

## **Housing Activity Update – February 2023/24**

### **1. Rent Collection**

- a. Rent collection performance has improved over the last 12 months, from 93.71% at the end of quarter 3 2022/23 to 94.68% at the end of quarter 3 2023/24. Over the same period, we saw a slight reduction in current rent arrears from 4.54% to 4.43%. Our arrears performance is very closely aligned to similar large urban authority landlords. Despite the improvement rent collection continues to be below target, with the cost of living crisis impacting on tenants' ability to pay their rent. We continue to undertake regular training with Housing Officers to ensure robust application of the arrears process.
- b. Housing Leeds has continued to communicate to tenants on its supportive stance on rent arrears, emphasising to tenants that they will not lose their council home because of financial hardship where they are positively engaging with us and making some payment against arrears. We continue to offer support via the Housing Officer (Income) team – up to the end of December we had supported 3675 households to generate additional income for tenants totalling £2.3m, an average of £629 per household.
- c. To support tenants to maximise their income and keep warm this winter our gas contractor, PH Jones, has partnered with British Gas as part of social value arrangements to offer £300k of free fuel vouchers, available to tenants on prepayment meters who are experiencing financial hardship to access gas and electricity.

### **2. Voids Performance**

- a) At the end of December 2023 the percentage of empty homes across Housing Leeds was 1.35% (700 homes). This represented a net reduction in empty homes of 240 over the period December 2022 – December 2023.
- b) Further reducing the number of empty homes remains a key strategic priority, with additional operational delivery capacity operating to support principal service delivery partners.
- c) Strong cross service collaboration continues to ensure opportunities to maximise outputs is maximised.

### **3. Repairs update**

- a) Demand for the repairs service continues to exceed that of previous years with demand running at circa 6% higher than last year, meaning an additional 12,500 repairs are projected for the full year, placing both operational and financial pressure on the service. This is a trend that other landlords are reporting nationally.
- b) Despite this, the level of work in progress (WIP) has now reduced from around 30,000 repairs at the start of the year to around 16,000 at the end of 2023. This level of WIP represents the target level for the repairs service.
- c) As a result, repairs performance and satisfaction is on a positive trajectory, with improvements in the number of repairs completed within target and satisfaction with the repairs service anticipated to continue into 2024.
- d) As part of our commitment to service improvement colleagues in Housing Leeds and LBS work collaboratively in all aspects of service delivery including performance, customer satisfaction and learning from feedback. Over recent months teams have commenced a

programme of process reviews. Following customer feedback repairs was identified as the priority area for review.

- e) A full end to end review of the repairs process has commenced, the scope of which covers all elements from first contact through to invoicing. The review aims to identify opportunities for efficiency and to improve the customer experience. This review is also being supplemented by a review of the customer complaints process. This review programme is including representatives from many different stakeholders, including Contact Centre, Housing Leeds, LBS, Finance, Audit and IDS. The review remains ongoing and proposals are being drafted for consultation with Tenant Voice Panel. Improvements identified will be applied across all areas of the city, including those not delivered by LBS, in order to ensure improvements are applied for the benefit of all tenants.

#### **4. Damp, Mould and Condensation**

- a) Over the last 12 months significant time and resource has been dedicated to the refining the processes, data management, communications and staff knowledge and skills associated with damp, mould and condensation.
- b) Actions have focused on compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Service's *self-assessment*, including the introduction of a Damp and Mould Policy and Damp and Mould Strategy, consistent with industry guidance and best practice.
- c) Training has now been delivered to the vast majority of front line staff within Housing Leeds. An e-learning package is also being developed to supplement this training.
- d) The dedicated Damp and Mould Team continues to triage all calls relating to damp, mould and condensation. Additional resource has been aligned to this team to ensure there is capacity to meet the demand for the service.
- e) Resident communications remains a high priority task, ensuring tenants are supported to know how best report issues of damp, mould and condensation and are frequently provided with practical advice on how best to minimise condensation in the home.
- f) Several improvements are being introduced following the recommendations made by Leeds Tenant Scrutiny Board after its recent review of the advice and support that the service provides residents around damp and mould. These improvements include providing access to a more engaging practical awareness video, developing the communication forward plan, and enhancing the current website content.
- g) The service is currently actively engaged in the consultation from Department of Levelling Up, Communities and Housing relating to proposals for Awaab's Law.

