

Cheltenham Borough Council Cabinet Housing Committee

Meeting date: 19 February 2025

Meeting time: 6.00 pm

Meeting venue: Council Chamber - Municipal Offices

Membership:

Councillor Flo Clucas, Councillor Jan Foster, Councillor Richard Pineger, Councillor Julian Tooke and Councillor Suzanne Williams

Ian Mason (Tenant Representative), Bozena Tarnawska (Leaseholder Representative) and Agnieszka Wisniewska (Tenant Representative)

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Phone: 01242 264 246

1 Apologies

2 Declarations of interest

3 Public and Member Questions

4 Minutes of the last meeting (Pages 3 - 6)

To approve the minutes of the 23rd January 2025

5 CEO Briefing (Verbal Update)

6 Quarter 3 2024 - 25 Housing Complaints and Compliments Report (Pages 7 - 22)

7 Communal Areas Improvement Project Update (Pages 23 - 28)

8 Anti-Social Behaviour Service Improvement Plan Overview and Update (Pages 29 - 46)

9 Strategic Housing Risk Register (Pages 47 - 52)

10 Updates from the Tenant and Leaseholder Panels (Pages 53 - 54)

11 Review of the Housing Committee Forward Plan (Pages 55 - 58)

12 Items to be referred to Cabinet

13 Briefing Note - Impact of the Right to Buy Legislative Changes (Pages 59 - 64)

14 Briefing Note - Housing Sector Insight (Pages 65 - 72)



Cheltenham Borough Council Planning Committee Minutes

Meeting date: 23 January 2025

Meeting time: 6.00 pm - 6.47 pm

In attendance:

Councillors:

Frank Allen, Glenn Andrews, Paul Baker (Vice-Chair), Adrian Bamford, Garth Barnes (Chair), Barbara Clark, Jan Foster, Tony Oliver, Simon Wheeler and Suzanne Williams

Also in attendance:

Chris Gomm (Head of Development Management, Enforcement and Compliance), John Hindley (Highways representative Gloucestershire County Council) and Michael Ronan (Locum Planning Solicitor - One Legal)

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Mutton.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

3 Declarations of independent site visits

The following Councillors attended Planning View on the 21 January 2025:

- Councillor Frank Allen
- Councillor Paul Baker
- Councillor Adrian Bamford
- Councillor Garth Barnes
- Councillor Barbara Clark
- Councillor Jan Foster
- Councillor Tony Oliver

4 Minutes of the last meeting

A request from a member of the public to correct the minutes was received and was reviewed by the Monitoring Officer. The requested changes were not recommended to the Committee as council minutes are not intended to be a verbatim record of meetings and recordings are available on YouTube for four years for reference. The Committee agreed not to amend the minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 October were approved and signed as a correct record.

5 Public Questions

There were none.

6 Planning Applications

7 424/00725/OUT - Land at North Road West and Grovesfield Way

The Head of Development Management, Enforcement & Compliance introduced the report as published, highlighting that this was an outline application for up to 60 dwellings including 40% affordable housing and up to 550 square meters of flexible commercial use. He emphasized that appearance, landscaping, layout, and scale were reserved matters. He highlighted that an update sheet had been circulated with amended conditions and that the recommendation was to permit subject to these conditions and a s106 agreement.

There were no public speakers on the item.

In response to Members' questions, officers confirmed that:

- It would not be possible to resolve the drainage issue that has existed on North Road West since the BMW site was built through a condition on the current planning application. Cheltenham Borough Council and the County Council have enforcement powers to manage this issue and it will be raised with the Enforcement Team.
- Controlling routes of construction traffic to prevent contractors' vehicles using North Road West is within the scope of a construction management plan. This can be dealt with when the application to discharge that condition is submitted.

The matter then went to Member debate where the following points were made:

- The use of the site as a residential rather than commercial site was seen as a positive development, particularly given the pressure to build more houses as captured within the 5-year housing land supply particularly given the pressure to build more houses as captured within the 2.52 year housing land supply. The designation of 40% of properties as affordable housing was also highlighted as extremely important.

- Significant disappointment was expressed at the decision to provide access to the residential properties through North Road West, instead of Corinthian Way. North Road West is a very quiet county lane within the green belt, bound by hedgerows on both sides and is part of a designated national cycle route. In contrast Corinthian Way is a purpose-built two-lane road, designed to take high volumes of traffic.
- It was noted that the developers' had agreed to put a pedestrian crossing at a point on North Road West but it was felt that it would be unusual to install a pedestrian crossing on a country road.
- A length of the hedgerow will be lost to create access and concern was raised that this would represent significant biodiversity net loss and be a key loss of a wildlife corridor. This will also negatively impact the current safe use of North Road West by cyclists, runners and walkers.
- Concern was raised that once the road is resurfaced people will exceed the 30mph speed limit in the stretch of the road that pedestrians will be able to access. It was also noted that whilst it was possible for cars to pass each other the road was tight.
- As the access would only be for 60 properties it will not represent a significant increase in traffic.
- There are existing drainage issue on North Road West. It was stressed that the developers should bear in mind that the water course should be able to travel under the road in North Road West.
- Whilst the committee could reject the application due to concerns about access, given the Highways team had not raised an objection it was likely that the application would be approved on appeal.

Officers offered the following responses to the Member's debate:

- The Principal Development Co-Ordinator confirmed that the Highways team had discussed the use of Corinthian Way for access with the developer. They had confirmed they were committed to North Road West access due to the benefit it would bring to the residential estate to create a separation from the commercial site. Highways do prefer to have separate accesses to avoid conflict of lots of pedestrians with large HGVs. The Highways team then considered the benefit and risk of North Road West access, including speed readings and the visibility that could be achieved, and on balance there was no fundamental reason they could not support the application.
- The speed limit on North Road West is presently going to remain at 50mph. Internal paths on the estate will lead pedestrians to a section of road where it is 30mph.
- There will be pedestrian access to Corinthian Way, the only separation will be vehicular.
- At most 20m of hedgerow will be lost to create the access.
- Discussions have already been held with the developer about the location of access and it is not for the committee to re-design the scheme or fundamentally change means of access to the site. Members have the right to vote against the officer recommendation. However, as officers are happy with the means of access from North Road West and the application complies with planning policy it is likely this refusal would be subject to an appeal. Members were reminded that if a decision is made without evidence to support the decision the authority is exposed to risk of costs on any appeal.

The matter then went to the vote on the officer recommendation to permit subject to conditions and s106 agreement:

For: 9

Against: 1

Abstentions: 0

Voted to permit subject to conditions and s106 agreement.

8 Appeal Update

The committee noted the appeals update.

9 Any other items the Chairman determines urgent and requires a decision

There were none.

10 Briefing Note - Changes to the 5 Year Housing Land Supply Position following publication of the NPPF (December 2024) and related changes in the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)

The committee noted the briefing note.

Cheltenham Borough Council

Cabinet Housing Committee – 19 February 2025

Q3 2024/25 Housing Complaints & Compliments

Report

Accountable member:

Cabinet Member for Housing & Customer Services, Flo Clucas

Accountable officer:

Caroline Walker, Director of Housing, Customer Services and Communities

Ward(s) affected:

n/a

Key Decision: No

Executive summary:

This report provides an overview of housing related complaints and compliments received during quarter three 2024/25.

