

SCRUTINY REPORT

MEETING: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY HOUSING SUBGROUP

DATE: 10th SEPTEMBER 2024

SUBJECT: HOUSING TRANSITION UPDATE

REPORT FROM: KATE WATERHOUSE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (STRATEGY & TRANSFORMATION)

CONTACT OFFICER: ESME DAVIES - PROGRAMME MANAGER HOUSING

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report follows the earlier reports considered by Overview and Scrutiny in January 2024 and by Cabinet in June, October and November 2023. This report provides Members with an update of the work undertaken following the transfer of housing management function, housing stock and staff back into the Council on January 15th 2024. Members are asked to review the report and agree the below recommendations.
- 1.2. To note this report also responds to the following recommendations in the Council's [Annual Governance Statement](#):
- Consider the findings of the Strategic Housing Review and the future management and maintenance of council housing in the Borough and implement any required actions.
 - Develop a transformation plan to respond to legislative and regulatory changes effecting Social Housing and deliver step change improvements to customer services and satisfaction.
 - Prepare for the inspection of social housing by the regulator and the introduction of the Social Housing Regulation Bill.
- 1.3. Recommendations:
- Note work undertaken and progress made by the Housing Services Directorate since January 2024.
 - Note timescale of Improvement Programme including recruitment of key roles, development of Target Operating Model and Procurement of a Change Partner.
 - Discuss and agree forward plan for the Overview and Scrutiny Housing Sub Committee.
 - Review current performance information (Appendix A).

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1. In June 2023 following a strategic review conducted by Campell Tickell, Bury Council's Cabinet agreed the Housing Management function provided by the ALMO Six Town Housing should return to direct management by the Council.
- 2.2. The Cabinet report also made a series of commitments to immediately improve services to tenants, including progressing refreshed policy and operating models which were consistent with the requirements of The Regulator of Social Housing and requested the development of an Improvement Plan which was approved by Cabinet in October 2023.

- 2.3. Subsequently a compliance audit led by the interim Chief Executive of Six Town Housing highlighted some immediate issues with property standards which were inconsistent with the management agreement between Six Town Housing and the Council. Therefore, the Cabinet agreed in November 2023 to bring forward the planned transfer from the initial timetable and the transfer of management occurred on January 15th 2024.
- 2.4. A programme of work was introduced in order to respond to the outstanding actions and weekly compliance reporting was introduced. An interim structure was developed to ensure the continued delivery of the Housing function whilst the transfer was completed.
- 2.5. The overarching aim of the in-sourcing was the development of an integrated model whereby the following outcomes can be achieved:
- To contribute to the LET'S vision by:
 - Contributing to inclusive economic growth through regeneration and renewal
 - Reducing health inequalities through better standards of homes and neighbourhoods
 - Improving children's lives through safe and secure housing
 - Preventing homelessness and meeting housing need through developing the housing pipeline.
 - Supporting our most vulnerable residents to find and sustain suitable accommodation.
 - Improving our reputation as a social landlord of choice by providing better housing options and a more tenant focused offer.
 - Providing safe and secure housing, efficiently delivering the Council's landlord responsibilities in managing and maintaining our 7,838 homes.
 - Consistently achieving decent home standard, providing warm, energy efficient affordable homes.
 - Meeting the needs of tenants and residents by being tenure neutral and through playing a pivotal role in the delivery of Bury's Neighbourhood model.
- 2.6. The progress of the Improvement Plan and Transfer was overseen by Bury Council's Senior Leadership Team. Following the TUPE transfer consultation and approval from Cabinet to proceed, considerable emphasis has been placed on supporting staff from within the Council and those previously employed by Six Town Housing to get to know each other and to be able them to work together more effectively.
- 2.7. For the staff joining the Council there has been emphasis on learning and development to support with their awareness of Council's processes, procedures and policies, as well as the opportunities available to them as Council's employees such as our benefit scheme, apprenticeship programme and wellbeing offer.
- 2.8. An engagement plan was developed, and the OD Team have arranged workshops on Council values, democratic governance, employee review processes and procurement. The housing managers have been invited to take part in the Management Programme with good take up. Regular newsletters for staff were introduced to keep them updated, along with virtual and in-person service review sessions; the next one is scheduled for the 19th September.
- 2.9. As part of their induction into the Council, over 100 Housing Services staff members have taken part in the LET'S Do It! Challenge with the aim of all staff taking part over the next few months.
- 2.10. The Council's Elected Members have also had an introduction and training for their new responsibilities:
- All member training sessions on the new Housing Regulations delivered by Campbell Tickell

