce or delay greater needs arising.”

- 3.3 In March 2022 the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Department of Health and Social Care published guidance for ‘Disabled Facilities Grant delivery’. The Guidance reflects on the legal framework for grants and encourages Local Authorities to act in partnership to improve their services. Arrangements for HEART anticipated most of the best practice encouraged in the Guidance. The professional body for Home Improvement Agencies is Foundations. They delivered the report for Government and their Chief Executive Officer is the independent Chair for the HEART Board. The relationship enables a positive two way exchange on how best to deliver these important services.
- 3.4 There has been significant progress to bring 6 Authorities together to provide for one, holistic service for customers. The level of partnership working to deliver Disabled Facility Grants and adaptations was commended as sector leading when it was implemented. It remains largely unique in its level of integration.

4 Housing Assistance Policy

- 4.1 The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 places a statutory duty on Local Authorities to help disabled people qualifying for home adaptations. These works (called eligible works) must be considered “necessary and appropriate” to meet their needs and “reasonable and practical” regarding the age and condition of the property. These are called Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs).
- 4.2 As well as these mandatory grants, Local Authorities also have the general power under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (the RRO) to give assistance for home repairs, improvements, and adaptations for the purpose of improving living conditions in its area.
- 4.3 District and Borough Councils set out their intentions for grant funding in their Housing Assistance Policy. This balances out the needs of residents against budget availability. Where budget is available a Policy can be more generous than means tests and grant caps set out in the legislation. Since 2018 the HEART Partnership has had a single Policy to deliver grant funding. The Housing Assistance Policy attached at Appendix A of this report is the revised, joint Housing Assistance Policy for HEART. It sets out a shared approach to providing housing assistance for improving the living conditions of residents.
- 4.4 The mandatory Disabled Facility Grant arrangements set out in the legislation remain the basis of the Policy however grant levels in the national system

have not changed for many years. Government has a stated intention to improve this position but has not done so yet. The HEART Board is keen to have a Policy which accounts for increased costs due to inflation, support the wider health and social care system and use the opportunity of the sustained provision of Government grant to fund Disabled Facilities Grants. The revised Policy provides for a more generous grant award system than is given in the legislation. It includes a change to the means test as well as the level of grant available to deliver an intervention. This is allowed for (and encouraged) as part of the Regulatory Reform Order referred to above as it enables Councils to reflect local circumstances.

4.5 After the required needs assessment has been undertaken the following grants arrangements support the delivery of home adaptations or improvements.

- Following the assessment of need the legislation requires a means test to be applied for the grant application. To allow for adaptation such as stair lifts to be delivered to more applicants and without delay the Policy allows for a cost of adaptation sum of £7,500 granted before a means test is undertaken.
- In some complex cases the grant allowance of £30,000 provided in the legislation is insufficient. The current policy allows for an additional £10,000 to be given to top up the national, mandatory grant. Recent price increases mean that for larger, more complex cases the level of funding can be insufficient. The new Policy allows for both the grant and loan elements to be £20,000, meaning that a total of £70,000 would be available for works and fees.
- The current policy allows for a £500 non means tested grant to be given for small home improvement (eg grab rails, key safe, adjusting a step) following a home safety check visit. The revised Policy allows for £1000 to be available to any resident over the age of 55 or who are disabled.
- HEART delivers a holistic assessment of a home environment. This means that an intervention can be to improve the home (with a new heating boiler for example) as well as provide an adaptation. For the Warm and Safer Homes (WaSH) Grant the HEART Board is proposing a grant of £10,000 grant with a further £10,000 available as a 0% non-repayment loan which would be placed as an indefinite land charge against the property to be re-paid upon sale under all circumstances.

4.6 The majority of grant funded adaptations are stairlifts, level access showers and ramps. In 2022/2023 45 adaptations were delivered in the private sector. Social care equipment is also provided by the service. Home improvement services are delivered as part of the holistic home assessment service offer as well as home safety grants.

4.7 The Policy will be kept under review by the HEART Board to ensure that it is receptive to demands on the service and budget availability. It can be reviewed whenever necessary but certainly annually in conjunction with the

consideration of budgets for the service. Minor changes to the policy may be approved in accordance with District and Borough governance requirements. Major changes to the policy will require the approval using the partner Authority's governance arrangements. Nonetheless it is the intention that the policy remains consistent across the 5 districts of Warwickshire.

5 Report Implications

5.1 Financial and Value for Money

5.1.1 Government continues to provide funding for Disabled Facilities Grants which meet the mandatory scheme. Councils can also provide discretionary grants as appropriate and set out in an agreed policy statement. The grant award for North Warwickshire for 2022/2023 is £771,304. At the end of January 2023 the capital funding available to the Council to spend on adaptations in the private sector was £1.36m. In addition, the Housing Revenue Account provides a budget of £191,280 annually for adaptations required in the Council's own stock.

5.1.2 The grant provision is part of Government Better Together funding which is paid to the County Council. The mandatory grant is given directly to the Boroughs and Districts from the County Council and supports the provision of Disabled Adaptation Grants however it is not ring fenced entirely for that provision and, when a formal policy statement is agreed, it can be used for home improvement grants and to support hospital discharge arrangements. The joint Housing Financial Assistance Policy provides a clear framework for spending the grant. This has been reviewed by the Partnership and when agreed by all parties will be implemented from September 2023

5.1.3 The requirements for the Better Care Fund are set out in the Government's "Integration and Better Care Fund planning requirements for 2017-19". Adherence to these requirements is overseen by the Health and Well Being Board.

5.1.4 The Council employs one member of staff (a Housing Assessment Officer) as part of the HEART structure.

5.1.5 The delivery of this assistance policy is tied closely with budget/ Government grant available to the Council. As a consequence its policy objectives will be kept closely under review in conjunction with the quarterly budget reports submitted to the HEART Board by the Host Authority.

5.2 Legal and Human Rights Implications

5.2.1 As set out in the body of the report, the Housing Grants, (Construction and Regeneration Act 1996) states that a local authority *must* approve grants for adaptations to meet particular needs of those with disabilities if various provisions are met. These are:

- (a) that, in the case of an owner of a property, they have an interest in the property as an owner;
- (b) that the relevant works are necessary and appropriate to meet the needs of the disabled occupier; and,
- (c) that it is reasonable and practicable to carry out the works having regard to the age and condition of the dwelling, caravan, houseboat, or building concerned.

In determining point (b) above, the Council must consult the Social Services authority for the area concerned. This usually comprises an assessment by an Occupational Therapist or Social Worker who will make appropriate recommendations.

- 5.2.2 The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 contains a broader power which may be available to undertake works where the conditions set out in paragraph 5.2.1 are not met. This power also allows the Council to incur expenditure to carry out such adaptations to its own properties when the tenant has a disability which requires such assistance.
- 5.2.3 Formal guidance on delivery was provided in March 2022 by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Department of Health and Social Care entitled 'Disabled Facilities Grant Delivery' which local authorities must consider in exercising its functions under either of these powers.
- 5.2.4 The partnership arrangements also ensure that all the Local Authorities involved can meet their obligation to co-operate with Social Services authorities to assess need under the Care Act 2014 .
- 5.2.5 The shared service provisions must comply with Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972 and the Local Government (Arrangements for the Discharge of Functions) (England) Regulations 2012 specifically, in addition to any contractual arrangements between the authorities concerned, the Council must delegate the relevant functions to the host authority so that officers appointed to deliver the services may lawfully exercise those functions. Only Full Council may delegate functions to another local authority. Accordingly, if Board agrees to renew the current arrangement, it will also need to recommend that Council delegates these functions accordingly. The requirement to review and affirm these delegations is further emphasised by the implementation of additional legislation since the arrangements were initially made.
- 5.2.6 The "Integration and Better Care Fund planning requirements document for 2017 -19" explicitly states that the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 enables authorities to use specific funding for wider purposes and it invites Council to act to use the funding to improve delivery and reduce bureaucracy involved in the grant application process. The HEART arrangements and proposed Policy further that purpose.

5.3 Environment and Sustainability Implications

5.3.1 By supporting people to be able to live independently the Council is contributing directly towards a healthier communities' priority.

5.3.2 Improvements to the HEART and continued delivery of this service should provide our customers with consistent information, advice and adaptations that will assist in improving their quality of life.

5.4 Equality Implications

5.4.1 The aim of the HEART is to improve the delivery of the Disabled Facilities Grants service both in quality and timescales and offer a holistic assessment which is much more than just delivering adaptations. This should result in a positive impact for people with disabilities and other service users sharing the protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010.

5.4.2 The service aims to improve the quality of life and social justice for residents in the north of the County, so it is much closer to that enjoyed by the rest of Warwickshire. It also aims to provide a choice of housing to meet the needs of the residents of the Borough. In addition, we are working in partnership to improve health and reduce health inequalities for residents in the Borough

5.6 Risk Management

5.6.1 The Council requires the grant funding provided by Government to deliver its mandatory duties to provide Disabled Facilities Grants. The use of grant for wider purposes could put the funding for this specific duty at risk. However, this is recognised in the partnership documentation and the service will always act to provide funding for mandatory grants.

The Contact Officer for this report is Angela Coates (719369).

Background Papers

Local Government Act 1972 Section 100D, as substituted by the Local Government Act, 2000 Section 97

Background Paper No	Author	Nature of Background Paper	Date
Disabled Facilities Grant delivery – Guidance for Local Authorities	DLUHC & Department of Health and Social Care	Government Guidance	2022

Housing Assistance Policy 2023-2026

Date of Issue :	24 April 2023	Next Review :	September 2024	
Last Reviewed by				
Policy Owner	Partner Local Authorities / HEART Management Board			
Approval Date				
Author				
Version Control				
Document ID.				

Version History

Version	Author	Date	Changes
Final	Angela Coates	3 May 2023	Final draft agreed by Board

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This policy is a shared housing financial assistance policy for all the districts and boroughs within Warwickshire, namely, North Warwickshire Borough Council, Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council, Rugby Borough Council, Warwick District Council and Stratford on Avon District Council (known as ‘the authorities’ for the purpose of this policy). It sets out their shared approach to providing housing assistance for improving living conditions for residents. The policy has been developed in Partnership with Warwickshire County Council, as the Care Authority, and aims to support some of the most vulnerable people in the County by providing a framework for financial assistance under the provisions of the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002. This policy seeks to make the best use of available resources and achieve added value wherever possible that demonstrates improvements in residents’ health, safety, and wellbeing at home.
- 1.2 The authorities that are partners in the Home Environment Assessment and Response Team (HEART) will deliver the support outlined within this policy. This service has delegated powers to act on behalf of the authorities with respect to the delivery of support under this policy and therefore, unless stated otherwise, any reference to ‘the authorities’ is the HEART partnership.
- 1.3 This policy updates and replaces all previously published policies and has been reviewed following changes in both national guidance, the Government social care White Paper publications and changes in the operational landscape (including increases in costs and funding available).
- 1.4 The policy will be reviewed annually by the HEART Management Board and if appropriate amended with approval sought by the District and Boroughs as required.
- 1.5 The Councils can publish a separate policy or addendum to this policy to incorporate other forms of financial assistance for delivery within their own areas by other teams or services.

Context

Legal Context

- 2.0 The **Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996** (the 1996 Act) places a statutory duty on Local Authorities to help disabled people qualifying for home adaptations. These works (called eligible works) must be considered “necessary and appropriate” to meet their needs and “reasonable and practical” regarding the age and condition of the property. These are called Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs).
- 2.1 As well as these mandatory grants, Local Authorities also have the general power under the **Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002** (the RRO) to give assistance for home repairs, improvements, and adaptations for the purpose of improving living conditions in its area.

- 2.2 Capital grant funding is passported to local housing authorities from the Better Care Fund (BCF) which combines money from health, social care and housing budgets to deliver health and care services. Any assistance provided from this fund must only be used for the specific purpose of funding adaptations for disabled people who qualify for a Disabled Facilities Grant made under the 1996 Act or for other forms of assistance provided to any persons under the RRO that meet agreed objectives.
- 2.3 The **Care Act 2014** requires local authorities to identify, provide and arrange services, facilities and resources to prevent, delay or reduce the needs of individuals either for care or support. This includes home adaptations.
- 2.4 The **Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970** places a duty to assist disabled children and young people 'in arranging for the carrying out of any works of adaptation in [their home] or the provision of any additional facilities designed to secure [their] greater safety, comfort or convenience' (Section 2). This duty arises where the authority has assessed the need for the specific adaptations.
- 2.5 In addition, **National guidance** (Safeguarding Disabled Children –Practice Guidance (2009) and Working Together to Safeguard Children - A guide to inter-agency work safeguard & promotes the welfare of children (2010)) also informs practice in respect of a local authority's duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people.
- 2.6 Under the **Housing Act 2004**, Local Authorities have a duty to keep housing conditions under review, including having regard to and taking action to reduce hazards that might be dangerous or prejudicial to health.
- 2.7 The **2022 DFG Guidance** jointly published by the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) provides new guidance on developing a adaptations and RRO policy. It has been considered whilst writing this Housing Financial Assistance Policy.

Local Strategic Context

- 2.8 Each individual local housing authority has its own strategic objectives which are reflected in the priorities for this assistance policy. The policy also seeks to support the County-wide shared objectives of the Better Care Fund (BCF) Plan. The BCF plan states that "*Creating a home environment that supports people to live safely and independently can make a significant contribution to health and wellbeing, and is an integral part of our integration plans, and strategic use of the DFG can support this.*"
- 2.9 The authorities are working collaboratively through this policy to deliver services to support vulnerable residents to remain living safely in their homes for as long as possible.

3.0 General Policy Principles

- 3.1 The principle of the policy is that all residents in the County should have access to a safe and warm home, free from major hazards that meets their needs. The primary responsibility to maintain private homes lies with the owner. The Authorities will support owners in fulfilling this responsibility by providing advice, support, and assistance to enable them to make use of their own resources to fund repairs and improvements. They will only provide financial assistance where this is not possible

or practical or where it is a statutory requirement. The Council will assist residents who are owners and tenants to remain living independently within their homes within the scope of this policy.

3.2 Applicants for assistance must:

- be aged 18 or over, although applications for grants can be made on behalf of children under the age of 18 by a parent or guardian, and
- be a UK citizen, and resident in the County.

3.3 Funding calculations are based on what is considered by the authorities to be a reasonable price for necessary work (known as the eligible expense). Eligible expense will always exclude labour where works are carried out by the applicant, or a member of their family as set out in the Act. This applies to works provided under the RRO.

3.4 Where financial assistance is provided, the eligible expense will include necessary associated costs such as building and planning fees, Architect, private Occupational Therapist and other professional fees and agency advice service costs as detailed in the legislation and applies across these policy interventions.

3.5 Ongoing maintenance and repair of home improvements, adaptations and equipment provided through this policy will become the responsibility of the applicant, owner or landlord.

3.6 Payment will only be made if acceptable invoices are submitted upon completion or throughout the work.

3.7 Financial assistance cannot be given retrospectively. Applicants are strongly advised not to start any eligible work before their application for assistance is approved.

3.8 Payment will normally be made direct to the main contractor(s) not their sub-contractors or grant applicant(s) though HEART reserves the right to pay the appropriate person where disputes occur.

3.9 Where the applicant decides to apply directly to the Council without using the HEART service the Authority reserves the right not to process and application in accordance with the legislation placing the onus on the applicant. Once approval has been given the applicant has 12 months from the date of the approval in which to complete the works, unless otherwise stated.

3.10 A fee is charged when HEART manage the delivery of the adaptation. The fee is agreed by the HEART Board, is kept under review and published on the HEART website information.

4.0 Customer Feedback

4.1 Customer feedback is collected to inform the service. To support this Policy customer experiences will be shared with the HEART Management Board so that concerns and observations about the effectiveness of the policy can be assessed.

5.0 Equality and Diversity

- 5.1 The authorities are committed to fulfilling their roles as an employer, service provider, purchaser of goods and services and community leader without discrimination. This policy will be applied fairly and give equal treatment regardless of age, disability, gender, sexual orientation, transgender status/gender reassignment, race, and religion/belief. All members, employees and agents of the authorities must seek to eliminate discrimination and promote equality and good relations between all groups. The Authority's equality information can be found on the individual authority's websites.
- 5.2 This policy is particularly relevant for anyone who has a disability or long-term condition. Its aim is to ensure that people have a safe and suitable home so that they can live independently in their current home for as long as is possible.
- 5.3 The Authorities will record and consider data where supplied to gain insight on the impact of this policy on diverse customers and help improve operational processes

6.0 Priorities and capital resources

- 6.1 Since 2015 the Disabled Facilities Grant allocation has been paid by Government to local authorities through the Better Care Fund to support integration between health, social care and housing services.
- 6.2 The importance of the DFG has been recognised by increased budget allocations to a county-wide allocation of £5,124,786 (2022) annually. This level of funding has been confirmed for 2023/2024.
- 6.3 The grant allocation is used to fund the assistance set out in this policy. The HEART Management Board receive budget reports quarterly and keep demand and spend under review. Annually the Board agrees the budgets for the forthcoming year.

7.0 Summary of Types of Assistance available

The following assistance is available through this policy:

7.1 Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants

Grants that local authorities must make available to residents who meet the required qualification criteria as set out in the 1996 Act, and the accompanying regulations and subsequent amendments.

7.2 Additional Discretionary Support for Mandatory DFG Applicants:

The following grants are discretionary and are offered subject to Council funding and resources available at the time:

7.2.1 Discretionary Disabled Facilities Assistance

7.2.2 Discretionary Contribution Support Grant

Where a discretionary element is being applied to top up a Disabled Facilities Grant it will be included on one approval notice.

7.3 Other Assistance

The following grants and assistance are discretionary and are offered subject to Council funding and resources available at the time:

Warm and Safer Homes (WaSH) Grant

Hospital Discharge Grant

Home Safety Grant

Energy Efficiency Support & Referral

As part of this Policy, following an assessment, funding is made available to cover the likely costs of stairlifts and ramps without the requirement for a means test.

Additional forms of assistance may be developed and added to a revised policy at a future date.

Further details of the assistance types are within the appendices to this policy. The table below provides a summary of the assistance available through this policy.

Additional Discretionary Support for Mandatory DFG Applicants				
Grant	Max Amount	Is a Financial Means Test Required?	Who is Eligible?	How is Eligibility assessed?
<p>Discretionary Disabled Facilities Assistance</p> <p>To top-up a mandatory DFG where cost of eligible work exceeds the maximum grant (currently £30,000)</p> <p>The grant can be used to pay fees.</p> <p>The assistance can be used to support applicants to move where their home is unsuitable for adaptations</p>	<p>£20,000 Grant</p> <p>And up to</p> <p>£20,000 Loan</p>	<p>No additional means test to that carried out in addition to the Mandatory DFG means test</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disabled applicants who are owner-occupiers, private/ housing association tenants. • Parents/guardians applying on behalf of children under 19 years old. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The applicant has been assessed as eligible for a mandatory DFG and the cost of the DFG eligible works is in excess of the maximum DFG grant.
<p>Discretionary Contribution Support Grant</p> <p>Please refer to flow chart at Appendix C</p> <p>This helps applicants who may otherwise would not be able to proceed because of the means tested contribution. This supports wider social care & health objectives.</p>	<p>£30,000</p>	<p>No additional means test to that carried out for the Mandatory DFG</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disabled applicants who are owner-occupiers, private or housing association tenants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The applicant has been assessed as eligible for a DFG. • The first £7,500 of any assessed contribution will automatically be eligible for funding. It is anticipated that this will cover the cost of stairlifts and ramps in most cases and other adaptations up to this amount can be considered. • Where the eligible works are likely to be below £7500 then no means test will be carried out. • Unforeseen works will be funded without a further means test.

Other Assistance				
Grant	Max Amount	Is a Financial Means Test Required?	Who is Eligible?	How is Eligibility assessed?
Warm and Safer Homes (WaSH) Grant	£20,000	The qualifying financial criteria are at Appendix D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eligible owner-occupiers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The applicant must be an owner occupier and must meet the financial eligibility criteria Only 1 grant will be awarded in any 5 year period The applicant must have owned the property for 5-years prior to grant award
Hospital Discharge Grant	£10,000	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eligible disabled or vulnerable residents as assessed by the referrer and HEART team members 	<p>The works must be required to :</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Enable faster discharge from hospital Reduce the risk of re-admission Address significant difficulties in providing safe and dignified home-based care
Home Safety Grant Scheme	Home Safety matters considered and up to £1,000 for works.	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any resident aged 55 years or over Any household which includes a disabled person 	The Home Safety Check is available to all eligible residents. Preventative works will be funded to where no Care Act need has been identified

8.0 How assistance is delivered

Option 1 – HEART Managed Process

8.1.1 By agreement the HEART Service can fully assist the customer with the application process. The Team will work with the customer to do an assessment of circumstances and complete an application as well arrange for the delivery of the eligible works. For many customers this can be the easiest option.

8.1.2 The Team will:

- Carry out a needs assessment of person and property
- Where applicable, assess the applicant's financial circumstances in accordance with the statutory **means test or local financial criteria** which will identify any contribution to be paid towards the cost of the works or whether the applicant qualifies.
- Discuss how the adaptations / eligible works can be provided in the home and what building works or alterations are required to provide them.
- Agree the eligible works and arrange an Architect to design extensions and seek planning permission or building regulations approval if required.
- Assist in the completion of the application process for the DFG.
- Arrange contractors and seek quotes and specifications.
- Help to oversee the works on site on behalf of the applicant.
- Consider unforeseen works for additional grant assistance.
- Agree payments with the customer and ensure the customer receives appropriate certificates and guarantees.