In this quarter, 62 complaints were received and accepted at stage one of the housing complaints process. Of these, 59 have been responded to, with 51 complaints upheld, either in their entirety or in part, and 8 were not upheld.

7 cases were considered at stage two of the complaints process, with six being upheld either in their entirety or in part, and 1 was not upheld.

11 compensation payments, totalling £1,650 have been paid to customers. One compensation offer has not been accepted.

The three areas of greatest dissatisfaction are quality of work, poor communication, and service delays.

30 compliments have been received during the quarter, with the majority for Repairs (17), Benefits and Money and Advice service (4).

Complaints relating to disrepair remain low with two reported during this quarter

There has been a significant decrease in complaints relating to contractors, with 8 complaints of that nature recorded during this period, compared with 15 in quarter two and 12 in quarter one. This reflects the work of the planned maintenance managers in working with the contractors to proactively review the complaints and engage in conversation where quality of work concerns has been identified.

There were no complaints in this quarter that were specifically equality related.

Recommendations:

1. That the report and next steps are noted by Cabinet Housing Committee.
-

Implications

1.1 Corporate Plan Priorities

This report contributes to the following Corporate Plan Priorities:

- Being a more modern, efficient and financially sustainable council

1.2 Performance management – monitoring and review

Committee will be kept informed quarterly regarding performance in housing complaints.

2 Background

2.1 Complaints data is collected monthly and reported quarterly and annually. This allows for monitoring of areas and levels of customer dissatisfaction as well as the identification of learning and service improvements.

This reporting allows for performance monitoring to ensure that we are compliant with the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code in respect of complaint management and response timescales.

3 Reasons for recommendations

3.1 To ensure that committee are kept informed of the volume of housing complaints and dissatisfaction, the service areas experiencing complaints, as well as the areas for learning and service development.#

4 Key risks

Failure to comply with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code and the Council complaints policy and manage complaints appropriately may result in a maladministration decision from the Ombudsman, intervention and financial penalty.

Report author:

Caroline Walker, Director of Housing, Communities & Customer Service,
caroline.walker@cbh.org

Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Q3 2024/25 Housing Complaints and Compliments report.

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Housing Complaints and Compliments Report

Q3 October to December 24/25

Natasha Dhillon, Complaints Officer

Natasha.Dhillon@cbh.org



part of



In this period:

| STAGE 1 | Compliments | Complaints Opened | Complaints responded to |
|----------|-------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| October | 13 | 21 (2 Withdrawn) | 29 |
| November | 11 | 29 (3 Withdrawn) | 26 |
| December | 6 | 12 (3 Withdrawn) | 4 |

| STAGE 2 | Complaints Opened | Complaints responded to |
|----------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| October | 1 | 3 |
| November | 3 (1 Withdrawn) | 2 |
| December | 2 | 2 |

In quarter 3 for 2024/25 fiscal year, 62 complaints were initiated at Stage 1, with 8 of these subsequently being withdrawn. During this period, responses were provided for 59 complaints at Stage 1.

When compared to the same quarter for 2023/24, the figures show stability with similar numbers of complaints. However, there has been a notable increase in Stage 2 complaints, with 2 escalated in Q3 23/24 compared to 6 in this current quarter.

Within the period it has been identified that there is a high pattern for complaints arising from leaks, damage to external sheds/out house buildings and the delay in carrying out temporary repairs. We have also, identified issues with the service our contractor HJS are providing regarding communal doors, gates and fob entry systems.

OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2024



The period for this report is between 01/10/2024 00:00:00 - 31/12/2024 23:59:59 (inclusive)

Q3 OVERVIEW STAGE 1: October to December 2024/25

62 complaints opened in Q3 October to December 2024. Eight complaints were withdrawn or closed due to no tenant contact. 43 out of the 59 complaints closed were all responded to within 10 working days. One complaint was responded to outside of target. 15 complaints had agreed Stage 1 extensions, and all were responded to within the extended timescale

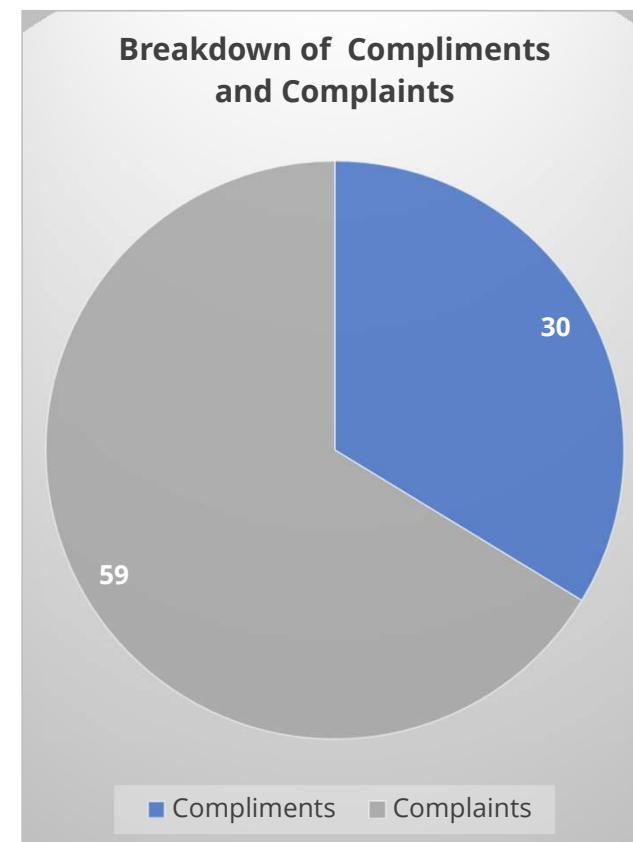
The average number of days taken to investigate all closed complaints was 11.7 days. All complaints that exceeded the initial 10-day target had formal extensions agreed with the complainant, in line with the Housing Ombudsman code. The average time taken to respond to complaints that were not extended was 8.2 days.

Compensation: Of the 59 responses sent, eleven were offered compensation at Stage 1

CBC declined seven complaints, those complaints were responded to via phone call if possible and all by letter to advise why the complaint was not accepted in line with our complaints policy.

| RESOLVED AT STAGE 1 | ESCALATED TO STAGE 2 | UPHELD | PARTLY UPHELD | NOT UPHELD |
|---------------------|----------------------|--------|---------------|------------|
| 54 | 5 | 36 | 15 | 8 |

There is a 91.5% success rate at resolving complaints at Stage 1.



Q3 OVERVIEW Stage 2: October to December 2024/25

Number of complaints escalated to Stage 2: In this period six complaints were escalated to Stage 2, one withdrew.