- Workshop held with members of the Housing Advisory Board including external input on roles and responsibilities from Campbell Tickell
 - Shared monthly performance reports with Housing Advisory Board to ensure awareness of progress against standards
- 2.11. As part of the Improvement Plan, staff working in former Six Town Housing Contact Centre, Communications, Rents, Finance and HR have moved into the respective Corporate Core Teams. The new Housing Services has also integrated into the Council's governance processes such as attending Audit and Scrutiny for the first time in July.
- 2.12. In terms of the overall structure, the current role of Director of Housing Operations is vacant following an interim appointment made at the beginning of 2024 to oversee the transfer for a period of six months, The Executive Director of Strategy & Transformation is directly supporting the Housing Leadership Team until a permanent housing director is appointed in the Autumn to start in the new year.
- 2.13. This report outlines the next steps the Council will take in order to achieve the vision for Bury Housing Services in long term.

3. UPDATE ON IMPROVEMENT PLAN AND SERVICE PLANS

- 3.1. Throughout the lead up to, and implementation of, the transfer of Housing Services the Improvement Plan developed in October 2023 has continued to be delivered. Examples of the improvements made include:
- A Housing Review Group was chaired by the Chief Executive to oversee the transfer and the due diligence that was undertaken by the Council's Legal Services. All remaining actions regarding Six Town Housing Limited have been assigned responsible officers and are being tracked via Internal Audit.
 - Within the Due Diligence Report a full assessment was undertaken of the contracts and asset liabilities of the former ALMO. These have been updated to the Council's Terms and Conditions where possible and a programme of training on procurement and contracting in line with the Council's Constitution and Scheme of Delegation has commenced with all senior manager in the Housing Team.
 - As part of the commitment made in the June Cabinet Report, the stock condition survey is now at 83%, which is above the industry average and a plan is in place for to survey the remaining properties.
 - 49 properties (as of June 2024) identified as potentially non-decent have been included in programmes for work for 24/25.
 - There has been a significant increase in the accountability and assurance regarding reporting both property compliance and customer satisfaction. There have been continuous improvements in addressing outstanding high-risk areas of non-compliance. Fire risk assessments, Gas safety checks, Legionella checks, lift compliance and asbestos surveys are 100% and follow up actions are being managed and outstanding backlog reducing. Further detail on this is included in the Performance Report attached as Appendix A.
 - A new prioritisation of repairs has been implemented, and the backlog has been reducing consistently over the last eight months. Response times have also been introduced against more meaningful criteria and are now improving.
 - A 30-year HRA Business Plan has been agreed, which sets investment plans to manage and maintain council housing stock in the context of capital funding levels, treasury management and borrowing capacity.
 - The 2024/25 £19.8m Capital Programme was agreed at Cabinet on 16th July 2024 to improve homes, increase energy efficiency and meet the decent homes standard.
 - A new Tenant Engagement Strategy has been developed, building on the results from the Test of Opinion and feedback from the Tenant's Voice Group and others. This is to be agreed at the Housing Advisory Board in September.