Option 2 – Customers own Contractor Process

8.2 This option is where an applicant may wish to use the services of the HEART service to assist with their application for DFG or other assistance. An Architect may be appointed to provide drawings and consider planning permission requirements from HEARTS framework. However the customer can seek their own architectural services.

8.3 The customer is responsible seeking at least 2 quotes from contractors sourced by themselves and for managing the works. Advice and guidance can be provided.

Option 3 – Customer Managed Process

8.4 This option is where an applicant may wish to complete all elements of the application, supporting information and sourcing professional and contractor services themselves. An applicant can use their own Architect or draftsman and contractors to plan, develop or build a preferred scheme that meets the needs identified by the local authority. Any grant provided will be on the basis of meeting the assessed needs only and at a basic level of design fixtures and fittings.

9.0 HEART Contractors

9.1 The HEART service maintains a framework of contractors that undertake grant funded works. The procurement arrangements accord with the HOST authority Contract Standing Orders.

HEART has several types of contractors and specialist services within its supply chain. These include

- Architects
- Asbestos surveying companies
- Stair lift manufacturers and installers
- Bathroom installers
- Ramp installers

9.2 HEART effectively links contractors and suppliers with applicants that receive a grant and the contractual relationship is set out in the terms of the HEART agreement document signed by customers. Nonetheless there is a relationship between the contractor and HEART / HOST authority in conjunction with the applicant and HEART will work with customers and contractors to try to resolve issues that arise from HEART sourced contractors.

9.3 Each job that is intrusive to the building fabric will be subject to an asbestos survey to determine if specialist removal or precautions are necessary to complete the job. This survey will be paid from the capital grant irrespective of whether work progresses as will other specialist survey or design works where the grant works do not progress.

10.0 Fees and Ancillary charges

10.1 The Council will consider reasonable fees for financial assistance. The following fees will be eligible for financial assistance if they have been properly incurred in making and processing an application or delivering the eligible works.

- Confirmation, if sought by the Council, that the applicant has a relevant owner interest
- Relevant legal fees
- Technical and structural surveys
- Design and preparation of plans and drawings
- Preparation of schedules of relevant works
- Assistance in completing forms.
- Applications for building regulations approval (including application fee and preparation of related documents), planning permission, listed building consent and conservation area consent (and similar)
- Activities associated with contractors and the obtaining of estimates
- Consideration of tenders
- Liaison between customer and contractor regarding the relevant works and troubleshooting.
- Framework contract management
- Disconnection and reconnection of utilities where necessitated by relevant works
- Payment of contractors

- 10.2 Where the above services are provided by HEART they are included within the service fee which will be levied at the percentage rate agreed by the HEART Management Board.
- 10.3 Fee's will be paid in addition to the financial assistance limits but will not be levied on grants with a non-time limited land-charge so they do not become repayable.

11.0 Prioritisation of Case Types

- 11.1 For most cases the Council will prioritise cases in in chronological order of receipt of enquiry.
- 11.2 If appropriate the team will instigate a triage process to escalate an urgent case. The triage process has regard to the criteria outlined in the 2022 DFG Guidance¹
- Coming out of hospital and at risk
 - Living alone and deemed at significant risk
 - Severe cognitive dysfunction and at risk
 - Living with a carer who is elderly or disabled
 - Living without heating or hot water and at risk
 - Limited life expectancy,
 - The property subject of the enquiry is in such a condition as to present an immediate and significant danger to the occupants or visitors.
- 11.3 Cases which are consulted on with other agencies will be dealt with as required as there is often a long lead in period e.g. home suitability cases or children's adaptations. Where a property, case, customer, or category of assistance is to be considered outside of chronological order when not deemed an urgent case, the HEART Team Manager / Private Sector Housing Manager will sanction the action and a written record will be retained on file in justification of that decision. Where a case can be delivered at the initial enquiry stage for example a home safety provision of equipment or minor adaptations then these will be directly issued by the duty team to remove undue delays for straightforward solutions.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disabled-facilities-grant-dfg-delivery-guidance-for-local-authorities-in-england>

11.4 All enquiries will be allocated a priority of 'Standard' or 'Urgent' upon assessment and applicants may request a review of their priority by the Assessing Officer if they believe their needs to have changed at any time in the process. To meet the needs of certain cases HEART has triage process so that urgent cases can be escalated. The following list is not exhaustive. It is intended to provide guidance as to when an enquiry could be considered urgent. The target date for completing an urgent assessment is 2 weeks.

- Life limiting condition – e.g. Motor Neurone Disease, Huntington's disease.
- End of life where an adaptation or repair is required
- Palliative diagnosis where an adaptation or repair is required
- High risk to health / safety / wellbeing
- High risk of informal / formal carer breakdown
- High risk to informal / formal carer health and safety
- The condition of the property results in a high risk
- No fixed form of heating from November to March
- No hot water supply in the property
- Works are necessary to facilitate discharge from hospital or nursing or residential care
- An adaptation is required to facilitate an essential aspect of care / treatment. e.g. a ramp is required to facilitate wheelchair access in and out of the property for regular hospital treatment such as dialysis.
- Severe cognitive dysfunction that results in a high-risk situation
- Unable to access some essential facilities and lives alone, no formal / informal support
- Adaptations required to enable a care package to commence and there is no other alternative, this could result in a risk of hospital admission
- Some safeguarding matters, depending on nature

12.0 Complaints

- 12.1 The HEART Partnership Agreement provides for the HOST's complaints procedure to be used in the first instance. If the customer is not happy with the response given the Local Authority providing the grant funding will be involved in considering the first stage of the complaint and will respond independently at stage 2 of the procedure. The complaints procedure is shown on Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council's website or can be obtained from their customer services team.

13.0 Service standards, Key Targets

- 13.1 There is no national standard for the services provided through this policy excepting a statutory requirement for Councils to determine valid and fully made applications for mandatory DFG within six months. This does not account for pre-application activities such as the screening process and the 'application support' and administration including occupational therapy assessment, means testing, producing specifications, finding contractors. Some delays may be caused by documentation not being provided or decisions made by the applicant.
- 13.2 Legislation requires that works be completed within 12 months of any DFG grant approval being issued, but this can be extended by negotiation if there are valid reasons to do so, such as the customer receiving care, occasional changes in contractor or specification, complex snagging etc.
- 13.3 Locally, the service aims to apply the funding it receives fully each year with minimal waiting lists whilst maximising the outcome for customers.
- 13.4 The HEART Team is committed to ensuring good quality customer service and the performance measures used are based around measuring and improving the quality of service and customer outcomes as well as ensuring improvements in the speed of service delivery.

14.0 Review of the policy

- 14.1 The Policy may be reviewed whenever necessary but certainly annually in conjunction with the consideration of budgets for the service. Minor changes to the policy may be approved in accordance with District and Borough governance requirements. Major changes to the policy will require the approval using the partner Authority's governance arrangements. It is the intention that the policy remains consistent across the 5 districts of Warwickshire.

15.0 Special Cases Panel

- 15.1 The Special Cases Panel will consist of senior officers from HEART. At least one of them should be the Head of Home Environment Services or the HEART Manager.
- 15.2 The Panel will meet as required to review complex cases requiring additional funding and applications for specific additional discretionary assistance.
- 15.3 This Panel will also review all cases where applicants wish to appeal a decision regarding their case if they believe that their circumstances are not fully reflected within the scope of this policy and how it is implemented.
- 15.4 Residents can appeal where if their particular circumstances are not adequately reflected through the existing policy. The claim can only be successful if they establish to the satisfaction of the Panel that their case falls within the following criteria:
- Failure to carry out works will place the applicants or existing family's health and safety at immediate risk;
 - The applicant or member of their family has a specific and serious medical condition or disability – including mental health – which is being aggravated by the existing condition of the property and the provision of assistance would significantly improve the condition;
 - The condition of the house will imminently prevent the ability of the existing family to continue to live together;
 - The condition of the property will lead to the intervention of other statutory services, thereby causing additional expenditure from other public sources e.g. children being taken into care;
 - The work would be of wider benefit than to the applicant and their family e.g. where other properties are affected.
- 15.5 In all the above cases:
- The applicant has no means by which they could reasonably be expected to fund the work, either privately or with 'welfare' assistance, and
 - The assisted works must significantly reduce the problems under the above criteria, described by the applicant or identified by the Council
- 15.6 Where an appeal is successful the assistance offered may be one of the types contained within this policy or a variation.

16.0 Prioritisation of Assistance

This policy includes both mandatory and discretionary assistance. It also helps remove housing hazards that local authorities have a statutory duty to take action to help reduce the risk from. Capital resources to fund the assistance within the policy are limited and at times it may be necessary for the provision of discretionary assistance will need to be curtailed or suspended when budget forecasts suggest that mandatory grants will need to be prioritised to ensure they are funded.

Under the delegated responsibilities from each Local Authority it has been agreed that for budgetary reasons the responsible officer within the authority can suspend the discretionary assistance in consultation with the relevant Board Member. This will be in the form of a delegated officer decision and will be published on the Councils' website.

The priority hierarchy is as follows:

- 1 Mandatory DFG
- 2 Discretionary DFG
- 3 Warm and Safer Homes Grants
- 4 Hospital Discharge Grants
- 5 Home Safety Grant
- 6 Contribution Support Grant

17.0 Key definitions, references, and abbreviations

RRO – Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2002/1860/article/3/made>

The 'Act' (1996) – Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/53/contents>

The 'Guidance' (2022) – National DFG Guidance published March 2022 by Government
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disabled-facilities-grant-dfg-delivery-guidance-for-local-authorities-in-england>

DFG – Disabled Facilities Grant.

DDFA – Discretionary Disabled Facilities Assistance

BCF – Better Care Fund

WCC – Warwickshire County Council

NBBC – Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council

NWBC – North Warwickshire Borough Council

RBC – Rugby Borough Council

SoADC – Stratford on Avon District Council

WDC – Warwick District Council

HEART – Home Environment Assessment and Response Team

DLUHC – Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

HHSRS – the Housing Health & Safety Rating System, the prescribed system under the Housing Act 2004 for measuring hazards associated with housing conditions

ECO – Energy Company Obligation

Certified Date – the date certified by the service on behalf of the Council as that on which the execution of eligible works is completed to the Councils (HEART) satisfaction. In this instance being the works completion date.

Dwelling – a building or part of a building occupied or intended to be occupied as a separate dwelling, together with any yard, garden, outhouse and appurtenance belonging to it or usually enjoyed with it.

Exempt disposal – a disposal or transfer of the whole or part of the premises to a person whose main residence is the property and who is (a) one of the joint owners of the dwelling, or (b) the wife, husband or partner (including same sex) of the owner or one of the joint owners of that property.

Relevant disposal – a conveyance of the freehold or an assignment of the lease, or the granting of a long lease (one of over 21 years, otherwise than at rack rent)

Member of family – a person is a member of the applicant's family if they are the spouse of the applicant or living together as partners, or is the grandparent, parent or dependent child

of the applicant or their spouse or partner (inclusive of same sex partners, step-children, adopted and foster children).

Owner-occupier – whilst this term is self-explanatory, where appropriate it will include certain tenants with repairing type leases (sometimes called FRI or Full Repairing and Insuring Leases, of a suitable duration) who would otherwise be unable to insist their ‘superior landlord’ undertake renovations. Repairing lease tenants would qualify for DFG in their own right, with permission.

18.0 Appendices

Appendix A. Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant and amendments

This is included for context and information purposes and includes locally agreed amendments.

The Council will award mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) according to the governing legislation – principally the 1996 Act and subordinate Regulations and Orders as amended - and guidance issued by central Government, and which details amongst other matters the types of work that are to be funded, the maximum grant payable (currently £30,000), and the test of financial resources where applicable.

Qualifying Criteria

All owner-occupiers and tenants, licensees or occupiers who can satisfy the criteria in sections 19-22 of the 1996 Act are eligible to *apply* for DFG, but applicants must be aged 18 or over (this does not apply to the disabled person, who may be younger). Tenants of Private Social Housing Providers and private landlords are also eligible to apply. Council tenants will be referred to their Housing Authority Landlord after initial assessment by HEART which will consider the adaptation in the context of their housing management policies. Being eligible to apply does not automatically confer approval – some cases will not meet statutory tests as described below, and others may have significant means tested contributions that will affect their decision making.

As a part of the application process, the Authorities will require certificates relating to property ownership and future occupation and will request permission from the owner. The Authorities would reasonably want to ensure the tenant has the right to carry out the works and that the landlord would not object.

Qualifying Works

Those works eligible for mandatory DFG are set out in section 23(1) of the 1996 Act, as amended. These are;

- i. facilitating access by the disabled occupant to and from the dwelling, qualifying houseboat, or qualifying park home, (now including the garden) or
- ii. making the dwelling, qualifying houseboat or qualifying park home safe for the disabled occupant and other persons residing with them;
- iii. facilitating access by the disabled occupant to a room used or usable as the principal family room;
- iv. facilitating access by the disabled occupant to, or providing for the disabled occupant, a room used or usable for sleeping;
- v. facilitating access by the disabled occupant to, or providing for the disabled occupant, a room in which there is a lavatory, or facilitating the use by the disabled occupant of such a facility;

- vi. facilitating access by the disabled occupant to, or providing for the disabled occupant, a room in which there is a bath or shower (or both), or facilitating the use by the disabled occupant of such a facility;
- vii. facilitating access by the disabled occupant to, or providing for the disabled occupant, a room in which there is a wash hand basin, or facilitating the use by the disabled occupant of such a facility;
- viii. facilitating the preparation and cooking of food by the disabled occupant;
- ix. improving any heating system in the dwelling, qualifying houseboat or qualifying park home to meet the needs of the disabled occupant or, if there is no existing heating system or any such system is unsuitable for use by the disabled occupant, providing a heating system suitable to meet their needs;
- x. facilitating the use by the disabled occupant of a source of power, light or heat by altering the position of one or more means of access to or control of that source or by providing additional means of control;
- xi. facilitating access and movement by the disabled occupant around the dwelling, qualifying houseboat or qualifying park home in order to enable them to care for a person who is normally resident and is in need of such care;
- xii. facilitating access to and from a garden by a disabled occupant; or making access to a garden safe for a disabled occupant.

Local amendments to DFG

Council Tax

Council Tax reduction is eligible as a passporting benefit.

Warranty Provision

The Authorities will include as part of the mandatory DFG the cost of a maintenance agreement for a period of five (5) years (where available) from the certified date for stair lifts, through-floor lifts, Clos-o-mat type toilet, step-lifts and similar equipment installed with the assistance of that grant. Where maintenance agreements of 5-years are not available through the Manufacturer the Council will fund the maximum warranty that is available. Where installing a reconditioned stair lift, any unspent warranty will be increased to the full 5 years if possible.

Necessary, Appropriate, Reasonable & Practicable

A DFG will only be made if the works are both 'necessary and appropriate' and 'reasonable and practicable'. Where an applicant prefers a different scheme of works to that approved by the Council, the Authority may offer to 'offset' the value of the original scheme towards those greater works with appropriate safeguards. This is at the discretion of the Authority.

Works which have been started prior to the approval of an application will not be eligible for financial assistance.

Unexpected works which arise during the carrying out of eligible works will be considered for assistance if the works could not have been reasonably foreseen and if they are vital to the completion of a safe and effective adaptation.

Unforeseen works carried out without prior approval of the Authority will not be eligible for assistance. Where unforeseen works are necessary these will be added to the grant up to the specified maximum for mandatory DFG. Costs above the mandatory grant maximum may be supported as discretionary DFA in accordance with this policy. Care must be taken when agreeing to schemes of works on third-party property such as tenanted accommodation, that the property owner is fully engaged with the decision process. This is also particularly important where an architect or similar is acting on the customers behalf, and where issues such as planning permission, building control and other regulation are involved.

Contractors

The DFG award is for a sum of funding only and is not inclusive or exclusive of using particular contractors or products. Customers may specify and choose their own contractors, agent, products and design – but take responsibility for those choices, as long as the contractors are suitably qualified, and the result meets the HEART Service and Occupational Therapist's requirements. Contractors will need to be insured and appropriately regulated where appropriate.

Financial Assistance

Mandatory DFG will be subject to a means test in accordance with the regulations made under the 1996 Act, as amended. The maximum mandatory DFG award is currently £30,000 minus any contribution required by a 'means test' (test of financial resources). Successive applications may be awarded for those persons whose condition is degenerative, or they develop additional needs. If the maximum grant limit is changed by statute then the maximum available DFG award by the Authorities will reflect this.

Where successive applications are awarded, the applicants' assessed contribution to the first grant award will be taken into account if within the time period of the contribution originally calculated (10 years if owner, 5 years if tenant).

NOTE: where an applicant is in receipt of a recognised, qualifying, means tested benefit they will not be further means tested and they will have no calculated contribution to make. Where works are for the benefit of a child or young person of 19 years of age or younger at the date of application – they too will be exempt from a means test.

Order of processing applications

DFG applications or recommendations will usually be processed in chronological order, in line with any approved priority system, excepting in emergency circumstances at the discretion of the Authority.

Recovery of assistance awarded

Some mandatory DFG may be recoverable in accordance with permitted values. Where the customer is an owner-occupier and not a tenant, a sum of up to £10,000 may be recovered for works more than £5,000. This sum would only be recovered if the property were sold or title otherwise transferred within 10 years of the certified (completion) date of works, subject to the Council's discretion to reduce or waive in the case of financial hardship. All recoverable costs would be registered as a land charge against the property.

NOTE: this is separate and different to the potential repayment of grant in the event of a breach of occupancy conditions or detected fraud. Also, Councils are entitled to recalculate grant awards in limited circumstances, such as for example if any relevant insurance claims are pending, and to cease making payments and to seek repayment in some cases as detailed in sections 40-42 of the 1996 Act.

Conditions relating to Contractors, Standard of Works and Invoices

In approving an application for financial assistance, the Council will require as a condition that the eligible works are carried out in accordance with any specification it has decided to impose.

The eligible works must be carried out by the contractor(s) upon whose estimate the financial assistance is based, or if two estimates were submitted, by one of those contractors. The Council's consent must be obtained prior to the works if a contractor who did not submit an estimate is to carry out the works, and if an agreement is given, an estimate from the new contractor must be submitted to the Council (this does not automatically convey a difference in revised grant award – any additional costs must be separately financed by the client).

An invoice, demand or receipt will not be acceptable if it is given by the applicant or a member of the applicant's family. Where works are carried out by the applicant or a member of their family, only the cost of materials used will be eligible for financial assistance.

It is a condition of the financial assistance that the eligible works are carried out within 12 months of the date of approval of the application. This period may be extended by the Council if it thinks fit, particularly where it is satisfied that the eligible works cannot be completed for good cause – requests for additional time must be made in writing before the 12-month period ends and approved extra time will be confirmed in writing by the Council.

The payment of the financial assistance to the applicant will be dependent upon the works being carried out to a standard that is satisfactory to the Council and upon receipt of a satisfactory invoice, demand, or receipt for the works and any preliminary or ancillary services or changes.

The Council will usually make payments direct to the contractor on behalf of the client, and not usually to the applicant. Where the applicant disagrees with a payment made direct to a contractor, no payment shall be made until any dispute is resolved. Where the dispute is not resolved the Council reserves the right to make payment to the contractor. Legislation permits the Council to make payment by delivering to the applicant an instrument of payment in a form made payable to the contractor, OR by making payment direct to the applicant in accordance with information provided prior to grant approval.

NOTE: Contractors receiving direct payment may be required to provide sufficient information to be set up on the Council's financial systems – BUT this should not frustrate the client's choice, as the mandatory DFG grant (only) is an award of funds and not an award tied to a specific contractor with additional financial conditions.

Future occupation of the dwelling

It is a condition of the grant that throughout the grant condition period (that is 5 years from the date of certification) the dwelling is occupied in accordance with the intention stated in the certificate of owner occupation or availability for letting or intended tenancy.

Customer Own Schemes (COS)

Customers who meet the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) eligibility and are therefore entitled to a grant allocation may wish to 'top-up' the DFG funding. The DFG recommendation by the Occupational Therapist will be for the most cost-effective solution which meets all identified needs and will look to adapt an existing property. Where a customer wishes to pursue a different scheme, they will be responsible for the difference in costs between the DFG 'Mandatory Scheme' and the final cost of the works, including unforeseen costs.

It is the responsibility of the customer to clearly define what is privately funded works and specifications and provide an itemised costing for those works. The Council will only fund the assessed DFG element of the works and customers will be responsible for unforeseen works and contingency funding where these are not clearly associated with the assessed works.

The HEART surveyor and Occupational Therapist will work with the customer, their architect and builders as applicable, to ensure that the final scheme meets the disabled person's needs and where applicable planning and building control regulations have been adhered to.

Where a customer is progressing along this route there will be additional responsibilities for the customer to comply with all legal requirements including construction legislation and the grant legislation. The customer will be responsible for any additional funding beyond the grant award, for any contingency and for management of the contractors and service providers. Payment of grant will only be made once the appropriate facilities have been provided.

HEART will have guidance to assist customers.

Repayment

Where a charge (repayable grant) is due for recovery, on receipt of a written request from the responsible person the individual Authorities will consider the options to reduce or waive repayment in particular circumstances to be determined in accordance with the following criteria;

- the extent to which the recipient of the grant would suffer financial hardship were they to be required to repay all or any of the grant;
- whether the disposal of the premises is to enable the recipient of the grant to take up employment, or to change the location of their employment;
- whether the disposal is made for reasons connected with the physical or mental health or wellbeing of the recipient of the grant or of a disabled occupant of the premises;
- whether the disposal is made to enable the recipient of the grant to live with, or near, any person who is disabled or infirm and in need of care, which the recipient of the grant is intending to provide, or who is intending to provide care of which the recipient of the grant is in need by reason of disability or infirmity.
- Whether the adaptation was completed in order to facilitate a foster placement and any reasons why the property may now be being sold.