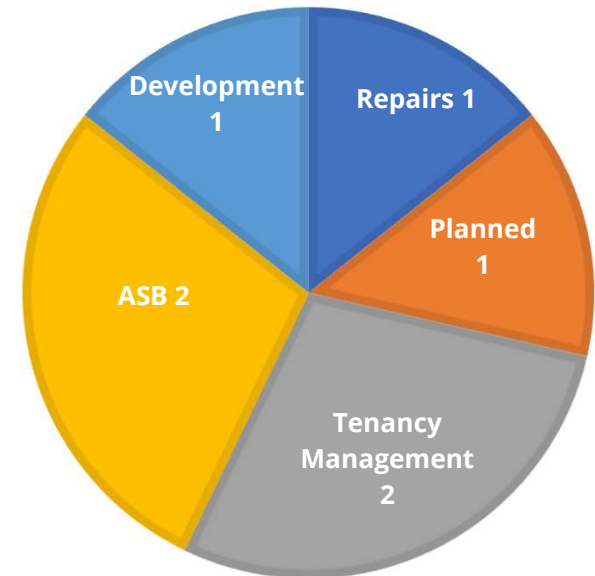
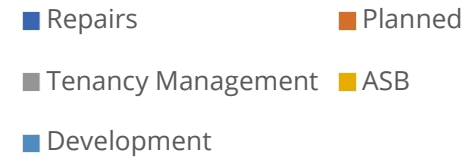
Seven complaints were responded to at Stage 2 within the period. Six were responded to with their agreed targets, one was responded to outside of the agreed target.

Compensation: Of the seven stage 2 responses sent, four were offered compensation at Stage 2

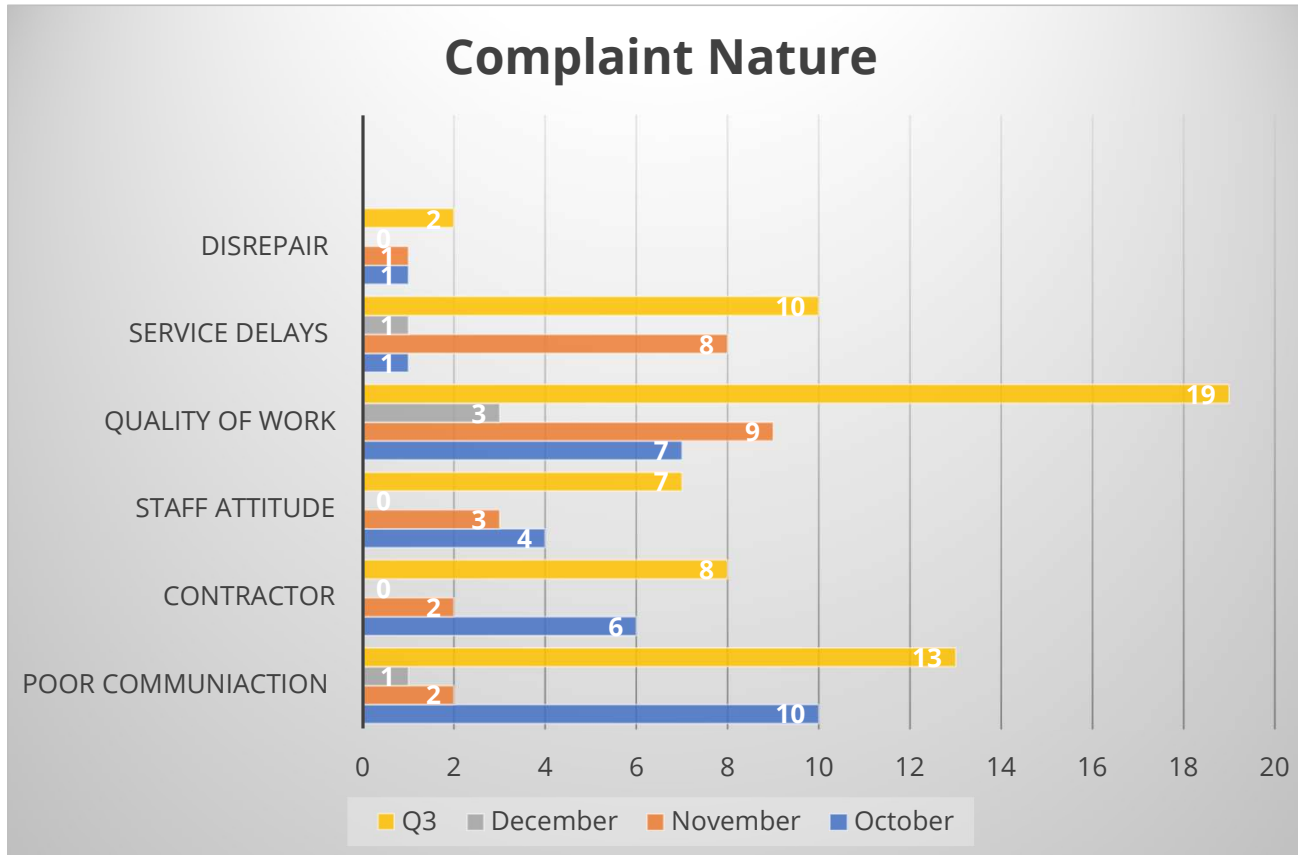
- £300 - solar panels not working for 6 months
- £392.51 – credited to rent account
- £250 - contribution to shed building cleared
- £1000 - (not accepted and are expecting this case to go to the Housing Ombudsman)

| RESOLVED AT STAGE 2 | ESCALATED TO OMBUDSMAN | UPHELD | PARTLY UPHELD | NOT UPHELD |
|---------------------|------------------------|--------|---------------|------------|
| 6 | 1 Unknown Status | 4 | 2 | 1 |

BREAKDOWN OF STAGE 2 COMPLAINTS BY SERVICE AREA



Breakdown of Complaint Nature



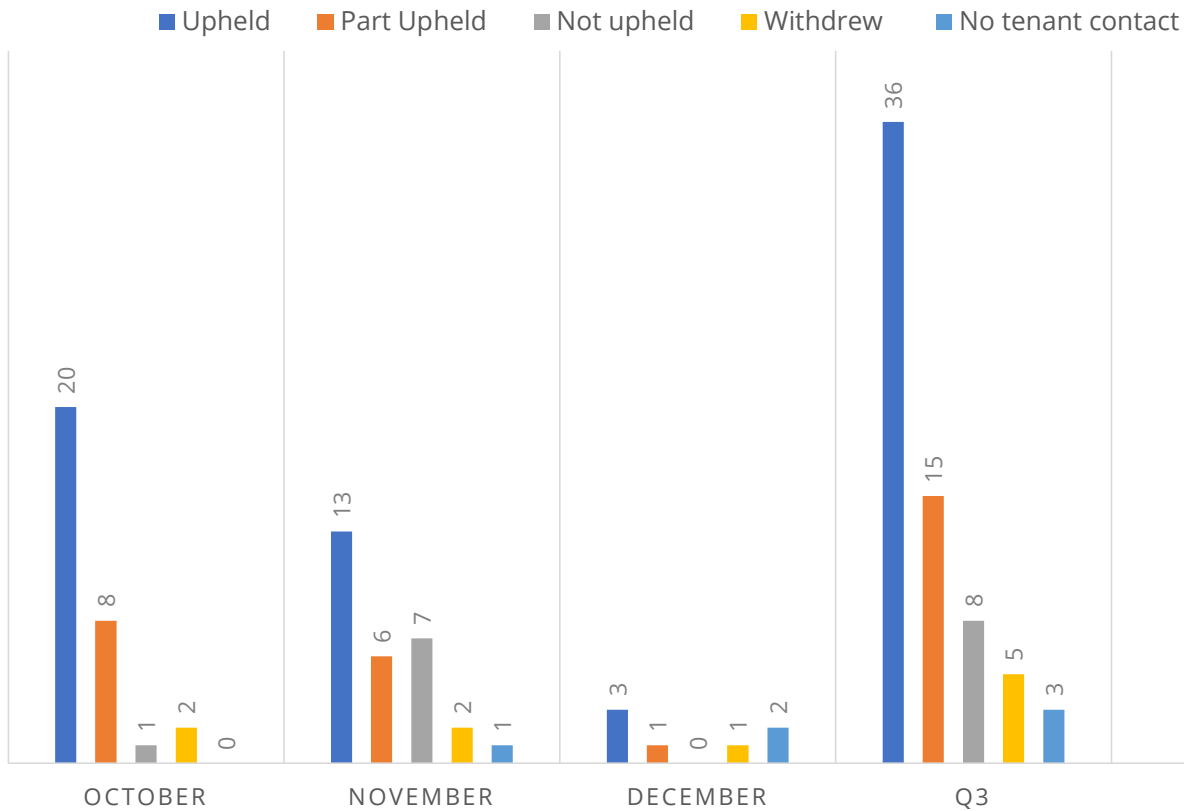
After review, it was shown that the most frequent reason for complaints at Stage 1 was "quality of work." It is important to remember that this is not always associated with repairs, it is also a reflection on the quality of work being completed by staff in other service areas such as ASB.

