



**Report of** Environment and Housing  
**Report to** Housing Advisory Board  
**Date:** 20 May 2015  
**Subject:** High Rise Project Update

Are specific electoral Wards affected City wide	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):		
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:		

### Summary of main issues

1. The High Rise Project was established following the Housing Management Review recognising the need for some specific work to be undertaken with high rise housing to address a number of issues. Full time project management was put in place from March 2015 to help drive the high rise work forward. A project plan has since been developed and a Project Board established to help provide strategic leadership to deliver the identified outcomes. This report provides an update on progress made to date.
2. In Summer 2014, the High Rise Advisory Group commissioned a satisfaction survey for all tenants living in high rise accommodation across the city. The survey generated a number of issues facing high rise tenants. Through the High Rise Project, a number of actions have been agreed to begin to address some of these issues and concerns. This report details the key issues raised by tenants, and actions proposed to address them.

### Recommendations

Housing Advisory Board is invited to note progress to date with the high rise project and actions to be undertaken.

## 1. Purpose of this report

To update Housing Advisory Board on progress made with the High Rise Project, and provide information on a number of pieces of work that are underway in response to the MSF tenant survey undertaken in July/August 2014.

## 2. Background

2.1 High rise housing is a substantial part of Council Housing in Leeds, with over 7500 households in 116 blocks across the city. Housing Leeds faces a number of challenges linked to high rise flats, including high investment need, energy efficiency, community safety, under-occupation, communal and grounds maintenance, day to day management issues and refuse and recycling.

2.2 A project group was established in 2013 to investigate the issues and to develop a strategy for high rise housing, with Chris Simpson taking up the project lead on a temporary basis. This project group worked with the service to achieve the following:

- Commissioned structural surveys of each construction type to understand the investment need of each construction type.
- Research via Renew into the make-up, demand and turnover by block to identify themes and 'block types'.
- Established the Leeds High Rise Group (renamed Leeds High Rise Advisory Group) – a strategic body of tenants living in high rise flats to help advise Housing Leeds on how to improve its service offer to high rise.
- Undertook a survey of all high rise tenants to identify tenant views

2.3 Full time project management was put in place from March 2015 to help drive the high rise work forward. A project plan has since been developed and a Project Board established to help provide strategic leadership to deliver the identified outcomes.

## 3. Main issues

### High Rise Project:

3.1 The central objective of the High Rise Project is to develop a clear High Rise Strategy, defining the future role and vision for high rise in Leeds, and using that to develop a clear, long term investment strategy.

3.2 This objective will be met via the completion of supporting objectives detailed below. There are 3 clear stages to the project:

- **Stage 1** – Agree a purpose/vision for each high rise block/cluster with clear housing management models to meet that vision.
- **Stage 2** – Develop a 10 year investment programme designed to deliver the agreed vision for High Rise;
- **Stage 3** – High Rise Strategy - including Investment Strategy and Marketing Strategy agreed for implementation.

- 3.3 The project will be run through three clear workstreams; Housing management; Repairs and Maintenance; and Strategic Investment. Within these workstreams there are a number of key outcomes that need to be delivered in order to meet the overall project objectives. The high level outcomes are set out below. A diagram showing workstreams, lead officers and key outcomes is attached at appendix 1.
- Development of a clear Strategy for high rise in the city
  - Core Housing management offer developed
  - Agree defined role/vision for each block to inform investment planning;
  - Different housing management models identified for specific blocks where beneficial;
  - Consistent high quality services across the city;
  - Clearly defined standard offer for repairs and maintenance in high rise blocks;
  - Marketing and communications strategy developed for high rise;
  - Strengthened customer/tenant involvement in high rise.
  - Community safety/ASB - a core and enhanced service offer.
  - Environmental and waste - a core and enhanced service offer.
- 3.4 In addition to the three project workstreams there will also be concurrent pieces of work around information and intelligence, health and safety, and marketing and communications. Regular updates will be brought to Housing Advisory Board as the project progresses.
- 3.5 Significant work has been undertaken with the Environment and Housing Performance and Intelligence team to develop further analysis and profiling of each of the blocks across the city. Each block will have a 'block on a page' profile, detailing all the key information about the block, as well as further detailed analysis based around clusters of blocks that share similar issues and profiles. This work will be further developed through the information and intelligence strand that will underpin the project workstreams and help inform decisions made around future role/vision for each block. We will work with the High Rise Advisory Group throughout the project to agree the best way to involve tenants at each stage of the project.

### **MSF Tenant Survey**

- 3.6 In July 2014 the High Rise Advisory Group commissioned a survey to gauge the views of all high rise tenants to help inform the overall evidence base. The survey was developed through wide consultation with tenants, staff and other key stakeholders. It was conducted through a postal survey sent to all high rise households (both LCC and the 8 PFI Blocks) to both tenants and leaseholders. (The PFI survey did not include questions in relation to the upkeep of the block).

