

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Dated:</b>
Housing Management and Almshouses Sub-Committee	16/07/2021
<b>Subject:</b> Housing Update and Risk Register	<b>Public</b>
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	4
<b>Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>If so, how much?</b>	<b>£</b>
<b>What is the source of Funding?</b>	
<b>Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?</b>	<b>Y/N</b>
<b>Report of: Director of Community and Children's Services</b>	<b>For Information</b>
<b>Report author: Liam Gillespie, Head of Housing Management</b>	

### Summary

This update on Housing Service performance and management information keeps Members up to date with progress in key areas of our work. The report is submitted to Committee twice yearly.

This report covers the period from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021.

Members may wish to note that:

- Rent collection stood at 97% at the end of the financial year, down from 98.4% last year, still a very high percentage given the challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic
- There was a 73% increase in housing applications over the whole year, with 122 more received than in the previous year
- Estate standards remained high, consistently exceeding the target 80% average for both internal and external inspections

### Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report

## **Main Report**

### **Background**

1. This report is presented to the Housing Management & Almshouses Sub-Committee every six months. The report provides Members with an overview of Housing Service performance and progress on key issues, plus some additional information of interest.
2. This report covers the period 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021.
3. It is intended to give Members information on these areas of work:
  - Repairs & Maintenance
  - Estate Management
  - Revenues
  - Allocations
  - Affordable Housing
  - Complaints
4. The report also gives an update on the risk register entries relating to Housing & Neighbourhoods (Appendix 2).
5. The report has a performance dashboard attached (Appendix 1), which gives a visual summary of performance in various areas.

### **Repairs**

6. The repairs helpdesk experienced a significant increase in calls, receiving 11,710 during the whole year to March 31<sup>st</sup> 2021. This represents an increase of 33% on 2019-20.
7. Despite this substantial increase in demand during a challenging time for housing operations, the contact centre team managed to achieve an impressive 94% success rate in answering calls made to our 0800 number.
8. Performance against repairs service standards declined in 2020-21. This is due to the challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic, which affected contractor workforces and our ability to enter people's homes for non-urgent repairs matters. Despite these difficulties, a substantial percentage of repairs were still completed within time. Performance will be monitored closely as restrictions ease to ensure that it returns to pre-pandemic levels.
9. Gas safety compliance (properties with a current valid CP12 gas safety certificate) stood at 99.42% at the end of March 2021. This represents 10 properties without a current certificate, though action was taken in response in accordance with our well-established procedures for enforcing gas safety checks. As of the first week

in July 2021, only 6 homes were without a CP12 and action was being progressed in respect of them all.

## **Estate Management**

10. Our formal estate inspections regime, which was suspended in Q1 and Q2, restarted in October 2020. In Q3-4, a total of 445 grounds and internal block inspections were completed across our estates, with the average score across all estates remaining above 80%.
11. Officers have continued to improve the quality of the inspections data and recently introduced a new scoring system, which is designed to be fairer to those estates with fewer 'elements' to inspect. It was noted that these estates would score poorly overall if one element of the inspection fell below standard. The A-D scoring scale has now been changed to an A-E scale and early indications show that this produces a more representative score for the estates in question, while still enabling officers to easily identify areas for improvement.

## **Revenues**

12. At the end of the financial year 2020/21, rent collection stood at 97%; arrears amounted to £374,275. This is an increase of £153,086 on last financial year and is attributable to the financial hardship experienced by our tenants during the COVID-19 pandemic.
13. Arrears increased significantly in 2020/21 due to the impact of lockdown on our residents' incomes. Further analysis was completed on our arrears profile and this shows that the proportion of households in arrears of any amount, and households in significant (i.e., 8+ weeks') arrears, had increased during the pandemic. The proportion of households in 8+ weeks' arrears stood at 6.2% (118 households) at year end, up from 2.9% or 55 households at the end of March 2020.
14. At the end of June 2021, overall rent arrears had reduced to around the £350k mark.
15. Officers continue to monitor the situation closely and are maintaining contact with tenants in arrears, offering them appropriate advice and support, or referrals to City Advice and other agencies as required. We have maintained a supportive approach throughout the pandemic and will continue this to sustain tenancies and incrementally reduce arrears.
16. Former tenant arrears were £12,586 more than the target of £85,000 at year end. This was due to staff resources being concentrated on managing current tenant rent accounts during the pandemic and a temporary pause on debt enforcement action during lockdown. Officers have now resumed attempts to contact and recover debts in accordance with our policy and established procedure in this area.
17. Perhaps unsurprisingly, community centre revenue reduced drastically due to our centres being closed for much of the financial year in line with public health

