

# Executive Business Report

## Birmingham City Council

16 April 2024



**Subject:** Executive Business Report  
**Report of:** Cabinet  
**Report author:** Councillor Jayne Francis, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?  Yes  No

If relevant, provide exempt information paragraph number or reason if confidential:

### 1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 On 10 September 2019, Full Council accepted the recommendations of the Coordinating O&S Committee review in respect of changes to the Full Council agenda.
- 1.2 Recommendation 3 of the review requested that the Executive provide an update to Full Council on its work via the provision of an Executive Business Report (EBR). It was agreed that EBR's would be provided to Full Council four times per municipal year and will include details of progress made in relation to Council strategic outcomes and priorities linked to two Cabinet Member portfolios.
- 1.3 This report will be used to provide an update on the Housing and Homelessness portfolio.
- 1.4 The City Housing directorate has faced significant challenges throughout 2023-24. The Housing Ombudsman's Special Report of January 2023 identified failures across the directorate's response to repairs and complaints and resulted in active intervention from the Housing Ombudsman between January 2023 and February 2024. As a result of the Housing Ombudsman's Special Report, a referral was made to the Regulator of Social Housing; following an inspection of the Council's compliance with the Consumer Standards in place at the time, a breach notice was issued in May 2023. These two regulatory breaches required the directorate to

commit to recovery plans to evidence compliance, resulting in significant actions across services to deliver improvements.

- 1.5 The increased regulatory landscape continues to provide challenge to the directorate, there have been several recent consultations on proposed legislative changes which will require significant operational and financial changes across the directorate if implemented. This pressure will be particularly acute across Repairs and Maintenance as a result of Awaab's Law and within Housing Solutions and Support (HSSS) as a result of changes to social housing eligibility and allocation.
- 1.6 The impact of the overall saving requirements following the issuing of the s114 notices has been most acutely evident within Housing Solutions and Support, which is the area of City Housing receiving most funding via the General Fund. The impact of the s114 notice on other areas of City Housing, which are, in the main, funded via the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), has not been as significant, however these areas have also contributed to savings within the HRA budget as part of the Directorate's wider response to the challenges faced by the Council.
- 1.7 HSSS continues to see significant demand both as a result of increased homelessness presentations and demand for temporary accommodation. The number of households in bed and breakfast accommodation, the difficulties in moving these households on to more suitable temporary or permanent accommodation within the statutory six-week timescale and the costs of procuring this accommodation remain a significant pressure. Demand for social housing via the housing register continues to rise; there are large backlogs for the assessment of applications to join the housing register and for those households on the register, the supply of properties is not of a scale that meets their needs either in terms of volume or type of properties.
- 1.8 Across Asset Management, pressures continue to deliver on the Council's requirements to deliver Decent Homes compliance within the existing stock. The approval of the Asset Management Strategy and the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan in January 2024 have unlocked the necessary investment to deliver these improvements for our tenants however there will be a pressure to deliver these improvements at a scale to meet our ambitious targets over the next 8 years.
- 1.9 The intervention of Commissioners within City Housing has necessitated changes in order to deliver the Improvement and Recovery Plan, which will ensure that work programmes across the directorate are delivering the required changes to deliver improvements to address existing pressures and that the directorate is moving at pace to achieve regulatory compliance whilst also contributing to the necessary financial savings.

## **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 That the report be noted.

### **3 Context**

3.1.1 Since the last update to City Council on 1 November 2022, officers within City Housing (CH), City Operations (CO) and Place, Prosperity and Sustainability (PPS) directorates have continued to work with partners to respond to the housing needs of Birmingham's citizens.

3.1.2 This update sets out the key challenges facing the portfolio, the priorities driving our business planning, and the progress that we have made against our strategic priorities.

### **3.2 Pressures**

3.2.1 City Housing continues to face significant pressures, both financial and regulatory. Since the Grenfell tragedy in 2016, the Council has moved at pace to deliver necessary legislative compliance across the housing portfolio. This has required significant investment, in particular in relation to fire safety provision, with a total committed spend of c£160m to the end of 2029 to ensure compliance with relevant legislation. No additional funding was provided by central government for this work, which was funded in the main by the diversion of funds from capital projects and other improvements.

3.2.2 In January 2023, the Council was the subject of a Paragraph 49 special report from the Housing Ombudsman, initiated following their concern over the number of complaints received for similar repairs issues, which were often unresolved for long periods. The Housing Ombudsman highlighted particular concerns around the way in which the Council addressed repairs, the way in which complaints were responded to, and the Council's record keeping across repairs and complaints. This active intervention from the Housing Ombudsman required the Council to carry out significant activities across these three areas to provide assurance to the Housing Ombudsman that these failures were being rectified and that the necessary remedial actions were in place.

3.2.3 In May 2023, the Council was issued with a breach notice by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH), triggered by the Housing Ombudsman's report of January 2023. The Regulator found the Council to be in breach of both the Home Standard and the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standards. Of particular concern was the Council's performance across the "Big Six" compliance areas (gas safety, electrical safety, water safety, lift safety, fire safety and asbestos), where the Council had significant numbers of overdue surveys and inspections potentially placing tenants at harm.

3.2.4 The Regulator was also critical of the number of homes that did not comply with the Decent Homes Standard, and the way in which the Council engaged with tenants, which it found to be ineffective. Again, a significant programme of work has been and continues to be undertaken, in order to achieve compliance and satisfy the Regulator that the Council has understood and appropriately remedied the failures identified.

