

SCRUTINY REPORT

MEETING: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

DATE: 11 March 2025

SUBJECT: HOUSING TRANSITION UPDATE

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

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1. SUMMARY

- 1.1. 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. Recommendations:
- Note work undertaken and progress made by the Housing Services Directorate since January 2024.
 - Review current performance information and feedback from external review to agree recommendations for further service improvement.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1. This report outlines the progress since the transition of Bury Housing Services back into the Council from their ALMO Six Town Housing and the work that has been overseen by the Overview and Scrutiny Housing Sub Committee.
- 2.2. Since the last progress report to the Overview and Scrutiny Housing Sub Committee on the 10th September 2024, the New Director of Housing Operations has been appointed and started with the Council. The new permanent Head of Property has also been appointed which has bolstered the Housing Leadership Team. The two remaining substantive leadership roles Head of Compliance and Head of Repairs are currently being advertised and are due to close on 10th March.
- 2.3. 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.
- 2.4. It was recognised that the statements had not been adopted by staff and tenants, therefore, a more concise version has been developed. Staff have inputted into this version at the whole staff events. The next step is to speak to involved tenants via the Tenant Engagement Team. This vision goes beyond our tenants recognising that Bury Housing has a role to play across our estates to build united communities.

What will be different? Our draft vision
Happy tenants, quality homes, united communities

Bury Housing Services puts people and their wellbeing first. How people feel about the homes we provide for them matters to us.

We want our tenants to feel safe and secure, warm and welcome, healthy and happy in their homes and a valued part of their local community.

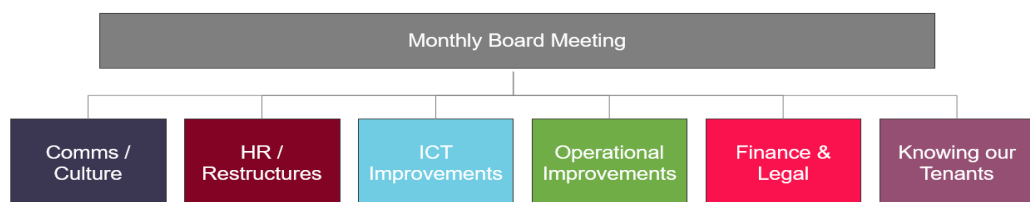
We see our legal duties as the starting point, not the end game, for our tenants' homes. We go above and beyond as a landlord, creating homes that people love.

We work hard to offer the right advice at the right time, to help people get the right housing for them and to prevent people coming homeless.

We couldn't do this without our passionate, skilled and committed teams, who embrace our people-first focus through the work they do every single day.

3. Improvement Plan

- 3.1. In order to achieve the vision and to support the completion of the outstanding integration actions as identified in the September report, Bury Housing developed an improvement programme alongside the service action plans with the following workstreams:



- 3.2. The Transformation Board met most recently on 27th February and discussed progress. The following areas were identified as at risk:

- 3.2.1. **HR/Restructures:** The Repairs, Property Safety and Assets restructure has taken longer than anticipated. The amended timeline is for the consultation to start in May following approval in April Cabinet.
- 3.2.2. **ICT Improvements:** Short term and long-term ICT capacity has been highlighted as a significant risk. The Board noted the need for short term filling of a vacancy but also a need to invest in ICT transformation budget

3.2.3. **Finance and Legal:** A HRA budget was agreed at Council in February 2025. The next step is to test the 30-year business plan. The Repairs Restructure is a significant investment and cannot be approved before understanding the impact on the HRA. The resolution of Six Town Housing Limited is an outstanding risk.

3.3. Trueman Change have supported the Leadership Team to develop a clear internal communications plan to further staff engagement. Monthly managers meetings have been introduced to dispel myths and keep teams updated with key messages such as the restructures. A staff communication champion meeting has also been introduced which hears the concerns of staff and directly feeds into the Transformation Board.