- Development of processes to learn from themes from Complements/Complaints and Tenant Satisfaction Survey feedback are being developed and will be included in Council Report in the future. See Performance Report Appendix A for detail on Tenant Satisfaction measures.
 - A review of the Housing Officer role and neighbourhood offer is being undertaken to support integration in to the Bury Public Service Reform Model to deliver the LET'S DO It! Strategy.
- 3.2. Throughout the transition the Council has maintained its focus on supporting tenants and residents. The Annual Report will be published in September which provides more detail on this; however, activity has included:
- Conducted 24 Estate Walkabouts, a 50% increase from the previous year.
 - Held 44 cost of living events with tenants and partners and 13 social isolation events.
 - Distributed 300 winter warmer packs to 13 foodbanks, which staff and contractors donated items to.
 - Held 5 Cost of living summer events and promoted engagement /volunteering including the recruitment of estate walkabout representatives.
 - Contacted over 200 tenants without gas to offer welfare support.
 - Serviced 269 Tenancy Support cases utilising multi agency approach to case management.
 - Organised a number of clean-up days working in partnership with tenant groups, and colleagues from waste management.
 - Supported a number of environmental projects working with tenant volunteers to improve green spaces.
 - Organised 13 Neighbourhood Launch events across the borough further to reintegration to Bury Council
 - Embedded the external Tenant Satisfaction survey system through CX receiving over 600 tenant satisfaction survey returns which identified underrepresented non-digital groups, as a result making provisions for surveys to be conducted face to face at events. This captured 71 additional surveys.
 - The SHDF (Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund) wave two has commenced, currently working being delivered on the Chesham Fold Estate.
 - Residents are kept up to date with local opportunities and policy with monthly newsletters
- 3.3. In parallel to this the demand for housing has continued to increase. Following the integration of Six Town Housing into the Council work has been undertaken to streamline processes between the Homelessness and Housing Options Team and the Housing Management Function. This is to ensure that the Council maximises the use of its housing stock in the face of unprecedented demand:
- 2,700 on the social housing register compared to 1,808 last year.
 - 143 households in temporary accommodation compared to 113 last year.
 - 2,395 Homeless Applications taken since April 2024.
 - Home Office policy increasing presentations from asylum dispersal accommodation. Further information detailed in this update to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 3.4. Another important area of focus of the two teams has been the refresh of the Council's Housing Allocation Policy to reflect that return of Six Town Housing but also to reflect other recent changes in legislation and the commitments the Council has made to supporting vulnerable groups, specifically children leaving social care. This revised Policy will be presented to Cabinet in September for approval to consult. Paper available [here](#).

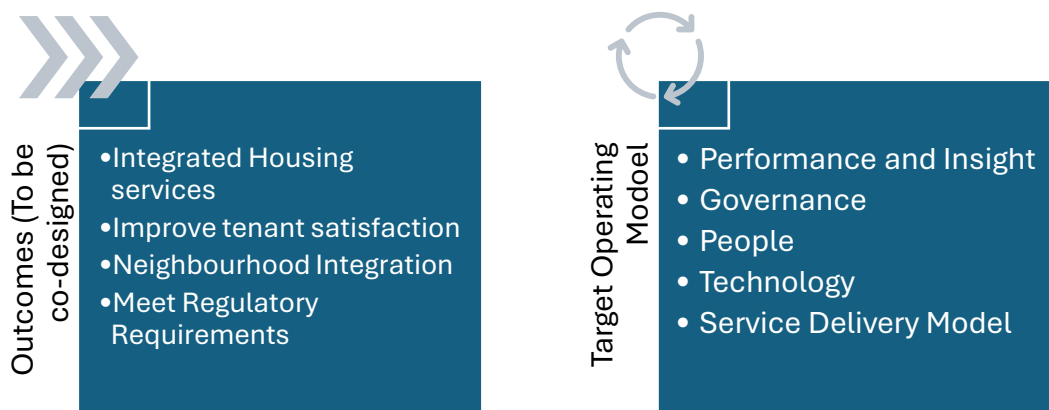
- 3.5. Finally, in terms of the governance the remaining stock which was outside of the HRA (circa 150 properties), the Six Town Housing Ltd company has been retained to oversee these homes and to be accountable for performance and housing standards. The Board will meet for the first time in September to agree terms of Reference and to approve the Company accounts.

3.6. There are some remaining actions which have been incorporated into the Improvement Plan or Service Action plans. To summarise:

October 2023 Improvement Plan Area	RAG Rating and Outstanding Actions
Health & Safety Property Compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outstanding actions are linked to the implementation of software TCW (The Compliance Workbook) which is in the final stages of testing to automate the compliance procedures (December 2024) Permanent structure of the Compliance and Repairs Team to be developed as part of Target Operating Model (March 2025)
Compliance against the current proposed Regulatory Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actions complete. Mock inspection will explore further improvements. (December 2024)
Financial Business Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asset management plan to be revisited once asset data has been updated with all stock condition data. (March 2025)
Procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Star Procurement supporting development of long-term strategy. (December 2024)
Income & Expenditure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review roles and responsibilities of integrated staff with Finance Team underway in conjunction with the Council's S151 Officer. Review of the HRA income streams to identify savings ensure efficiencies are made post transition to maximise income. (March 2025)
Improve Tenant Satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policies and processes reviewed and a new Tenant Engagement Strategy to be presented to September's Housing Advisory Board. Allocations Policy Review to be updated to reflect corporate parent responsibilities (September 2024)
Public Sector Reform (PSR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing is a key partner within the PSR Leadership Team with a proposal being taken to the September Steering Group for Housing Officers to lead the neighbour based Public Service Leadership Teams. Development of a tenure blind ASB offer will be linked to the new Target Operating Model. (March 2025)