- 3.2.5 The regulatory landscape continues to evolve and, in particular, there have been several recent consultations on proposed legislative and regulatory changes that will have a direct impact on the Council's delivery of housing services.
- 3.2.6 **Consumer Standards** – the Regulator consulted in 2023 on proposed changes to the existing Consumer Standards, reducing the existing standards from six to four (tenancy; safety and quality; neighbourhood and community; transparency, influence and accountability). Whilst these standards replace the existing standards under which the Council received the Breach Notice in May 2023, they are also supported by the enhanced powers given to the Regulator under the Social Housing Regulation Act, which became law in 2023. This Act fundamentally changes the way in which social housing is regulated, increasing opportunities for tenants to seek redress in the form of financial penalty when landlords are not performing to a high level. The Act also places an enhanced focus on tenant engagement, management of complaints and building safety, particularly within high-rise blocks.
- 3.2.7 The role of the Regulator is also changing because of the Social Housing Regulation Act, from a reactive approach acting on complaints received to, from April 2024, a proactive inspection-based approach assessing compliance with the Consumer Standards. Given the Council's ongoing engagement with the Regulator following the Breach Notice, it is anticipated that Birmingham may be one of the earlier social landlords chosen for inspection. In preparation for any inspection, in September/October 2023 the Strategic Enabling function carried out a self-assessment against the proposed Consumer Standards. This has been used to gauge the current level of compliance against the standards and drive a series of Task and Finish groups delivering recommendations and changes against each of the new Consumer Standards in preparation for inspection. A further independent mock inspection will also be carried out as an additional check on current levels of compliance before April 2024, with any recommendations or actions being delivered by the relevant service areas.
- 3.2.8 **Awaab's Law** – between January and March 2024, the government consulted on Awaab's Law, in response to the tragic death of Awaab Ishak in December 2020. Whilst the Council welcomes legislation to prevent such tragic incidents from occurring in future, the scope of the legislation consulted is significantly wider than anticipated, and is likely, if implemented as drafted, to present significant financial and resource issues for all social landlords in scaling up repairs capacity to meet the anticipated demand, ensuring that sufficient appropriately trained staff are available to carry out inspections and meeting the additional administrative pressures imposed by the legislation.
- 3.2.9 The Council has responded to the consultation to set out its concerns regarding the scope of the proposals and has liaised with national partners

to ensure that a unified response is provided to highlight the potential impact on all social landlords of the legislation as drafted.

- 3.2.10 **Social Housing Allocations** – between January and March 2024, the government consulted on the proposed changes to social housing allocations. Again, the legislation as drafted could place significant financial and administrative pressures on the Council, particularly around the intended exclusion from the housing register of certain groups based on their route to residence in the UK and an increase in the local connection threshold to qualify for an allocation of social housing. The legislation also proposes retrospectively applying these criteria to all persons currently on the housing register, which would have significant implications for households in temporary accommodation and owed a statutory homelessness duty where the Council is no longer able to meet this duty via an offer of social housing.
- 3.2.11 The Council has responded to the consultation and set out its concerns in relation to the effect of the proposed changes on social landlords, particularly those with significant existing social housing demand such as Birmingham.
- 3.2.12 **Competence and Conduct Standard** – between February and April 2024, the government consulted on setting standards for Competence and Conduct across the social housing sector, aimed at driving up standards and ensuring that staff are appropriately trained and experienced to deliver services to tenants. The standard as drafted would place a significant financial burden on the Council of ensuring that all required officers are appropriately trained to demonstrate compliance with the standard, and this training would need to be delivered within a 24-month window which could have significant impacts on ongoing service delivery given the number of officers that may need a relevant qualification.
- 3.2.13 The Council has responded to the consultation and set out its concerns around the operational and financial challenges the standard as drafted would impose.
- 3.2.14 **Decent Homes 2** – following the implementation of the Social Housing Regulation Act, it is likely that a new Decent Homes Standard will be developed, bolstering and building on the existing standard from 2006. Given the Regulator’s criticism of the current rate of compliance with the existing decency standard, there is significant work and investment required to bring the existing housing stock up to the existing standard as a minimum.
- 3.2.15 **Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard** – it is also likely that a Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard will be developed, which will require the Council to ensure that all housing stock is compliant with the minimum standard. This programme is also likely to require significant financial investment to ensure compliance.
- 3.2.16 Whilst the effects of the pandemic have somewhat receded, the Cost-of-Living crisis remains a real and significant challenge for many of our citizens,

with an associated impact on those services dealing with households most in crisis.

### **3.3 Strategic Enabling Service**

- 3.3.1 The strategic enabling function was established in February 2022 and since this time has grown and delivered across the directorate in line with its aims to support operational teams to deliver high quality services to citizens.
- 3.3.2 The strategic enabling service has led or partnered in the delivery of several significant work packages since 2022 including the HRA Business Case, Asset Management Strategy and Housing Strategy. The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Prevention Strategy 2024-29 has been developed in conjunction with partners and those with lived experience of rough sleeping and homelessness and builds on the work done by the Housing Solutions and Support service and partner organisations in addressing the housing needs of the most vulnerable residents and to ensure that where it does occur, homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring. This strategy will go to Cabinet in May 2024 for approval.
- 3.3.3 In response to the rise in poverty in the city following the Covid-19 pandemic and the ongoing Cost of Living Crisis, the Strategic Enabling service is working to refresh the current Financial Inclusion Strategy and associated partnership. This work will be focused on working closely with residents and groups with lived experience of poverty. Working in conjunction with the Poverty Truth Commission will enable the Council to design appropriate resources, engage with communities and develop solutions for residents facing financial hardship across the city. This work is particularly beneficial for households facing homelessness or reliant on benefits and living in social housing. The directorate will continue to prioritise work to protect these vulnerable groups.
- 3.3.4 The Council is signed up to the Money Adviser Network (MAN), a technology-based scheme aimed to simplify how creditors refer customers in financial difficulties to free, regulated debt advice. This service aims to ease pressure on other face-to-face debt advice provision, ensuring that it is available to those who would benefit the most, with minimal delay at the point of need. This service is available to residents via several means, and officers from Housing Management, Housing Solutions Service, Early Intervention and Prevention, Rents, Revenues and Benefits have received training on referring residents to the service, although residents may also self-refer.
- 3.3.5 In August 2023 the Strategic Enabling service hosted a “Meet the Ombudsman” event for tenants to hear about the role of the Housing Ombudsman and the rights of tenants in holding their landlord to account. The success of this event, both in terms of the benefits to service areas in hearing and responding to the concerns of tenants and citizens and for tenants in feeling that their voice is being heard, has led to quarterly “Tenant

Talk” events being held across the city to continue this good work and build relationships with our tenants and neighbourhoods.