### **3.7 Main issues reported**

Nearly a third of tenants (31% or 2,374 responses) responded to the survey, and a number of issues and themes were identified. A brief summary of the main findings is below:

- 75% are satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live;
- 71% satisfied with their block as a place to live;
- 78% reported feeling safe in their block with 73% reporting they had not experienced any ASB in the previous 6 months;
- For Sheltered blocks there was very high level of satisfaction, ranging from 94% to 96% across the range of questions (compared to 68% to 76% for general needs LCC tenants).

### **3.8 Responses varied across the blocks, with 29 blocks reporting high satisfaction (88% or higher) with their block as a place to live, with 18 blocks reporting low satisfaction (45% or less).**

Citywide, the main issues emerging from the survey (ranging from 20-22% reported as a major problem) are drug use or dealing, rubbish or litter, car parking and noisy neighbours. There were also a number of issues reported around the cleaning and maintenance of the blocks.

In terms of the upkeep of the block, the most reported major issue for high rise residents overall is the cost of their heating, a major issue for two in five respondents, 41%. Concern about heating is a key theme for Leeds City Council. More than one in five respondents (21% - 25%) identified three other major issues – rubbish chutes and /or waste disposal, lifts, and how well the heating works.

Now the project is fully up and running, we can communicate the results of the MSF survey with tenants along with actions we have identified to address the issues they raised. A letter will be sent to all high rise tenants during May/June giving a summary of the survey results, actions being put in place and information on how they can get more involved through various groups, forums and strategic bodies.

### **3.9 Proposals / Actions**

From reviewing the findings of the tenant survey, and exploring some of the issues raised further through walkabouts in a number of blocks, and discussions at the High Rise Advisory Group, The Project Board have identified a number of issues that could be undertaken that could have a big impact on tenant satisfaction. We are currently exploring with lead officers the feasibility and resource implications of undertaking these actions. These are summarised below:

- **Scope of cleaning**

There seems to be a general concern with the quality of cleaning within blocks that were evident in the survey and have been raised at the HRAG. These issues can be broadly broken down into 2 issues:

**Quality of internal cleaning and amount of time spent in each of the blocks:**

Need to work with cleaning teams to explore any issues and encourage tenants to attend monitoring visits to raise specific issues. There is also a significant problem in some blocks around the level of rubbish that needs to be removed by cleaners, impacting on the time available for cleaning. This will be picked up on the review of waste and recycling (see below).

**Action:** Establish time limited review/ working group to work with tenants, housing management and cleaning staff to look at where improvements could be made. This should also address issues raised by tenants through the survey and at the High Rise Advisory Group.

**External condition of blocks:**

The external condition of blocks is perceived to be poor, and is contributing to tenant dissatisfaction, with years of dirt and grime, moss etc on the outside walls, open decks, windows, rusty pipes and panels, balcony edges and fittings, untidy and worn looking canopies. This was also picked up by Property and Contracts on a walkabout during December 2014. Some form of regular external cleaning programme would address these issues and make the blocks more welcoming for tenants.

**Action:** Look at costs/practicalities of periodic external cleaning programme for high rise blocks. Report due to next High Rise Project Board.

- **Review of Waste and recycling.**

There is currently a disparity between collection intervals e.g. once per week in some blocks, twice a week in other blocks nearby – higher dissatisfaction with rubbish in blocks with single weekly collection. This is based on historical differences between the 3 ALMOs but needs to be addressed to ensure we are providing a consistent service across all the blocks. There also needs to be some review of chutes to ensure they are fit for purpose, and recycling facilities as there have been a number of issues raised by tenants around inadequate facilities and some sites where there are no recycling facilities available.

**Action:** Review of waste and recycling approach across high rise blocks.

- **Cyclical repairs and maintenance programme for High Rise.**

There are a number of issues across the blocks with unreported repairs to communal areas, balconies, external areas, blocked drains, leaking and rusty pipes, etc which not only make the block look unwelcoming, and lead to tenants

dissatisfaction, but could worsen also over time, leading to much more costly and time consuming repairs. A number of these issues are not reported by tenants or picked up by housing management staff and so are often not dealt with at all.

It is proposed that we look at establishing a small dedicated resource from the repairs team that could survey each block on a cyclical basis over the next few months and assess and complete any necessary work that is needed. This could then be a cyclical survey repeated on a regular basis. This would make a big difference to the maintenance of the block, increase tenant satisfaction, and ultimately in the long run could be more cost effective than the current approach by having a more proactive service that deals with small issues before they become a bigger problem.

**Action:** Housing Management and Property and Contracts to develop proposal for a cyclical repairs / maintenance survey in High Rise blocks. Report back to next High Rise Project Board.