#### **5. Asset Management and Investment**

- a) The 2023/24 HRA Capital Programme is on track to deliver around £73m of investment works by the end of the year, including £29.2m of major decarbonisation and energy efficiency projects.
- b) The Investment Programme also remains on track to exceed the commitment to deliver in excess of £100m of decarbonisation works between 2020 and 2025, with over £62m of works already delivered and a further £40m currently on site.
- c) The 2024/25 programme is now well developed with further investment to be committed to decarbonisation works, as well as additional funding being allocation to programmes of work aimed at maintaining and improving the Decent Homes Standard, such as windows, doors, roofs, kitchens and bathrooms.

- d) The service continues to work closely with stakeholders to identify external funding opportunities to support the Asset Management Strategy and maximise outputs for tenants.

## 6. Building Safety Act Compliance

- a) All buildings within the scope of the Building Safety Act (BSA) were required to be registered with the Building Safety Regulator (BSR) by end of October 2023, including the provision of Key Building Information. This deadline was met for all 119 LCC buildings in scope.
- b) From April 2024, these buildings require completion and submission of a Building Safety Case to be submitted to the BSR. Following investment and growth in the Building Safety Team and Fire Safety Team, progress to achieve this is on track.
- c) Additional requirements under BSA include improvements in resident access to building information, known as the Golden Thread and the development of a building specific communications strategy for in-scope blocks. In all cases, progress remains on track with strong assurance of compliance when the requirements go live.

## 7. Rehousing of Residents from 11 Large Panel System High Rise Blocks

- a) The Council's Executive Board approved the rehousing of residents and demolition of 5 blocks at the October 2022 meeting and 6 blocks at the October 2023 meeting. Work to rehouse residents of the 11 blocks is underway in readiness for their subsequent demolition. Residents are being supported to move to new homes that suit them in the longer-term by offering priority A and direct let status and payment of a homeloss and disturbance payment to support their move. Good progress is being made.
- b) These Large Panel System (Reema construction) high rise blocks and timescales for emptying the blocks is identified in the below table:

no.	High rise block name	ward	decision and date of rehousing start	estimated date empty
1 - 3	Alderton Heights (3 blocks)	Alwoodley	October 2022 Executive Board decision, rehousing started November 2022.	October 2025
4	Gipton Gate East	Gipton & Harehills		July 2025
5	Gipton Gate West	Armley	October 2023 Executive Board decision, rehousing started November 2023.	April 2026
6	Raynville Court			April 2026
7	Raynville Grange	Moortown		April 2027
8	Leafield Towers	Killingbeck & Seacroft		April 2027
9	Bailey Towers		April 2027	
10	Brookland Towers		April 2027	
11	Ramshead Heights			

- c) The demolition of two further blocks, The Highways (in Killingbeck and Seacroft ward), is underway and work due to be complete later this summer.
- d) Activity to plan for the demolition of other blocks has now started, with the aim of procuring one or more specialist contractors to carry out demolition of the blocks between 2025 and 2027.

## 8. Pressures on the Leeds Homes Register/Homelessness

- a) Leeds continues to open the third highest number of homelessness assessments in England. In quarter 3 of 2023/24 we completed 1403 homelessness assessments and 59% were owed a prevention duty meaning they were assessed during the prevention stage (compared to a national average of 39%). 78% of all cases assessed had a positive prevention during quarter 3 meaning that we were able to prevent the homelessness from occurring (compared to a national average of 53%).
- b) We are seeing an increase in the number of households who are unable to remain with family members (roughly a third of cases approaching Leeds Housing Options (LHO)). We believe this to be linked to the cost of living crisis and the increased financial strain accommodating friends or family can have.
- c) Over 15% of our customers have approached LHO due to their private rented tenancies being ended. Last year we saw a spike in section 21s being served and believed it was linked to increased mortgage interest rates for landlords, an increase of market rent (9% increase over 12 months reported in Leeds) and at the time, the Government's progression of the Renters Reform Bill.
- d) As a consequence of these pressures we have seen an increase in the number of households, particularly families, who are living in temporary accommodation. At the end of December there were 195 households in temporary accommodation (including 100 families and 95 single households). We continue to work proactively with households to support them to quickly access a permanent housing solution.
- e) Leeds City Council has made a series of successful bids for additional funding to support people affected by rough sleeping:
  - **Supported Housing Accommodation Programme (SHAP)** will enable us to provide 44 additional supported accommodation places by the end of March 2025. 25 will be dispersed properties and 19 will be self-contained units within 'cores'. 5 x 1 bed for young people and 14 x 1 bed for adults.
  - **Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme (RSAP)** - funding allocated for the purchase of 72 properties across 5 rounds to support people affected by rough sleeping, the last round of 8 properties is to be delivered by March 2024. Properties have been a very successful addition of accommodation and since the scheme started we have successfully moved on 13 people through the scheme.
  - **Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF)** - allocated to support humanitarian schemes to deliver 41 properties for Ukraine and Afghanistan resettlement schemes which will be reintroduced as council stock. A total of 25 properties have been purchased, the scheme needs to be delivered by March 2024.
  - **Rough Sleeping Initiative Move On and Prevention Fund** - additional funding, extra bedspaces and increased outreach provision has been agreed for rough sleepers for use during the winter period as part of the City's response to winter planning.
  - **Supported Housing Improvement Programme (SHIP)** - aims to improve the quality of the accommodation and the support provided in short-term supported housing. As part of this work three officers within Leeds Housing Options are working on the support element of this work and officers in the Private Rented Sector looking at property standards.
- f) There is continued pressure on the Leeds Homes Register. The overall number of applicants on the register has remained steady for the last 3-4 years with 26300 on the register at the end of quarter 2 and over 5000 applicants with a priority A or A+ band. This has contributed towards average wait times for someone with band A status