- 3.3.6 In response to the Housing Ombudsman’s Special Report, a team has been set up within the Strategic Enabling function to bring all Ombudsman-related activities within one area of expertise, ensuring that the Council maintains good relationships with the Ombudsman and that lessons learned from Ombudsman determinations are shared with the relevant service areas and improvements monitored. The City Housing Compensation Policy, approved by Cabinet in January 2024, is an integral part of the work of this team, ensuring that citizens are offered appropriate financial redress at the first opportunity to recognise where the Directorate gets things wrong and preventing the need for complaints to be escalated to the Ombudsman.
- 3.3.7 The Strategic Enabling function is the responsible area for the management and monitoring of the Council’s relationship with the Regulator and works to support and monitor the operational delivery of the required regulatory and compliance improvements, whilst also managing the Directorate’s ongoing relationship with the Regulator to ensure that communication is frequent, convivial and productive.
- 3.3.8 The Strategic Enabling function has recently embedded a data team working across the City Housing directorate, to analyse, interpret and act on data and deliver intelligence-led improvements across service areas. This team brings together data from across the directorate, addressing compliance and performance concerns and modernising the Council’s approach to the collection, analysis, assurance and reporting of data to establish current service levels, benchmark against the relevant comparators (including WMCA, Core Cities, Housemark etc) and to support and evidence the delivery of service improvements. The team collaborates with the corporate data team as well as other services to provide content and provide reporting solutions to improve and automate the secure sharing of housing data. This team has been integral to the delivery of the directorate’s response to the RSH’s Breach Notice and the Housing Ombudsman’s Special Report, enabling the directorate to demonstrate the effectiveness of measures taken to respond to the failings found and to evidence the effectiveness of these actions. This team continues to work across Housing Management, Asset Management and HSS to deliver data-driven improvements to benefit the service delivered to tenants and to measure the effectiveness of the directorate’s performance against internal and national measures.
- 3.3.9 The City Housing Strategic Enabling Team (workforce arm) have launched a SharePoint site that serves as a centralized hub for Workforce Development information, guidance and tools, induction information and briefings and can be accessed by all staff across the Directorate. It also offers a feedback form so we can ensure the site information and navigation experience can be shaped around the user needs.

- 3.3.10 In late 2023 the service developed and promoted a Learning Needs Assessment (LNA) tool to allow staff to self-assess their level of knowledge and confidence against a range of skills and subjects which relate to the specific job role they are in. This allows the service, to provide Learning and Development interventions that meet the needs of the workforce, to empower and aid them to do their jobs effectively through tailored personal and professional development. We will continue to deliver key training in response to immediate workforce skills and knowledge demands.
- 3.3.11 From March 2024 onwards, the focus of the workforce programme is to further establish foundations to enable the team to respond efficiently and effectively to future learning and development requirements of the City Housing workforce. The qualification element of the Competence and Conduct standard will come into force in April 2025. The workforce team are currently engaging with key stakeholders to inform a corporate response to the proposals.
- 3.3.12 The service is in the early stages of setting up a sustainable Programme Manager and Business Analyst team to deliver improvement programmes across the directorate. This team will deliver change in conjunction with the relevant service areas, including defining project scope, resource management, risk mitigation and time management. This team will ensure that change is delivered across the directorate in a consistent manner, in line with relevant change management principles. Business Analysts will provide tailored support to service areas in delivering change, including root cause analysis, research and benchmarking, process mapping and embedding change.
- 3.3.13 The service's IT team works alongside DTS to deliver digital and technology-based solutions across the directorate including the scoping and implementation of IT applications and software to support the delivery of new ways of working and change programmes.
- 3.3.14 The Strategic Enabling service continues to lead on the Warm Welcome programme, delivering safe spaces for citizens to keep warm through winter months. This programme ensures that citizens have access to safe, welcoming warm spaces where the focus is not on poverty or an inability to afford to heat their homes. This is delivered by offering hospitality and connection; connecting people to each other, service, wellbeing activity, opportunity and warmth. Officers work closely with key community partners to deliver this programme and there are now 252 Warm Welcome spaces across the city ensuring that citizens can access local warm spaces and the necessary support throughout the Cost-of-Living Crisis.

## **3.4 Whole House Retrofit**



- 3.4.1 The Council is actively working to secure funding to deliver improvements to citizens to make their homes more energy efficient, prevent heat and energy loss in the home and reduce fuel bills. We have allocated £8.1m for the Home Upgrade Grant and Local Authority Delivery (LAD3) programme, targeting fuel poor citizens in both private and public sector homes.
- 3.4.2 The Home Update Grant scheme has progressed to its second phase (HUG2). This scheme focuses on owner-occupied off-gas homes and is delivered in collaboration with the WMCA and ActOnEnergy. Most of the householders who have applied for this scheme will benefit from solar panel installation, and either open-source heat pumps or high heat retention storage heaters. We have targeted owner occupiers in specific areas via mail and in-person visits to communicate the benefits of the scheme and increase uptake.
- 3.4.3 We have a memorandum of understanding with AgilityEco and EON for the delivery of the ECO4 and Help to Heat Group schemes. Householders in specific areas have been targeted with relevant information and over 600 applications have been received across the two schemes. To date, 85 properties have received a complete retrofit. This scheme continues to be publicised and contractors are scaling up operations to be able to deliver increased capacity going forward.
- 3.4.4 The Council has been awarded a grant of £24.8m via the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) and has committed significant match funding to retrofit 2076 homes across the city. The aims of this programme are to upgrade stock currently below Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) Band C via the delivery of a suite of improvements depending on the type of property. The project is underway with 1178 properties commenced on-site and the remainder being targeted in a rolling scheme with a planned completion date of March 2025.

