

Report to:	Cabinet	Date: 05 October 2023
Subject:	Strategic Housing Review – Future Management and Maintenance of Council Housing	
Report of	Cabinet Member for Housing Services	

Summary

To update Members on the results of the Tenant's test of opinion and progress following an earlier Cabinet report received in June 2023.

Recommendation(s)

1. Note the outcome of the Tenants test of opinion.
2. Note the service improvement plan activity to date.

Reasons for recommendation(s)

This is an updating report to Cabinet.

Alternative options considered and rejected.

Not applicable

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1.0 Background

The Strategic Housing Review outcomes were reported to Cabinet 7th June 2023. Cabinet agreed that the views of Tenants should be obtained and that further updating reports will be provided to Cabinet by December 2023. This report updates Cabinet on the outcome of the tenant's opinion, further work continues in relation to the improvement work as set out in the earlier report.

1.1 Engagement & Tenant's Test of Opinion

Following approval from Cabinet in June 2023 the customer offer documentation was prepared to inform the tenant and stakeholder test of opinion.

The Tenant engagement commenced on the 31st July 2023 and closed on the 4th September 2023. Every Tenant and leaseholder was written to outlining the Council's proposals with a reply form to express their view. It was supplemented with

information on the Council and Six Town Housing website in the form of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) tenants' newsletters, social media messages and text message reminders.

The test of opinion was conducted by an independent agency (UK Engage) who have extensive experience of operating tenant ballots. It was important for the Council and Six Town Housing to ensure the widest possible engagement with tenants and lease holders.

The views of the Six Town Housing Customer Review Group were sought and tenants were engaged through the Tenant & Residents Associations. Campbell Tickell was appointed as the Independent Tenant Advisor to support Tenants and Residents through the proposal and to support tenants and Residents to express their views, through in- person and on-line sessions.

A 9.89% response rate was achieved, with 771 returns from our 7,700 tenants, of which 90.5% support the proposal for the Council to deliver the housing management and maintenance service directly, as follows:

- 90.8% support the proposal to bring the direct management of services into the direct management of the Council
- 94.2% of tenants reported the information received regarding the ballot was useful
- 87.3% of tenants reported the information provided was sufficient
- 91.4% of tenants reported that they understood the proposal and how we plan to integrate services & save money to reinvest in their homes
- 95.7% of tenants reported they understood the proposed change and that it does not change their tenancy / services or rent.

The response rate has been confirmed to provide a statistically sound result. Positively the feedback also identified 300 residents who indicated they are interested in getting more involved in activity on their estate.

1.2 Service Improvement progress to date

The June 2023 Cabinet report also made a series of commitments to immediately improve services to tenants, including progressing refreshed policy and operating models which are consistent with the requirements of The Regulator of Social Housing. Inspections under new regulatory standards will commence from April 2024 so the Council must be able to demonstrate compliance with this standard by this time.

Accordingly, the June Cabinet report approved the development of :

- a robust **Communications Plan** to ensure clear, consistent information is provided in a timely manner to all Stakeholders. June 2023
- **A Performance Improvement Plan** June – December 2023 to include
 - Review customer access arrangements
 - Tenant Satisfaction Measures introduced April 2023

- Income maximisation action plan
- Review Housing Capital Programme establish 3–5-year investment plan.
- Compliance review
- Day to day Repairs establish service targets and cost and performance data.
- Finalise Housing Revenue Account – 30 Year Business Plan
- Preparation of detailed **staff offer**
- Preparation of detailed **Customer Offer**, service specification and transition plan, by July 2023. To include the priorities identified in the Strategic Housing Review
 - Access to services
 - Repairs
 - Environmental Management
 - Community Safety and ASB connectivity

All actions have been progressed in accordance with these commitments with particular improvements now made including:

- A Joint reception point for housing enquiries opened in August 2023 in the Town Hall, to offer face to face support. The new arrangements have been welcomed by tenants and received positive feedback.
- Tenant Satisfaction Measures which are compliant with The Regulator of Social Housing requirements have been introduced April 2023 are monitored monthly with improvement plans in place for areas not on target.
- A Neighbourhood Policy which is compliant with regulatory standards was approved by Board on 20 September 2023. Work is underway in partnership with Council colleagues to align neighbourhood working with the LET'S do it public service reform model.
- Complaints processes have been reviewed and new processes implemented, which are again compliant with the expectations of the Regulator of Social Housing.
- housing management services have been reviewed and a process is underway to align activity to the 5 neighbourhoods, the caretaking team are now aligned with Housing Management to improve responsiveness in relation to environmental issues.
- A programme of Estate walkabouts with Ward Members has commenced.
- A review of Six Town Housing governance has been undertaken to streamline decision-making and focus activity on improvement and preparation for Regulation.
- A review of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Framework has been completed and was considered by the STH Board 20 September 2023.

Ongoing activity includes:

- A review of the Housing Capital Programme to establish 3–5-year investment plan is in progress.

- The development of a balanced robust 30-year HRA Business Plan, which sets investment plans to management and maintain council housing stock in the context of capital funding levels, treasury management and borrowing capacity
- An income maximisation action plan to improve rent collection rates and support to tenants.
- A service review of day-to-day Repairs is in progress to establish service targets and cost and performance data. Work on the assets and liabilities register has been completed to ensure a comprehensive understanding
- A Service Review is in progress to assess the performance of the day-to-day repairs delivery to tenants and to establish service targets and cost and performance data

Members are also asked to consider the Part B report on this agenda which related to contracting and compliance matters.

2.0 Next Steps

A further Cabinet report will be submitted to Cabinet in November setting out recommendations for next steps.

Links with the Corporate Priorities:

An integrated approach to the management of council housing for tenants will help realise the Let's do it Strategy of public service reform and the Housing Strategy objectives of safe, high quality and mixed tenure housing offer

Successful delivery of these strategies relies upon new localised arrangements which draw upon the strengths of local communities and reflect the distinct identities of the six towns which make up the borough.

Equality Impact and Considerations:

Inclusion and equity must be at the heart of the Council's approach to the management and maintenance of its housing. An EIA was provided to support the recommendation to return the housing stock to direct Council control.

Environmental Impact and Considerations:

The model for management and maintenance of council housing contributes to the achievement of a carbon neutral Borough by 2038. STH has made progress in establishing approaches and pilot schemes. Investment through the Housing Capital Programme to modernise and refurbish council housing provides the opportunity to enhance delivery and be cost effective within a fully scaled Council-wide programme.

Assessment and Mitigation of Risk:

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
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Implementation of the agreed vision and service models	Communications Plan, Stakeholder engagement
Financial sustainability of the Housing Revenue Account – PEST environment – within the context of the Council’s Financial pressures	Financial capacity Inflation, cost controls Development of a robust HRA Business Plan
Operating within the Regulatory environment	Effective regulatory preparation. Performance management & continuation of the improvement journey

Legal Implications:

Members are asked to note this update setting out the outcome of the Tenant ballot and activity undertaken to date, there is a separate part B report on this agenda for Members consideration.

Financial Implications:

The report updates on the progress since the earlier Cabinet report in June of this year. Within the previous report reference was made to savings that could be delivered through removing duplication and enabling the best use of resources. These savings are yet to be quantified.

Costs incurred to date as part of this process have been charged to the Housing revenue account which is a separate ringfenced account and not part of the Councils general fund.

Background papers:

Cabinet report – Strategic Housing Review June 2023

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

Term	Meaning
Six Town Housing	Bury Council’s Arm’s Length Management Organisation
Housing Revenue Account (HRA)	Ring fenced Account for the provision of housing management and maintenance of council housing