4. NEXT STEPS

- 4.1. Alongside the organisation who will conduct the mock inspection we have also procured two other organisations to support us over the next six months. Firstly, a recruitment partner has been appointed who will support the executive search for the permanent Director of Housing Operations, Head of Property Services, Head of Building Safety and Head of Direct Works. The working timetable is that successful candidates will be appointed in December 2024.
- 4.2. Secondly, the Council have engaged the support of a HR/ Organisation Development strategic change partner to support the next phase of the integration and build a long-term plan to deliver the vision for Bury Housing. Their expertise, overseen by the Programme Manager and Head of People and Culture will support the development of an updated target operating model and subsequent change management programme. They have initially been asked to support Bury Housing Services for 6 months and progress will be included in standard Housing Subgroup agendas.



- 4.3. Business as usual will continue be alongside the Change Partner. The following governance and reporting will ensure that services continue to be scrutinised at the appropriate level.

Key areas of focus	Reporting
Property Compliance and Tenant Satisfaction Measures	Reported at Performance and Regulation Group, Key indicators to Council, HAB, Regulator of Social Housing
Audit Recommendations	Reported to Audit and Scrutiny
Risk Management	Housing Sub-Committee, Audit Scrutiny
Housing Services Action Plans	Housing Leadership Team meeting
Tenant Engagement	Tenant Engagement Strategy to be approved at HAB in September and action plan to be developed. Tenant Voice Scrutiny Group assigned actions from the HAB
Preparation for In-depth Assessment and recommendations from the mock inspection	Recommendations to be reported to Housing Sub-Committee
Development of the integrated neighbourhood model and tenure neutral offer	Neighbourhood Model paper to HAB
HRA Management and Government Planning Proposals	Chief Accountant and Business Growth and Investment

5. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY HOUSING SUBGROUP

- 5.1. It is recommended that the Overview and Scrutiny Housing Subgroup receives as standard reports on the follow items:
- Most up to date performance Report
 - Improvement Programme update
 - Recommendations from Mock Inspection (once available)
- 5.2. Alongside the regular reporting the following themes could be discussed to support the development of the Bury Housing vision and meet the regulatory requirements:
- Complaints
 - Repairs and maintenance programme
 - Neighbourhood Model
 - Anti-social behaviour Policy and process
 - Tenancy governance
 - Housing Sufficiency
 - Housing Allocation Policy Consultation

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1. Following the reintegration of Six Town Housing back into the Council, there has been a focus on accountability and ensuring that Property Compliance is well managed and improving. Interim structures have ensured that Housing Services have continued to be delivered for our tenants.
- 6.2. There is still much to do in particular to improve tenants' satisfaction. The second phase will focus on developing a Target Operating Model that ensures Bury Housing Services has the resilience to maintain and improve on the performance and property compliance and meet the regulatory requirements of the Regulator of Social Housing.
- 6.3. The Overview and Scrutiny Housing Subgroup will be kept updated with these developments and receive regular reports as agreed through the forward plan.

List of Background Papers:-

Appendix A – Performance Report

Overview and Scrutiny Report January 2024

[Strategic Housing Review Management of Housing Stock.pdf \(bury.gov.uk\)](#)

Cabinet report, November 2023 -

[Strategic Housing Review Future Management and Maintenance of Council Housing.pdf \(bury.gov.uk\)](#)

Cabinet report, October 2023 -

[Strategic Housing Review Part A.pdf \(bury.gov.uk\)](#)

Cabinet report, June 2023 -

[Strategic Housing Review.pdf \(bury.gov.uk\)](#)

Contact Details:-

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