

## **Housing Activity Update – Quarter 1 2022/23**

### **1. Rent Collection**

- a. Rent collection performance has dipped over the last 12 months, from 95.51% at the end of quarter 2 2021/22 to 93.95% at the end of quarter 2 2022/23. Over the same period, we saw an increase in rent arrears from 3.5% to 4.3%. This decline in performance mirrors experiences of other landlords, particularly larger urban landlords. The main contributor towards this decline in performance is thought to be increasing hardship experienced by tenants on low incomes – high inflationary increases mean that basic essentials such as home energy, fuel and food are costing tenants more over the last year alongside the removal of enhanced benefit levels that had been in place during the pandemic. However other internal factors have contributed including some ongoing issues with the arrears functionality in the new housing management system / staff confidence in using the system. All Housing Officers have received a robust training programme over recent months to address these issues. On a more positive note, we have seen the gap between last and this year's performance reduce over the last quarter, and will continue to closely monitor the performance trend during quarter 3 and 4.
- b. Housing Leeds has recently restated to tenants 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. Alongside this we have recently launched our Winter / Christmas Income Campaign which has week by week activities planned, including sharing key messages with customers about additional support available, delivering targeted messages to specific customer groups.
- c. In summer 2022 the government announced its intention nationally to fully roll out Universal Credit by 2024, although we are awaiting plans for the rollout of managed migration in Leeds. 16384 Council tenants are now in receipt of Universal Credit to support them with paying their housing costs – we continue to offer support to tenants newly affected by Universal Credit. Around 48% of Council tenants on UC have their rent paid direct by DWP to Housing Leeds as landlord.
- d. Housing Leeds is currently working with finance colleagues to model different rent increase levels for 2023/24, seeking to achieve a balance between an increase that is affordable to tenants but also enables Housing Leeds to cover the cost of essential services and its ambitious investment programme. The government has recently consulted on proposals to limit the level of social housing rent increases to 3%, 5% or 7%. The Local Government Association provided a response to government on the consultation; Leeds City Council engaged with LGA as part of this consultation.

### **2. Voids Performance**

- a) Reducing the number of void properties in the city remains a key strategic priority for the service, not only to maximise income from rents, but also in the context of the huge demand for social housing, illustrated by the number of people on the Leeds Homes Register.

- b) Actions Plans are in place for all service providers in relation to void returns, with the targets set on these plans now consistently achieved by all service providers, meaning the trend for the number of voids is positive, reducing on a weekly basis. The Housing Leeds Action Plan has included the short-term procurement of additional contractors to support the efficient reduction in voids. These contracts are in place until the end of the 2022/23 financial year, by which point it is anticipated the target of no more than 1% of stock being void will have been achieved.
- c) The ongoing energy crisis remains a key risk to the service. Energy providers continue to restrict supplies being 'switched', meaning the time taken to manage the energy supplies in void properties is significantly impacted. The service continues to work with partners at Energy Angels to minimise this impact.

### **3. Repairs update**

- a) Demand for the repairs service remains higher than anticipated, meaning some non-emergency repairs are taking longer to complete. The service continues to work closely with all stakeholders to monitor the impact and ensure customer communications is managed effectively.
- b) As the Responsive Repairs, Voids and Cyclical Maintenance contract in the West of the city with Mears reaches the end of its first year (having commenced in October 2021), the service would like to update Scrutiny Board on changes to the way customer satisfaction data is gathered across the city to improve accuracy and quality of this Key Performance Indicator. In previous years, 'transactional' customer satisfaction data from completed repairs was gathered via outbound calls made by the Contacts Centre's Out of Hours team. This model enabled only a very small sample of tenants to be surveyed each month (c.500 maximum across the city representing 4% of all completions). This method consistently returned customer satisfaction scores of around 90%, which was significantly higher than the scores received in the bi-annual 'perception' STAR survey, which typically returned scores in the low- to mid- 70%.
- c) To address this disparity and to ensure that the monthly transactional surveys return a more accurate and representative level of customer satisfaction, the service has now moved away from telephone surveys to a model of sending out electronic surveys via SMS message, upon completion of all repairs, to all tenants for who a mobile phone number recorded. This revised methodology enables the service to now target c.10,000 surveys each month and therefore the majority of tenants are now given the opportunity to give feedback after each repair and report any outstanding issues they have so that these can be dealt with proactively and without escalation through the formal or informal complaints processes. This represents a significant benefit in terms of improving customer satisfaction and efficiency through the effective intervention and resolution of issues in a proactive manner.
- d) While the new method of collecting customer satisfaction data is a positive development in relation to accuracy, volume and customer outcomes, Scrutiny Board is asked to note that this new methodology typically returns results some 10-20% lower