All recoverable charges will be recorded as local land charges.

The land charge will be placed in accordance with 2008 General Consent² which enabled local authorities to place a local land charge for the portion of the grant over £5,000. The charge can be up to £10,000 and applies if the owner wants to sell the property within 10 years of the certified (completion) date.

Worked examples of the charge are given below:

	Total Grant Awarded	Exempt Amount	Remaining Value of Grant	Charge Placed
Example A	£12,000	£5,000	£7,000	£7,000
Example B	£15,000	£5,000	£10,000	£10,000
Example C	£25,000	£5,000	£20,000	£10,000

Second Residencies

In cases where families separate, and a court order provides that residency of the subject disabled child is split between two households, the Authority may consider the award of DFG funding to provide adaptations in a second home, which is not the primary residence of the disabled individual, but which facilitates access to the second household with whom residency is shared.

Cases would be considered individually by the Special Cases Panel and must be able to demonstrate through the provision of Court Orders, or equivalent Residency agreements that residency is shared and the lack of provision in the second home means that the child is not able to live as expected.

Where relevant professionals are supporting the family their involvement with the application should be considered.

2

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7811/generalconsent2008.pdf

Appendix B. Discretionary Disabled Facilities Assistance

Purpose of the assistance

The purpose of this assistance is to help the vulnerable members of the community where the Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) is insufficient to cover the full cost of the works or where the works are out of scope of the legislation but by completing them there would be demonstrable savings to the wider public purse and clear benefits to the applicant and/or their family/carers. It is also available to support residents whose properties are unable to be adapted or where a move to an alternative home may be more appropriate.

How will it be funded?

The grants would be funded from the DFG Budget as resources allow. Mandatory Grants will have priority. The HEART Management Board will be kept informed of relevant spending patterns and pressures.

Who will it help?

Those who have been assessed as eligible to apply for Mandatory DFG assistance and towards the mandatory designed scheme to meet identified needs where a home is being adapted.

It will be available to those assessed as eligible for Mandatory DFG assistance but whose property is either unsuitable for adaptation to meet their needs or where a move to an alternative home is considered more appropriate.

Will it be means tested?

There will be no additional formal means test as all applicants for this assistance will have been means tested for mandatory DFG prior to applying for this grant and that assessment would be used to confirm eligibility.

How much funding might be available?

Funding under this scheme is available in two parts.

A maximum of £40,000 is available under this scheme.

Will there be a charge against the property?

The first £20,000 paid under this scheme will not be subject to a local land charge.

For works or costs which exceed the initial £20,000 paid under this scheme any amount provided will be placed in full as a local land charge against the property. This land charge will not be time limited and therefore will be repayable when the property is sold.

Note – this is a separate land charge to the £10,000 recoverable DFG land charge which expires at 10 years from the certified date.

Conditions attached to the grant

Works must not have been started or completed if they are to be considered eligible for funding under this provision. Unless they are as a result of unforeseen increased costs of a mandatory DFG whilst on-site which increases the cost of the works above the mandatory DFG funding limit.

Moving Costs

Where funding is requested to support moving and house purchase costs these will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and will be determined by:

- The tenure and location of the original and new properties

- The residual equity and any increased mortgage debt and whether this is affordable without financial assistance from the Council
- Whether moving within the District/Borough or the County, or beyond
- Whether the original property is unadaptable, unaffordable or poor value to adapt
- Whether moving is required due to a landlord refusal to permit an adaptation
- Whether the move is an occupier preference rather than a necessary requirement

Other conditions

The person must be a permanent resident of the District/Borough they are applying for funding from and the property must be their permanent address.

Conditions restricting future use and ownership of the property – the following additional conditions will apply where the Council has made an award of DDFA;

- The owner will notify the Council in writing if a relevant disposal of the property is proposed.
- The owner of the property will provide, within 21 days of a written notice from the Council, a statement confirming the ownership and occupancy of the dwelling. If the property has been sold or transferred the statement will include the date of transfer of ownership.
- DDFA may be registered as a charge against the property and will be repayable on sale or transfer of the property, subject to exempt sales. The charge will be binding on successors in title.
- It is a condition of DDFA that where an owner makes a relevant disposal of the dwelling, other than an exempt disposal, the DDFA shall be repayable subject to above.
- If the property is transferred, or the sale price does not reflect the market price, the Council will have the right to seek an independent valuation of the market value, which will be binding on both parties, in order to recover the grant repayable.

If the applicant for DDFA is a tenant then the Council will liaise with the appropriate landlord to explore whether alternative funding options, such as funding from the landlord and/or moving to alternative suitable accommodation is an option, before approving DDFA.

Applications for DDFA will be considered for Top-Up once works have already been started and unforeseen costs arise, if the scheme is a Mandatory Scheme.

A maximum of one application for DDFA will be considered in any 5-year period.

How to apply

Through the HEART Service and funding will be considered on a case-by-case basis as outlined above.

Appendix C. Discretionary Contribution Support Grant

Purpose of the assistance

The means test, as set out in the Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 has remained unchanged since the introduction of DFGs in 1996. It is widely accepted as being out of date and does not consider the outgoings of a household when assessing a contribution towards DFG. Results can occur which mean vulnerable people are unable to proceed with the adaptations they need to help them live at home due to an unaffordable contribution level. The 2018 DFG Review recommended that the means test be overhauled, and this is currently proposed in the Social Care White Paper 2021, but until changes are made it is proposed that discretionary contribution assistance is provided.

The aim of this scheme is to help the vulnerable members of the community where the applicant is unable to proceed with adaptations because of a means tested contribution which means that they are at significant risk in their home and/or the failure to complete adaptations will result in increased costs to the wider Social Care budgets. It gives the Council the ability to pay these contributions from discretionary funding therefore enabling works to go ahead and the applicant to remain living in their home.

How will it be funded?

The grants would be funded from the DFG Budget as resources allow. Mandatory Grants will have priority. The HEART Management Board will be kept informed of relevant spending patterns and pressures.

Who will it help?

Those who have been assessed as being eligible to apply for Mandatory DFG assistance.

The following pathway indicates how HEART considers customers for discretionary disabled facilities assistance:



Will it be means tested?

There will be no additional formal means test.

How much funding might be available?

Discretionary Contribution Support Grant (DCSG), up to a maximum of £30,000 may be awarded.

Applications for this grant will be considered and approved as follows:

£1 to £7,500 – will be approved under the scheme of delegation

£7,500 to £10,000 – will be considered on a case-by-case basis and the eligibility criteria for funding at this level would be savings of less than £15,000 for a single person and less than

£25,000 for a couple. Evidence will be required. Approvals will be under the scheme of delegation.

Contributions above £10,001 would be reviewed individually by the Special Cases Panel to ensure that households with the means to fund their contributions, do so. Whilst also ensuring that those households who are assessed as having a contribution due to a working spouse are not disadvantaged. Customers will need to prove why they cannot fund the contribution through commercial loan or income.

Will there be a charge against the property?

DCSG will be registered, **in full**, as a local land charge against the property for a period of 10 years and will be recovered on the sale or transfer of the property, subject to rules regarding exempt sales.

Note – this is separate to the £10,000 recoverable DFG which expires at 10 years from certification of works completion and separate to the DDFA land charge

Any DCSG awarded will be detailed on the approval notice for DFG

Conditions attached to the grant

The person must be a permanent resident of the District/Borough to whom they are applying for funding and the property must be their permanent address.

Conditions restricting future use and ownership of the property – the following additional conditions will apply where the Council has made an award of DCSG;

- The owner will notify the Council in writing if a relevant disposal of the property is proposed.
- The owner of the property will provide, within 21 days of a written notice from the Council, a statement confirming the ownership and occupancy of the dwelling. If the property has been sold or transferred the statement will include the date of transfer of ownership.
- DCSG will be registered as a charge against the property and will be repayable on sale or transfer of the property, subject to exempt sales. The charge will be binding on successors in title.
- It is a condition of DCSG that where an owner makes a relevant disposal of the dwelling, other than an exempt disposal, the DCSG shall be repayable subject to above.
- If the property is transferred, or the sale price does not reflect the market price, the Council will have the right to seek an independent valuation of the market value, which will be binding on both parties, to recover the grant repayable.

A maximum of one application for DCSG will be considered in any 10 year period.

How to apply

Applications will be considered through the HEART team as part of an application for Mandatory DFG assistance if a contribution is identified through the means test.

Appendix D. Warm and Safer Homes (WaSH) Grant

Purpose of the assistance

The purpose of this grant is to eliminate Category One hazards as identified by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System within owner-occupied homes in the County. In certain circumstances, as the HEART Management discretion the elimination of Category Two Hazards may also be included in eligible works if they are identified as having the potential to deteriorate and become Category one hazards if not remedied.

How will it be funded?

The grants would be funded from the DFG Budget as resources allow. Mandatory Grants will have priority. The HEART Management Board will be kept informed of relevant spending patterns and pressures.

Who will it help?

Funding will be available subject to the following eligibility criteria:

- The applicant must be the owner-occupier of the property
- The applicant must have owned the property for a minimum period of five years
- The applicant must meet one of the following financial criteria:
 - Be in receipt of:
 - Income Support
 - Income-based Job Seekers Allowance
 - Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
 - Support under Part IV of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
 - The Guarantee element of State Pension Credit
 - Child Tax Credit (as long as there is no entitlement to Working Tax Credit and the household income does not exceed £20,000 as assessed by HM Revenue and Customs). This amount will be reviewed and published on the HEART website information.
 - Universal Credit
 - Council Tax Support (not single person reduction)
 - The applicant is aged 55 years or over and/ or has a disability and their income level is below the income tax threshold
- Works required must not be eligible for funding from any other sources, such as insurance policies.

Will it be means tested?

There is no formal means test to assess a contribution, but applicants must meet the financial criteria set out above.

How much funding might be available?

Funding under this scheme is available in two parts.

A maximum of £20,000 is available under this scheme.

Will there be a charge against the property?

The first £10,000 paid under this scheme will not be subject to a local land charge.

For works or costs which exceed the initial £10,000 paid under this scheme any amount provided will be placed in full as a local land charge against the property. This land charge will not be time limited and therefore will be repayable when the property is sold.

Conditions attached to the grant

Only a single award of this grant will be available in any five-year period.

For works or costs which exceed the initial £10,000 paid under this scheme any amount provided will be placed in full as a local land charge against the property. This land charge will not be time limited and therefore will be repayable when the property is sold.

How to apply

Through the HEART team. An assessment of hazards within the property will take place using the HHSRS system methodology to establish if there are qualifying hazards present.

Appendix F. Hospital Discharge Scheme

Purpose of the assistance

The purpose of this assistance is to:

- 1 Enable faster discharge from hospital
- 2 Reduce the risk of re-admission
- 3 Address significant difficulties in providing safe and dignified home-based care.

How will it be funded?

The grants would be funded from the DFG Budget as resources allow. Mandatory Grants will have priority. The HEART Management Board will be kept informed of relevant spending patterns and pressures.

Who will it help?

It will support residents who are requiring discharge from hospital or where the provision of adaptations will reduce the risk of hospital readmission or enable safe and dignified home-based care.

Works may include adapting the home to accommodate a disability, remedying defects including safety hazards, security issues and thermal comfort measures.

Will it be means tested?

There will be no formal means test.

How much funding might be available?

A maximum of £10,000 may be available

Will there be a charge against the property?

There will be no land charge placed against the property.

Conditions attached to the grant

The works must be deemed as necessary to meet one of the three purposes for which funding is available.

Assessment for this funding may be prioritised over other caseload, at the discretion of the HEART management.

How to apply

Applications for this assistance will be referred by professionals in a Social Services, Acute or Primary Care Trust setting as being necessary to facilitate a hospital discharge or identified through routine work where circumstances indicate this is an appropriate solution.

Assistance will be managed by the HEART service.

Appendix G. Home Safety Grant

Purpose of the assistance

The purpose of this assistance is to offer free home safety interventions to all qualifying residents who are assessed by HEART staff for other services, or who approach requesting this assistance as a stand-alone request or referral.

The funding available under this assistance is to support preventative works where no qualifying Care Act need has been identified. If a qualifying Care Act need is identified, then work would be carried out under a qualifying scheme or a referral made to an appropriate service provider.

How will it be funded?

The grants would be funded from the DFG Budget as resources allow. Mandatory Grants will have priority. The HEART Management Board will be kept informed of relevant spending patterns and pressures.

Who will it help?

This check is available for:

- Any resident aged 55 years or over
- Any household which includes a disabled person

Funding for works is available for the above residents who do not have an identified qualifying Care Act need but where preventative works are strongly indicated as being a recommendation from the home safety assessment.

Will it be means tested?

There is no means test for this service or funding assistance.

How much funding might be available?

The home safety assessment is free of charge.

The maximum funding available for completing works is £1,000

Will there be a charge against the property?

There will be no charge placed against the property.

What will the assessment include?

The assessment will include identification of potential hazards within the home such as:

- Falls Prevention; Advise on safe clear floor pathways, ill-fitting carpets, trailing electrical wires, uneven floors, furniture obstructions, garden paths and shed / garage access, access to main doors (front, side, rear), bins etc.
- Mobility and use of facilities; Freedom of movement within home, identify ill-fitting doors and windows, stair & grab rails, steps, lighting, switches and sockets, changing a lightbulb, putting up or adjusting curtains / blinds and fittings,

- Hazards from hot surfaces and materials; Radiators, gas fires, hot water cooker arrangements,
- Warm Home Assessment; Identify damp & mould, insulation (cavity & loft), lack of central heating, draught proofing, water cylinder jacket, fuel poverty assessment, tariff/supplier choice, meter position and readability
- Security checks; Window & door locks, fitting key safes,
- Fire Safety; Smoke alarms, carbon monoxide detectors.

What works might be carried out?

The remedial works funded through this grant may include:

- Grab rails
- Stairs rails
- Internal ramps (half steps)
- Refitting and/or easing doors
- Easing windows
- Key safes
- Fit smoke alarms
- Door safety chains
- Access to property (minor trip hazards)
- Change & fit light bulbs
- Tack loose fitting carpets
- Re-route trailing wires
- Fixing loose floor boards (or refer on to others)
- Relocate small items of furniture
- Remove minor slip trip or fall hazards within the home or garden.

Conditions attached to the grant

There is no limit on the number of applications a household can make but the maximum funding available to complete works is £1,000 in any 3-year period.

Funding is based on households not individuals.

Eligible HEART fees for the delivery of the works will be paid.

Works can be carried out by an 'approved' Handyperson scheme or directly purchased by or on behalf of the resident if suitability is agreed.

Funding is available for both labour and materials costs.

How to apply

Through the HEART team.

Appendix H. Energy Efficiency Support

Purpose of the assistance

The authorities intention is to support residents wherever possible to improve the energy efficiency of their homes and support works that will reduce fuel poverty. Where existing schemes apply e.g. through local authorities or national criteria, HEART will make referrals or signpost to relevant organisations.

How will it be funded?

Where resources allow the authorities will work with HEART and other providers to source funding to support measures and engage with partners to attract funding for schemes as it becomes available.

Who will it help?

Schemes will be developed based upon the funding criteria as schemes become available.

How to apply

As funding opportunities become available, if successful bids are made via the HEART partnership then HEART will manage any available schemes and promote them accordingly.

Appendix I – Signatories and Key Dates

This document has been ratified by each partner Housing Authority by its own process, and duly minute as agreed and adopted. The effective date of the policy is that of each partner Authority.

Minute reference number Date

Representing (organisation) **Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council**

Minute reference number Date

Representing (organisation) **North Warwickshire Borough Council**

Minute reference number Date

Representing (organisation) **Rugby Borough Council**

Minute reference number Date

Representing (organisation) **Stratford on Avon District Council**

Minute reference number Date

Representing (organisation) **Warwick District Council**

Agenda Item No 9

Resources Board

19 June 2023

**Report of the
Director of Housing**

**Policy – Dealing with Damp &
Mould in Council Properties**

1 Summary

This report presents a policy statement which provides a clear direction for services when they are dealing with damp and mould conditions in the Council's landlord stock.

Recommendation to the Resources Board

That the policy statement about services to deal with conditions of damp and mould be considered and approved.

2 Consultation

2.1 The policy statement has been shared with the Housing Task and Finish Group and Borough Wide Tenants Forum.

3 Background

3.1 It has always been important for the Council to encourage tenants to report repairs (including damp and mould conditions) in their home and for the Housing Division to assess the causes and take action.

3.2 There is a heightened focus on tackling the causes of damp and mould nationally following the death of a child in a Housing Association property which the Coroner linked directly to the mould conditions in his home. As well as the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill the Government is proposing to enact legislation about damp and mould conditions in rented properties this year.

3.3 The Council has a clear procedure for tackling damp and mould when it is reported. Some of the works required can be done quickly (gutter/ roof repair, water leak, drain block) but some need extensive works (rising damp, fabric of the building breaking down over time).

3.4 To support the procedure and our Decant Policy the Council needs to provide a policy position which it can share with its staff and tenants to provide for a clear understanding about what we will do to eradicate damp and mould growth in homes.

4 Policy Statement & Supporting Information

- ... 4.1 The policy statement is attached at Appendix A for consideration and comment. It is closely aligned with a procedure and our Decant Policy.
- 4.2 We encourage tenants to report repairs. We have emphasised the importance of telling us if they suspect damp or see mould in their home in our most recent newsletter and we will continue to raise awareness. We have an in house repairs service which can be proactive and respond promptly to reports made by tenants. Prevalent issues that arise in the responsive repairs part of our service inform our planned and capital works programmes. The Maintenance Managers work closely to understand what our stock is telling us and create planned programmes to improve tenant's homes.
- 4.3 Our approach to identifying and managing damp in our properties and mould conditions recognises that the cause is not 'one thing'. The cause might be different in different properties and there may be more than one cause in some properties. The support that tenants need to address the problem is different. We have revised the information we provide for tenants with our Public Health colleagues but different households will need different levels of support as we take necessary action. For this reason our maintenance and management teams work closely together. They work together to proactively identify issues and also address them. For example if the technical team arrive to do an annual gas service and the tenant has no funds on their meter an alert is raised with the Tenancy Sustainment Officer to offer support to the tenant because not using the heating system is likely to cause moisture and condensation and could be a precursor to mould developing in the property.
- 4.4 An important aspect of identifying issues and addressing them early that we encourage tenants to report repairs. Having done so we need to promptly deal with the disrepair. Getting to a leaking pipe, a leaking gutter, a roof repair or a broken drain quickly prevents problems escalating. Our in house Electricians have authority to act to deal with ineffective ventilation fans and upgrade them or supply additional ones if required. Nonetheless we take every opportunity to find out if there is an issue that we need to address. We know that not all tenants will report repairs. We promote a duty of care to our tenants with our in house team and contractors. All visits to properties are used to encourage tenants to tell us about the condition of their home so that we can act to resolve disrepair or conditions that can cause damp, condensation and mould. Both maintenance and management staff use the visit as an opportunity to discuss the condition of the property and act together to offer support. If a property needs to be decluttered to help with ventilation we provide assistance to do that work. If a tenant is not using their heating system because of financial concerns we offer to support them to maximise their income.

- 4.5 Our response repairs service and capital programme plans are closely connected. Common problems identified in the response repairs service can trigger planned programmes to address the disrepair in a stock of properties rather than just those from which issues have been reported. We have an ageing stock. This means that some of our flats have had to have response repair work to address the damp and mould conditions reported which is caused by the structure of the building and latent defects which can have detrimental consequences over time. For some blocks we recognised that the underlying problems were not just prevalent in those where tenants reported concerns and therefore used the information to trigger major works. For one estate of flats this resulted in a programme to provide a new roof, new windows and external wall insulation. Unfortunately for two other blocks the options appraisal was to regenerate and the blocks were demolished with new build properties replacing them. On another estate of flats reports of damp and mould were not frequent but from the information we had we were aware that the structure of the buildings required attention to improve the thermal comfort to prevent future problems. Once again a major works programme delivered a new roof, external wall insulation and new windows.
- 4.6 We have good information about our stock and repairs reported on our maintenance database. The data is accessible and reportable. We use it to inform our asset management priorities. It is kept current by a designated planned investment resource and intermittent stock condition surveys. We have information on EPC grading for all of our stock and this is updated when planned works are completed. The data indicates the condition of our stock as it relates to the Decent Homes Standard. We draw on the information regularly and specifically annually to develop our programmes of work. Over the last 5 years we have had major programmes to provide new roofs (and roof insulation) for our stock, external wall insulation and new windows. All these schemes help prevent conditions for damp and mould. We have used Local Authority Delivery funding to support programmes to deliver external wall insulation and windows as well as heating systems. We have a proactive programme to provide new, efficient gas boilers. Some of our more rural estates do not have gas mains and we have implemented a scheme of delivering Air Source Heat Pump systems to provide more energy efficient heating for our tenants.
- 4.7 As well as information and reports about components and response repair activity from our main database we have recently introduced software which provides a real time dashboard indicating where damp and/ or mould has been reported and linked repairing activity such as leaks and drains. The software uses algorithms to search our maintenance database in order to present premises to staff and managers that have reported concerns about damp, mould and disrepair issues that could be the cause.
- 4.8 Our Maintenance Surveyors are the designated resource to assess all reports of damp, condensation and mould. They respond to tenant reports or those from staff or contractors who have undertaken a visit. They act within 10 working days to diagnose the problem. Subsequent action depends on the nature of the problem. They have a range of interventions available to them.