### **3.5 Affordable Housing**

- 3.5.1 The lack of affordable housing has for many years been, and continues to be, a significant pressure in Birmingham. At the present time, demand for affordable housing is measured at around 22,000 units of all property types and sizes. The total current Affordable Rent and Social Rent pipeline indicates that there are around 1900 homes scheduled to be delivered, which equates to less than 9% of the total demand. This disparity is most acutely felt for households requiring properties of larger size; demand for properties of five bedrooms and larger is calculated at 894 units, whilst the pipeline figures indicate that there are only 6 units planned.
- 3.5.2 Additional housing need across all affordable tenures is 6,426 dwellings per year, which represents 90% of overall additional housing need within Birmingham per year. The limited availability of suitable land across the city, the location and quality of these sites and the difficulties around viable

delivery of affordable housing incentivises developers to use sites commercially rather than for residential use given the associated profit margins.

- 3.5.3 The Affordable Housing Delivery Group is working to understand the need for housing for those low-income households who cannot afford to live in properties being built across Birmingham, and to work with developers to identify need and potential solutions. The Council's [Housing Strategy 2023-2028](#) seeks to address via partnership working and delivering innovative solutions to ongoing need.

### **3.6 Housing Solutions and Support Service (HSSS)**

- 3.6.1 The Housing Solutions and Support (HSS) service delivers services to citizens who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, and those citizens (whether existing or prospective tenants) who apply to join the Council's housing register to express an interest in void properties managed by the Council and partner Registered Providers who advertise via the Birmingham Choice scheme.
- 3.6.2 Demand across HSS continues to increase year-on-year, driven by a combination of factors including the cost-of-living crisis, the lack of social and affordable housing options, the rising costs of the Private Rented Sector and the continuing growth in Exempt Accommodation.
- 3.6.3 The HSS service is delivered across three distinct areas: Housing Solutions and Rough Sleepers, Temporary Accommodation (TA) and Applications, Allocations and Accommodation Finding.
- 3.6.4 **Rough Sleeping** – The number of people sleeping rough in Birmingham has broadly reflected the national trend since 2000 – reducing to single figures until 2010/11 then rising to a peak in of 91 in 2018/19. The counts for 2020 and 2021 were lower particularly due to the Covid-19 measures, including the “Everyone In” initiative, before rising to 39 in 2022. The count for 2023 (taken on a single night in October 2023 based on the number of people bedded down plus intelligence from partner organisations, was 36. This 8% reduction should be considered against the national trend of a 27% increase from 2022.
- 3.6.5 Birmingham has been working in conjunction with the WMCA and the Centre for Homelessness Impact since 2022 to deliver the government's Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022, to deliver the objectives that rough sleeping is rare, brief, and non-recurring. The challenge remains to prevent individuals from experiencing, and returning to, rough sleeping. The service works closely with the voluntary sector to deliver a comprehensive outreach and emergency accommodation offer to those on the street.
- 3.6.6 **Housing Solutions** – Housing Solutions and Support Service continues to encounter homelessness presentations at a significant and increasing rate. In 2023-24 there were on average 418 presentations for homelessness assistance per week, and 285 homeless applications being taken. The

comparable numbers in 2022-23 were 340 presentations per week, with an average of 233 applications taken. The average number of weekly presentations is 54% higher than in 2020, and the number of weekly applications taken 62% higher than in 2020.

- 3.6.7 Homelessness presentations from single people (overwhelmingly single males) continues to be a significant challenge for the service. This cohort makes up 70-85% of the weekly presentations for housing assistance. This number has continued to increase in recent years – in 2019-20 presentations from single people made up between 50-65% of presentations each week. The significant driver for this increase in presentations is the growth in Exempt Accommodation across the city and the ongoing churn within these properties where people may repeatedly move between providers and properties in relatively short periods, in most cases approaching the Council for assistance on each occasion.
- 3.6.8 For families presenting as homeless, the primary drivers continue to be those reflected nationally – the ending of tenancies in the Private Rented Sector, domestic abuse and host households no longer willing to accommodate the family. Prevention activities continue to be successful in many cases; the service is on track to achieve an End of Year Prevention rate of 53%, in line with the national average. This has been delivered by significant improvements in prevention rates over recent months – the recently monthly average has been more than 60%. Successful prevention is more difficult for families than single people, given the relative lack of affordable family accommodation across the city when compared to the buoyant Exempt Accommodation and HMO markets.
- 3.6.9 Activities continue to procure suitable family accommodation to support the prevention and relief offers. The Accommodation Finding Team (AFT) has now secured over 400 homes, in 2 years, in the Private Rented Sector for families threatened with homelessness. This process is not without challenges; landlords require an incentive offer to work with the Council through this route given that there are alternative, more lucrative, opportunities available such as Exempt Accommodation/HMO. The increase in Local Housing Allowance rates in April 2024 should further support the work of the AFT in being able to provide an attractive offer to prospective landlords.
- 3.6.10 Households who have come to the UK through a migrant route appear to be more vulnerable to homelessness in the city. Birmingham's population is made up of 17% migrant households, while this applies to 30% of homeless presentations and 47% of households in temporary accommodation. A Home Office accelerated process of determining the status of asylum seekers between August and December 2023 resulted in increased demand, this approach has been extended into 2024. A partnership working with Homes4Ukraine has successfully found 178 homes in the private rented

sector for households leaving hosted accommodation, and there are similar needs for other populations.