This was also listed in Q1 as the second primary contributing element.

One of the most common complaints is still about poor communication. Delays in callbacks and responses to queries, as well as internal departmental communication and that involving interacting with third-party contractors, are the main causes of poor communication reports.

A decrease in staff attitude-related complaints indicates improvement.

Complaint Outcomes

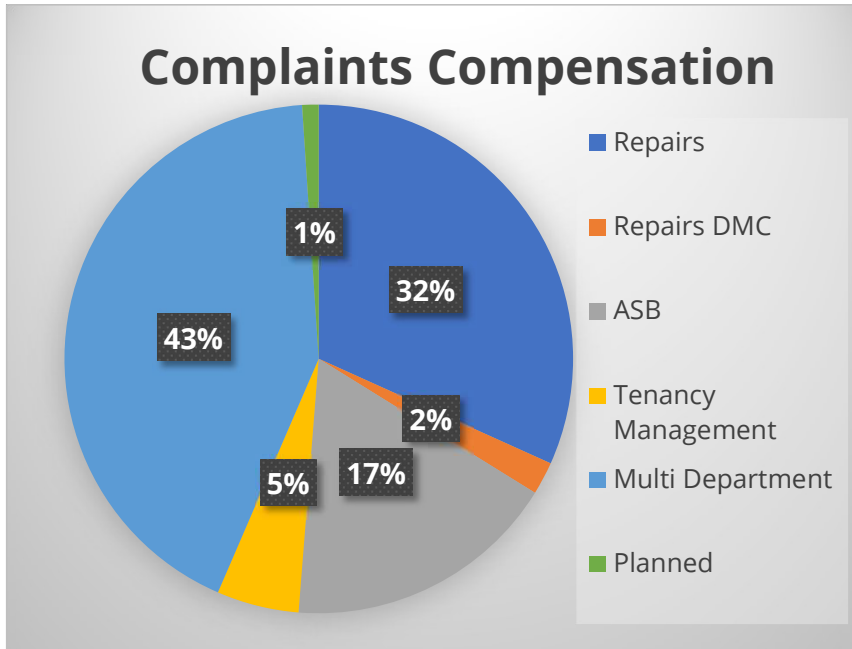


51 out of 59 complaints that were addressed in Stage 1 were partially and fully upheld.

To help CBC carry out additional internal investigations with the appropriate departments, learning records are kept for every complaint that is responded to and the Complaints Officer works with the service areas required to monitor learning.

There are complaints that are not responded to due to no tenant contact. Tenants are contacted on three occasions by phone and sent an email if we have a recorded email address. Customers are able to re open a complaint after a period of no contact.

Complaints Compensation



| Month | Amount | Department | Total |
|--------------|---|--|------------------|
| October | £50 voucher £100 £30 voucher £60 £450 £200 | Repairs Reactive Tenancy Management Planned Contractor Repairs Reactive Repairs Reactive Repairs Reactive | £890 |
| November | £500 £150 £60 £1217.67 (not accepted) | ASB Repairs Reactive Repairs DMC Multi Department | £710 |
| December | £50 voucher | Tenancy Management | £50 |
| Total | | | £1,650,00 |

There has been an increase in compensation payments, this now seems to be the desired outcome of a complaint and is being asked for more frequently. Customers' perceptions of their right to compensation and their level of understanding have clearly changed. It is imperative that the organisation promote the significance of home content insurance more consistently and that the company be cohesive when doing so. Additionally, regulations must be revised to exclude reported loft space damages and natural occurrences.

Significantly fewer disrepair instances have resulted in fewer high value payouts, this is a good development and might be related to the number of disrepairs being handled through the complaints procedure.

Complainant Profile

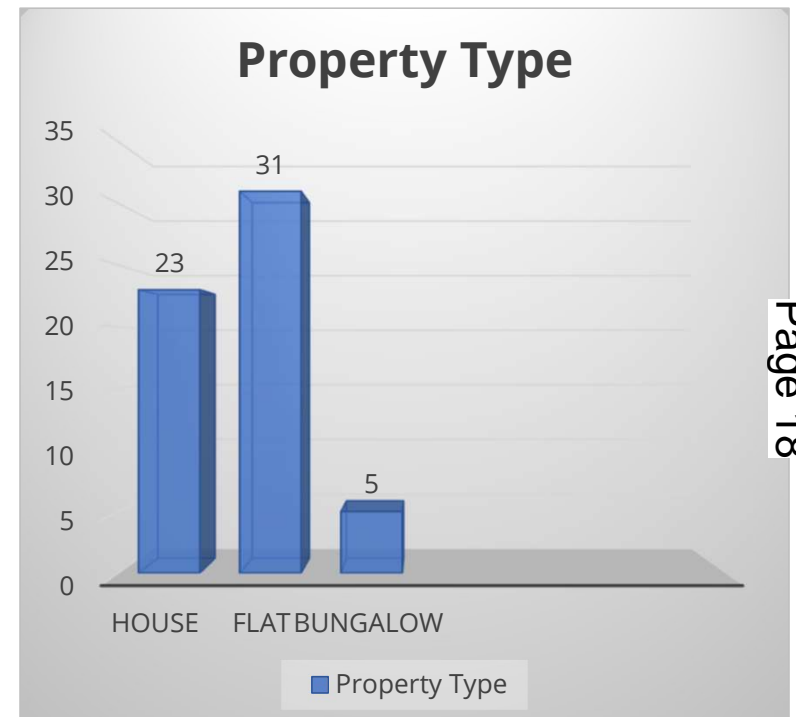
Property Type

| Age Category | Total |
|--------------|-------|
| No Age Data | 1.6% |
| 16-24 | 1.6% |
| 25-34 | 18.8% |
| 35-44 | 21.9% |
| 45-54 | 17.2% |
| 55-64 | 23.4% |
| 65-74 | 10.9% |
| 75-84 | 4.7% |
| Total | 100% |

| Ethnic Origin | Total |
|--------------------------------|-------|
| White British | 87.5% |
| No Data | 4.7% |
| White Other | 4.7% |
| Mixed White and Asian | 1.6% |
| Black or Black British African | 1.6% |
| Total | 100% |