- **Improve Entrance areas (first impressions).**

First impressions of a block can often be very poor, leading to a negative view of the accommodation on offer both to existing and prospective tenants. If we want to change the way high rise is viewed in the city then the external appearance of a number of blocks needs to be addressed. The cyclical repairs/maintenance survey referred to above will develop a list of priority works to be completed that will improve the overall appearance of the blocks. There also needs to be further work to look at things such as canopies (where they are tired and damaged are they needed? do they need to be replaced? can we have a different approach dependent on the future vision for the block?)

There are examples around the city of schemes where funding such as HAP money has been used to develop initiatives like community gardens that give the blocks better kerb appeal. More work needs to be done to review how we could encourage further HAP bids and explore other funding streams to encourage more schemes like this.

**Action:** Project Board to agree approach, and explore potential funding to implement some of this work.

- **Security in blocks.**

Drug use and dealing was highlighted as a significant issue in the tenant survey and has been raised a number of times at the High Rise Advisory Group. People accessing areas such as chute rooms and electrical cupboards to take drugs has been highlighted as a particular programme. To address this we should review if it is practical and cost effective to improve security by putting locks on chute room and electrical cupboard doors to prevent this but still allow residents access. The project will also link into to other workstreams around improving CCTV and further enhancing security around high rise blocks to ensure we maximise the impact for tenants. We will also work closely with LASBT, the Police and other agencies to look at further ways we can improve safety.

**Action:** Develop proposal for Project Board to consider on effective ways to improve security within the blocks.

- **Review of garages**

There have been concerns raised with garages which are in poor condition and are being used for drug taking and generally attract anti-social behaviour. A review should be put in place to determine where investment is needed, and where not fit for purpose consider demolition and replacement with open parking.

**Action:** Wider review of garages to determine future use.

- **Making use of old housing office/space facilities within blocks where appropriate**

There is an opportunity to re-use space for tenant activities linked in with tenant involvement team and area housing offices. There were several comments from residents that they do not have housing surgeries in their block, and they feel they are not closely located to their nearest housing office. (several examples where no surgeries and not close proximity to housing office).

**Action:** Look at re-establishing housing surgeries in blocks/clusters. Work with tenant involvement team to look at alternative use for communal space, and explore possible HAP funding bid for facilities where appropriate.

- **Tenant involvement**

Work to improve tenant involvement in blocks which was perceived to be poor in the MSF tenant survey. We need to look at developing new groups, encouraging representation on HAPs, HRAG and other tenant forums.

**Action:** Work with tenant involvement team and area management to look at how we can better engage with high rise tenants. There is an opportunity around initiatives such as the free WIFI project to offer an enhanced tenant support and look to establish tenant groups.

**Action:** Tenant Involvement team to develop proposal.

#### **4. Corporate Considerations**

##### **4.1 Consultation and Engagement**

Tenants, staff and wider stakeholders were fully involved in the development of the MSF Tenant Survey and this engagement with tenants will continue throughout the life of the high rise project. Work is underway with the tenant involvement team to determine how best tenants can be involved in each area of work, but in particular in work to determine the make-up and future vision for each block. In addition, the High Rise Advisory Group will be fully involved in the

development of the project and will be updated regularly throughout the life of the project.

#### 4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

Housing Advisory Board members are being asked to note the progress being made with the High Rise Project, and as such, a decision is not being made. An Equality Impact Assessment screening will be undertaken on the project as a whole, and individual EIAs will be carried out on particular areas of work where required.

#### 4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

High rise housing has been deemed a priority by the Housing Advisory Board. The development of a high rise strategy and investment plan will be delivered in line with the Council's policies and procedures and is designed to deliver an improved and more cost effective Housing service for high rise tenants across the city.

The work of the High Rise project will also contribute towards the delivery of a number of Best Council and City priorities.

#### 4.4 Resources and value for money

One of the main aims of the high rise project is to determine the most efficient and effective way of spending HRA resources to develop the best offer for high rise tenants in Leeds. The High Rise Strategy and Investment Plan will ensure that all investment is determined in a consistent, fair and effective way across the city.

In particular, the actions identified in section 3.8 will need significant resources to be delivered successfully. Some of them could be resourced within existing budgets by changing the way we work, while others will require specific funding. The project team are currently exploring resource options to ensure that actions can be funded appropriately.

#### 4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

None at this stage. The report is an update paper and is not subject to call in.

#### 4.6 Risk Management

A risk register will be developed for the project as a whole and will be monitored throughout the project by the project manager and project board.

### **5. Conclusions**

- 5.1 This report highlights the progress that has been made to date with the high rise project, and provides an update on a number of pieces of work that are now underway with the ultimate aim of improving customer satisfaction for high rise tenants. Now that project management is in place it is expected that progress will be made quickly. Housing Advisory Board will be kept fully informed as the project develops.



## **6. Recommendations**

- 6.1 Housing Advisory Board is invited to note progress to date with the high rise project and actions to be undertaken.

### **Background documents<sup>1</sup>**

#### 7.1

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<sup>1</sup> The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.