3.6.11 The s114 notice and the requirement to make savings from General Fund activities required the service to review the existing delivery model. To achieve the savings, the service has identified 38 vacant posts to be deleted and two redundancies. The effect of the cuts on planned activities includes the cessation of the Property Acquisition Programme (which was on course to purchase over 300 homes) and a review of the Temporary Accommodation Strategy including a significant reduction in planned investment. The service will continue to actively explore alternative options to increase the supply of suitable family accommodation, in accordance with the revised financial position.

3.6.12 **Temporary Accommodation** – the temporary accommodation team continues to experience significant demand, driven by the increases in presentations and applications when compared with previous years. As of 8 March 2024, the numbers of households in temporary accommodation were as follows:

Tenancy Type	Total	Average Days Stay	Number Out of Borough
Annexe	196	248	0
Bed and Breakfast	713	150	112
Dispersed	2359	783	2
Hostel	500	300	0
Private Landlord	2	5287	0
PSL Tenancy	1307	871	319
Total	5077	514 (average)	434

3.6.13 The number of households in bed and breakfast continues to be a significant pressure, as does the Council's ability to comply with the statutory six-week limit on bed and breakfast accommodation for households with family commitments. As of 26 February 2024, there were 416 such households who have been in bed and breakfast for over six weeks, this is 100 lower than the recent high point of 516 hit in June 2023. The current Bed and Breakfast Reduction Plan is under review in consultation with DLUHC to agree appropriate timescales and actions to deliver against this challenging objective.

3.6.14 The Council's new Homeless Prevention Strategy 2024-29 will go to Cabinet for approval in May 2024.

3.6.15 **Applications, Allocations and Accommodation Finding** – the service continues to receive significant demand for accommodation via the housing register. In 2023-24, an average of 447 applications were received each week, with an average of 490 assessments being completed. The service does however carry a significant backlog of applications due to historical recruitment issues and consistently high volume of applications. The current backlog of applications to be assessed (as of 8 March 2024) stands at 10,358, of which around 63% have exceeded the eight-week assessment target time.

3.6.16 The number of households on the housing register continues to grow; there are now almost 23,500 live applications. In the 12 calendar months to March 2024, 3560 properties were let via the Birmingham Choice scheme. Of these, over half were studio or one-bed properties, with only 156 properties of four bedroom and above being let. Just under 31% of all lets were to households owed a homelessness duty; there are around 7000 households with a Band A award on the housing register, of which almost 5000 have this award as the result of a homelessness duty being owed. A further 7000 households have either a Band B or Band C award for overcrowding.

### **3.7 Capital Investment and Repairs**

3.7.1 The Capital Investment and Repairs service is responsible for maintaining the Council's housing stock of some 59,000 units, including over 200 high-rise blocks and 17,000 low-rise properties. The service works in partnership with two contractors, Fortem and Equans, to deliver on-demand repairs and a scheduled programme of maintenance activity across the city.

3.7.2 In April 2024, interim repairs contracts will commence with Equans and Fortem until April 2026 following a period of review and negotiation. The termination of the existing contract with Wates in March 2022 and the replacement by Equans, has resulted in a higher standard of repairs being carried out in the relevant properties, although the service continues to receive significant volumes of repairs requests and complaints relating to repairs.

3.7.3 City Housing carried out just under 240,000 repairs in 2022-23 and the figure for 2023-24 is likely to be around 250,000. Data also confirms that there are an average of 4.2 repairs carried out per property per year, which is more than the national average of around 3 repairs per property, per year, highlighting the lack of investment in, and the overall age of, much of the Council's housing stock.

3.7.4 It is recognised that there has been an historical lack of investment in the Council's housing stock following the significant investment made to achieve the Decent Homes Standard in 2010, and this is evidenced by the Regulator's

criticisms around the current decency levels. The Council has been under-prepared for events such as the Grenfell tragedy, which required the diversion of significant funds from repairs and maintenance works to building and fire safety. Significant investment is required to bring the Council's stock back up to the current Decent Homes Standard; in January 2023 Cabinet approved the Housing Strategy 2023-28, which set out the strategic priorities for the period as follows:

- i. A strong supply of genuinely affordable housing.
- ii. Citizens can access and sustain the right home for them.
- iii. Neighbourhoods are enhanced and the quality of existing homes are improved.

3.7.5 In January 2024 Cabinet approved the [HRA business plan](#), including the 30-year business case, which sets out the Council's long-term strategic investment plan to support the management, maintenance and investment in the Council's housing stock and relevant commercial assets.

3.7.6 To achieve compliance with the Decent Homes Standard, some £1.434bn will be invested to accelerate the existing works over the next eight years. Over the 30-year life cycle of the plan, some £4.326bn will be invested in the Council's existing housing stock to ensure statutory and compliance obligations are met. There will also be significant investment in delivering affordable homes and estate regeneration as well as towards the Council's decarbonisation goals.

3.7.7 In January 2024 Cabinet also approved the [Asset Management Strategy](#), which sets out the directorate's approach to ensuring that priority 3 of the Housing Strategy – neighbourhoods are enhanced and the quality of existing homes are improved – is delivered.

3.7.8 The Asset Management Strategy seeks to ensure that the Council provides homes that are safe, warm and sustainable, and commits the directorate to carrying out the necessary improvements to both achieve this objective and ensure regulatory compliance. There are ambitious commitments within this strategy to ensure delivery of these objectives, and to ensure that tenant satisfaction with the services provided by the directorate improves as a result of the Council acting in a joined-up way across both Asset Management and Housing Management to bring tangible benefits for tenants.