increasing to 133 weeks, creating significant pressures to the system, with increasing numbers of households in temporary accommodation or supported accommodation who no longer require support and are urgently awaiting move on.

- g) The Council's Executive Board made a decision in December 2023 to begin consultation on proposed changes to the Council's Lettings Policy. Possible changes for consideration include:
- Allocating the majority of properties to applicants in housing need on a permanent basis.
  - Reviewing the criteria for joining the housing register.
  - Restrict adult household members who can be included on an application as a household member to be rehoused.
  - Increase the length of time that a priority is awarded for.
  - Create a new direct let category for rooflessness.
  - The proposed approach to a review of Local Lettings Policies, New Build Lettings Policies and Children at Height.
- h) Consultation began in early January and will conclude in early March, with an online survey available on Your Voice Leeds and attendance at multi agency forums to seek the views of partners. A workshop was held with Scrutiny Board Members on 31 January. An Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken as part of working up the proposed Lettings Policy changes.

## 9. Social Housing Regulation

The 2023 Social Housing (Regulation) Act was enacted in July 2023, with a more robust regulatory framework of social landlords overseen by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH). Key requirements of regulation include the following:

### Tenant Satisfaction Measures

- a) From April 2023 social landlords are required to report annual performance against 22 Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs), made up of 12 measures collected via tenant perception survey and 10 measures reported from management information. Housing Leeds has been undertaking quarterly tenant perception surveys since April 2022 to build up a baseline performance position ahead of the TSMs becoming a regulatory requirement. The annual performance is reported to tenants via the Annual Report to Tenants, and quarterly updates are provided via the tenant email and on social media. Performance reporting has also been amended so that performance reports into Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board, Tenant Scrutiny Board and Leeds Housing Board includes TSM performance.

### Review of the Consumer Standards

- a) As part of the previous and new regulatory frameworks, social landlords are required to demonstrate that they comply with each of the requirements of 4 Consumer Standards, The RSH undertook consultation on proposed changes to the Consumer Standards in summer 2023 and setting a stronger expectation that landlords can evidence that they comply with the standards. The proposed updated Consumer Standards are as follows:
- **Safety and Quality Standard** – requirement to provide safe and good quality homes and landlord services to tenants.

- **Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard** – requirement to be open with tenants and treat them with fairness and respect so that tenants can access services, raise complaints, influence decision making and hold the landlord to account.
  - **Neighbourhood and Community Standard** – requirement to engage with other relevant parties so that tenants can live in safe and well maintained neighbourhoods and feel safe in their home.
  - **Tenancy Standard** – requirement for the fair allocation and letting of homes and how tenancies are managed and ended by landlords.
- b) Self assessments against the proposed updated standards are currently underway in Leeds in order to evidence the extent of our compliance and inform improvement opportunities.