3.4. Trueman Change have also conducted workshops with Repairs, Contact Centre, Homelessness Teams and they have started workshops on “role of the housing officer” to enable Housing to contribute effectively to the public service reform model. The workshops take the staff through three sessions which provide them with the skills to identify changes they can make themselves and empower them to take ownership of improvements. Each set of workshops has an action plan which will be included in the service action plans. Feedback from teams involved in the sessions have been very positive with changes from the repairs workshops already being piloted.

4. Altair – Mock Inspection

4.1. In October 2024 Bury Council commissioned Altair to undertake a mock inspection of our Housing Services to ascertain Bury Housing’s readiness for Inspection and provide external validation of our performance against the regulatory standards.

4.2. Altair meticulously examined our Housing Services, engaging with a wide range of staff, tenants and elected members. Using the new standards, no significant failings were identified and a number of areas of good practice were referenced. Altair reported assurance around Property Compliance and our culture of fair treatment of tenants were particularly commended. They also recognised our approach to listening to tenant voices and ensuring our services are accessible to residents' diverse needs.

4.3. As we anticipated, Altair identified areas for improvement in Data Management, Repairs, Governance, the Website, and Engagement. The service was already aware of these and are actively ensuring our Service Action Plans are updated to include actions. PI's have been developed for 25/26 to help us track and monitor progress in key areas identified in the inspection. Trueman Change have supported the tenant Engagement Team and involved Tenants to develop new methods of engagement integrated into the Housing Advisory Board.

4.4. The full report is linked in the documents below in Appendix A.

5. GMCA Homelessness Stocktake

5.1. In the previous report it was recognised the pressure that the Homelessness team is under with significant national policy directives dictating demand. The GMCA's Homelessness team provided an assessment of the current Homelessness and Migration function in December 2024 to identify the core challenges and opportunities in Bury's mission to end homelessness in the Borough.

5.2. Their reflection was that in the face of these challenges, GMCA colleagues found a highly resilient and motivated core team, in the face of overwhelming demand and significant resource constraints. The right functions, ambitions, values and cultures are broadly in place to see significant improvements.

5.3. They provided a series of recommendations in a stocktake report which is linked in this report appendix B. A few key recommendations are identified below:

- 5.3.1. Convene a cross-directorate working group looking at how the Council can achieve better value from money in Temporary Accommodation
 - 5.3.2. Better use of data and technology e.g. Participate in the proposed Migrant Rough Sleeping Census
 - 5.3.3. Utilise the opportunities presented by changes in funding and strategy to re-engage key stakeholders in the Council's efforts to collectively prevent homelessness
 - 5.3.4. Take advantage of the Live Well agenda and Homelessness Prevention Grant settlement to embed housing advice in community settings
- 5.4. The team have also been working with the Department Housing and Local Government (DLUHC) regarding the unprecedented hotel use. The last report was that there were 183 placements in 115 families are in dispersed accommodation, 14 families are in step down 57 are in hotels (32 families, and 25 singles). A B&B elimination plan has been agreed with DLUHC colleagues which is a priority for delivery over the next six months.