than the approach previously employed. The new methodology went live in the summer (after an initial trial period) and data is currently being collected and analysed to determine statistical accuracy ahead of reporting as a KPI. At the end of July 2022, citywide data for repairs is showing customer satisfaction at around 70% and importantly, the comments behind the data have been shared with service providers to enable trends and learning outcomes to be identified. Work is ongoing to analyse and better understand the data and stretch targets are being set to ensure that satisfaction levels are improved as the service continues to progress through its recovery phase.

#### **4. Asset Management and Investment**

- a) The Capital investment programme set out a plan to deliver over £100m of renewable heating and energy efficiency projects over the five-year period 2020-2025.
- b) Since the last update, Ground Source Heat Pumps have been installed at six high rise blocks and a programme of 17 further blocks are at procurement stage, with work due to start on site in late 2023.
- c) The District Heating Clusters project has created three new district heating networks, installing ground source heat pumps to 14 high-rise buildings. Cluster 4 has recently started on site and the four blocks in this cluster will have ground source heat pumps installed by March 2023. Clusters 5 and 6 are currently at design/procurement stage and installation to the 9 blocks within these is planned to start in 2023.
- d) In total, 55 blocks have now had renewable heating installed as part of the Leeds Pipes, District Heating Clusters, and Ground Source Heat Pumps projects, and a further 30 blocks are on site or at design and procurement stage. Plans have yet to be developed for the remaining 29 blocks, including PFI managed blocks and those heated by gas.
- e) A project to improve 190 system-build properties in the Holtdales is now nearing completion and has been supported by £4.1m of grant funding secured through the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) demonstrator. The work includes air source heat pumps, EWI, new roofs, ventilation, LED lighting, and smart heating controls.
- f) The Fitting the Future project has recently started and will improve 150 system-build properties in the Boggart Hill area of Leeds. The scope of work will include EWI to all homes, Solar Photovoltaic Panels (Solar PV) to homes meeting the orientation and elevation requirements, and Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points for up to 50 of these properties. This project has secured £2.0m of ERDF grant funding.
- g) Two major high-rise improvement projects are due to start on site shortly. These will improve the thermal efficiency of 630 flats in seven high-rise blocks through the installation of external wall insulation and new roofs and increase structural integrity through concrete repair work. Grant funding of £9.6m has been secured from Wave 1 of the SHDF to support this work.

- h) Fire safety work remains a priority with sprinklers currently being installed in six high-rise blocks and the programme to install comprehensive fire safety measures to back-to-back houses and Victorian era properties continuing.
- i) The core programmes of work to improve housing quality have continued with £3.6m of roofing replacements, £3.7m of kitchen and bathroom upgrades, and £0.7m of window and door replacements due to take place during the 2022/23 financial year.
- j) A programme of work to replace soil stacks in high-rise buildings has also commenced this year. This work will improve the quality of homes and reduce repairs and disrepair. Two blocks are currently having soil stacks replaced and a further three are due to start on site shortly. All Housing Leeds managed high-rise buildings are having full stack surveys completed and the outcome of these surveys will inform the soil stack replacement programme.

#### **5. Aldertons/Gipton Gate plans**

- a) Options appraisal activity has been undertaken to inform the best course of action to take in relation to 5 of our high-rise residential blocks which have been identified as requiring significant investment work. These blocks are of a Large Panel System (LPS) construction type, comprising of three Alderton Heights high rise blocks in Alwoodley, and two Gipton Gate West and East blocks in Gipton.
- b) A report was submitted to the Executive Board for decision on 19th October 2022 which detailed the outcomes of this options appraisal, recommending that all residents be rehoused, commencing November 2022. The emptying of these blocks is being recommended in readiness for their subsequent demolition to clear the sites ready for new modern housing to be developed.