### **Resident Engagement Strategy**

- c) As part of the regulatory framework it is important that social landlords are able to evidence that they are providing opportunities for tenants to provide feedback, hearing the voice of a diverse range of tenants, using customer feedback to deliver service improvements and communicating effectively with tenants. Housing Leeds is currently reviewing its Tenant Engagement Strategy to strengthen its engagement on all aspects of service delivery. A number of formal mechanisms exist including the online forum, Your Voice Leeds, the Tenant Voice Panel (a panel of almost 200 tenants who have volunteered to support us with service improvements), Tenant Scrutiny Board and Housing Advisory Panels. As it is proposed that the Housing Advisory Panels stop meeting after the end of March proposals for the future engagement of local engagement with tenants will be developed shortly to ensure that there is local tenant influence into service delivery.

### **Governance Arrangements**

- d) In July 2023 the Leeds Housing Board (Operations) was established as a joint Board of tenants and Elected Members to oversee Housing Leeds' compliance with new regulatory requirements, receiving evidence of performance and compliance and offering challenge and suggested areas of improvement. A full record of agendas and papers is available [here](#). Since its establishment the Board has received TSM performance information, considered the TSM methodology, received updates on complaints including the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Self Assessment and our plans for undertaking self assessments against the Consumer Standards, including the self assessment of the Tenancy Standard.
- e) A programme resource has been identified to support our work to ensure robust compliance with the regulatory framework with monthly Board meetings of senior officers with the programme team.
- f) Leeds City Council is responsible for ensuring compliance with the regulatory framework for all of its properties including where functions have been delegated to other organisations or services, e.g. Belle Isle Tenant Management Organisation (BITMO), Private Finance Initiative (PFI) areas. We are therefore reviewing our contractual and performance management arrangements to receive assurance that contracted organisations are complying with regulatory requirements for delegated functions.

- g) Department of Levelling Up, Communities and Housing (DLUCH) has indicated that professionalisation of the sector will become an important part of the regulatory framework, with a requirement for all senior managers to hold housing qualifications and for robust training to be delivered across the organisation. We are awaiting further details of the qualification and training requirements, although consultation is expected in early 2024.
- h) Also as part of the regulatory framework is the requirement for each landlord to have a designated person for health and safety. Again we are awaiting further details of this requirement from the regulator.
- i) A workshop has been arranged with the Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board on Social Housing Regulation on 2 April, to outline the proposed changes to the regulatory framework and seek the Board's input into approaches adopted by Leeds to provide robust governance and performance management arrangements, current performance and areas of risk.

## **10. Complaints**

- a) As reported to Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board in January 2024 87% of stage 1 complaints and 88% of stage 2 complaints were responded to on time. Whilst this performance is not meeting target performance is improving from 2022/23 when only 74% of stage 1 complaints and 65% of stage 2 complaints were responded on time. The service saw an increase in complaints linked to repairs backlogs following COVID, impacting on our ability to respond on time. However, as the backlogs have reduced we have seen a similar reduction in the number of complaints and a greater proportion of complaints being responded to on time.
- b) The Housing Ombudsman Service has strengthened powers as part of social housing regulation and a [Complaints Handling Code](#) has been published which sets out the requirements for landlords to manage and learn from complaints. Housing Leeds completes an assessment against the code each year. A copy of the most recent self assessment was reported to the Leeds Housing Board in [January 2024](#). A detailed report on complaints, including the nature of complaints, ombudsman cases and complaints satisfaction monitoring was reported to the Leeds Housing Board in [November 2023](#). Tenant Board members are working with the service more closely as Complaints Champions, to support the service in further strengthening its compliance on the management of complaints.

## **11. Housing Delivering Digital Improvement Programme**

- a) The IDS / Housing Steering Group has been in place for over one year with representation from senior officers in Housing Leeds and IDS Lead Product Managers to oversee the delivery of a programme of digital improvements. A number of improvements have been delivered / are planned for the coming months:
- b) Upgrade to the Housing Management system (Cx) – took place in October 2023. The upgrade provided resolution to a number of system issues since go live, improved system performance (speed) and delivered enhanced functionality including relating to applying rent review and direct debit uplifts.
- c) Upgrade to the Tenant Portal – as part of the Cx upgrade improved functionality is available via the customer portal which will enable tenants to order some repairs and

book appointments online. We are currently reviewing our business processes aligned to the portal, along with the verification process ahead of a roll out during early 2024.