3.7.9 In response to the Housing Ombudsman's Special Report of January 2023, significant work has taken place across the Capital Investment and Repairs service to accept, implement and evidence the changes identified by the Housing Ombudsman. This has been a wide-ranging piece of work which has delivered improvements in the way in which tenants are able to report repairs, communication between tenants, the Council and contractors and had delivered robust reporting and governance structures to ensure that senior management have appropriate oversight of repairs performance and issues

and are able to both respond to concerns as they arise and take an intelligence-led approach to future repairs and maintenance. We are pleased that the Housing Ombudsman recognised the significant improvements made and confirmed that their active intervention was no longer required from February 2024 based on the progress across these workstreams, although work will continue to embed these improvements going forward.

3.7.10 In response to the Regulator’s Breach Notice of May 2023, significant improvements have been made to the Council’s regulatory compliance across the board. The Council committed to an ambitious target and timescale in order to achieve regulatory compliance, demonstrating both our acceptance of previous failings and our commitment to getting this right. Compliance across the “big six” has increased in all areas and, whilst we acknowledge that there remains work to be done before we can be satisfied that we are compliant across the board, we are pleased with our progress.

<b>Compliance Area</b>	<b>April 2023</b>	<b>February 2024</b>	<b>% Change</b>
Gas Safety (Properties)	99.80%	99.98%	<b>+0.18%</b>
Gas Safety (Blocks)	78.57%	100%	<b>+21.43%</b>
Electrical Safety (Properties)	73.69%	89.10%	<b>+15.41%</b>
Electrical Safety (Blocks)	82.01%	84.44%	<b>+2.43%</b>
Fire Risk Assessments (High Rise)	94.74%	100%	<b>+5.26</b>
Fire Risk Assessments (Low Rise)	34.43%	73.38%	<b>+38.95%</b>
Legionella (Properties)	71.21%	75.79%	<b>+4.58%</b>
Legionella (Blocks)	100%	100%	<b>NA</b>
Asbestos (Properties)	28.20%	45.22%	<b>+17.02%</b>
Lifts	95.60%	99.42%	<b>+3.82%</b>
Carbon Monoxide (Installation)	50.38%	90.62%	<b>+40.24%</b>
Smoke Detectors	52.46%	99.15%	<b>+46.69%</b>

3.7.11 Despite these challenges, there have been many successes within the service. Shelforce, the Council business unit specialising in providing PVCu windows and doors to local authority buildings projects received the King’s Award for Enterprise in Promoting Opportunity, the highest UK award for British business, in recognition of their role in delivering employment opportunities and promoting social mobility. This success builds on the many awards Shelforce has previously received, both locally and nationally, in recognition of their excellence. Shelforce’s award-winning success has put

them on a path for continued growth and investment in people underpinned by their commitment to diversity and inclusion.

3.7.12 Equans and Birmingham City Council were the overall winner in the Contractor of the year category in the 2022 UK Housing Awards.

### **3.8 Exempt Accommodation**

3.8.1 The Exempt Accommodation budget allocation for 2022-23 from the Corporate Invest 2 Deliver programme was £1.9m. There was a £700,000 underspend against this budget returned to the Invest 2 Deliver programme; this was in the main a result of operational difficulties around monitoring the actual spend and difficulties in recruiting staff to short-term contracts.

3.8.2 For the financial years 2023-24 and 2024-25 the Council has received £3.19m funding from DHLUC (£1.62m in 2023-24 and £1.57m in 2024-25). This was the Silver 'ask' of the Gold, Silver and Bronze funding proposal submitted. The updated business case for 2023-24 and 2024-25 received s151 approval in November 2023. The Supported Exempt Accommodation partnership can continue to deliver the programme and recruit to all vacancies across the partnership.

3.8.3 It is anticipated that the current inspection activity will remain at the same level throughout 2023-24 and 2024-25, however there may be some impact with the loss of funding for the Resident Engagement role in 2024-25.

3.8.4 The Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023 will introduce new Supported Housing licensing regulations in 2025-26.

3.8.5 Since 2020, there have been 2878 inspections carried out which equates to just under 32% of a growing sector of currently 26,500 claimants across 8,800 properties. Since April 2022, 18549 desktop assessments have taken place, resulting in 1240 claims being cancelled due to Care Support and Supervision concerns.

3.8.6 In September 2023, the Council launched the Preferred Providers List (PPL) as the benchmark for quality provision within the city. The Housing Solutions and Support Service are utilising the PPL for referrals into the sector. To date, accreditation has been awarded to 32 providers who have demonstrated that they have achieved the standard (2 Gold, 5 Silver and 16 Bronze). There are 9 providers currently awaiting assessment.

3.8.7 The Right to Buy (Restrictive Covenant) Policy was approved in 2023; this sets out the management of properties previously disposed of under Right to Buy where the terms of the disposal agreement specify the usage of the property as a single private dwellinghouse or similar.

3.8.8 The Council continues to work with other local authorities who are part of the National Supported Housing Improvement Programme as well as the Core Cities and the WMCA.