These were developed out of a specific project we undertook in 2019 because we experienced a spike in cases of damp and they were taking long than we expected to resolve. The range of interventions we have developed have helped to improve timescales for resolution. The other matter we addressed was the need to move tenants out of their home temporarily to undertake works. We developed a generous support package for them which reflected how disruptive having to move out can be but some also told us that they did not want to move under any circumstances. Out of that feedback we developed a way of working with a specialist contractor, supported by our in house team to do intrusive works with a tenants' cooperation without the need for them to move out. Tenancy Services Officers work in conjunction with the Surveyors as required. Tenants often need support whilst we deal with technical issues.

4.9 We closely manage and review reports of damp and mould in our system. The Response Repairs Manager reviews activity and action with the Surveyors weekly and the Director of Housing reviews it and seeks to unblock challenges in monthly performance meetings. It is high profile in the service for both maintenance and management Managers.

4.9.1 Whilst we are confident in our systems of work we are not complacent. The team is having a fresh focus on how we can tackle damp and condensation in our properties. Maintenance and management staff have had refresher training and we have revamped our procedures and forms which support assessments. We have embarked on a new stock condition survey. As part of this survey we are proactively seeking information from tenants.

5 Report Implications

5.1 Finance and Value for Money Implications

5.1.1 Since the Council met the Government's Decent Homes Standard as required by 2010 its ability to commit funding to a full capital programme for its housing stock has been constrained. The constraint is a result of payments necessary to fund its subsidy system settlement and caps on rent levels. The nationally recognised cost of living crisis places a risk on rent collection. Additionally the costs of contract works has increased significantly over the last two years due to inflation and difficulties in sourcing some materials.

5.1.2 The annual capital programme (excluding new build schemes) is in the region of £3.5m. It is critical that the team continues to build on its successes in order to deliver the Council's capital programme, take actions to ensure health and safety requirements are met and to address matters which will be agreed as part of the Asset Management Plan. Programmes of work are based on stock condition data which is held on the asset management database.

5.1.3 Over the last 5 years the Asset Management Team has delivered successful programmes of work for External Wall Insulation and replacement windows. Most of the programme was for individual properties. Work has also been completed on blocks of flats. Two bids for additional funding to install energy

efficiency measures to individual properties were successful and attracted additional funding into the Council's budgets.

5.1.4 The budget to deliver the response repairs service is £1.7m annually.

5.1.5 Achieving value for money for tenants dictates that we need to deliver services which receive good satisfaction feedback, are cost effective and are comparatively good performing when benchmarked with other social landlords.

5.2 Legal Implications

5.2.1 The Council has to meet legal requirements for managing gas installations, electrical installations, for health and safety arrangements, building regulations and Right to Repair.

5.2.2 Building safety issues have become more high profile following the Grenfell Tower fire. There is considerable legislation which covers regulatory requirements that must be adhered to. There have been recent changes to enhance these. Dealing with damp and mould conditions proactively and effectively is also a focus for Government and the housing Regulator who expect social landlords to act in a zero tolerance manner with regard to these issues.

5.2.3 The Council has legal duties set out in the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 to ensure its buildings are not in disrepair and to consult with leaseholders about proposed repairs which are deemed qualifying works. If a tenant suffers disrepair as a result of the Council's failure to meet its repairing duty under the 1985 Act the Council can be liable to pay damages for any harm suffered. Further, if as a result of the Council's failure to maintain the structure of buildings a leaseholder's property is damaged, the Council can be liable to pay damages for their losses.

5.2.4 As well as being accountable to Councillors and tenants the Council's housing services are expected to meet the requirements of the Housing Regulator. The Maintenance Service requirements are set out in the 'Home Standard'. This states that a Registered Provider should:

With regard to quality of accommodation:

- Continue to maintain at least the decent homes standard after December 2010
- Meet the standards of design and quality that applied to the home when it was built if they are higher than the Decent Homes Standard
- Consider whether the locally agreed standard can be more than the Decent Homes Standard (the continuing need for energy efficient homes is a factor here)

With regard to repairs and maintenance:

- Provide a cost effective repairs and maintenance service

- Respond to tenants' needs, offer choice and have the objective of completing repairs and improvements right first time
- Meet all statutory requirements for health and safety of occupants

5.2.5 Systems of work in the Response Repairs team are expected to adhere to the 'Right to Repair' legislation. The Landlord and Tenant Act requires the Council to proactively address the condition of properties. This legislation has been enhanced recently by the Homes (Fitness for Habitation) Act 2018 which came into force on 20 March 2019. It amends the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985. It provides for a new implied covenant that the premises are fit for habitation at time of letting and during the term of the tenancy. Crucially it allows tenants to challenge their landlord directly in Court. The Act underpins current legislation and sets out that a property could be deemed unfit (if it is defective and not reasonably suited for occupation) due to issues such as disrepair, stability, damp & mould growth, excess cold, crowding and spacing, lighting and noise. There is an exception if the tenant has caused the issue by not acting in a tenant like manner.

5.3 Human Resources Implications

5.3.1 Whilst dealing with conditions of damp and mould conditions requires a whole team approach – housing management, response repairs and improvement programmes – the necessity of dealing with responsive repairs which address disrepair and mould conditions largely falls on the Response Repairs Service delivered by the Housing Direct Works Team.

5.3.2 In order to ensure tenants reports about damp and mould are dealt with promptly it is possible that additional tradesman resource will be required in the Housing Direct Works team. This will be kept under review and reported to the Special Sub Group if an adjustment to the capacity of the staff structure is required.

5.4 Risk Management Implications

5.4.1 The age of its stock and health and safety requirements mean that it is important to be able to take a more proactive approach to managing the Council's assets.

5.4.2 If the Council does not provide effective services to deal with damp and mould conditions there is risk to the health and well being of its tenants and a risk of complaints and financial claims.

The Contact Officer for this report is Angela Coates (719369).

Background Papers

Local Government Act 1972 Section 100D, as substituted by the Local Government Act, 2000 Section 97

Background Paper No	Author	Nature of Background Paper	Date
Decent Homes Standards	Government	Regulation of housing standards for social housing	2006
Social Housing (Regulation) Bill 2022	Government	Forthcoming legislation	2022

North Warwickshire Borough Council

Housing Division

Policy For Dealing with Damp and Mould Conditions in Council Owned Domestic Stock

REVIEW

This policy will normally be reviewed annually to ensure that it remains fit for purpose, unless an earlier review is required due to regulatory, statutory, or other requirements.

INTRODUCTION

This policy states how the Council intends to deliver effective management and maintenance services to address and improve property conditions that cause damp and mould.

The delivery of this policy is closely aligned to the procedures followed by the Maintenance Service when responding to reports of damp and/ or mould. It is supported by the Council's Decant Policy which gives financial assistance to tenants if they need to move out of their tenancy whilst remedial work is undertaken.

We respond promptly when a tenant reports an issue of damp, mould or condensation. Our conditions of tenancy insist that tenants report repairs and concerns to us. When they do so with a concern about damp, mould and/ or condensation a Surveyor visits to do an assessment. A technical Surveyor visits within 10 working days of a report about concerns by a tenant.

The main objectives are to:

- To promote a 'report it' culture so that tenants are encouraged to tell the Council about disrepair and concerns about damp and mould

- To adopt a whole team approach to improving the condition of a property with damp and mould.

- To use all home visits to seek out information on property conditions – including those that cause damp and mould

- Ensure that tenants are treated in a fair and consistent way & that their particular circumstances (including medical) are taken into account in delivering a solution.

- To use information about property types and conditions as well as tenant reports to be proactive in providing interventions to deal with damp and mould conditions.

- Comply with statutory requirements and good practice.

- Focus on working in partnership with tenants ensuring that a safe and healthy internal environment is provided.

- Undertake effective investigations and implement all reasonable remedial repair solutions and improvements to eradicate damp including, managing and controlling condensation.

- Ensure that tenants have access to and/or are provided with

comprehensive advice and guidance on reporting and controlling damp and condensation.

Maximise the available budgets and ensure that they are used effectively and efficiently to deal with damp and condensation problems.

Deliver major programmes of work that prevent and/ or tackle the causes of damp.

Ensure that the fabric of our property is protected from deterioration and damage resulting from damp and condensation.

SCOPE OF POLICY

The scope of this policy covers how the Council and our tenants are able to jointly control, manage and eradicate damp and this includes:

- All domestic properties including emergency / temporary accommodation.
- Identifying the types of damp: rising, penetrating and condensation damp, including internal leaks.
- Offering guidance, advice and assistance throughout the process to tenants living in a property in which damp and/ or mould conditions have been found.

TYPES OF DAMP COVERED BY THIS POLICY

All properties in which damp and/ or mould conditions have been found are covered by this policy. For clarity some of the causes of damp are listed below.

Rising Damp

The movement of moisture from the ground rising up through the structure of the building through capillary action. Usually caused by a defect in the structure of the building.

Penetrating Damp (including internal leaks)

Water penetrating the external structure of the building or internal leaks causing damp, rot and damage to internal surfaces and structure. The cause can be the result of, for example:

- Water ingress due to defective or poor original design / workmanship of the structure.
- Defective components for example roof coverings, external wall doors and windows.
- Defective or blocked rainwater gutters and pipes.

- Defective or leaking internal waste pipes, hot and cold water and heating systems.
- Flooding due to burst pipes.

Condensation Damp

Condensation occurs when moisture held in warm air comes into contact with a cold surface and then condenses producing water droplets. This can take two main forms:

- Surface condensation arising when the inner surface of the structure is cooler than the room air.
- Condensation inside the structure (interstitial) where vapour pressure forces water vapour through porous materials (e.g. walls), which then condenses when it reaches colder conditions within the structure.

The conditions that can increase the risk of condensation are:

- Inadequate ventilation e.g. not opening windows and trickle / background vents and using mechanical extraction in bathrooms and kitchens.
- Inadequate heating g. undersized boilers and radiators, draught stripping.
- Inadequate thermal insulation. e.g. Missing or defective wall and loft insulation.
- High humidity e.g. presence of rising and penetrating damp.
- Poor building design and construction – specific cold areas (bridging) which are integral with the building construction.

Conditions that can lead to condensation are:

- Poor ventilation – not opening windows, blocking up vents not turning on extract fans, not allowing air to circulate around furniture.
- Poor heating – not heating the house which can be a result of fuel poverty.
- Defective insulation – dislodged insulation in lofts.
- High humidity - not covering pans when cooking and drying laundry inside the house can contribute to this.
- Overcrowding.

Mould is a natural organic compound that develops in damp conditions and will only grow on damp surfaces. This is often noticeable and present in situations where condensation damp is present.

LEGAL AND REGULATORY EXPECTATIONS

The Council complies with relevant legislation and regulation, including:

- Housing Act 1985
- Homes (Fit for Human Habitation) Act 2018
- Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 Section 11 – Repairs and Maintenance
- Housing Act 2004 – Housing Health and Safety Rating
- Decent Homes Standard
- Commonhold & Leasehold Reform Act 2002
- Defective Premises Act 1972
- Environmental Protection Act 1990
- Equality Act 2010
- Right to Repair Regulations 1994

Related Policies and Procedures

- Tenancy Agreement
- Maintenance Service Roles & Responsibilities

The Councils Responsibilities

The Council is responsible for the structure, fabric and fixtures and fittings of the property.

The Decent Homes Standard provides statutory guidance for social landlords with regard to the condition of their properties. Our repairs and maintenance service aims to ensure that the Council's properties meet the Decent Homes Standard criteria for a property:

- That it meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing
- It is in a reasonable state of repair
- It has reasonably modern facilities and services
- It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort

Property data is used to understand our stock, archetypes and components of properties that are likely to suffer from damp and mould. We use software which provides a real time dashboard indicating where damp and/ or mould has been reported and linked repairing activity such as leaks and drains. The software present premises to staff and managers that have reported concerns about damp, mould and disrepair issues that could be the cause.

We draw component data information regularly and specifically annually to develop our programmes of work.

Information about the maintenance service is available on the Council's website. We encourage tenants to report repairs.

Proactive and Data Led

We will ensure that all our staff and contractors are aware of this policy so that we can and create a good understanding of the issue and encourage reporting of damp and mould conditions.

We hold information about our stock on our maintenance database. The data is accessible and reportable. We use it to inform our asset management priorities. It is kept current by a designated planned investment resource and intermittent stock condition surveys. We have information on EPC grading for all of our stock and this is updated when planned works are completed. The data indicates the condition of our stock as it relates to the Decent Homes Standard.

SERVICE STANDARDS

We will promptly investigate to determine the cause of damp and condensation and carry out remedial repairs and actions in accordance with the tenancy agreement and repairs standard.

We will promote our services and actively encourage tenants to report concerns about damp and/ or mould in their tenancies.

We will inform the tenant of the findings of the investigations. This will include identifying the possible causes of damp, recommending effective solutions and all necessary remedial works / actions / enhancements and the estimated timescales to complete the works /measures. This will be communicated to the tenant keeping them up to date with their enquiry through the process from inception to completion.

We will respond to a report of damp and condensation and complete any remedial works/measures within a reasonable timescale in accordance with the processes and procedures. This will be dependent on the severity and urgency of the problem and on the complexity of the solution of the remedial works/actions required.

We will provide effective heating and ventilation systems to help tenants prevent the conditions which cause condensation/ mould conditions.

We will provide an effective response repairs service so that disrepair which can lead to penetrating damp is addressed promptly.

The Council will undertake improvement programmes that will help to prevent the causes of damp and mould.

The Council will make good internal surfaces following any remedial work carried out ensuring that surfaces are prepared to a condition ready redecoration.

We will ensure that all relevant staff have training and are aware of and understand the delivery of the service that will meet the aims of this policy.

Where Internal conditions within a home for example, overcrowding and excessive hoarding of personal belongs are having an effect on health and wellbeing of the occupants support will be provided to improve the situation.

If it is unsafe or impractical for the occupants to remain in the property while the works are carried out, alternative accommodation arrangements will be made.

Oversight

The Director of Housing meets with the Maintenance Managers at least monthly to review how we are acting to address damp, condensation and mould in our properties. This includes both improvement programmes and response repairs.

The housing service is overseen by the Resources Board. Councillors receive reports about the maintenance service and performance at least annually.

The Resources Board is supported in its oversight by a Housing Task Group of Councillors which have a particular focus on the services we provide to tenants. This includes the performance of the repairs and maintenance service – including reports of damp, condensation and mould.

The Borough Wide Tenants Forum receives performance reports quarterly which includes information about the maintenance service – including matters relating to reports of damp and/ or mould. Our Borough Wide Tenants Forum is encouraged to offer challenge and supports us to scrutinise service delivery. We encourage tenants to report repairs

Complaints

If a tenant or leaseholder is not satisfied by the way in which their repair has been dealt with, or in the way in which the work has been carried out, a formal complaint may be raised.

Concerns and complaints can be raised in the following ways:

Website northwarks.gov.uk

By emailing Customer Services

customerservices@northwarks.gov.uk

By contacting a Local Councillor

Matters should be resolved as soon as possible and within 10 days of the acknowledgement; for complex cases this may be extended for a further 10 working days. If matters cannot be resolved within the maximum timescale of 20 working days, we will contact the complainant to let them know of the delay and advise when we will be able to respond by.

The Housing Ombudsman can also be contacted any at point to offer free, impartial advice to tenants and leaseholders. The Council will advise tenants and leaseholders of the Housing Ombudsman's contact details in all regular and other correspondence. Their contact details are as follows: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Agenda Item No 10

Resources Board

19 June 2023

Report of the Corporate Director Resources

Members' Allowances 2022/23

1 Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Members of the allowances paid for 2022/23. The Council also has a duty to publish the amounts paid to Members under the Members' Allowance Scheme.

Recommendation to the Board

That the report be noted.

2 Report

2.1 Out-turn for 2022/23

- 2.1.1 The cost of Members' Allowances and other payments made under the Members' Allowance Scheme in 2022/23 was £244,188.78. A breakdown of these costs is shown at Appendix A. There were no claims in respect of Dependents'/ Carers' Allowance.

3 Report Implications

3.1 Finance and Value for Money Implications

- 3.1.1 Provision was made in the Cost of Democratic Processes budget.

3.2 Legal, Data Protection and Human Rights Implications

- 3.2.1 Under the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 the Council must publish details of its Members Allowances scheme in a local newspaper annually. In summary, this information must state that a scheme has been made, its main features, any special responsibility allowances, confirming the Council consulted and took account of the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel in preparing the scheme, and that the scheme and records of the payments referred to below for that year can be inspected at the Council's offices.

3.2.2 It is a specific requirement that the Council keeps a record of the names of recipients of payments, the amount that each receives under the scheme and the nature of those payments and makes it available for inspection at the Council's offices. As soon as possible after the end of each year the Council must arrange for publication in its area of the total sum paid to each Member in respect of each of the following:

Basic Allowance.
Special Responsibility Allowance.
Dependents'/Carers' Allowance.
Travel and Subsistence; and
Co-optees' Allowance.

3.2.3 The Council will be discharging the above duties by publishing a record in the Atherstone Herald.

The Contact Officer for this report is Nigel Lane (719371).

Background Papers

Local Government Act 1972 Section 100D, as substituted by the Local Government Act, 2000 Section 97

Background Paper No	Author	Nature of Background Paper	Date

PAYMENTS TO MEMBERS 2022/23

Name	Initials	Basic Allowance £	Special Responsibility £	Travel (Mileage) £	Total £
Bell	M	5,633.04	5,640.00		11,273.04
Chambers	J	5,633.04			5,633.04
Clews	D	5,633.04	1,976.04		7,609.08
Clews	T	5,633.04	454.42	62.70	6,150.16
Davey	B	5,633.04	1,976.04		7,609.08
Deakin	J	4,206.53	67.89		4,274.42
Dirveiks	N	5,633.04			5,633.04
Farrow	J	5,633.04			5,633.04
Gosling	J	5,633.04	4,146.58		9,779.62
Hancocks	D	5,633.04			5,633.04
Hayfield	CC	5,633.04			5,633.04
Humphreys	DJ	5,633.04	(20.44)		5,612.60
Humphreys	M	5,633.04	2,009.04		7,642.08
Jarvis	RJ	5,633.04		55.80	5,688.84
Jenns	A	5,633.04	1,976.04	148.95	7,758.03
Jordon	M	5,633.04			5,633.04
Lees	B	451.17			451.17
MacDonald	J	5,633.04			5,633.04
McClauchlan	A	5,633.04			5,633.04
Morson	PF	5,633.04			5,633.04
Moss	BP	5,633.04		136.80	5,769.84
Osbourne	M	5,633.04			5,633.04
Parker	K	5,633.04	185.92		5,818.96
Parker	M	3,906.77			3,906.77
Parsons	D	5,633.04		55.80	5,688.84
Phillips	H	5,633.04	1,790.12	439.65	7,862.81
Phillips	O	5,633.04			5,633.04
Reilly	D	5,633.04	1,976.04	843.75	8,452.83
Rose	S	5,633.04			5,633.04
Simpson	M	5,633.04	5,640.00		11,273.04
Singh	M	5,633.04			5,633.04
Smith	LJ	5,633.04		216.00	5,849.04
Smith	S	5,633.04			5,633.04
Symonds	C	5,633.04	5,640.00		11,273.04
Wright	A	5,633.04	1,790.12	92.70	7,515.86
Wright	DA	5,633.04	12,434.03		18,067.07
TOTAL		194,454.79	47,681.84	2,052.15	244,188.78

Agenda Item No 11

Resources Board

19 June 2023

**Report of the
Director of Housing**

**Asset Management Plan for the
Council's Landlord Stock**

1 Summary

This report presents a refreshed Asset Management Plan for the Council's Landlord Stock for comment and consideration.

Recommendation to the Resources Board

That the refreshed Asset Management Plan be considered and approved.

2 Consultation

2.1 The Asset Management Plan has been shared with the Housing Task and Finish Group and Borough Wide Tenants Forum. Amendments have been made according to their feedback in advance of the Plan being submitted to the Board.

3 Background

3.1 In January 2023 the Resources Board received a report about the delivery of the Council's maintenance services – for capital works and response repairs. To support the delivery of those services an Asset Management Plan is produced every 3 to 5 years.

3.3 The maintenance service has been and is delivering large refurbishments of the Council's blocks of flats and improvement schemes to provide retrofit energy efficiency measures. These major work programmes are provided by contractors. The provision of a response repairs and safety compliance service is delivered by the Housing Direct Works Team.

3.4 The revised plan reflects on the achievements of the Housing Division over the last 3 years in delivering services to tenants. It provides a direction of travel for the forthcoming 3 years however it will be revised when the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill is enacted.

4 **Asset Management Plan Priorities**

- 4.1 The Plan is attached at Appendix A for consideration and comment.
- 4.2 As well as being accountable to Councillors and tenants the Council's housing services are expected to meet the requirements of the Housing Regulator. In accordance with the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill 2022 the Regulator will become more proactive from 2024. All Social Landlords are required to publish Tenant Satisfaction Measures which include key performance indicators in 2024. In its 'Reshaping Consumer Regulation' implementation plan the Regulator sets out 3 key priorities – safety, transparency and energy efficiency. The Regulator will be undertaking on site inspections from next year. In providing for a more robust regulatory approach the Government has a focus on building safety, property conditions and ensuring arrangements are in place to listen to tenants' views and deal with their concerns and complaints promptly. The Asset Management Plan is a public statement about how the Housing Division will deliver against national and local priorities.
- 4.3 The Asset Management Plan covers both housing management and maintenance services. It is critical that they act together to provide services that tenants expect. The Plan provides factual information about the stock profile and condition, indicates how we act to meet housing needs, provide homes with modern facilities which are energy efficient and damp free as well as safe and accessible. Tenancy management and providing sustainable neighbourhoods are critical to delivering the Plan.
- 4.4 There are significant challenges on the service in delivering against the Plan. This includes pressures on the Housing Revenue Account caused by increased costs to deliver contracts and for materials as well as particular issues around recruitment of staff. The Council has to prioritise services which ensure that properties are in a safe condition and ensure the wellbeing of occupants.