6. Quarterly Performance

- 6.1. The Overview and Scrutiny Housing Sub-Committee has reviewed Performance as a standard agenda item. The most recent quarterly report is included for review appendix c.
- 6.2. A key concern at transfer was the ability to assure property compliance. Performance has stabilised and the Altair review supported the internal position that there were no significant issues. This high level of scrutiny should be maintained.
- 6.3. Bury Council's Internal audit has provided additional assurance; the following audits have taken place: gas (substantial), electrical safety (moderate), Damp Mould and Condensation (substantial), lifts (Full assurance), and Disrepair (Limited). The actions are monitored by the Business Improvement and Assurance Manager.
- 6.4. The stock condition survey is 87% complete and there is an action plan with Neighbourhoods to work with no access properties. The new Head of Property is working to develop a rolling programme to maintain the level in the coming years. 87% is high when compared to peers and will allow the team to work with Finance to develop the 30-year business plan.
- 6.5. The capital programme for 2024-25 although delayed has been approved and start on site is imminent for two schemes communal areas (including security doors) and roofing programme both which are borough wide.
- 6.6. We are seeing an increase in disrepair claims month on month, we anticipate numbers will continue to rise in the new year. The ability to respond to claims is very much dictated by our current resources. This has been documented in the risk register. This emphasises the importance of implementing the new structure by July 2025 to increase capacity. As an interim measure some short-term roles have been agreed.
- 6.7. Tenant Satisfaction Measures (set by the Regulator) have consistently been below target but themes are drawn out as part of the tenant feedback process. Based on feedback an anti-social behaviour action plan has been developed and there has been a review of the environmental policy and caretaking services. As an example, we have increased the frequency of cleaning in communal areas. Moreover, there is a significant link between overall satisfaction and repairs satisfaction and there is an expectation that an improvement in repairs performance (e.g. right first time) will increase overall satisfaction. The Repairs and Property restructure will increase capacity to deliver the service against the service standards.

7. KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS

- 7.1. Our teams have identified the following stand out achievements from their service areas:

- Recognition from our partnership working in Whitefield with award from Greater Manchester Police
- Estate days; Visited 1800 properties (23% of our stock) engaged with 236 tenants, 162 volunteers help on the day Moved 35 tonnes of rubbish
- Invest to save approach for the council, sourcing new accommodation via Huntley House/Silver Street, reducing cost of Temporary accommodation
- 12 month programme of property safety communications via Bury communication team
- With the help of our tenants we have reviewed and launched our engagement strategy
- Following feedback doubled the amount of resources and now clean our general need blocks every two weeks
- Positive audit programme feedback for Property Compliance
- Working with wider Council to develop a Tenure Neutral ASB policy. Resulting in two positive determinations from the Housing Ombudsman Services
- Delivery of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund wave 2.1 for 293 properties, works include loft insulation, wall extraction degraded insulation and refill new thermally efficient cavity wall insulation
- Reduced overdue repairs from 873 to 293. Including Implemented 4 new 'fit for purpose' repairs service standards to better manage demand
- Review of the Performance Scorecard including separating Six Town Housing and Springs performance
- Approval of the Capital Programme for 2025/26 and progressing to start on site for two schemes
- Training of the Housing Advisory Board and Councillors by Altair on the regulatory standards
- Tenant consultation of the 2025-26 targets providing a comprehensive understanding of our performance against benchmarking, barriers to achieving targets allowing tenants a forum to give constructive feedback
- Developed Neighbourhood plan to show how Housing Services fits into the Council's Integrated Neighbourhood Model and presented report to the Public Service Reform Steering Group

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1. There are key areas for improvement for Housing Services; restructures and communications from a staff perspective and improving repairs, improving our response to ASB and delivering the capital programme for our tenants and residents. One year on from transfer the mechanisms are in place via the Improvement Programme and Governance structures to provide a level of assurance and momentum for delivery.
- 8.2. The stability of the service 12 months post transfer will enable Housing to explore its role within the wider council and further develop on the days of action and partnership working on our estates to drive improvements in our communities to support the LET'S strategy.
- 8.3. The service remains focused on being ready for an inspection from the Regulator of Social Housing. This provides an important focus on compliance with regulatory standards but endorses our commitment to placing the tenant at the heart of our service plans and delivery. As part of this the contribution of the Overview and Scrutiny Housing Sub Committee has been very valuable in providing challenge on the direction of travel through becoming familiar with the regulatory standards and providing constructive critical member-led oversight.

List of Background Papers:

Appendix A – Altair Report

Appendix A – GMCA Homelessness Stocktake

Appendix C- 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 \(bury.gov.uk\)](#)

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