- 3.8.9 **Housing Management** – Following a review of the Housing Management Service by Campbell Tickell in 2022-23, the service is currently at the early stages of a redesign aimed at delivering a locality-based model to increase visibility in local areas by delivering greater officer presence on patches and embedding closer links between tenants and the services they receive. This work will progress throughout 2024-25.
- 3.8.10 **Voids** – City Housing are focusing heavily on void management across the city. Given the pressures that the Housing Solutions and Support service face, it is essential that voids are managed as efficiently as possible. As of March 2024, the directorate is operating at slightly in excess of the 28-day target (28.5 days). Whilst this remains outside of the agreed target, this has fallen from 33 days in November 2022 and demonstrates the excellent work carried out by officers to improve performance by focusing work on Fortem’s performance in the south of the city to bring this in line with the Council’s target.
- 3.8.11 Benchmarking of the Council’s void performance via Housemark does however indicate that our performance is significantly greater than that of most local authorities with retained stock levels over 15,000.
- 3.8.12 **Tenant Engagement** – TPAS, a national lead in the field of tenant engagement, reviewed the Council’s existing tenant engagement framework and effectiveness in delivering tenant engagement across the city. The final report, received in January 2023, highlighted several areas of concern and improvement. The service has been working since this time to develop a revised Tenant Engagement Framework, making necessary changes to the existing structure to deliver greater representation city-wide and to ensure that engagement is effective in that tenants have, and feel that they have, genuine and effective input into the way that the Council develops, delivers and monitors its services.
- 3.8.13 Throughout 2023-24, the Directorate commissioned Housemark to carry out Tenant Satisfaction surveys on a quarterly basis with a representative sample of tenants to assess satisfaction across a wide range of measures including tenant engagement. The results of these surveys, whilst highlighting some areas where tenants feel that the Directorate is not providing services that meet their needs, are helping to shape the delivery of services and the ways in which the Directorate engages with tenants when taking decisions or when delivering services.
- 3.8.14 **Antisocial Behaviour (ASB)** – ASB continues to be a significant issue across both Council-managed estates and within wider communities across Birmingham. The Council’s existing Antisocial Behaviour Policy has been reviewed and revised and will be relaunched in 2024 alongside a specific policy addressing Hate Crime. These new policies have been developed in conjunction with community safety colleagues and other partners to ensure that a preventative approach is adopted wherever possible across tenure,

and that the Council's response to ASB irrespective of tenure is consistent and joined-up. These revised policies will seek to embed and enhance the existing ASB policy and procedures, which include mediation services and signposting to partner agencies to assist with the detection, investigation and where appropriate pursuing of legal action against perpetrators of ASB. The Council will adopt an approach where tenants are supported to sustain their tenancies and appropriate action is taken against perpetrators.

3.8.15 The use of Power BI reporting has enabled management and officers to have greater visibility of ASB issues and ensure that reported cases are dealt with effectively and in line with the Council's current policy. The use of these measures has seen a significant improvement in the way in which ASB is responded to, the ways in which residents are kept informed of the progress of their case and the ways in which the Directorate is able to use intelligence and data to target areas of concern.

3.8.16 **CCTV Strategy** – Tenant feedback via Tenant Satisfaction Measures and for officers working within communities has confirmed that safety is a primary concern for tenants. In particular, tenants within high-rise blocks have highlighted their concerns at the Council's previous decision to decommission CCTV across the portfolio, and the associated rise in crime and antisocial behaviour since this date which had led to tenants feeling unsafe in their homes and neighbourhoods.

3.8.17 A CCTV strategy has been developed by the Directorate, including commitments to install CCTV within "hot spot" areas as a priority to deliver reassurance to tenants and to assist in the delivery of safe homes in line with the Asset Management Strategy. The installation of CCTV via this strategy will seek to deliver against the following key commitments:

- i. We will install CCTV cameras across high-rise blocks in Birmingham where there is elevated evidence of ASB, with a rational approach.
- ii. We will work in partnership to increase safety across the city.
- iii. We will play a key role in reassuring tenants of their safety within their homes and neighbourhoods.

The CCTV strategy will come to Cabinet for approval in 2024.

3.8.18 **Sheltered Accommodation** - The Directorate is undertaking a full review of the existing Sheltered Housing provision. This review was scheduled for 2022-23 but was paused pending the Housing Management service redesign. This review will include a review of the current policies and procedures around how sheltered housing is managed and the physical properties we have available for this provision. A full stock condition programme will take place within the existing sheltered housing provision to inform the review. The overarching objective of the review will be to ensure that the Council's sheltered housing provision meets the needs of existing tenants and provides the appropriate stock levels of a suitable quality for

older people in Birmingham who want to transition into this type of accommodation.

3.8.19 **High-Rise Living** – City Housing has carried out significant improvement works within high-rise blocks, both in response to the Grenfell tragedy and the enhanced regulatory landscape. The Council maintains a stock of 211 high-rise blocks, one of the largest portfolios of this type in the UK.

3.8.20 A review has taken place of communal areas and spaces within high-rise blocks, with these areas being RAG rated based on condition and this information has been shared with Capital Investment to enable targeted investment of those areas most in need of renovation.

### 3.9 Private Rented Sector

3.9.1 On 1 March 2022 the Council adopted its Private Rented Sector Strategy 2022-27. Work is ongoing to deliver against the Council's seven key priorities for the private rented sector, ensuring that the work of the service directly improves standards in the sector and enables tenants to have safe and stable accommodation. The key priorities are:

- i. Increase the supply of safe and secure accommodation by bringing empty homes back into use.
- ii. Identify and implement local initiatives to address local issues.
- iii. Tackle disrepair and criminality.
- iv. Prevent illegal evictions and harassment.
- v. Improve the energy efficiency of homes, tackle fuel poverty and reduce carbon emissions.
- vi. Operate a high-quality mandatory HMO licensing scheme.
- vii. Seek to influence Government and national regulatory agencies to enhance relevant legislation and regulation.

3.9.2 **Selective, Additional and Mandatory Licensing** – Following a successful application to DLUHC to operate a selective licensing scheme, this has been in operation in 25 of the city's 69 wards since June 2023. This scheme targets wards where both the private rented sector accounts for over 20% of the available housing stock and where there are high levels of deprivation and/or crime. This is the largest scheme of its type in the UK, covering in excess of 40,000 properties. Since June 2023, 23,427 applications have been received for selective licences, with 12,942 landlords being prosecuted for non-compliance.