5 **Report Implications**

5.1 **Finance and Value for Money Implications**

- 5.1.1 Since the Council met the Government's Decent Homes Standard as required by 2010 its ability to commit funding to a full capital programme for its housing stock has been constrained. The constraint is a result of payments necessary to fund its subsidy system settlement and caps on rent levels. The nationally recognised cost of living crisis places a risk on rent collection. Additionally, the costs of contract works has increased significantly over the last two years due to inflation and difficulties in sourcing some materials.
- 5.1.2 The annual capital programme (excluding new build schemes) is in the region of £3.5m. It is critical that the team continues to build on its successes in order to deliver the Council's capital programme, take actions to ensure health and safety requirements are met and to address matters which will be agreed as

part of the Asset Management Plan. Programmes of work are based on stock condition data which is held on the asset management database.

5.1.3 Over the last 5 years the Asset Management Team has delivered successful programmes of work for External Wall Insulation and replacement windows. Most of the programme was for individual properties. Work has also been completed on blocks of flats. The Housing Direct Works Team have acted to improve electrical safety in homes and gas compliance is robust.

5.1.4 The budget to deliver the response repairs service is £1.7m annually.

5.1.5 Achieving value for money for tenants dictates that we need to deliver services which receive good satisfaction feedback, are cost effective and are comparatively good performing when benchmarked with other social landlords.

5.2 Legal Implications

5.2.1 The Council has various legal obligations to inspect and maintain gas and electrical installations. Other duties are set out in health and safety legislation, building regulations and the Right to Repair under the Housing Act 1985.

5.2.2 Building safety issues have become more high profile following the Grenfell Tower fire and there is considerable legislation imposing requirements that must be adhered to. Recent and pending changes to legislation tighten these duties. Dealing with damp and mould conditions proactively and effectively is also a focus for Government and the Housing Regulator who expect social landlords to act in a zero-tolerance manner regarding these issues.

5.2.3 The Council has a legal duty under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 to ensure its buildings are not in disrepair and to consult with leaseholders about proposed repairs which are deemed qualifying works. If a tenant suffers disrepair because of the Council's failure to repair the Council may be liable to pay damages for any harm suffered. Further, if because of the Council's failure to maintain the structure of buildings a leaseholder's property is damaged, the Council can be liable to pay damages for their losses.

5.2.4 The Maintenance Service requirements are set out in the 'Home Standard'. This states that a Registered Provider should:

With regard to quality of accommodation:

- Continue to maintain at least to the decent homes standard after December 2010
- Meet the standards of design and quality that applied to the home when it was built if they are higher than the Decent Homes Standard
- Consider whether the locally agreed standard can be more than the Decent Homes Standard (the continuing need for energy efficient homes is a factor here)

With regard to repairs and maintenance:

- Provide a cost-effective repairs and maintenance service
- Respond to tenants' needs, offer choice and have the objective of completing repairs and improvements right first time
- Meet all statutory requirements for health and safety of occupants

5.2.5 Systems of work in the Response Repairs team are expected to adhere to the 'Right to Repair' legislation. The 1985 Act requires the Council to proactively address the condition of properties. This has been enhanced recently by the Homes (Fitness for Habitation) Act 2018 and amends the 1985 Act. It provides for a new implied covenant that the premises are fit for habitation at time of letting and during the term of the tenancy. Crucially it allows tenants to challenge their landlord directly in Court. The 2018 Act provides that a property could be deemed unfit (if it is defective and not reasonably suited for occupation) due to issues such as disrepair, stability, damp & mould growth, excess cold, crowding and spacing, lighting and noise. There is an exception if the tenant has caused the issue by not acting in a tenant like manner.

5.3 Human Resources Implications

5.3.1 To continue to deliver against the Government's agenda for social housing the Council may have to consider the structure and capacity of both the maintenance and management teams. This is not anticipated in the first year of the Plan but will be considered during 2024.

5.4 Risk Management Implications

5.4.1 The age of its stock and health and safety requirements mean that it is important to be able to take a more proactive approach to managing the Council's assets.

The Contact Officer for this report is Angela Coates (719369).

Background Papers

Local Government Act 1972 Section 100D, as substituted by the Local Government Act, 2000 Section 97

Background Paper No	Author	Nature of Background Paper	Date
Decent Homes Standards	Government	Regulation of housing standards for social housing	2006
Social Housing (Regulation) Bill 2022	Government	Forthcoming legislation	2022

NORTH WARWICKSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL
HOUSING DIVISION
ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN
2023 -2026

		Review Date
Version 1	Angela Coates	February 2023
Document Owner	Angela Coates	
Version 3	Angela Coates	June 2023
Document ID.		

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Executive Summary

1 Introduction and Context

1.1 Context

Much has been achieved since the last Asset Management Plan was published in 2018. The previous Plan set out some key objectives for the Housing Division. The achievement of these sets a firm foundation for the activities set out in this Plan. They include:

- New build/ regeneration schemes in Mancetter, Atherstone and Warton
- Continuing to meet the Government's Decent Homes Standard
- Major essential works & energy efficiency programmes for blocks of flats
- Programmes of works to provide energy efficient homes
- Extensive programme of works to provide energy efficient heating systems
- Robust arrangements for health and safety compliance – including those to ensure safe gas and electrical installations – including the presence of smoke and Carbon Monoxide alarms
- Improved resources for the Housing Maintenance Team to deliver services
- Proactive Tenancy and Neighbourhoods services
- Achieving a “good” level of tenant satisfaction

1.2 Scope

The Housing Division Asset Management Plan covers all of the housing stock owned and managed by North Warwickshire Borough Council and includes garages and sheltered scheme communal rooms as well as shops managed in the Housing Revenue Account.

1.3 Definition and Purpose

This Asset Management Plan provides a framework to enable us to manage the stock proactively and support the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan objectives. It is important that the Council's housing assets continue to meet housing needs. It helps to ensure that resources for maintaining the assets in good condition and investments made are clearly focussed.

1.4 Corporate Goals and Objectives

The objectives for the Asset Management Plan support the strategic objectives set out for the housing service in the Council's corporate plans. These include sustaining the Decent Homes Standard as a minimum throughout the stock, building new homes, ensuring the efficient and effective management of the Authority's asset, involving tenants in the service and ensuring we tailor our services our customers' needs. Leasehold management is part of the Housing Division service for both Housing Revenue Account shops and flats.

1.5 Lifespan and review process

This plan reflects the changes in the social housing sector as well as progress made locally over the last few years. Since the last Plan was agreed there has been renewed emphasis on providing buildings that protect the health and safety of social housing tenants. The Housing Regulator will be more proactive from 2024 and listening and acting on tenants' complaints has become a critical feedback mechanism to assess service performance. The Maintenance Service provides for an effective balance between improvement programmes, planned work and reactive responsive repairs. Tenancy services are focussed on rent collection, managing tenancies and neighbourhood services have a focus on good housekeeping and safety in flats and sheltered schemes.

This Plan offers a position statement with regard to the Council's housing assets and looks to the future as we build on the firm foundations over the last two years. The action plan covers 3 years with a view to fully revising the Plan from 2026.

1.6 Data Sources

The Asset Management Plan links strategic and operational drivers for the Housing Division's services. In order to achieve this link this plan considers:

- the profile of the stock and its condition
- the priorities identified by tenants
- performance and benchmarking information
- Corporate Plan objectives and Government direction on housing

2 Current Position

This section outlines the Council's current position with regard to its stock, meeting housing need and understanding tenant priorities.

The housing stock totals 2588 as at 31st March 2023. The stock condition survey information is kept updated as work programmes progress. Data will be audited and verified during 2023.

3 Use of Resources

If stock numbers reduce due to Right to Buy, and new build programmes do not replace them, the outcome is that there is less income being generated - a lower rental base – and therefore less to spend on maintaining the remaining assets.

The Council's 30 Year Business Plan is directed at ensuring its property assets remain in good condition and, when funding is available, building new homes. This plan covers a short period of the overall Plan to reflect current priorities. Following a period of Government rent increase restraint from 2016/ 2017 rents were increased again from 2020. From 2023/2024 Government has placed a further restraint due to the national cost of living increases. Rent losses from voids are kept to a minimum with efficient systems of work to undertake repairs and to let them quickly. The stock is ageing and has required considerable investment over the last 5 years. Costs for contract delivery have increased significantly over the last 3 years due to inflation rises.

4 Future Direction

This Asset Management Plan sets out the Council's current position with regard to the management of its stock. The Plan also looks forward. There are a number of steps which need to be undertaken to ensure the sound development of the 3 year plan. A broad outline of the work required to manage the Council's assets well is set out in the Asset Management Plan and this includes work to be undertaken to:

- Meet Housing Needs
- Involve tenants and understand and meet their priorities
- Retain the stock in good condition
- Focus on energy efficiency in all of our activity
- Manage leasehold flats and shops
- Ensure health and safety requirements are met in full
- Provide a service which is value for money
- Understand risks to delivering the Plan

The Government's intention for the direction for social housing is provided in the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill 2022. This Plan has regard to those stated intentions which we understand will

prioritise building safety, the provision of energy efficient homes, the importance of customer care, quality services and listening to tenants' views.

1. Introduction and Context

1.1 Context

North Warwickshire is a rural Borough with the largest centres of population in the market towns of Atherstone, Coleshill and Polesworth.

The Council's stock is spread over a rural area with the largest amount of its properties in Atherstone (550), Arley (150), Dordon (126), Mancetter (226) Polesworth (302), Kingsbury (158), Baddesley (145), Hartshill (148), Coleshill (129) and Water Orton (94).

The first Plan set out some key objectives for the Housing Division. The 2018 Plan provided a clear direction for 'business as usual' to manage the stock. They included:

- Reviewing the Lettings Scheme to ensure that housing needs are met & have efficient systems in place to manage voids.
- Have actions and resources in place to deal with challenges to rent collection
- Procurement of capital works programmes according to stock condition information
- Ensure the databases we have for stock condition and safety information are kept up to date.
- Undertake options appraisals for blocks of flats that require extensive structural repairs
- Ensure efficient and effective systems of work within Housing Direct Works
- Develop an action plan to keep under review arrangements for safe systems of work for health and safety
- To develop procedures and information for tenants to address issues of damp in properties
- Act on garage survey condition information
- Build new homes to add to the Council's stock to meet expressed housing needs
- Deliver proactive tenancy and neighbourhood management services
- Keep under review the Tenant Partnership Agreement and support the scrutiny role of the Borough Wide Tenant Forum
- Review arrangements for leaseholder management and procedures for service charges
- Review our response to the Regulator's requirements to ensure compliance

In the face of unprecedented challenges in 2020 and 2021 these objectives have largely been delivered. The notable exception is action to respond to the findings of the garage survey information. The review of leasehold management arrangements was delayed and has now been covered by an internal Audit report dated March 2023. This gives significant assurance for how the Council manages its leasehold properties. As part of this plan, we will review the way in which leaseholders are consulted about works for which they have to pay.

In addition to taking opportunities to bid for Social Housing Grant to build new homes, the Council has also successfully bid for properties which have become available as part of planning Section 106 Agreements. Buying from private developers has enabled us to sustain a supply of Council owned properties for social rent without the need to buy land because our own supply is limited.

This Asset Management Plan needs to have regard to the requirements of the Housing Regulator as set out in the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill 2022 however in doing so our intention is to build on the productive and settled teams that the Managers in the service have established to provide better services for our tenants. These teams have achieved good rent collection rates, provide robust tenancy management services and deliver response repairs which tenants request as well as improvement programmes. The Asset Management Team continues to procure programmes of work using frameworks, direct tendering or partnering to keep the Council's stock in good condition and the Housing Direct Works Team has been reviewed to ensure it provides response repairs efficiently. In both teams the technical and health and safety expertise has been enhanced to meet regulations and expectations. As part of the Platform Housing Group consortium the Council continues to be a development partner with Homes England and is therefore able to attract Social Housing Grant.

Some of the changes offer opportunities whilst others pose risks which have to be addressed. The Housing Division develops an Asset Management Plan as a standalone document because of the detail necessary to provide a clear direction for the management of the Council's assets that the Housing Division provides. The Plan has been developed in a way that enables tenants to understand the current position of the Housing Division for Asset Management and future direction. The Borough Wide Tenants Forum has been fully informed about the decisions which have been necessary to establish the foundations set out in the Plan and have been asked for their views.

This Asset Management Plan identifies the investment and maintenance needed to contribute to the Council's strategies. The Asset Management Plan supports and is informed by corporate objectives. It also reflects the housing section of the Climate Change Strategy.

The Asset Management Plan reflects the priorities set out in the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan. This 30 year plan has been agreed by the Council to reflect its position with regard to the Housing Revenue Account that there is no subsidy provided within the system. It is noted that there are risks to the Business Plan. These include collecting rent income in the face of the increasing daily living costs, the possibility of increased 'Right to Buy' sales and reducing opportunities to build or purchase properties to replace those sold as well as the significant

increases in inflation which have a direct impact on material costs and labour required for maintaining the stock.

1.2 Scope of the Asset Management Plan

The Housing Division Asset Management Plan covers all of the housing stock owned and managed by North Warwickshire Borough Council and includes garages and sheltered scheme communal rooms.

North Warwickshire Borough Council is responsible for the management of 2588 properties (31st March 2023). The breakdown of the Council stock by location is set out in Appendix (page 50). The Council has of stock of 1069 garages and 23 sheltered scheme communal rooms. It manages 124 blocks of medium rise flats. It owns 20 shops which are leased. There are 134 leased flats in the stock.

The Housing Division's vision is:

“To provide customer focussed services by competent, knowledgeable staff with tenants fully involved at a level suitable for them at both strategic and operational levels.”

The focus of the whole team delivering management and maintenance services is to manage the asset for the Council corporately and most importantly for the tenants who live in the Council's properties and on estates that the Housing Division manages. Both the Management and Maintenance Sections work together to provide services which are aimed at maintaining and improving the Council's asset to ensure we provide homes and estates where people choose to and want to continue living. This is the case whether we are carrying out day to day repairs, bringing homes up to modern standards, managing tenancies so that they remain in good condition or providing neighbourhood services to keep estates to a high standard and free from anti-social behaviour.

1.3 Definition and Purpose of the Asset Management Plan

This Asset Management Plan provides a framework to enable us to manage the stock proactively and support the 30 year Business Plan. It helps to ensure that resources for maintaining the assets in good condition and investments made are clearly focussed on meeting current and future customers' housing needs in terms of type of properties available, location, facilities and standards.

1.4 Corporate Goals and Objectives

The objectives for the Asset Management Plan support corporate strategic objectives specifically with regard to the health and wellbeing of residents. Critically this includes addressing the condition of properties and sustaining the decent homes standard as a minimum throughout the stock,

building new homes, ensuring efficient and effective management of the Authority's asset (including collecting rent due), involving tenants in the service and ensuring we tailor what we do to our customers' needs. The aims of this plan also need to support the actions set out in the Council's Homelessness Strategy to ensure we can meet housing need.

1.5 Objectives for the Asset Management Plan

The objectives for the Asset Management Plan support the corporate objectives set out for the housing service which includes ensuring that the Authority takes a strategic and proactive role in meeting the housing needs and associated issues across all tenures and that housing plays a fully integrated role in corporate initiatives. The plan therefore aims to:

- Set out the role of the Council's stock in meeting housing need
- Identify the resources required to keep the asset in good condition, sustain the Decent Homes Standard as a minimum for the whole of the stock, improve its energy efficiency and, as funding allows, building new homes.
- Seek energy efficiency measures in all of our activity
- Ensure the service offers best value for the rents tenants pay
- State how high standards of health and safety for customers and the workforce will be sustained
- Deliver services which meet tenants' priorities and encourage tenant involvement
- Assess the risks posed to achieving the aims of the Plan

1.5 Lifespan and Review Process

This Asset Management Plan is a working document that drives decision-making in the management of the Council's housing stock of dwellings and garages and sheltered scheme communal rooms.

The teams delivering the Plans objectives are committed to delivering good customer service and are productive in doing so. Following a period of review up to 2018 the services have matured and become established. For two years of the last Asset Management Plan they faced the uncertainty of working in the period of the pandemic when working practices had to change. Nonetheless good performance in all services was achieved. This Plan seeks full engagement with all stakeholders to reflect on what works, the new regulatory regime and how we can best serve our tenants.

This Plan offers a position statement with regard to the Council's housing assets and looks to the future. The action plan covers 2 years. It will be reviewed annually and revised to reflect actions required for the 3 years of the strategy.

1.6 Data Sources

The Asset Management Plan links strategic and operational drivers for the Housing Division's services. In order to achieve this link this plan considers:

- the profile of the stock and it's condition, and
- the priorities identified by tenants
- services required to provide sustainable neighbourhoods

This information is then used to inform:

- the programmes of work
- the budget profile, and
- the methods of delivery
- future arrangements for tenancy and neighbourhood management services

The data used in the preparation of this plan are from:

- current information about responsive repairs and stock condition data as held on the IBS housing management system
- information from Energy Performance Certificate Data
- financial information in the 30 Year Business Plan
- performance data and customer satisfaction feedback

2 Current Position

2.1 Overview

As a social housing landlord, the Council is a Registered Provider and as such is subject to regulations. In accordance with the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing the Council ensures it meets the national standards. The national standards underpin all aspects of the Council's landlord services from customer care and tenant involvement, rent collection, property maintenance, tenancy and neighbourhood management. The Regulator is particularly concerned with the safety and health of tenants and the last few years have seen action taken against landlords who have failed to meet gas safety requirements and do not have fire safety measures in place. The Housing Ombudsman takes against landlords who do not safeguard their tenants from damp properties and conditions where there is mould growth.

2.1.1 The Council's local commitments are set out in its 'Tenant Partnership Agreement' which is reviewed annually and submitted to the Resources Board for consideration. Understanding tenant priorities through their involvement and scrutiny arrangements is critical to the success of asset management planning.

2.1.2 In accordance with the regulations a report setting out our performance across all of the housing services delivered is published annually. The Housing Division participates in a national benchmarking club and undertakes an annual satisfaction survey in order to measure performance. The most recent tenant satisfaction survey (2021) told us that 82% of tenants were satisfied with our overall service, 83% were satisfied with the overall quality of their home and 84% expressed satisfaction with their neighbourhood as a place to live. 85% of tenants said that the Council provided a property that is safe and secure.

2.2 Stock Profile

The housing stock totals 2588 as at 31 March 2023. In summary the stock comprises:

Property	Size	Number
Bedsit		13
Flat	1 Bed	455
	2 Bed	128
	3 Bed	10
Maisonette	1 and 2 Bed	18
Houses	1 Bed	8
	2 Bed	414
	3 Bed	869
	4 Bed	55
	5 Bed	1
Bungalows	1 Bed	311
	2 Bed	306
Total		2588

(2690 at last report)

In the first Asset Management Plan we reported a stock of 2739 properties as at 31st March 2012. In the last plan in 2018 we reported a stock of 2690. Changes are due to Right To Buy sales, demolitions and new build properties coming into the stock.

There are 134 leasehold flats in the Council's stock. The Council is responsible for the structure of the building – including windows. If work is undertaken a charge is made in accordance with the leaseholder regulations. In some circumstances, where the charge will be more than £250.00, formal consultation is required. The condition of the structure and works required is considered as part of the stock condition arrangements. The inside of the property is the responsibility of the leaseholder.

During 2022 we have let new houses and flats at Hatters Close Warton and on Long Street Atherstone as well as New Street, Dordon.

The table below sets out the new build properties developed by the Council since 2010. We have developed 163 new properties to date for our own stock.

Development	Number and types of property
Beavons Close, Water Orton	9 x 2 bed bungalows
Eastlang Road, Fillongley	2 x 2 bed houses and 2 x 3 bed houses
Laurel Close, New Arley	2 x 2 bed houses and 4 x 3 bed houses
Stanyers Close, Kingsbury	3 x 2 bed houses and 3 x 3 bed houses
Dragons Court, Atherstone	9 x 2 bed bungalows
Jenners Court, Atherstone	9 x 2 bed bungalows, 4 x 2 bed houses and 3 x 3 bed houses

Lister Road, Atherstone	3 x 2 bed flats, 1 x 1 bed flat, 4 x 3 bed houses
Princess Road, Atherstone	2 x 2 bed bungalows
Chetwynd Drive, Grendon (Section 106 development)	4 x 2 bed houses, 1 x 3bed house and 4 x 4 bed houses
Hastings Road, Grendon (Section 106 development)	2 x 2 bed houses and 2 x 3 bed houses
Wood View, Grendon (Section 106 development)	2 x 2 bed houses and 1 x 3 bed house
Cadman Close, Mancetter	4 X 2bed houses and 2 x 3 bed houses
Joseph Cadman Court, Mancetter	6 x 1 bed flats and 8 x 2bed flats
Byford Drive, Polesworth (Section 106 development)	1 x 2bed bungalow
Grinham Avenue, Polesworth (Section 106 development)	4 x 3 bed houses
Little Jims Close, Polesworth (Section 106 development)	5 x 2 bed houses and 5 x 2 bed bungalows
Thompson Way, Polesworth (Section 106 development) Hatters Close, Warton	8 x 1 bed houses, 1 x 2 bed bungalow, 9 x 2bed houses and 2 x 4 bed houses 4 X 1 bed flats, 16 X 2 bed hours
Long Street Atherstone	4 X 3 bed houses
New Street, Dordon (Section 106 development)	2X 2 bed houses
Coleshill Road Atherstone	6 X 2 bed flats

2.3 **Stock Condition**

The Council needs good data to inform its work programmes. Following a new stock condition survey in 2015 the data has been updated as programmes of work have progressed. During 2023 the information held will be audited and reviewed with site visits to confirm the condition of individual properties. This will enable us to provide re-assurance that work programmes are planned using accurate information.