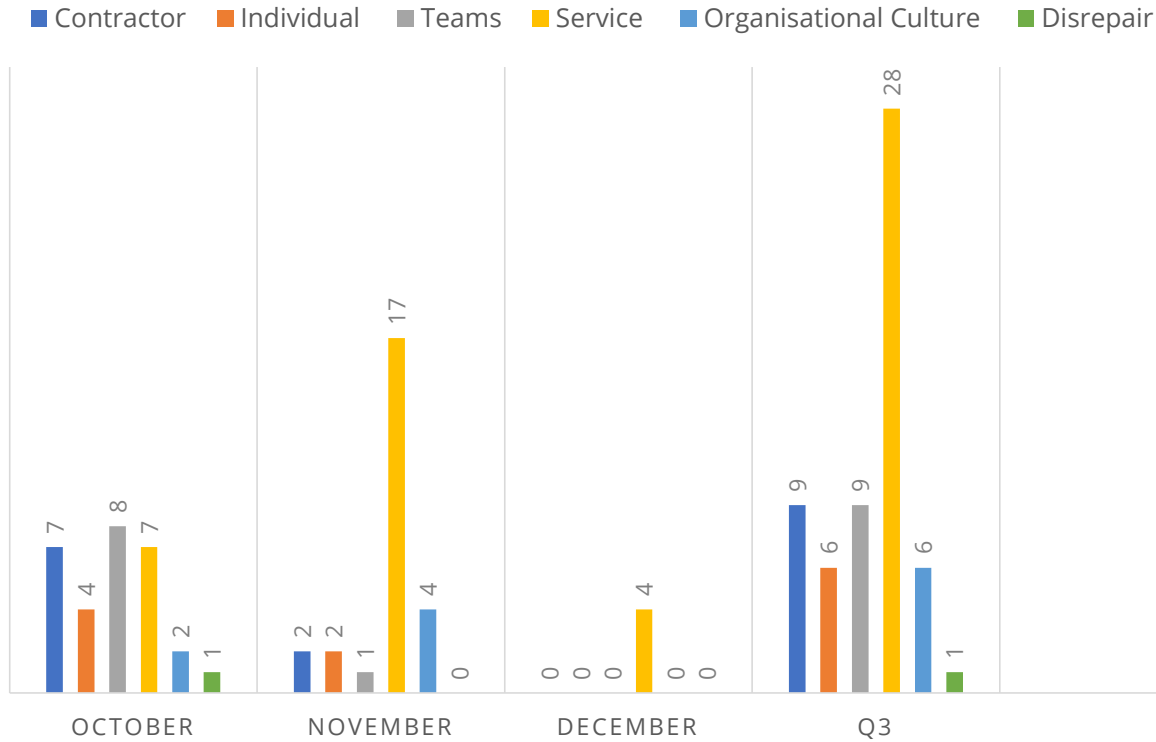
| Disability Flag | Total |
|-----------------|-------|
| Disabled | 10.9% |
| Not Disabled | 87.5% |
| No Data | 1.6% |
| Total | 100% |

| Gender | Total |
|---------|-------|
| No Data | 1.6% |
| Female | 70.3% |
| Male | 28.1% |
| Total | 100% |



LEARNING FROM COMPLAINTS - October – December

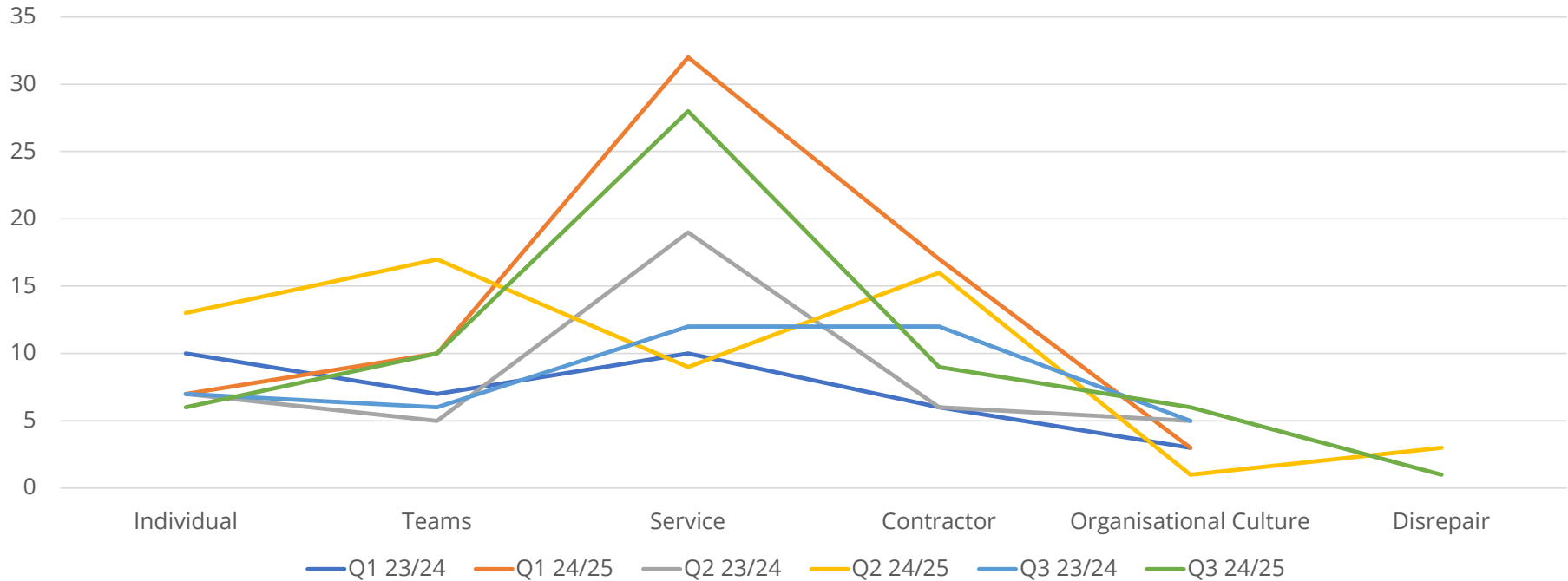
LEARNING FRAMEWORK



The primary message from the concerns raised this quarter is complaints relating to the service we offer.

The complaints have arisen because our customers haven't received the services or work that we promised them in a timely manner or at all. This increase has been caused by several variables, some of which may be related to the present problems we are having with contactors and procurement delays.

Learning Framework Applied



Since the appointment of the Complaints Officer in February 2023, we have accumulated a year's worth of data for comparison. As demonstrated earlier, there is a noticeable correlation in the learning framework's application to the complaints. The decrease in the number of individual and disrepair service failure-related complaints is a positive development, underscoring the significance of learning from complaints and its impact. However, this same ethos must be applied to service delivery.