#### **6. Pressures on the Leeds Homes Register/Homelessness**

- a) Over the last couple of years there have been increasing pressures on housing demand in Leeds. Leeds Housing Options continue to excel at early intervention. During 2021/22 Leeds accepted 68% of homelessness assessments at the point an applicant is threatened with homelessness rather than when actually homeless compared to a national average of 46%. This has resulted in high levels of prevention outcomes being achieved with 84% of applicants who approached when threatened with homelessness being helped to secure an accommodation outcome that is available to them for a minimum of 6 months (compared to a national average of 56%).
- b) There is continued pressure on the Leeds Homes Register. The overall number of applicants on the register has remained steady for the last 2 -3 years with 26480 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 137 weeks, creating significant pressures on individuals in urgent housing need and increasing numbers of households in temporary accommodation or supported accommodation who no longer require support and are urgently awaiting move on. At the end of quarter 2 there were 120 households living in temporary accommodation –

80 single person households, 40 family households. Although relatively low for a city the size of Leeds, it is still a notable increase on pre-Covid times.

- c) A number of measures have been put in place in response to this issue:
- In April 2022 a temporary change was made to the Council's Lettings Policy to allocate all existing Council homes through the housing needs quota and to suspend the date of registration quota, to increase the number of allocations to those in the highest need.
  - In June 2022, a decision was taken to offer 25 direct lets for applicants living within specific supported accommodation where blockages are meaning that the support provider is unable to accept new cases into supported accommodation. Housing associations are also providing homes to support this.
  - To compliment this work is underway with support providers, Adult Social Care and Children's Services to strengthen the rehousing pathway of applicants living in temporary supported accommodation – providing training and guidance to agencies on how to support someone to manage their application, bid effectively etc., strengthening advocacy / support worker contact information to ensure that proactive contact can take place to discuss suitability of an accommodation offer.
  - Alongside this work we are looking to more robustly apply provisions within the lettings policy such as priority extensions / discharging duty for repeated offer refusals / applying qualification / reduced preference criteria where appropriate.
  - Leeds Housing Options are currently recruiting to 2 posts that will be dedicated to maximising the number of homes that are generated via the private rented sector to support housing pressures. It is envisaged that the post holders will take a strategic approach to landlord recruitment and retention, while ensuring that the commitment to boost standards in the private rented sector remains uncompromised

## **7. Changes to Regulatory Framework**

### **The introduction of Tenant Satisfaction Measures**

- a) The Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) has recently published its response to the consultation it ran earlier this year about proposals to introduce 22 'Tenant Satisfaction Measures' (TSMs), which are intended to give a clear picture to tenants, landlords and the RSH how a landlord is performing.
- b) The TSMs are:

<b>TSMs collected from tenant perception surveys</b>	
<b>Code</b>	<b>Title</b>
TP01	Overall satisfaction
TP02	Satisfaction with repairs
TP03	Satisfaction with time taken to complete most recent repair
TP04	Satisfaction that the home is well-maintained
TP05	Satisfaction that the home is safe
TP06	Satisfaction that the landlord listens to tenant views and acts upon them
TP07	Satisfaction that the landlord keeps tenants informed about things that matter to them
TP08	Agreement that the landlord treats tenants fairly and with respect
TP09	Satisfaction with the landlord's approach to handling complaints
TP10	Satisfaction that the landlord keeps communal areas clean and well maintained
TP11	Satisfaction that the landlord makes a positive contribution to neighbourhoods
TP12	Satisfaction with the landlord's approach to handling anti-social behaviour
<b>TSMs generated from management information</b>	
CH01	Complaints relative to the size of the landlord
CH02	Complaints responded to within Complaint Handling Code timescales
NM01	Anti-social behaviour (ASB) cases relative to the size of the landlord
RP01	Homes that do not meet the Decent Homes Standard
RP02	Repairs completed within target timescale
BS01	Gas safety checks
BS02	Fire safety checks
BS03	Asbestos safety checks
BS04	Water safety checks
BS05	Lift safety checks

- c) Data for twelve of the TSMs, TP01-TP12, will be collected via tenant perception surveys. The Council must start collecting the information from April 2023, but has already begun quarterly tenant surveys, initially collecting data on the draft TSMs that were contained in the consultation document, that will give us 12 months to bed in the new survey system and to build a baseline of data of how our tenants think we are performing.
- d) Our performance in line with the remaining 10 TSMs will be ascertained by internal data. Work is ongoing to ensure the IT systems are in place to provide accurate reports from the software packages in use across Housing Leeds.
- e) The Council will be required to submit annual returns on TSM results to the RSH, which will collate the data submitted by large providers and publish the results. The information will be used by the RSH to identify areas where they may wish to seek further assurance from a registered provider that they are meeting the required standards.