- d) Review of Arrears Policy in Cx – implemented in November 2023. The updated policy has strengthened the use of system intelligence to capture more scenarios and identify which accounts in arrears are triggered for particular actions, whilst taking into account payment cycles and payment arrangements, helping to ensure that there is more robust arrears management.
- e) Launch of the High Rise Hub – delivered in October 2023 as a digital platform for high rise residents to request and / or instantly access health and safety information relating to their block or their home, a requirement of the Building Safety Act.
- f) Launch of Any Day Advertising via Abris – system improvements were delivered in November 2023 to enable us to now advertise Council and Housing Association properties every day, instead of once a week. This is projected to help us increase rental income by approx. £100k each year. Plans are underway to deliver an upgrade to Abris during 2024 – consideration is currently being given to improved functionality that could be delivered via the upgrade.
- g) Mobile Technology – the service could achieve huge efficiencies from the delivery of comprehensive mobile working technology. As part of a first phase of delivering mobile technology the service is looking to roll out a mobile working solution for the completion of stage 2 fire checks and person-centred fire risk assessments – enabling information to be recorded digitally during the check and forwarding actions to relevant teams. The next phase of the mobile working project will consider mobile working options for the completion of Annual Tenancy Check Ins.

## **12. Housing strategy**

- a) The Leeds Housing Strategy 2022-2027 was approved by the Council’s Executive Board in June 2022. 6 monthly updates are provided to the Leeds Housing Board (Strategic) meetings, with the last update made to the meeting in September 2023. A full copy of the update is provided [here](#), but a summary update of each theme, is outlined below:

### **b) *Meeting Affordable Housing Need***

The Leeds Affordable Housing Growth Partnership Action Plan (2022-25) was finalised at the end of 2022, outlining plans to deliver a pipeline of circa 750 new affordable homes each year 2022-25. In 2022/23 633 new homes were delivered. We are currently consulting on proposed changes to the Council’s Lettings Policy in order to ensure that we are effectively meeting affordable housing need (as outlined separately in this paper). Leeds Housing Options continue to work with landlords in the private rented sector in order to maximise the number of households rehoused into the private rented sector and the Private Sector Team continue to seek to reduce the number of empty private homes in the city.

### **c) *Improving Housing Quality***

Housing Leeds continues to make good progress through its improvement programme to reduce carbon emissions and improve the quality of homes, alongside proactive option appraisals and asset management decisions of its most difficult to treat, as outlined in this report. Housing Leeds also continues to proactively enforce



improvements to housing conditions in the private rented sector and maximise the positive outcomes from the Selective Licencing Scheme.

**d) *Reducing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping***

The 2023-28 Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy was approved by Executive Board in July 2023, outlining 4 ambitions of universal prevention, targeted prevention, intervention and recovery through strong city partnership working and a shared and integrated approach to building on our offer of housing options. Leeds continues to perform well in maximising homeless preventions and is making good progress in reducing the number of homeless young people. There is lots of positive work happening to support people affected by rough sleeping with a number of funding opportunities to provide specialist support and accommodation. A more detailed operational update is included earlier in this paper.

**e) *Thriving and Inclusive Communities***

Housing Leeds continues to work as part of strong partnership arrangements in the city, both at a strategic and operational level to ensure that robust arrangements are in place to respond to incidents of antisocial behaviour and domestic abuse, ensuring that staff are trained and confident in identifying and responding to community safety concerns. Alongside this we continue to work with housing association partners to maximise partnership working across the wider social rented sector.

**f) *Improving Health Through Housing***

One of the Best City Ambition's breakthrough projects is 'Better Homes for Health and Wellbeing'. A number of projects are underway to support this breakthrough project including a hospital discharge project which has created 2 Housing Officer posts to work within the Transfer of Care Team in the Leeds hospitals, Health and Housing training, and developing an escalation pathway into the housing sector for children with asthma. In June 2023 Leeds launched as a Marmot city and Housing Leeds is working closely with Public Health colleagues and the Institute of Health Equity to achieve partnership working which seeks to reduce health inequalities relating to housing via system change, focusing on priorities for the second year of the partnership.

**g) *Child and Age Friendly Housing***

Through the Thriving Strategy good progress has been made in strengthening relationships between housing teams and Children's social work teams to ensure a supportive and collaborative rehousing pathway for care leavers and proactive and collaborative support for families living in Council Housing. Through the Age Friendly Action Plan progress is being made in the development of 7 new extra care schemes via Home Group and Housing Leeds, with 2 Home Group schemes now opened and a further one scheme due early this year, and the Leeds City Council scheme at Gascoigne House in Middleton opening in October 2023.