The Complaints Officer will conduct further analysis of complaints concerning service delays following an increase in such complaints. Subsequently, they will collaborate with relevant managers to assess the implementation of identified learning and improvement actions and determine if further measures are necessary

Compliments



IN THE LAST 3 MONTHS

- We launched SMS customer satisfaction surveys to receive feedback regarding the complaints handling process
- We have successfully communicated and managed requests from the Housing Ombudsman's within their timeframes

NEXT STEPS

- To review and analyse the results of SMS customer satisfaction surveys which are sent out following complaint closure
- To review compensation policy ahead of review date 2026 due to increased compensation claims from complaints
- To assist with loft narrative in the business following comments received in this period
- To collate learning data ready for end of Q4 meetings with teams

Cheltenham Borough Council

Cabinet Housing Committee – 19 February 2025

Communal Areas Improvement Project Update

Accountable member:

Cllr Flo Clucas, Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services

Accountable officer:

Paul Leo, Interim Housing Transformation Director

Ward(s) affected:

All wards with council housing stock.

Key Decision: No

Executive summary:

This report is to update the committee on the project to improve the cleaning and maintenance of communal areas.

Recommendations:

1. To note the report.
-

1. Implications

1.1 Financial, Property and Asset implications

The project does not require additional budget. The new equipment and other costs have been covered from existing budget.

Signed off by: Gemma Bell, Director of Finance and Assets gemma.bell@cheltenham.gov.uk

1.2 Legal implications

The provision of cleaning and maintenance of communal areas is part of the obligations on the landlord under the tenancy and lease agreements and is recharged to residents.

Signed off by: Claire Hughes, Monitoring Officer claire.hughes@cheltenham.gov.uk

1.3 Environmental and climate change implications

There are no direct environmental or climate change implications in the improvement plan.

Signed of by: Maizy McCann, Climate Officer, Maizy.mccann@cheltenham.gov.uk

1.4 Corporate Plan Priorities

This report contributes to the following Corporate Plan Priorities:

- Ensuring residents, communities and businesses benefit from Cheltenham's future growth and prosperity
- Being a more modern, efficient and financially sustainable council

1.5 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

There are no direct implications from the improvement plan.

1.6 Performance management – monitoring and review

The satisfaction with communal area maintenance is one of the areas in the Tenant Satisfaction surveys which are regularly carried out. An improvement in the satisfaction level will show how well the improvement plan is working.

2 Background

2.1 In the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) report to the Cabinet Housing Committee at its meeting on 13 November 2024 maintenance of communal areas was one of the areas that had the lowest satisfaction rating with 65% of tenants being satisfied. In response, the team responsible for communal areas has been implementing an improvement plan.

2.2 The estate services team are working to address dissatisfaction with the cleaning of communal areas and the following activities are in progress:

2.2.1 New Cleaning Rotas & Schedules – After a review new rotas and schedules were introduced in June 2024. Historically cleaning teams may have visited the same estate more than once in a week to clean different blocks on that estate. The new rota reduces the number of visits with more time spent at each location to complete the cleaning to all blocks on the estate. This approach reduces travel time, dedicates more time to cleaning, increases the impact of the cleaning and the visibility of the cleaning teams.

2.2.2 New equipment – The team has now deployed new equipment including battery powered backpack hoovers and battery powered floor scrubber/dryers which are more effective than the brooms, mops, and buckets which had been used previously. This new equipment is more suited to the flooring that many of the blocks now have, such as non-slip vinyl or laminate floors, and allows a better quality of clean in an efficient manner. There are no trailing leads, and the floor is dried as it is cleaned which allows for a safer environment for employees, tenants and visitors.

2.2.3 Block survey form – a block inspection form for use by staff has been created. It incorporates

ideas from colleagues across different teams who been involved by providing ideas and feedback to ensure that the final form will work for each team. Initially the form is being piloted in paper format as a template for staff to complete when out on the estates visiting the blocks. The intention is to develop this an electronic form (using Versa mobile working tool). Tenants have agreed to pilot the use of this form and feedback on the cleaning service by completing the form and commenting on the form itself.

- 2.2.4 Team meetings – we have covered the feedback received via the Acuity customer satisfaction surveys and the cleaning staff have discussed the feedback and ways that they may improve quality and efficiency in their work. The new equipment will help, as would a collective more proactive approach to their work, for example, planned replenishment of van stocks and better route planning. Attitude and behaviours have been discussed with the team to reinforce expectations around providing quality services for our customers.
 - 2.2.5 Estate Inspections are taking place on a quarterly basis with Tenancy Management and the Estates & Cleaning Supervisor, with Councillors and Police also attending.
 - 2.2.6 CCTV Installed – CCTV has recently been installed at the block which has been subject to the greatest level of fly-tipping. In conjunction with CBC Neighbourhood Team, Tenancy Management and the Estates and Cleaning Team monitoring this block, it is anticipated that the CCTV cameras will act as a deterrent to fly tippers. We are also exploring the possibility of joint funding for more CCTV capacity.
 - 2.2.7 Dedicated multi-trade resource – from November onwards a multi trade person has been dedicated to work specifically on communal areas, visiting one block at a time in a planned way to complete an inspection which will be recorded on the versa mobile working form. Any repairs will then be completed by the same operative wherever possible.
- 2.3 The Estates Maintenance Supervisor will be available to answer members' questions at the meeting.

3 Reasons for recommendations

- 3.1 The committee are asked to note the report and raise any issues where more information is required.

4 Alternative options considered

5 Consultation and feedback

- 5.1 The tenants and leaseholder panels have been involved in developing the improvement plan and actions and are providing feedback on its effectiveness.

6 Key risks

- 6.1 There are no additional risks linked to the recommendations. This work relates to corporate risk CH5 which is reproduced in Appendix 1 below. This covers tenant satisfaction.

Report author:

Paul Leo, Interim Housing Transformation Director, email: paul.leo@cheltenham.gov.uk.

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Risk Assessment

Background information:

Tenant Satisfaction Measures Report to Cabinet Housing Committee 14 November 2024.

Appendix 1: Risk Assessment

| Risk ref | Risk description | Risk owner | Impact score (1-5) | Likelihood score (1-5) | Initial raw risk score (1 - 25) | Risk response | Controls / Mitigating actions | Control / Action owner | Deadline for controls/ actions |
|----------|--|---------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------|---|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| CH5 | Tenant Satisfaction - If there is a decline in the quality of services delivered to tenant's, then this may result in reduction in customer satisfaction (evidenced through the TSMs) affecting the quality of life experienced by residents in Cheltenham and leading to referral to the Housing Ombudsman and/or Regulator for Social Housing. | Claire Hughes | 4 | 3 | 12 | Reduce | <p>Effective oversight of service delivery performance by senior officers, Cabinet and Housing cabinet committee.</p> <p>Review and monitoring of service standards.</p> <p>Effective tenant voice and listening and acting on tenant feedback.</p> <p>Learning from complaints.</p> <p>Review of nation TSM data</p> | | |

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Cheltenham Borough Council

Cabinet Housing Committee – 19 February 2025

Anti-Social Behaviour Service Improvement Plan

Overview & Update

Accountable member:

Cllr Flo Clucas, Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services Accountable

Accountable officer:

Caroline Walker, Director of Housing, Communities & Customer Service

Ward(s) affected:

n/a

Key Decision: No

Executive summary:

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the Housing ASB Service, to present the Anti-social Behaviour (ASB) improvement plan to Cabinet Housing Committee, and to provide an update on progress.