### **Review of the Consumer Standards**

- a) As part of the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill which is currently before Parliament, the RSH will be given powers to undertake a review and update of the Consumer Standards. There are currently four, which social housing landlords must demonstrate that they meet:
- Home Standard – quality of accommodation and repairs and maintenance

- Tenancy Standard – how properties are allocated/exchanged and terms around tenure
  - Neighbourhood and Community Standard – issues around neighbourhood and communal areas and anti-social behaviour
  - Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard – customer service and complaints, tenant rights and involvement
- b) Although it will take some time for the RSH to propose, consult on and implement the new consumer standards once it has been given the powers, in preparation Housing Leeds is carrying out a self-assessment exercise looking at how robustly we comply with the current standards. The learning from these self assessments will help us to identify areas for improvement ahead of full regulation being in place from April 2023.
- c) The Council is also considering how it can best meet the scrutiny and oversight expectations that the RSH will expect once the Bill has become law – a key aim of the Bill is to increase transparency of performance and to give tenants greater prominence in scrutiny and decision making. Proposals will be discussed by the current Leeds Strategic Housing Board in December to consider how these expectations can be met.
- d) **Building Safety Act Changes**
- e) The Building Safety Act is a significant change to building related regulations, brought about following the Grenfell Tower tragedy. The Act and associated secondary legislation, is being introduced over several months from April 2022 to October 2023 and brings in several measures intended to make buildings and residents safer. They include the formation of a new Building Safety Regulator, whose role is to enforce a more stringent regulatory regime for buildings of 18m and over, as well as overseeing safety and standards in buildings of all heights.
- f) This Act will have a significant impact on how the Council manages domestic dwellings in high rise buildings. These high-rise buildings are considered to be at a higher risk of fire, due to their construction height and layout. In addition, landlords are required to better engage with all people, including leaseholders and vulnerable people who occupy properties in the high-rise blocks.
- g) Housing Leeds continues to plan and prepare for the introduction of the Building Safety Act to ensure it is ready to deliver on these enhanced standards. These preparations are being managed via the High Risk Residential Buildings (HRRB) Board, chaired by the Chief Officer, Housing, which focuses on all elements of the Act, including building safety, resident consultation, IT requirements ('The Golden Thread') and fire safety. The Board is considering the resource impact, IT requirements and process / procedural changes that the Act will require, and the risks associated with it.
- h) Housing Leeds is engaging with a range of local, regional and national stakeholders to ensure the changes required are implemented in good time and to the highest standards. Based on current progress, the service remains confident that these changes will have been implemented and embedded by October 2023

## **8. Housing strategy**

a) The Leeds Housing Strategy 2022-2027 was approved by the Council's Executive Board in June 2022. The updated themes of the strategy, along with an update in progress in delivering the priorities are as follows:

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

The Leeds Affordable Housing Growth Partnership Action Plan (2022-25) was approved by the Council's Executive Board in September 2022, outlining plans to maximise the supply of affordable housing over the next 3 years. Work is also progressing well to actively manage the Leeds Homes Register and increase housing provision for those in housing need via the private rented sector, as outlined in this report.

### **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 with selective licencing now fully in place within the Beeston and Harehills areas.

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

The updated Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is currently being drafted, with a first draft being available for consultation in November. Meanwhile good progress is being made in delivering the 4 priorities with targeted groups in place to progress each of the priorities. On the reducing repeat and hidden homelessness priority services are ensuring that trauma informed approaches are adopted across the sector, that there is a co-ordinated approach to data collection on hidden need and that additional provision is put in place to meet specific needs. On the theme of having the right services working in the right way the focus has been on mapping services and identifying opportunities for removing any blockages for customers.

### **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 Board has recently been established to oversee the delivery of the breakthrough project, with representation from across the housing, health and social care sectors. Priorities identified include integration of housing into the wider system's health inequalities work, delivering collaborative training to health and housing sectors and strengthening housing's role in facilitating hospital discharge.

**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 1 Home Group scheme opened in late 2021, 2 schemes due to open within the next year (One Home Group in late '22/ One Housing Leeds in summer '23). The remaining schemes are at differing stages of feasibility and planning.

h) The delivery of the Leeds Housing Strategy will be overseen by the Leeds Strategic Housing Board. A meeting is planned for December to review progress in more detail.