2.3.1 **Data**

The stock condition database is kept up to date as improvement programmes are completed to properties to ensure the information is accurate and up to date. Information is held on the Housing Division's housing management system and can be readily used and reports can be drawn from it to inform programmes of work. It includes dates when properties had improvement works and predicts when future improvement work will be required in accordance with the component life cycles set out in the Decent Homes Standard. Capital programmes are based on this information and supplemented to ensure homes are energy efficient. The Decent Homes life cycles are set out in Appendix 2 (page 48). All teams, responsive and planned, are required to update component information as they deliver their planned work. Information includes information on electrical and gas installations as well as components such as roofs, kitchens and bathrooms.

2.3.2 **Older Stock**

Where the stock is older we have found the breakdown of the fabric of some buildings which can lead to problems of damp and disrepair. We have had to undertake extensive, major works to a number of vacant properties over the last few years. In 2018 we noted an increase in reports about damp from tenants. A designated surveyor was appointed to deal with these reports and take action. Since then, the number of reports has averaged 200 to 250 annually and following training for staff a new procedure was developed to ensure prompt action is taken when a report is received. A policy position to give clear direction to teams who deal with properties with damp and mould conditions has been drafted for consideration.

2.3.3 **Voids**

The condition of some of our properties that become vacant is poor. There are a variety of reasons for this. For some the fabric of the building has been found to be poor with extensive, major works required to floors and walls. In others tenants have refused improvement works and they require modernisation. Unfortunately some properties are returned in a poor condition because of the behaviour of the tenants. Whatever the reason if a vacancy needs more work than would normally be expected there is a cost to the Housing Revenue Account both for the remedial work and loss

of rent. It is the Housing Direct Works Team that undertakes works to bring properties back up to standard in accordance with the published Vacant Property Standard.

2.4 Programmes of Work

Future planned works programmes are based on information held in the housing maintenance system about the expected lifespan of component types with consideration for age and condition as well as energy efficiency and the provision of modern facilities. The Council does not have a published local policy with regard to addressing the needs of its stock. Its main reference point is the Government's Decent Homes Standard. Nonetheless its continuing ambition for its asset is to sustain it in good condition and ensure it remains in demand.

2.4.1 Regulation

The Regulatory Framework sets out its expectations with regard to the stock of Registered Providers in the 'Home Standard Section'. This requires Providers to maintain their homes to at least the Decent Homes Standard, have a prudent approach to repairs and maintenance of homes and communal areas with an appropriate balance of planned and responsive repairs and be able to show value for money in all aspects of its maintenance service. An adaptations service has to be provided and statutory requirements have to be complied with for health and safety.

2.4.2 Investment Priorities

The investment priorities to ensure resources are available to support the management and maintenance of the Council's stock is set out in Appendix 3 (page 50). The Council's housing stock is in demand and continues to benefit from good levels of investment. There was a period after the Decent Homes Programme ended in 2011 when investment was driven by information from responsive repairs information and requests. This way of working left us with a backlog of works. Over the last five years a more traditional way of working and the establishment of a strong Asset Management Team has ensured that we proactively deliver the work programmes required to keep the stock in good condition.

2.4.3 The work programmes which have been developed are to provide consistent and robust approach to ensure that properties continue to meet the Decent Homes Standard however we have also started a stream of bespoke works to flats and to individual properties with serious structural and/or latent defects. Latent defects are found some time after construction is completed. Usually discovered because a problem is found and diagnosis reveals that the premises were not constructed in accordance with the agreed design or approved standards.

2.4.4 Garages

The Council has a stock of 1069 lock up garages for rent. A survey of the Council's garages was undertaken during 2016. The survey is detailed and splits the stock into three main categories. There are blocks which are at the end of their useful life, would not be economical to repair and should be demolished. There are blocks that would benefit from significant investment to bring them back to a good standard. There are other blocks that are generally in good repair but would benefit from minor repairs and a painting programme. Many garages have asbestos roofs and care will have to be taken to deal with those to safeguard health and safety.

2.4.5 Shops

The Council has a stock of 20 shops which are managed by the Housing Division because rent income is paid into the Housing Revenue Account. The shops provide a community benefit in the areas they serve. Vacancies are rare. The Housing Division manages shops in Polesworth (3), Ridge Lane (1), Kingsbury (8), Atherstone (5) and Shuttington (1) and Water Orton (1). Their use ranges from general dealers to hairdressers and cafes/ fast food outlets. Tenants are responsible for the internal arrangements of the premises and signage. The Council is responsible for the structure of the building – including windows.

There are currently 162 long term vacant Council garages across the Borough (100 more than reported in the last Plan). Four underused garage sites were used to provide new affordable rural homes for rent in 2010. Other sites are being considered to provide for development, but access issues are making them less attractive than those already used.

2.4.6 Communal Rooms

The Housing Division manages 23 communal rooms as part of its sheltered schemes. Two have had conversion works since the last Plan was published. At Rowland Court, Arley the local Pharmacy undertook works to provide for a pharmacy premises in the room and in doing so they developed new facilities for the communal room using the old boiler house. At Eastlang Road, Fillongley the large, underused communal room was divided to give a smaller communal space for the sheltered scheme in order to allow for a one-bedroom flat to be developed for letting. The rooms are all in good condition and do not need any major works however some are underutilised and will be reviewed as part of this Plan.

2.5 Meeting Housing Needs

The Council's stock plays a critical role in the local housing market to meet the need for affordable homes. Whilst owner occupation remains a clear aspiration for many and the Government has provided for schemes to assist first time buyers, affordability is still an issue for some households.

The private rented sector remains relatively small in this area with rent levels and the need to

provide a deposit being prohibitive for some. Access is also restricted due to welfare benefit criteria. Universal Credit criteria mean that rent payments are paid direct to the tenant and not the landlord and Local Housing Allowance rates have not been reviewed for some years and there are bedroom restrictions in accordance with household size. As access to home ownership and private sector housing has been squeezed over the last two years there has been an increase in the need to find accommodation for applicants who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. The most prevalent shortfall to meet demand is for two-bedroom homes.

2.5.1 **Housing Demand**

Our biggest demand in terms of expressed interest from households registered on the waiting list is for Atherstone (178 applicants) and then Polesworth (140 applicants) and Dordon (137 applicants). For other areas the demand is Mancetter (108 applicants), Grendon (128 applicants) Baddesley (122 applicants). Demand for family homes generally outstrips supply in Coleshill (88), Water Orton (76) and Kingsbury (87).

2.5.2 **Vacancies**

In 2021/ 22 we let 44 properties in Atherstone (19 houses); 17 in Polesworth (10 houses); 11 in Dordon (3 houses); 12 in Mancetter (0 houses); 11 in Grendon (7 houses); 9 in Baddesley (4 houses); 8 in Coleshill (no houses); 19 in Kingsbury (6 houses); 1 in Water Orton (0 houses).

2.5.3 The Council's own stock turnover continues to be relatively low at around 5% (an average of 140 properties annually). This is an indicator of sustainable communities however it also means there is pressure to meet housing demand. The Council's ability to provide new homes and to work in partnership with Registered Provider partners to develop more affordable homes in the Borough remains a priority and is a key factor in keeping waiting list numbers to a manageable level which means we can prevent crisis homelessness.

2.5.4 Over the last 4 years new properties provided by the Council and Housing Associations developing in the Borough have ensured that housing need expressed in the housing register has been met in a timely manner and the use of temporary accommodation for households has been kept to a minimum. Any reduction in the delivery of new homes to rent will have a direct impact on our ability to meet housing needs in the Borough.

2.5.5 The type of properties which become vacant does change however profiling indicates that around 36% of vacancies are houses, 27% bungalows and 37%% flats. Over a 4 year period this is a total of 608 relets with 8 Bedsits, 163 bungalows, 215 flats, 216 houses and 6 maisonettes. As we are letting more properties to a younger cohort of applicants as well as ensuring focussed services for

our older tenants we also need to consider services for younger tenants who may be moving into their first home to live independently and as well as support to settle in and deal with financial issues or life skills may also require assistance to ensure that they are able to manage their obligations with regard to maintaining their home in good condition and repairing responsibilities. We have found that some new tenants struggle with furnishing properties and as a consequence we have started a small initiative to provide furniture and white goods as a home starter pack for new tenants.

2.5.6 Sustainable Estates

The use of Introductory Tenancies since 2014 is helping the Tenancy Service Team manage tenancies closely in the first 12 months. There is a proactive combination of interventions by the Tenancy Services Officers and the Tenancy Sustainment Officer to support new tenants.

2.5.7 The Council's contribution is important as the largest stockholder of affordable rent homes in the Borough. We recognise that for the Council to continue to provide properties where people choose to live our asset management must provide properties which meet modern standards and are part of estates which are in good condition and free from anti-social behaviour. We have no hard to let properties and have low refusal rates and we intend to work to sustain that.

2.5.8 The Council recognises the importance of making the best use of its own stock. Whilst it has no 'hard to let' data collected specifically as part of the lettings process, we recognise that we need to track properties which are less popular and find out why.

2.5.9 Best Use of Stock

To improve the occupancy levels of its current stock the Council should continue building properties which offer older people a positive choice to move out of their larger family homes and continue to give tenants applying to downsize high priority in the Lettings Scheme. The support scheme provided to tenants' downsizing works well and remains in place. We will continue to use our customer information to discover how many properties are under occupied to encourage transfers to smaller homes to make better use of the stock.

The Housing Division is realistic about the extent that its own properties can help to meet housing need. A review of the Lettings Scheme during 2022 resulted in some minor amendments to the policy. The changes reflect the changing financial circumstances of applicants and the increasing difficulty for some in finding affordable homes in the private sector and also gave more scope to help tenants who are overcrowded to move to properties that meet the needs of their families. The

Register has had a rolling average of 350 applicants seeking housing at any one time. Waiting times are tracked and those waiting the longest are family households. Extended waiting times create a risk of homelessness and the consequent need to use temporary accommodation. The scheme is concerned with addressing housing need and the qualifying criteria recognises that. The Council lets around 140 properties a year from current stock (this is a change from an average of 160 reflected in the previous Plan). The average waiting time is 3 to 7 months. The importance of keeping these waiting times down cannot be underestimated in terms of preventing homelessness and the use of temporary accommodation.

2.6 Modern and Energy Efficient Homes

The Council has prioritised providing modern and energy efficient homes to meet the expectations of both current and future tenants. Its wide range of modernisation schemes over the past few years reflected the priorities of tenants. These included:

- Roof replacement programme (including soffit and fascia replacement)
- Flat to pitched roof conversions for blocks of flats
- Providing energy efficient gas boilers and Air Source Heat Pump systems
- Providing heating choices in flats
- External installation & replacement windows

2.6.1 Climate Change Strategy Objectives

The Council has a climate change strategy. The Housing Division has contributed to the content and objectives in the strategy. Our overarching aims are to

- Retrofit of existing homes
- Build new homes to a low or zero carbon standard
- Engage our tenants to help us deliver solutions

To support these aims our ongoing major works programmes have delivered the following:

The external wall insulation and new windows programmes of work to provide more energy efficient homes have been a success for individual properties across the Borough. From 2015 to 2021 329 properties have had new windows fitted and 379 have had the benefit of external wall insulation. Blocks of flats have also achieved better energy efficiency with new windows and external wall insulation.

Our roofing programme delivers 50 new roofs annually and loft insulation is also provided.

The replacement heating scheme delivers 150 to 200 new efficient gas heating systems annually.

The Government's Green Homes funding has supported the provision of energy efficient Air Source Heat Pump heating systems which have been installed in properties across the Borough to replace inefficient and expensive heating. We have continued with that programme post grant availability.

All new properties developed by the Council between 2015 and 2018 have solar panels. All new properties developed by the Council since 2020 have electrical vehicle charging provision.

Our new build regeneration schemes have ensured that local shop facilities have been provided to support the new developments.

Low energy lighting has been installed in our blocks of flats as part of electrical upgrades.

To date programmes of work to improve energy efficiency have considered the construction of and facilities in the property. In future this information will be considered in combination with the information from our bespoke property energy efficiency database. The combined information will promote our understanding of the needs of the stock and direct future programmes. Examples of retrofit that we will consider are:

- Roof insulation
- External wall insulation
- Energy efficient heating systems such as Air Source Heat Pumps
- Window replacement

2.6.2 When developing new homes we will seek designs which include energy efficiency considerations and include renewable energy measures where possible. We will engage partner housing associations and influence them to do the same. It is our goal that new homes are net-zero ready. Modern methods of construction will be considered. When considering new developments we will reflect on Forward Planning guidelines with regard to having accessible local services and alternatives to using vehicles for transport.

2.6.3 Major Works Programmes

Before 2020 we also prioritised modernising kitchens and bathrooms however this programme stalled during the two years of pandemic lock downs. Programmes of work were back in place from January 2023 but have stalled again due to rising costs and limited labour.

2.6.4 The quality of the works delivered are assured by the in-house team that manages them. We seek high levels of customer satisfaction. To date these schemes have sustained the Decent Homes Standard including taking the opportunity to work with tenants to ensure their homes are brought up to standards for modern living. All of this work will assist us to ensure that our properties meet customers' expectations in the future and that properties are not left vacant.

2.6.5 The Asset Management Team undertakes a range of different capital programme works. There are our traditional programmes but there is also bespoke work. The annual programmes are to upgrade kitchens and bathrooms, window replacement schemes, new roofing, external installation and to provide efficient gas central heating boilers and carry out electrical upgrades. During the term of the Plan significant refurbishment schemes have been undertaken for blocks of flats. The range of repairs included new roofs, external wall insulation, new windows, external and internal communal

area improvements and interventions to tackle damp and latent defects. Work has been completed to a high standard at Alder and Heather Court, Monument View, Oldbury View and Alexandra Court. A new roof has been installed on the flats at George Road Water Orton and St Leonards View, Dordon with major refurbishment works planned for Drayton Court and Abbey Green Court. All of the works delivered improve the energy efficiency of the buildings. Importantly the works also address fire safety issues in the buildings.

Future years will see a similar range of programmed works. Some meet tenant expectations as well as the Decent Homes Standard. Others are more concerned with addressing structural issues in buildings.

2.6.6 New Homes

In addition to the traditional capital works programmes, since 2010 the Housing Division has been delivering new affordable homes for the Borough. We have delivered schemes on garage sites, on our own land as part of regeneration schemes and by buying properties from developers. We aim to do the latter as often as possible as developing our own schemes is resource intensive. There is a consultation process, scheme design, planning requirements, procurement of contractors, rehusing needs to address and the building development to oversee. To take a development from design to completion is more resource intensive for the Council but we are able to direct the size and layout of these schemes. The opportunity to buy properties off a developer is helpful in adding to our stock and being able to use the Right to Buy receipt to do so, but the downside is that the Council has no influence over the property design or the products installed and fittings.

2.6.7 Satisfaction

In our most recent survey (2021) 83% of tenants who responded said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the overall quality of their home. 84 % said that they were satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live which is an important aspect for letting properties and sustaining low vacancies. 85% of tenants said that they were satisfied that the Council provided a house that is safe and secure which is an indicator that the Housing Regulator is particularly interested in.

2.6.8 Procurement

Programmes of works have largely been procured using traditional tendering methods. However other methods are considered if they are suitable such as making use of frameworks or partnering contracts. Processing tenders is resource intensive and the mobilisation periods are necessary but create a hiatus in delivering works. Contracts are generally awarded for two years with the possibility of extending them for a further two years if they are cost effective and delivering.

2.6.9 Future Programmes

The capital programme is driven by stock condition information kept and utilised from the Division's housing management software. It is also influenced by common response repairs reports and information from technical officers' site visits. Business planning and capital programmes are driven by the expected life cycle of components set out in the Decent Homes Standard. There are legal requirements which need to be met. Required funding is assessed over a 30 year business planning period with the Maintenance Service working on a 3 year capital programme with a rolling tender process. The capital programme priorities for the next 3 years are shown in appendix 3. For 2023/24 there is a continuation of catch-up programmes for kitchen and bathroom improvements and blocks of flats. The latter will include starting major works at Abbey Green Court, Polesworth. Routine programmes for roofs and heating replacements will continue. New programmes are planned for replacement windows and fire doors and these, as well as a roofing contractor, will have to be procured. Tenders are based on a 60:40 price/ quality split and contracts awarded in accordance with the Council's Contract Standing Orders.

2.6.9.1 Cyclical Repairs

Cyclical repairs and minor planned works to properties and garages have not been undertaken for the last 3 years. This means that the external parts of some properties (fascias, painted areas and garages are starting to deteriorate. They have previously been delivered by a combination of the in-house team and contractors. As part of the actions for this Plan we will consider how best to deliver these works and note that until we do so premises are deteriorating. Low level premises have traditionally been done by the in-house team. Work to properties above one storey has been undertaken by external contractors. Some of the work required in future cyclical programmes will reduce due to the installation of low maintenance products such as PVCu fascia.

2.6.9.2 Energy Efficiency

The average SAP (Standard Assessment Procedure) rating for the measurement of the energy efficiency of our dwellings is 66. This is slightly below the national average for social housing which is 68. Programmes of work to provide external insulation and roofing programmes with loft insulation are addressing this. Work is underway to capture the relevant Energy Performance Certificate information on the database to have an accurate reflection of the energy rating of our stock. It will be an action from this Plan to update the database we use to capture the SAP ratings from the Energy Performance Certificates.

Fuel poverty is being addressed as part of our improvement programmes with the installation of new gas boilers, Air Source Heat Pump systems, external wall insulation, new double-glazed windows and new doors. There has also been a programme of loft insulation as part of the roofing

programme and external wall insulation works. The Council's new properties are built to good levels of energy efficiency with some having solar panels to provide very energy efficient and low-cost homes.

The Council's investment programme for its own stock has improved energy efficiency measures. The work programme includes work to improve the insulation of dwellings through:

- External insulation
- Loft insulation
- Re-roofing (including increasing insulation)
- Fuel swaps (with a choice to move from electric to gas or Air Source Heat Pumps)
- Replacement of windows and doors

2.6.9.3 Damp & Mould Conditions

Tenants, the Housing Regulator and the Housing Ombudsman have been clear that homes where damp and mould has been reported and found must receive urgent interventions. When a report is received an expert Surveyor attends the property to discuss concerns with the tenant within 10 working days. Following that first visit an appropriate intervention is agreed with the tenant. The Surveyor will arrange for an intervention. This can include:

- ✓ Works to repair/ install a damp proof course
- ✓ Improving latent defects – such as cold bridging, floor construction
- ✓ Roof, gutter repairs
- ✓ Identifying and repairing leaks
- ✓ Arranging for energy efficiency measures
- ✓ Overhaul or replacement of ventilation fans
- ✓ Provision of specialist ventilation to address condensation
- ✓ Specialist treatment to remove mould spores
- ✓ Improving loft insulation

Sometimes major works are required to address the cause of damp. In this instance we support tenants to move out temporarily and provide compensation.

2.6.9.4 Response Repairs

As part of Tenant Satisfaction Surveys we have asked Tenants to prioritise the top three services we provide in order of importance. 75% of those replying said repairs and maintenance was a priority and 63% said the overall quality of their home was a priority. 35% prioritised their neighbourhood as a place to live. The Council recognises that how we deliver our maintenance services is critical in keeping properties in good condition.

Tenant satisfaction with the repairs and maintenance service is currently 78%. A recent report on social housing ('The Better Housing Review') stated that satisfaction with repairs averages 66% for social renters. Nonetheless we want to improve our performance. The main reasons for satisfaction were stated as job done to a good standard and professional and friendly workers. The main reasons for dissatisfaction were the time taken to address the repair and multiple visits to fix the problem. In 2022 the Division implemented new software to track repeat visits to a property to complete a repair. Multiple visits are a sign of inefficiency and are not good customer service. The tracker will support the team to root out the reasons for repeat visits and improve customer service. 76% of tenants were satisfied that the repair was done right first time. Having multiple appointments to complete works is an inconvenience to tenants.

2.6.9.5 In House Team

We want a comprehensive, prompt, efficient and customer friendly service for our tenants. Tenants have consistently told us that they prefer the response repair services to be delivered by the in-house team. It allows us to tailor our services for customers and give them confidence that they are getting value for money for their rent. 83% of tenants told us that they are satisfied that their rent provides value for money.

2.6.9.6 In February 2018 we concluded the review of the Housing Direct Works Team. The in-house team is important to tenants. It needs to be organised to meet expectations about quality and efficiency. Changes included how the appointments system is managed and how we plan and schedule the work to avoid delays. The team continued to deliver all services during the period of the pandemic and opportunities have been taken to improve competency with the majority of the tradesmen successfully completing National Vocational Qualifications in 2022. New systems of work have resulted in less reliance on contractors to support the delivery of jobs. This is better value for money at a time of inflationary pressures which have increased the costs of contract work by an average of 20%. There are challenges to recruiting qualified and experienced tradesmen and how this can be addressed will be considered as part of this plan. In the meantime apprentices for plumbing and electrical trades have been appointed.