The ASB service, alongside repairs, is of high importance to our housing customers, and is fundamentally linked to customers overall feeling of safety in their home.

Building on solid foundations, an ASB Service Improvement Plan with four key priorities has been developed, these are:

- Compliance with the Regulator of Social Housing Consumer standards
- Gathering accurate data on customer satisfaction
- Involving customers in shaping the Housing ASB Service
- Develop and deliver an effective communication campaign to improve perceptions

and understanding of the ASB service.

Consultative work has been completed through detailed scoping sessions with key stakeholders to develop an Improvement Programme made up of 5 projects, which are detailed in the appendices. The scoping sessions have been instrumental in identifying outcomes, benefits and interdependencies across the plan.

The plan has been broken down into 5 projects, details of which can be found in appendix i

The project team have adopted a prioritisation approach to decide the order in which the 5 projects will be delivered. The plan reflects available resource and capacity across the organisation, which enables some projects to run concurrently.

Recommendations:

1. That the Housing Cabinet Committee note the details of the improvement plan and the progress made to date in the delivery of the individual projects.

1. Implications

1.1 Financial, Property and Asset implications

Not applicable to this overarching report, however financial implications will be considered on individual projects as required.

1.2 Legal implications

N/A

1.3 Environmental and climate change implications

N/A

1.4 Corporate Plan Priorities

This report contributes to the following Corporate Plan Priorities:

- Ensuring residents, communities and businesses benefit from Cheltenham’s future growth and prosperity
- Being a more modern, efficient and financially sustainable council

1.5 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

Not applicable to this overarching report, however equality impact screening assessments will be completed on individual projects within the programme as required.

1.6. Performance management – monitoring and review

Performance against this improvement plan will be monitored and reviewed by the project sponsor.

2. Background

- 2.1. The overall function of our housing- related ASB Team is to tackle incidents of ASB that involve residents of our properties , whether the ASB is perpetrated by, or against, residents that live in council-owned housing and occurs inside, or within the locality of their home.
- 2.2. The ASB, Crime & Policing Act 2014 defines ASB as;
- (a) conduct that has caused, or is likely to cause, harassment, alarm or distress to any person,
 - (b) conduct capable of causing nuisance or annoyance to a person in relation to that person's occupation of residential premises, or
 - (c) conduct capable of causing housing-related nuisance or annoyance to any person.
- 2.3 ASB can generally be broken down into three main categories:
- Personal ASB - is when a person targets a specific individual or group.
Nuisance ASB - is when a person causes trouble, annoyance or suffering to a community.
Environmental ASB - is when a person's actions affect the wider environment, such as public spaces or buildings.
- 2.4 Common ASB reports received by the ASB Team are:
- Noise related nuisance
 - Drugs smells, use or apparent drug dealing
 - Verbal abuse and intimidation
 - Animal related nuisance
 - Damage, rubbish dumping and item storage in communal areas
 - 'Cuckooing' — where a resident's property may have been forcibly taken over for criminal purposes
 - Hate related incidents — where a person is targeted due to a protected characteristic
 - Domestic Abuse
 - Storing or selling stolen goods
- 2.5 In tackling ASB across Cheltenham it is vital that partnerships exist between

residents and those agencies that are responsible for finding solutions to, or enforcing ongoing nuisance and ASB issues.

2.6 The table below details partners that work to address, support and help residents in the tackling of ASB in a holistic and person-centred way:

| Partner | Main Responsibilities | Contact |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| Residents | -Report ASB witnessed and work with agencies to help provide evidence. | |
| Police | -Lead on investigation into criminal incidents. | 999 (emergency) or 101 |
| CBH ASB Team | -ASB that affects our tenants and leaseholders. -Issues that occur in, or in the locality of, council-owned housing | 0800 408 0000 asbteam@cheltenham.gov.uk Customer Portal |
| SOLACE | -ASB incidents that occur in Cheltenham, in respect of public spaces and non-council owned housing. | solace@gloucestershire.police.uk 01242 262626 |
| CBC Neighbourhood Team | -Environmental ASB in public areas, such as fly-tipping, dog fouling and graffiti | 01242 262626 |
| CBC Environmental Protection Team | -Noise nuisance in private property, potential statutory nuisance in Council property, air quality & food hygiene issues. | envhealth@cheltenham.gov.uk 01242 262626 |
| Crimestoppers | -UK charity taking anonymous reporting of crime information. | 0800 555 111 |

2.7 Very often, criminal, or anti-social incidents will interlink and touch the operational activity of several partners. The ASB Team have strong partnership working relationships and link up to ensure that the most efficient and holistic response is provided to tackle the issue.

2.8 We do this through the following multi-agency approaches:

- Safer Gloucestershire Partnership
- Cheltenham Community Safety Partnership
- Multi-Agency Problem Solving (MAPS) Forum
- Cheltenham Safer Communities meeting
- Cheltenham Locality Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) meeting

- 2.9 Aside from the above, formalised structure, ASB practitioners also regularly hold case meetings to share information and work together to tackle specific issues.
- 2.10 The ASB Team recognise that working in partnership with our customers, whether complainant or perpetrator is key in resolving anti-social behaviour. This starts from the point of complaint where clear time stated actions are agreed for both officer and complainant, to promote the ethos of the customer being an active participant in resolving the issue and to support community cohesion going forwards.
- 2.11 In 2021, the ASB Team initiated a change of approach in how reports of ASB are managed.

Whereas previously a report from a customer of lower level ASB such as dog fouling or noise nuisance would have initiated the opening of an ASB case at first point of contact. The approach that has now been adopted is for these types of cases to go through a period of assessment (two weeks in the case of noise nuisance), where it can be determined whether the matter is likely to constitute a statutory noise nuisance requiring further investigation and referral to Environmental Health for formal monitoring, or whether the evidence submitted shows that the level of perceived nuisance is acceptable, and would not reach the threshold for monitoring, for example if it relates to noise from children playing in the home.

- 2.12 Following this assessment, a decision is made as to whether further investigation is required, and if so, a case is opened and an action plan agreed with the complainant, or whether the behaviour is not deemed to be anti-social, and the contact be updated as such and closed. The reason for this change in approach is to allow the focus of the ASB officers to be on the increasingly serious and complex cases of ASB that are most affecting our communities, which require significant and often immediate intervention, whilst cases which require evidence of a pattern of behaviour over a period of time can be administrated less intensively whilst maintaining a high level of customer service.
- 2.13 The approach to perpetrators of ASB has evolved from a point where an issue was often solely viewed in terms of the behaviour an individual or group was displaying at the time of a particular anti-social incident with a focus on resolving the issue through punitive actions, to now focusing on asking 'why' the behaviour is happening.
- 2.14 To achieve sustainable outcomes in ASB cases it is vital that the reasons for a person or group acting anti-socially are explored in depth, and that factors such as mental health, trauma, physical health, and safeguarding are key considerations for officers when working with perpetrators, and that where needs are identified the customer is supported to address these to enable them to remedy their behaviour.
- 2.15 To support our customers to feel safe and secure in their homes, it is vital that they have the knowledge of how to report anti-social behaviour and the trust and confidence to do so.