guidance. Total income was £39,410.00, down from £103,794.00 the previous year, a reduction of 62%.

## **Allocations**

18. At the end of March 2021, there were 903 households on the waiting list for accommodation, though this has since reduced to 790 following the annual census of applicants, with many applications being cancelled due to loss of local connection, or the applicant not responding to contact from the Housing Needs Team.
19. A total of 149 applications were received during Q3 and Q4, with 139 new households being added to the register. There was a 73% increase in the number of housing applications received compared to the previous financial year. It is evident that this was a direct result of the pandemic adversely affecting applicants' employment and housing affordability.
20. Analysis of our letting activity showed that 41 properties were let in Q3/4, a significant increase on Q1/2, in which only 7 homes were let due to restrictions in place due to the pandemic. Despite lockdown restrictions, urgent moves for management transfer reasons were still facilitated (for instance, applicants transferring due to domestic abuse or serious medical needs). Lettings were suspended for all but the most urgent cases during lockdown, in line with government guidance. Overall lettings were down by almost half on the previous year, again a direct impact of the pandemic restrictions.
21. On a more positive note, Members may be interested to know that a high proportion of our homes are let after the first viewing; at year end, this stood at 88% of homes offered to applicants. The remaining homes were let after two viewings. This is reflective of the good standard that homes are brought up to during void works, the overall desirability of the estates we manage and their locations.

## **Complaints**

22. A total of 46 complaints were received across housing management and repairs in the year up to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. The majority of these were successfully resolved at Stage One.
23. There were five referrals to the Housing Ombudsman during the financial year, four of which resulted in our decisions being upheld; one referral resulted in a finding of 'service failure' in respect of part of the complaint. Steps were taken to implement the Ombudsman's recommendation in respect of the individual complainant's case.
24. The Complaints Policy has been reviewed and is due to be presented to Committee following resident consultation. The policy has been revised to reflect the provisions of the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Code of 2020.

## **Affordable Housing**

25. We plan to deliver 271 additional units of social housing by the end of 2023. Work is underway at the COLPAI development adjacent to Golden Lane Estate, where 66 units of social housing will be provided. Completion is expected by May 2022.
26. Members will be aware of the judicial review of the planning permission previously granted for the redevelopment of the Mais House sheltered housing complex at Sydenham Hill, resulting in the permission being quashed. At the time of writing, a fresh application had been submitted. This scheme, if approved, will provide 110 units of housing, including 71 much-needed two, three and four-bedroom homes.
27. Work is currently underway to provide new homes at Great Arthur House on Golden Lane (two accessible ground floor flats) and Isleden House in Islington (three new three-bed flats). The work at Great Arthur House began in January 2021 and at Isleden House in February.
28. A further 91 new homes are proposed for York Way Estate in Islington and a planning application for this scheme was submitted on 29<sup>th</sup> March. The proposal comprises four new residential blocks, a new community centre and an estate office.

## **Risk Register**

29. The Departmental Risk Register contains several strategic risks which are either specific or relevant to the Housing and Property Services. Having identified the key strategic risks, officers report actions already taken to mitigate against the likelihood and impact of these risks. The risk is then reassessed.
30. Each risk is then accompanied by an action plan which identifies future actions to be taken. This section of the report is intended to update Members on any action taken.
31. No red risk ratings were identified in the reporting period.

## **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – Housing Performance Dashboard
- Appendix 2 – Extract from Departmental Risk Register

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