2.6.9.7 Central to new systems of work are right first-time principles. This means that the organisation of work has to be able to deliver the right tradesman, with the right materials by appointment to the property requiring a repair. During 2022 right first-time performance for urgent plumbing, electrical and carpentry work was 96% against a benchmark of 94%. The materials contract for the Housing Direct Works Team was changed in 2019 and is due for renewal in April 2023. The contract has been proven to provide good value for money – not only for the costs of the materials but in how

they are delivered to the team. It has cut down entirely on travel time to a merchant and the just in time delivery system is cost effective and productive.

2.6.9.8 The work that the Housing Direct Works Team carries out critically links with the improvement work being carried out by the Housing Division and ensures properties remain in good condition once the work has been completed. The response repairs team and the programmed works team are now linked by the combined roles of the Gas Compliance Supervisor and Electrical Compliance Supervisor as well as the Support Team Leader. Practical matters such as ensuring materials used in the improvement programmes link to the response repairs service are agreed between the teams.

2.7 Safe and Accessible Homes

2.7.1 Adaptations

The Housing Division carries out around 100 (117 in 2021/2022) adaptations every year – stair lifts, level access showers and ramps as well as extensions when moving home is not possible. Whatever the adaptation a speedy response makes a significant difference to tenants. The HEART shared partnership assesses the needs of the tenant and makes a recommendation to the Housing Division to meet it. The time scale for delivering a bathroom adaptation has reduced from an average of 3 months to an average 2 months over the last 3 years. This is an improvement which was anticipated as part of this plan. The team also deal with requests for minor adaptations that do not need a HEART referral.

2.7.2 Asbestos

The Housing Division has a clear and robust stance to asbestos management. There are clear regulations in place about asbestos management which we adhere to, and our policy is set out in our Asbestos Management Plan for the Division. The principles are concerned with having good information about asbestos in common areas and individual properties and having robust procedures in place to share that information with tenants, staff and contractors. Training is provided in accordance with the regulations. The majority of our stock have asbestos surveys available. Where they are not available a specialist contractor is asked to complete one before work starts. We continue to provide intrusive refurbishment and demolition surveys before any work is undertaken in our properties to fully inform contractors about the materials found and to enable us to arrange for its removal before work begins if required. Decisions about removal are made on a risk basis and specialist contractors are used to remove the materials when required. We will be tendering contracts to provide for surveys and removal during 2022 and will have two new contractors in place. We expect them to continue for the period of this Plan.

2.7.3 Gas Safety

Providing prompt and robust services for gas installations is an important area for customer safety. The annual gas service visit is a legal requirement. To deal with resilience issues in the in-house team on 1st January 2018 the repair work and annual gas service programme became part of a contract with an external supplier. Two external contractors have been appointed during the period of the last plan. The contract is due to be tendered again in 2023 and a full review of how best to deliver this critical service will be undertaken.

2.7.4 Legionella

A competent contractor is in place to provide services to prevent Legionella. The contract was renewed in 2023. New risk assessments will be undertaken during 2023 to offer re-assurance. The contractor provides a regular testing programme for Legionella bacteria undertaken to ensure water tanks in flats and supplies in sheltered scheme communal rooms are safe. Where possible the use of tanks is removed and mains water services are provided.

2.7.5 Fire Risk Assessments

New fire risk assessments were delivered by an external fire safety specialist company in 2020. They provide a basis to review all fire safety measures in our common areas of flats and for sheltered schemes. An action plan to deal with the risk assessment recommendations is drafted and the priority actions dealt with. Actions have included improving on housekeeping to keep common areas clear of combustible items, removing bin stores from common areas, recording fire alarm and safety lighting testing, dealing with compartmentation issues and providing tenants with information about how they can help the Council keep them safe. The action plan is kept under review. New regulations for multi occupied buildings are in place from 23 January 2023 which include clear requirements for the provision of information to tenants about fire safety. There is also an intention to survey all of the fire doors to flats and provide repairs or replacements as required. The risk assessments will be reviewed in 2023 to accord with new building safety regulations. The activity of the Neighbourhood Services Team underpins the work required to keep common areas safe from fire risks. Major works to blocks of flats are assessing fire safety issues (compartmentation, ventilation, fire doors) and addressing issues discovered.

2.7.6 On Site Safety

Construction Design and Management (CDM) Regulations are relevant to all aspects of the maintenance service. Training is provided to ensure competency and risk assessments and method statements are required and considered before work starts on site. The risk assessments include consideration of tenants' circumstances and safety. A Principal Designer is appointed to provide oversight for health and safety for major projects. Maintenance Managers and Surveyors

address health and safety matters for smaller projects. Nonetheless in all works programmes the Council is ultimately responsible for the health and safety in their construction works.

2.8 Sustainable Neighbourhoods

An important part of our Asset Management is concerned with ensuring that we are delivering the right services in the right way to our customers. A good source of information is what customers tell us about our service. We undertake an annual satisfaction survey and have regular local meetings with tenants as well as a monthly meeting with the Borough Wide Tenants Forum. Our recent survey reflected that 84% of those surveyed said that they were satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live.

Sustainable neighbourhoods are about estates and communities as well as properties which are in good condition and have modern standards.

Introductory Tenancies have been used since 2014. This introduction to a Secure Tenancy is for 12 months initially and can be extended if there are concerns about the tenants' behaviour. These tenancies have helped the Tenancy Services Officers manage new tenancies closely in the initial stages.

2.8.1 Anti-Social Behaviour

In general the Housing Division has little serious anti-social behaviour on its estates – with an average of 1 or 2 cases a year where a Notice of Seeking Possession or other legal enforcement action has to be taken. When it does occur it is difficult for tenants and resource intensive for the team to address, however we work with partner agencies to address issues promptly. Community Protection Warnings and Notices are used where action is required but we want to avoid possession proceedings or are dealing with a leaseholder. Unfortunately we have had cause to use closing orders in a handful of 'County Lines' cases in the past. These are case in which vulnerable tenants are preyed on by criminal gangs and are rare but indicate a robust attitude, in partnership with the Police, to root out unacceptable and criminal behaviour.

Tenants feedback that parking is a major or minor problem on their estate. Proposals to improve parking on estates will be considered as part of future programmes of capital works however budget provision is likely to be limited.

A formal service level agreement was agreed with the Streetscape Division in 2016 for enhanced grounds maintenance in sheltered schemes. The agreement sets out the enhanced standard that

is provided for all of the sheltered schemes and for other areas of open space that are maintained from tenants rent payments.

2.8.2 **Rent Income**

The Council's landlord services are paid for entirely from the rent that the team collects. If the rent collection rates drop there will be a consequence for service delivery. This means that rent collection is always a priority for Tenancy Services Officers. How they manage this aspect of their work is supported by software that uses analytics to present arrears cases at an early stage so that we can be proactive to prevent escalation. Current arrears at 31st March 2023 were 1.21% of the £13m due to be collected. This compares well to benchmarking averages which are at 2.23%. Managing compliance with the tenancy agreement, concerned with behaviour or condition, is largely reactive. Nonetheless with regard to the latter the team are able to work in conjunction with the maintenance service when matters of concern are reported. The Neighbourhood Wardens will have a clear focus for a designated area of flats and sheltered schemes to ensure they are in good repair, free from signs of anti-social behaviour and safe. The team will continue to troubleshoot on estates if problems are reported. Handheld devices loaded with software designed for estate management tasks helps managers have oversight of common problems and the team to document and report issues discovered.

2.8.3 **Lettings**

Over the last year we have reviewed our systems of work to let vacant properties. Critically there is close liaison between the tenancy management and maintenance teams however turnaround times are largely driven by the efficiency and effectiveness of the Housing Direct Works team. Our average turnaround time at the end the financial year 2022- 2023 is 30 days for a standard re-let (benchmarking averages are 31 days). We continue to have issues of extensive repairs being required in vacancies from an ageing stock and where tenants have not maintained their tenancy in the manner we would expect. This is a cost to the service not only because of the extent of the repair work but also the rent loss. The Tenancy Services Officers are proactive in dealing with the condition of properties where a tenant requests a transfer but those which become vacant because of a death or notice are more difficult to address. The condition in which a property is kept is addressed during the life of the tenancy. Smaller patches assist with this oversight but the management of condition is largely reactive. We continue to ensure that properties are not routinely left empty for long periods of time causing blight to estates and compromising rent income levels.

2.8.4 To create sustainable tenancies our Lettings Scheme ensures applicants choose the area in which they want to live. We also work to provide new Tenants with good information about our service and the property and area they are moving to as well as access to support if appropriate. The

Tenancy Services Officers meet the new tenant when they accept the tenancy and set out the tenancy conditions. There is a further opportunity to do so at the six week settling in visit.

2.8.5 Tenant Engagement

A large part of the work of the Tenancy Services and Neighbourhood Services Teams is to engage with Tenants. They do this as part of their mainstream work as well as our specific Tenant Led Community Panels and local meetings. As part of their objectives the Panels agree to:

- Find out what the important issues are in their local area and represent those views
- Promote awareness of the Community Panel in their area
- Get involved with visits and events taking place in their local area and beyond

To ensure the Panels can pro-actively take remedial action on estate issues within their area, constituted Tenant Led Community Panels can bid for monies from the Housing Revenue Account to cover small scale environmental improvement issues such as installing gates, erecting additional fencing, installing security lighting, providing additional gardening services, removing or pruning bushes, erecting signage. It is envisaged that these environmental improvements are not currently covered by spending priorities but are important to the local Tenant community. A sum of £20,000 is set aside for the work the Panels request. Unfortunately during 2020 and 2021 the Panels were suspended. During 2023 we intend to re-engage with local communities.

Listening to what Tenants tell us and acting on their feedback is at the heart of our asset management. We understand that most of our customers cannot readily take their 'custom' elsewhere and therefore we must have easily accessible ways for them to be able to voice their opinions about our services. We want to encourage communities to work with us. Tenant participation is established in the Borough and we have a well-established, strong and experienced Borough Wide Tenants Forum which provides clear and honest feedback on our services. There is also scrutiny to consider particular areas of our service in detail.

3 Use of Resources

3.1 Financial Context

- 3.1.1 There are pressures and challenges on the Housing Revenue Account however we constantly seek to provide value for money to deliver the services required to address the Council's landlord commitments. The Government expectation is that the Council will ensure that its housing stock meets the Government's Decent Homes Standard as a minimum. Government further expects that any available rental income is directed at sustaining the assets in good condition and where

possible, is also used to build new homes. However reducing stock due to Right to Buy sales creates a lower base of rental income with which to both maintain existing stock and build new stock.

3.1.2 The Housing Revenue Account Subsidy reform was implemented from April 2012. The terms of the reform dictated that the Council had to take on £60m in debt to buy itself out of the subsidy system. The financial business model underpinning the new financial arrangements offered both opportunities and challenges. The financial position is set out in the Housing Revenue Account 30 year business plan and the position is reported to the Resources Board. It can be noted however that reform does not mean freedom. The Government's recent interventions in setting a policy for rent levels to reduce or not rise above a specified level is an example of this.

3.1.3 Government policy required rents to be reduced year on year from 2016 to 2020 and further rent constraint has been applied nationally from April 2023. This has led to a necessary adjustment to the 30 Year Business Plan as this has caused a gap between incomes and costs very early on in the lifespan of the plan which exaggerates a disparity between rising costs not being met by rising rents. Inflationary increases and their influence on material and labour costs is a challenge and will continue to be so during 2023. This will feed through the lifetime of the business plan reducing the value of each pound of rental income as rental increases are eroded by cost inflation.

3.1.4 There are also further risks to the value of the rental income stream posed by Universal Credit which makes rent collection more challenging, because for Universal Credit claimants there is a delay in payments being made and when they are made the housing benefit element is no longer paid direct to the Council. Rent collection is also suffering from the current cost of living pressures on low-income households.

3.1.5 Void levels also have the potential to reduce rental income so the work of the repairs teams is focussed on reducing void levels and getting properties back into use and in a fit state to be rented. A further challenge is to ensure vacant properties are let to a good standard quickly. Not to do so could result in significant loss of rent combined with additional spend on Council Tax because of the change in liability back to the Council. Action has been taken over several years to reduce the amount of hard to let properties in the stock. This is important because long letting delays means both a drain on income and means that the stock is not being used to best effect to meet housing need.

3.2 Financial Challenge

- 3.2.1 Demand has exceeded supply in terms of the ability of the current rental income stream to support necessary works. In accordance with tenant priorities and the need to ensure the Council's asset is in good condition the Council has provided budget provision of just over £3.5m annually for the three years of this plan to meet the demands of its capital programme. Health and safety compliance for gas and electrical installations, water supplies and Legionella, fire risks and asbestos management are a priority. That budget provision was designed to ensure that compliance could be sustained and if possible improved. However more than that has been spent to deliver programmes to address backlogs of work. In order to address the poor condition of some blocks of flats prudential borrowing has been used to supplement provision from rental income however as borrowing has increased in cost since the 2018 plan, this may need to be revisited and potentially some works rescheduled to avoid higher periods of borrowing.
- 3.2.2 In addition to budget commitments for capital improvement works there is budget provision of just over £3.1m annually in the Response Repairs Fund which supports revenue spend and response repairs works. This includes funding the Housing Direct Works team as well as some specialist services (for example for asbestos removal, health and safety risk assessments and damp surveys) and planned repair programmes.
- 3.2.3 The budget provision for cyclical and minor planned works is important and options for delivering these again will be an objective of this Plan. Traditionally the maintenance service has targeted to spend 30% of its budget on responsive and cyclical and minor planned work and 70% on planned, capital improvement works. This is with the intention of planned works keeping the asset in good condition proactively so that there are less responsive repair requests made. We are not currently achieving this balance however changes to how the Maintenance Service is delivered should ensure the service gets closer to this target during the period of this Plan.
- 3.2.4 The Council has used its funding to improve the energy efficiency of tenants' homes and reduce fuel poverty. Works include structural improvements including new windows and doors as well as the provision of more efficient heating and hot water systems. Over the last 3 years there has been significant investment in providing new energy efficient boilers and heating systems for tenants – including Air Source Heat Pumps.
- 3.2.5 The Council is committed to providing more new homes as part of its own stock as funding allows. Since 2010 the Housing Division has consistently provided for a development programme to provide additional affordable homes for the Council's own stock. This is helping to provide much needed additional homes to rent to meet housing need in the Borough and provides a buffer against a reduction in stock and possible viability issues caused by a potential increase in 'Right to Buy'

sales. Resources of just over £1m annually has been provided for within the capital programme which includes any surplus in the Housing Revenue Account combined with funding from 'Right to Buy' capital receipts received over and above those profiled in the Subsidy settlement.

3.3 Use and direction of Internal Resources

3.3.1 The spend on housing management services is in the region of £1.9m annually. This covers tenancy and neighbourhood management, including rent collection, as well as services to let the Council's properties.

3.3.2 Specific issues pertinent to the Division's Asset Management Plan include:

- Ensuring the Council's properties continue to be in demand and neighbourhoods are places where people choose to live
- Let vacant properties to a good standard quickly
- High satisfaction levels with the services the Housing Division provides
- Evidence of comparatively good performance in key areas such as rent collection and delivering maintenance services
- Our approach to procuring works to deliver improvement programmes and planned maintenance
- Ensuring the Housing Direct Workforce is efficient and effective
- Improved effectiveness in providing disabled facility adaptations

3.3.3 Procurement is a key area of business in managing our assets well. How we procure services to manage the assets is set out in the Council's Contract Standing Orders. To accord with the provisions we need to:

- Ensure the Response Repairs service offers good value for tenants
- Ensure contractors offer best value
- Have a clear customer focus in all procurement decisions
- Ensure that all other housing objectives are achieved within or less than the revenue budgets
- Be able to prove value for money in all significant spending areas within the housing division
- Have arrangements in place to monitor the effectiveness of contracts and use the information improvements in future procurement
- Have consideration for sustainability and equality issues in procurement

3.3.4 Recent feedback from our annual tenant survey indicates that 83% of those surveyed consider that the Housing Division services offer value for money.

3.3.5 To assist the monitoring of the use of resources the Housing Division is a member of the national Housemark benchmarking club. This provides comparative information annually that enables the Council to assess its performance against its own targets as well as benchmarked with other social housing providers.

3.3.6 The structure of the Housing Direct Works team has been adjusted in recent years in order to continue to modernise the service, to ensure that the team can be organised well, closely managed and developed, to provide flexibility to deliver the service and to ensure that legal duties are delivered. Tradesmen are at the forefront of the service and complete their own work in accordance with appointments and are able to order the materials that they need. Designated compliance Supervisors are in place for gas and electrical installations. The gas installations works were outsourced to improve resilience for this heavily regulated part of our service. This position will be reviewed in 2023. We have provided for a Response Repairs Supervisor and two Charge Hands to ensure that we act to deliver the reactive repairs within a timeframe that meets tenants expectations and that also enables us to manage voids effectively. Tenant's repair reports are handled by the Council's Customer Contact Centre leaving the Maintenance Support Team to focus on planning and scheduling works. The right first-time principle defines the efficiency of the service and works alongside an appointments system which provides for good access rates and customer service. Currently response repairs jobs are completed in an average of 9 working days.

3.3.7 The Tenancy Services Team are at the forefront of collecting rent to pay for services to tenants. The team also manages the stock of tenancies to ensure tenants meet their conditions of tenancy. We have sufficient capacity to manage tenancies (including their condition) and be proactive to protect the Council from tenancy fraud as well as to ensure that health and safety compliance for flats and communal rooms is a priority.

4 Future Direction

4.1 Overview

4.1.1 This Asset Management Plan sets out the Council's current position for the management of its stock. It sets out the progress that has been made since the last Plan was developed and states how the Council will sustain its stock in good condition and continue to deliver high levels of customer satisfaction. Of necessity the Plan is underpinned by the Regulatory Framework for social housing providers however its central concern is focussed on meeting local priorities.

4.1.2 The Plan anticipates the implications for social housing set out in the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill 2022-2023. Proactive consumer regulation at the forefront of the Bill. Some of the key provisions are:

- Making safety, transparency and energy efficiency as part the Social Housing Regulator’s fundamental objectives
- Enabling the Regulator to set standards for the competence and conduct of staff working for registered providers of social housing
- Requiring registered providers to nominate a designated person for health and safety issues
- Giving the Secretary of State the power to introduce new requirements for registered providers relating to electrical safety checks
- A power for the Regulator to direct registered providers to collect and publish performance information (see below)
- Regular inspections of registered providers (every 4 years)

To support the new regulatory requirements and ensure that tenants are satisfied that they are met social landlords are expected to publish performance information and seek tenant feedback on specific matters. The Housing Regulator has published the Tenant Satisfaction Measures which the Council will have to collect from 1 April 2023 and provide a return to the Regulator in the Summer of 2024.

4.13 The requirements of the Building Safety Act 2022 and the 2022 Fire Safety Regulations are also anticipated in the Plan.

4.1.2 The action plan attached as an appendix underpins the Asset Management Plan and sets out a number of steps which need to be undertaken to ensure the delivery of the Council’s objectives for its stock.

4.2 Meeting Housing Needs

4.2.1 It is crucial to the soundness of the Asset Management Plan that we understand the type and level of demand on our services and what is of value to our customers in to ensure that properties and services are fit for purpose and tailored to demand.

4.2.2 Building new homes has been an important part of our Asset Management Plan however it is resource intensive, and we need to ensure new developments are not prioritised over the good management of and investment in our current stock. We need to make sure current stock is fit for purpose and that best use is made of it in terms of extending its usable life to the maximum. To do so we have already undertaken several regeneration and major refurbishment schemes across the Borough.

4.2.3 The Council’s current 30 Year Business Plan provides funding annually for continuing the Council’s commitment to fund new build for its own stock. This funding is subject to any Government legislative changes including their stated intention to introduce a levy for higher value voids to pay

for Private Registered Provider Right to Buy scheme. The Council has very limited access to land which it owns for development purposes. Buying land adds to the cost of the development and access to grant funding is important in this circumstance.

- 4.2.4 The Council's Lettings Scheme and supporting procedures must be effective and efficient to ensure that housing need is met. It has recently been reviewed and will be adopted following consultation. The current scheme provides for a focus of resources on meeting housing. In face of possible rent loss and additional budget required for Council Tax payments for vacancies, performance is constantly monitored at a senior level to ensure properties are brought up to a letting standard quickly.
- 4.2.5 When the Council undertakes works to common premises of flats which include leaseholders we are required to have due regard to the legislation for applying service charges. What we can charge a leaseholder for works depends on the consultation process being undertaken in accordance with the legislation, the type of work being carried out and the contents of the lease. A review of these arrangements will be one of the action plan objectives.
- 4.2.6 Everyone wants to live in a nice place. Our business planning relies on our homes being in demand. The Council's Tenancy and Neighbourhoods Team is a critical resource in ensuring that its estates and properties are in good condition and that there is no anti-social behaviour from our tenancies. Ensuring that anti-social behaviour is kept to a minimum, the delivery of the Service Level Agreement for the grounds maintenance service and considering using some funding to improve parking on estates will help to meet tenants' reasonable expectation that the Council provides a nice place for them to live.
- 4.2.7 The Council published a Tenancy Policy in 2021 accordance with regulatory requirements. The Tenancy Policy states the Council's commitment to continue to provide secure tenancies to promote sustainable communities.