3.9.3 Currently 2,275 mandatory licenses have been issued across the city.

3.9.4 Under the terms of the selective licensing scheme, landlords can be prosecuted for failing to have a licence, with financial penalties including an unlimited fine or a rent repayment order where landlords fail to comply.

- 3.9.5 Additional licensing also took effect in June 2023, requiring landlords of smaller, non-mandatory HMOs to be licensed to operate. Since June 2023, 2,243 applications have been received for additional licences and 916 landlords have been prosecuted for non-compliance.
- 3.9.6 As with selective licensing, landlords can be prosecuted for non-compliance with the sanctions including unlimited fines and rent repayment orders.
- 3.9.7 The Council's mandatory licensing scheme was reviewed in 2021-22, with additional officer resources and processes in place from April 2022 to ensure that applications are determined within a reasonable timescale and compliance checks and enforcement activity against illegally operating HMOs is effective.
- 3.9.8 **Empty Properties** – Maximising the supply of available properties is a significant priority. By ensuring that empty properties are brought back into use as residential accommodation, this both increases the available housing stock at a time of unprecedented demand and addresses the issues that properties standing empty for long periods of time can bring to communities, such as fly-tipping, ASB and crime.
- 3.9.9 In 2022-23, 196 empty properties were brought back into use; this was a reduction in the figure from 2021-22 as a result of the impact of Covid-19 and a lack of resource within the team, however from April 2023-March 2024 a further 340 properties were brought back into use and it is anticipated that in 2024-25 the target of 350 properties will be met. As part of the joined-up approach to tackling both empty properties and homelessness, owners of empty properties are referred to the Accommodation Finding Team or to social housing providers as appropriate. The Empty Property Team continues to explore opportunities for joint working between the Council and property owners.

3.10 **Regeneration** – The Council continues to progress regeneration works across the city.

3.10.1 **Ladywood** – Plans have been approved for a regeneration project across Ladywood through a £2.2bn deal with Berkeley Homes. This scheme will deliver around 7,500 new homes as well as significant regeneration to an area of the city that has seen little significant investment in recent years.

3.10.2 Significant consultation has taken place with Ladywood residents, businesses and stakeholders in recent months, including 12 community consultation workshops and doorstep consultation and engagement with residents who may be specifically affected, and twice monthly drop-in sessions commenced in April.

3.10.3 We are aware of significant local mobilisation and opposition from some Ladywood residents and are seeking to engage in productive and mutually beneficial dialogue going forward.

- 3.10.4 A comprehensive engagement programme is in place, the immediate key activity is the development of a Resident and Community Charter with the community which will focus on, and set out, the approach to engagement and consultation on the proposed masterplan.
- 3.10.5 **Druids Heath** – the current proposed masterplan for the Druids Heath redevelopment has now been approved by the Commissioners. The Druids Heath estate is one of the most deprived across the UK and there are challenges around stock condition, ASB and high levels of poverty and deprivation.
- 3.10.6 An independent advisor (Loconomy) was commissioned in 2021. Working closely with BCC colleagues, Loconomy continue to engage with the community about the proposed development. Through workshops, drop-in sessions and door knocking, the team have been able to capture the community aspirations and concerns about the future regeneration. Over the coming months, the team will be launching the proposed masterplan to the community. An engagement programme has been developed by the team to ensure a meaningful consultation where we engage with as many people in Druids Heath.
- 3.10.7 Following initial consultation, we have developed an Engagement Framework and Resident and Community Charter with both Ladywood and Druids Heath which sets out the Council's offer and commitments to ensure that the community is treated fairly and involved at all stages of the regeneration programmes.
- 3.11 **BMHT** – The Council's Housing Strategy 2023-28 has confirmed that going forward the Council cannot deliver the necessary scale and scope of affordable housing delivery through BMHT alone.
- 3.11.1 Stakeholder engagement across the city has indicated that Registered Providers (RPs) felt disincentivised to deliver developments since the inception of BMHT and that they did not benefit from initiatives such as discounted land sales. The Council has identified a need for stronger partnerships across the city to enable all RPs to bolster the supply of affordable housing and to move away from one delivery vehicle across one tenure type.
- 3.11.2 The Council has delivered the first tranche of site disposals to RPs for several years, leading to significant interest across the sector. Following a highly competitive tender process, these sites have been successfully disposed of.
- 3.11.3 The first tranche of sites is distributed across the city and aims to deliver a total of 246 homes in areas including Hockley, Stechford, Bartley Green, Kings Heath and Bromford, ensuring that the spread of affordable housing developments is a city-wide programme.
- 3.11.4 There is ongoing commitment from the Council to deliver further tranches of land disposals to support the overall affordable programme. Tranche 2 has

been identified and is moving to tender stage; tranches 3 and 4 are currently being finalised.

### **3.12 Governance**

3.12.1 In order to deliver the Improvement and Recovery Plan, the directorate has implemented a revised and robust governance structure to provide the necessary scrutiny and challenge to ensure that activities are targeted to delivering change. Service-specific transformation boards are in place across Asset Management, Housing Management, Strategic Enabling and Housing Solutions and Support. Programme-specific boards are in place internally for Affordable Housing and Regulatory Compliance, whilst partnership boards are in place for Strategic Housing, Homelessness Partnership and the Birmingham Social Housing Partnership. Additional external governance is provided via ongoing monitoring from DHLUC in relation to B&B oversight, the RSH and the Housing Ombudsman. These boards and oversight bodies feed into a new Housing Improvement Sub-Board which includes Commissioners, Cabinet Member, relevant Directors and critical friends; this board ensures that activities across the directorate are delivering on programmes, monitors resources and risk and financial compliance against forecast spend and investment. This board then reports into the Improvement and Recovery Board, Cabinet, Audit and Oversight and Scrutiny.