4.3 Tenants' Priorities and Customer Care

- 4.3.1 We find out about what services are priorities for tenants by asking them in satisfaction surveys and by talking to them. Partnership with the Borough Wide Tenants Forum is critical to the latter. The pandemic period stalled our proactive engagement with tenants, and we now need to forge ahead again with this. In addition, we will be putting back in place transactional satisfaction surveys for some crucial services such as response repairs, lettings and dealing with anti-social behaviour. This will give teams ongoing information to feed on in order to improve services.

- 4.3.2 Over many years tenants have consistently told us that the quality of their home is the most important priority we should be achieving. We meet this priority mainly through the funding provided in the capital programme for improvement works. It remains a considerable commitment from the Housing Revenue Account. The most recent annual satisfaction survey indicates a satisfaction level at 82% with the overall service. However there continues to be an indication of disparity between older and younger tenants. Consideration of this will be an action from this Plan.
- 4.3.3 Tenants also consistently tell us that their neighbourhood is also a high priority. The Tenancy Services and Neighbourhood Warden team in conjunction with the Streetscape service is instrumental in keeping estates in good condition and being able to pick up on issues and actively troubleshoot. Most estates are in good order visually however there will be a renewed focus on blocks of flats where the behaviour of some tenants can be detrimental to the community and the area. In the annual satisfaction surveys, it is issues with parking that is continually stated as a significant problem rather than neighbour nuisance. The consideration of an annual scheme to improve parking on estates will be considered, as budget allows, to address tenant feedback.
- 4.3.4 Every business which serves customers must have an understanding of their priorities and have a high level of customer care at its heart if it does not it will fail. Surveys indicate good levels of satisfaction with the Housing Division's services but there can be no room for complacency. All complaints are monitored and responded to positively. We need to build on recent improvements which include making appointments for all repair requests standard, putting prospective tenants at the centre of the lettings procedures and providing good information and support services for welfare benefits changes. How we promise to act is set out in our 'Empowerment Promise'. This covers access to services, feedback, challenge and our aim to provide cost effective services.
- 4.3.5 Ensuring our services are focussed will also depend on how we are able to engage with tenants. The Borough Wide Tenants Forum is recognised and provides a focus for involvement and challenge. How this is affected is set out in the Tenant Partnership Agreement which is revised annually.
- 4.3.6 The main ambition of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 was to prevent homelessness as a priority. The Council's Housing Options Team have delivered against that priority however continuing to do so is likely to become more challenging with cost-of-living considerations, the rise in rents in the private rented sector and the affordability of homes generally in the housing market.

4.4 Stock Management

- 4.4.1 Its stock of properties is an important asset for the Council. The services delivered by the Housing Division are expected to act to ensure it is retained in good condition. The Housing Management Team collect the rent which pays for the services and acts to manage tenancies to ensure tenants adhere to their conditions of tenancy. The Housing Maintenance Team acts proactively to provide capital programmes of work in accordance with stock condition information and reactively to respond to tenants telling us there is a repair problem in their home.
- 4.4.2 The stock condition information is up to date following the extensive programmes of work recently undertaken. This information is used to develop the three to five year capital improvement programmes. As part of the actions undertaken for this Plan the stock condition information will be validated, an appropriate depreciation scheme will be agreed, timely annual programmes of work will be undertaken based on detailed specifications and the most appropriate procurement path will be taken to provide for a good balance of cost and quality. Consideration will be given to how the application of the Decent Homes Standard to the capital programme will ensure that the Council has modern homes which continue to be in demand. Information about improvement schemes will be published annually so that tenants know if their home will be affected. We will also keep tenants informed about delays to programmes of work. Leaseholders will be kept informed in accordance with legal requirements, regulations and best practice.
- 4.4.3 The stock condition information, regulatory requirements and technical knowledge of the team have directed the programme of works that we are setting out in this Plan for the next four years. Priority work includes:
- Completion of major works programme to blocks of flats
 - Rolling programme of improvement works for blocks of flats
 - Instigate fire door inspection and replacement programme
 - Provision of energy efficient heating systems
 - Kitchen and bathroom improvement programme to meet the Decent Homes Standard
 - Fire safety works
 - Replacement window scheme due to age and condition
 - Replacement of door entry systems due to age and condition
 - New roof programme
 - Programme for the provision of insulation
 - Rolling roofing programme and remedial works for the garage stock

4.4.4 Where the stock is ageing, we have seen the breakdown of the fabric of some buildings which can lead to problems of damp and disrepair. We have had to undertake extensive works to a number of vacant properties over the last five years and we continue receive reports of damp from tenants. We will continue to do remedial works to some of our blocks of flats. Recently refresher training has been provided for the team about damp and disrepair complaints in order to provide for proactive services to both provide good information for tenants and quick action. We need to be proactive in supporting and advising tenants how to avoid disrepair and mould growth caused by condensation.

4.4.5 Tenants expect the Council to act to ensure they are safe. Our activity includes:

- Management and Maintenance Teams acting together to gain access to carry out gas servicing
- Refreshing the Asbestos Management Plan and acting to ensure information is readily available about the presence of asbestos containing materials
- Having risk assessments in place and a specialist company to support the team to address Legionella bacteria risks
- Management and Maintenance Teams acting together to minimise fire risks
- Having a rolling programme in place to assess electrical installations and ensure that smoke alarms are working and in good repair

4.6 Value for Money

4.5.1 Reviews in the Housing Division have focussed resources on providing services based on what is of value to the customer and cutting out waste processes to provide more efficient systems of work. A right first-time approach is critical. Tenants don't want multiple visits to resolve issues. They want timely action which gets the job done in the most effective way. The Division will continue to work to these principles to provide the value for money that tenants expect.

4.5.2 Our intention is to have good levels of customer care within our front-line teams and to provide them with the sufficient flexibility in delivering services to enable them tailor services to meet their needs. 77% of survey respondents said that they think the Council is easy to deal with. Information held within the housing management software helps to guide staff about what tenants have told us about their circumstances and how they can be best assisted. We tailor our services where possible.

4.5.3 Until services were constrained by the COVID pandemic satisfaction with the service was regularly monitored by way of customer surveys and complaints and compliments. We will put these survey systems back in place during 2023. This will help us to inform our work. Performance against

agreed measures and complaints and compliments is also monitored and reported to Councillors and tenants. Costs are benchmarked with other social housing providers.

4.5.4 There is a commitment to keep an in-house repairs workforce because of the level of flexibility and customer care it can deliver, however it needs to be efficient and effective. The Housing Direct Works Team undertake works included in the Housing Repairs Fund for planned revenue and cyclical works and allows for a number of trades as part of the team. Work streams include:

- Responding to tenant repair requests
- Organising disabled adaptations
- Gas servicing, central heating repairs and installations
- Electrical testing, remedial works and rewires
- Minor planned works
- Replacement fascia programme

4.5.5 Efficient working practices require attention to three critical tasks. Appointments need to be made and kept ensuring access and reduce abortive calls. Tradesmen need to be competent and able to complete work right first time. Materials need to be readily available to ensure jobs can be undertaken promptly. Consideration is also given to the interaction between capital programmes and responsive work. We use this information to inform and identify our work to find an appropriate balance between responsive and planned work.

4.5.6 During the period of the previous plan the repairs reporting system provided by the Customer Services Team has matured and allows the front-line tradesmen to complete their jobs right first time over 97% of the time and within 6 to 9 working days. A new materials contract has been procured which allows for materials to be provided for van stock, next day delivery into the Depot and delivery to site when required. We have implemented software which uses algorithms to interrogate repair requests to identify jobs which have required multiple visits to complete. This allows the team to review why jobs have not been completed right first time and address common issues

4.7 Risks

A number of risks are identified as part of the Plan and will be addressed as objectives arising from the Action Plan, the Corporate Plan and the Housing Division's Forward Work Plan:

- Challenges to income revenue arising from Government policy constraint social housing rents.
- Rent income loss and Council Tax liabilities when properties are vacant for over 7 days
- Increase in 'Right to Buy' sales to a level at which there is an impact on the Financial Business Plan if there is no equal replacement

- The requirements of an ageing stock and the need to meet the Decent Homes Standard and sustaining the resource both in budget and staffing levels to keep premises in an acceptable standard.
- Increased focus nationally on reaching Net Zero Targets and changing building safety regulations.
- The significant increase in costs of resources (people and materials) due to COVID 19 and rising inflation due to global economic shocks
- Any reduction in the performance of Housing Direct Works which will put pressure on the Council to use external contractors and therefore impact on the level of expenditure available
- Costs of asbestos removal from properties to allow works to be undertaken are putting pressures on budgets
- The cost of fire safety works and the risks if they are not undertaken
- The Lettings Scheme priorities do not deliver mixed and sustainable communities

Section 5

Action Plan – 2023 - 2024

Relevant Actions from Forward Work Plan that will assist to progress the Asset Management Plan & Supplementary Objectives

Vision for the Service

The provision of a customer focussed service by well-trained knowledgeable staff with tenants fully involved at a level suitable for them at both strategic and operational levels.

Action	Lead Officer	Start Date	End Date	Priority	Measurement of Success	Resources – including Value for Money (VFM) Implications
Ensure the databases we have for stock condition and safety information are kept up to date.	Geoff Joseph & Shirley Gilbert	February 2023	Dec 2023	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Validation audit undertaken of data held for stock condition, gas & electrical installations, asbestos materials and energy performance Include inspections of shop premises and provide particular survey data about their condition. Gaps in information identified and action proposed to find out information Agree procedures and responsibilities for keeping data current Information fit for purpose to inform Financial Business Plan and works programmes Evaluate the basis for agreed programmes of work and make information available for tenants 	<p>Staff time to input and collate information.</p> <p>Having accurate and current stock information will ensure the Council's resources are well directed.</p> <p>Better information will ensure we can improve how we manage our information to Tenants</p>
Procurement of capital works programmes annually in accordance with stock condition information	Angela Coates & Geoff Joseph	April 2023	Ongoing	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capital programme agreed by Resources Board Programme to reflect the Council's climate change strategy objectives Information about programme published Contractors appointed to provide programmes of work at a keen cost, good quality and high standards of customer care 	<p>Staff Time</p> <p>Budgets which support the capital programme provide an average of just over £3.5m annually.</p> <p>Urgent schemes require specific consideration</p>

Action	Lead Officer	Start Date	End Date	Priority	Measurement of Success	Resources – including Value for Money (VFM) Implications
					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Borough Wide Tenants Forum providing feedback on the programmes 	
Ensure efficient and effective systems of work within Housing Direct Works	Roy Morning	April 2023	Ongoing	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver systems of work and make improvements necessary to ensure the workforce can be productive and cost effective Deliver materials procurement to ensure it meets the needs of the service Ensure that principles of customer care are at the heart of the service Evaluation of the performance of the gas installations contractor & propose options to improve it Evaluation of the performance of the electrical capital programme and propose options to improve Fully utilise Mobysoft reporting systems to identify and reduce repeat jobs 	<p>Staff Time.</p> <p>Part of the Repairs Fund provides funding for the Housing Direct Works Service. The budget is for the responsive repairs service, voids repairs and cyclical maintenance contracts</p>
Develop an action plan to keep under review arrangements for safe systems of work for health and safety.	Angela Coates	April 2023	Annual review of plan	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action plan developed annually and monitored regularly for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Asbestos management ➤ Electrical installation inspections ➤ Annual gas services ➤ Management of water supplies ➤ Fire safety arrangements ➤ Health and safety risk assessments 	<p>Funding to sustain the employment of a designated health and safety officer for the Maintenance Service</p> <p>The capital programme and Repair Fund budget support the actions required.</p>
To keep under review procedures and	Angela Coates	April 2023	Ongoing	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Robust procedure in place and used to address concerns 	Staff time to act on feedback and performance

Action	Lead Officer	Start Date	End Date	Priority	Measurement of Success	Resources – including Value for Money (VFM) Implications
information for tenants to address issues of damp in properties					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish a policy which sets clear standards for activity • Information for tenants provided and distributed to give advice about condensation • Monitoring process in place to assess complaints of damp received from tenants and action taken 	information and tenant information.
Review garage survey condition information	Angela Coates & Geoff Joseph	February 2023	July 2023	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree remedial action for each garage site • Assess HDW capacity to undertake planned works • Report to Resources Board sites which are not economical to repair • Evaluate garage sites for possible redevelopment • Agree a programme of remedial works 	The capital programme and Repair Fund budget support the actions required. There are limited resources currently to progress a full works programme.
Build new homes to add to the Council's stock to meet expressed housing needs	Angela Coates	April 2023	Ongoing	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Options considered to use Housing Revenue Account funds and land to build new affordable homes or take up opportunities to buy properties from developers. • Review landholdings in order to explore opportunities for new build developments & to do this in conjunction with the condition survey of garage sites 	The first call on the Council's Housing Revenue Account is sustaining its current assets. However, funding is identified in the Business Plan subject to other constraints.
Deliver amended Lettings Scheme & Ensure Systems of work to re-let vacancies are effective	Helen Parton & Mandy Rashid	April 2023	Ongoing	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lettings Scheme in place which ensures preventing homelessness is a priority, meets housing need and is customer focussed 	This work can be done with current resources

Action	Lead Officer	Start Date	End Date	Priority	Measurement of Success	Resources – including Value for Money (VFM) Implications
					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lettings scheme to provide for temporary accommodation to comply with Relief Duty • Customer centred lettings procedures in place with properties brought up to letting standard quickly 	
Have actions and resources in place to deal with challenges to rent collection	Helen Parton & Caroline Morris	April 2023	Ongoing	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff capacity in place and officers fully informed to deal with challenges to rent collection • Actions in place to fully inform and support customers • Partnership working on a sound basis to provide necessary services for customers • Rent collection rate sustained at over 98% • Fully utilise Mobysoft case management system 	Funding has been made available for additional staff resource.
Deliver proactive tenancy and neighbourhood management systems	Helen Parton & Caroline Morris	April 2023	Dec 2023	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review tenancy management procedures and working practices to ensure that the condition of tenancies is managed proactively and effectively • Review procedures for dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour • Review the procedures and working practices of the Neighbourhood Wardens Team to provide effective services to flats and sheltered schemes and ensure that they are safe • Keep under review and monitor the service level agreement for grounds maintenance services 	<p>The Tenancy Services Team and Neighbourhood Services Team have both been reviewed recently to provide for these actions.</p> <p>Once the survey is undertaken an options</p>

Action	Lead Officer	Start Date	End Date	Priority	Measurement of Success	Resources – including Value for Money (VFM) Implications
					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proactive work with Tenant Led Community Panels to meet their priorities for action Undertake a survey of estates to understand issues with parking and propose schemes of work 	appraisal will be required to set out priority areas and resources required
Keep under review the Tenant Partnership Agreement and support the scrutiny role of the Borough Wide Tenants Forum	Helen Parton	Annually in March		High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Production of a revised and agreed Tenant Partnership Agreement Ensure that the Agreement meets the requirements expected by the Regulator Support for two scrutiny exercises annually to provide detailed feedback on specific services in provided for tenants 	Resource is available to support this work and there is a designated Neighbourhoods and Tenant Involvement Officer in post to support the Forum and local Panels.
Refresh arrangements for leaseholder communications about charged for works	Angela Coates	Dec 2023	March 2024	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Procedures agreed for raising charges for leaseholders 	This review should improve the Council's ability to raise service charges for work undertaken and to be reimbursed
Review our service provision against the requirements of the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill to ensure compliance	Angela Coates	July 2023	August 2023	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete and audit of the Housing Division's position against the requirements set out in the published standards. Action plan agreed for tasks required to meet the standards 	The audit can be completed within current resources. Actions required are likely to be funded from current budgets.

DECENT HOMES STANDARD

ANNEX A

Component lifetimes and definition of 'in poor condition' used in the national measurement of the disrepair criterion

1. Table 1 shows the component lifetimes within the disrepair criterion to assess whether the building components are 'old'. These are used to construct the national estimates of the number of dwellings that are decent and those that fail. These lifetimes are those considered appropriate for use in planning for newly arising renewal works for social Landlords. They are the same as those used to calculate the MRA which were agreed following consultation in November 1999. Landlords will wish to consider whether these lifetimes are appropriate within their own stock for predicting the age at which the component ceases to function effectively.

Table 1: Component lifetimes used in the disrepair criterion			
Building components (key components marked*)	Houses and bungalows	All flats in blocks of below 6 storeys	All flats in blocks of 6 or more storeys
Wall structure*	80	80	80
Lintels*	60	60	60
Brickwork (spalling)*	30	30	30
Wall finish*	60	60	30
Roof structure*	50	30	30
Roof finish*	50	30	30
Chimney*	50	50	N/A
Windows*	40	30	30
External doors*	40	30	30
Kitchen*	30	30	30
Bathrooms	40	40	40
Heating central heating gas boiler*	15	15	15
Heating central heating distribution system	40	40	40
Heating other*	30	30	30
Electrical systems*	30	30	30

19. Kitchens are assumed to require replacing on grounds of repair every 30 years, bathrooms every 40 years. Therefore, the age aspects in the disrepair criterion are set at 30 and 40 years respectively. These lifetimes were agreed following consultation on the MRA. It is clear that social landlords and tenants prefer these amenities to be replaced more frequently to enable them to be maintained at a reasonable modern standard. Thus, different ages are required for kitchens and bathrooms under the reasonably modern facilities and services criterion.

Asset Management Plan 2023 - 2026

The Capital Programme priority spend proportions reflect a base budget of £3.5m submitted to Resources Board and reflected in the 30 Year Business Plan. The budget for 2023/24 includes additional funding for the flats at Abbey Green Court. This table does not include staff costs.

Proposed Programme	Share of budget 2023-2024	Share of budget 2024-2025	Share of budget 2025-2026
Electrical Installations Inspection report (EICR), rewire, Cat 1 works, smoke alarms, safety lighting, Carbon Monoxide Alarms	£600,000	309,000	318,180
	Electrical Installation Condition Reports, Urgent rewires & remedial works	EICRS Programmed rewires	EICRS Programmed rewires
Kitchens & Bathrooms	£600,000	£618,000	£630,360
The first year is a catch-up programme and then to meet the Decent Homes Standard	Average 100 kitchens and bathrooms	Average 100 kitchens and bathrooms	Average 100 kitchen and bathrooms
Heating (Gas & Electric)	£500,00	£515,000	£525,300
The first year includes replacement electrical heating systems. There has been an extensive programme in place over 3 years to provide efficient boilers.	Average of 100 heating systems	Average of 100 heating systems	Average of 100 heating systems
Fire Doors (Fire doors, door entries)	£200,000	£206,000	£210,120
A new programme will be developed following inspections to check the fire resistance of the door.	Numbers subject to tender price		
Energy Efficiency measures- including window programme	£250,000	£257,500	£262,650
There has been an extensive programme over the last 5 years to provide for external wall insulation.	Numbers subject to tender price		

Roofing (includes garages)	£400,000	£412,000	£420,240
This programme is for roofs on flats and individual properties.	Numbers subject to tender price		
Multi Contractor Works	£300,000	£360,500	£367,710
Bespoke works to individual properties, Housing Direct Works fascia programme & priority fire safety works.			
Improvement Works to Blocks of Flats	£4,250,000	£618,000	£630,360
Extensive programme of work to complete improvements to address latent defects, energy efficiency and fire safety	Abbey Green Court		
Adaptations	£200,000	£206,000	£210,120
This is for standard stair lifts, level access showers and ramps. Extensions are subject to reports to Resources Board for funding.			

Total Properties Held By North Warwickshire Borough Council

As at 4 th January 2023	Bedsit	Flat 1 bed	Flat 2 bed	Flat 3 bed	Maisonette 2 bed	Maisonette 3 bed	House 1 bed	House 2 bed	House 3 bed	House 4 bed	House 5 bed	Bungalow 1 bed	Bungalow 2 bed	Grand Total
Ansley		6	1					30	40	3		24	2	106
Arley		8	8					14	48	4		48	20	150
Atherstone	4	128	21	1		1		118	209	18		30	20	550
Austrey									9			7	5	21
Baddesley Ensor		1		1				41	39	1		56	6	145
Baxterley								2	3	2			12	19
Coleshill		44		6				10	30	1		26	12	129
Corley								1	1				6	8
Curdworth									4				2	6
Dordon		34	9		6			14	40			9	14	126
Fillongley		26		1				7	8	2		6		50
Grendon		2	2					16	14	4		8		46
Hartshill		28	37					15	42	2			24	148
Hurley	1		4					5	7			13	1	31
Kingsbury		34			11			11	72	1		14	15	158
Lea Marston									1					1
Mancetter	8	52	22					18	59	4		8	55	226
Maxstoke									3				4	7
Middleton								1	4	2				7
Nether Whitacre								2	4	1				7
Newton Regis									22			6		28
Over Whitacre									1					1
Polesworth		31	14	1			8	56	99	4		36	53	302
Ridge Lane		2	1											3
Shustoke		5						8	10	1			2	26

As at 4th January 2023	Bedsit	Flat 1 bed	Flat 2 bed	Flat 3 bed	Maisonette 2 bed	Maisonette 3 bed	House 1 bed	House 2 bed	House 3 bed	House 4 bed	House 5 bed	Bungalow 1 bed	Bungalow 2 bed	Grand Total
Shuttington			1					3	18		1	3	2	28
Warton		4						25	21	1		4	2	57
Water Orton		33						15	22			9	15	94
Wishaw									3					3
Witherley									2	2				4
Wood End		17	8						34	2		4	34	99
Grand Total	13	455	128	10	17	1	8	412	869	55	1	311	306	2586