- 2.16 During an initial contact with a customer who is reporting ASB, it is vital to establish rapport to understand the customer's desired outcome and then to agree what action will be taken by the ASB officer, and by the customer in terms of providing evidence.
- 2.17 In cases where ASB cannot be resolved through informal means and legal intervention is necessary and proportionate, it is key that customers understand the requirement for formal evidence, and how the absence of direct evidence can limit the likelihood of successful action. The ASB team have a strong track record of supporting customers to provide statements.
- 2.18 In situations where evidence of ASB is not forthcoming, or the evidential burden is not met, the ASB team will:
- Provide hearsay evidence on behalf of those affected
 - Seek to evidence ASB themselves through their community presence during normal working hours and through targeted out of hours work.
 - Deploy mobile CCTV to capture documentary evidence
 - Explore opportunities to secure evidence from partners such as other CBH colleagues, Contractors, Police, Youth Workers and other statutory and third sector bodies.
- 2.19 The under reporting of ASB has a significant impact on community safety. Within Cheltenham there are several groups that are defined as Organised Crime Groups (OCGs). Many of the individuals who make up these groups live and operate in communities where the council have significant housing stock such as St Peters and The Moors and base their activity around drug supply and acquisitive crime. OCG members target vulnerable tenants and create an atmosphere of fear and intimidation in the community. The ASB Team work closely with the police in tackling OCG activity in our communities, particularly in The Moors and St Paul's which are the Gloucestershire Pilot areas for the Home Office's 'Clear, Hold, Build' approach to organised crime, known locally as 'Endeavour'.
- 2.20 To address the challenge of under reporting, the ASB Team work with partners to utilise techniques such as cocooning , where a multi-disciplinary team, in this case colleagues from Gloucestershire Police, Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS) , Cheltenham Borough Council, Solace and youth outreach organisations come together to engage with all households in a community to give residents a direct opportunity to be heard, and to share their views about their community, and to encourage reporting of any issues.
- 2.21 The deployment of mobile CCTV cameras at key sites is another tactic utilised to tackle under-reporting. This technology provides an opportunity to capture evidence of ASB without the need for direct evidence from those affected but also provides reassurance to those affected in the knowledge that there is video evidence corroborating their reports.

- 2.22 This technique has been particularly impactful in the Monkscroft community. Following engagement with members of the Monkscroft Action Group (MAG) where several ASB concerns within that community were highlighted, CCTV was deployed at a strategic location to maximise the evidence of ASB and criminality. This provided a visible deterrent to ASB, but also opportunities for the ASB Team to address the impact of specific individuals whose behaviour was impacting those living around them, both through civil remedies and working in partnership with Police to support criminal prosecutions.
- 2.23 Mental health is the most significant challenge that the ASB Team must overcome to resolve conflict and achieve sustainable outcomes for our communities. It is becoming increasingly rare for mental health not to be a factor in a case, with either complainant, perpetrator or sometimes both experiencing mental ill health.
- 2.24 In cases of significant ASB, the ASB Team can find themselves in the difficult position of having to take legal action against a perpetrator who is experiencing mental ill health, in terms of obtaining a civil injunction order to limit their behaviour or a possession order which ultimately can result in them being made homeless.
- 2.25 It is often the case that the ASB Team must take these difficult steps for statutory agencies to engage in identifying treatment or alternative accommodation options. This is a far from ideal situation, and the ASB Team continue to strengthen relationships with mental health teams through monthly multi-disciplinary team meetings, to enable solutions to be found upstream of crisis, whilst also understanding the national picture of a lack of mental health resources and placements.
- 2.26 During the financial year 2023/24, the ASB Team investigated 58 cases and undertook 35 legal actions ranging from applications for civil injunctions and enforcement of those orders, to possession proceedings. During that time three customers were evicted from their homes because of a failure to modify their behaviour and adhere to conditions set out in a civil injunction order.
- 2.27 The regulator of Social Housing (RSH) set out new standards for social landlords on 29th February 2024 and these came into effect from 1st April 2024.
- 2.28 The consumer standards relate directly to the delivery of ASB Services. The Neighbourhood and Community Standard requires landlords to work in partnership with appropriate local authority departments, the police and other relevant organisations to deter and ASB and hate incidents in the neighbourhoods where they provide social housing. The Tenancy Standard requires landlords to provide services that support tenants to maintain their tenancy and prevent unnecessary evictions. The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard which requires landlords to be open with tenants and treat them with fairness and respect so they can access services, raise concerns, when necessary, influence decision making and hold their landlord to account.

- 2.29 These standards are the foundations of the five projects which make up the ASB Service Improvement Plan. The highest priority has been given to Project I - Consumer Standards Compliance. This project has centred around a review of the Housing ASB Policy, incorporating consultation with both customers and key stakeholders. The revised policy is currently scheduled to be brought to before this committee and cabinet for agreement in May 2025. Feedback from a customer focus group is contained with appendix i
- 2.30 The next highest priority area for development is the development of transactional ASB satisfaction surveys delivered to customers mobile phones by SMS message at the point that a triage action or ASB case is closed within the QL housing management system. This project supports the priority of gathering accurate data on customer satisfaction.
- 2.31 Prior to this ASB satisfaction data had been captured by writing to customers at the point of case closure to request the completion of a survey either on paper or via an internet link. The response to this has been very low.
- 2.32 ASB satisfaction is also captured through the quarterly Tenant Satisfaction Measures survey carried out quarterly on our behalf by Acuity. This survey has highlighted dissatisfaction with our response to ASB but does not consider whether the respondent has reported ASB to the housing team. Feedback has been sourced from these survey respondents so that unreported ASB can then be investigated.
- 2.33 The transactional SMS surveys are targeted at customers who have had direct involvement with the ASB service, allowing for accurate and timely feedback on casework and outcomes.
- 2.34 The transactional surveys went live in November 2024 and to date 34 surveys have been sent — 25 in relation to triage actions and 9 relating to the closure of ASB cases.
- 2.35 Unfortunately, the response rate to the transactional survey has been far lower than expected, despite it being publicised via social media, and it being detailed in case letters sent out to customers.
- 2.36 To date 4 responses have been received, equating to an 11.7% response rate. A breakdown of these responses is contained in appendix i.
- 2.37 The project group are scheduled to hold a three-month review of the transactional surveys during February 2025. The review will consider on how we can increase the response rate to the survey and encourage answers to all questions. This will focus on awareness raising and the potential to add an incentive such as an entry into a quarterly draw for all those who respond, with the opportunity to win a shopping voucher.

3 Reasons for recommendations

Cabinet Housing Committee require progress updates on the delivery of the ASB Improvement Plan to provide assurances that this programme of work is progressing and is supporting the wider priority of compliance with the Consumer Standards.

4 Consultation and feedback

Consultation on resource and priorities has taken place within the project group, with the project sponsor and with teams whose expertise is required to meet the aims of each of the 5 projects.

Report author:

Caroline Walker, Director of Housing, Communities & Customer Service,
caroline.walker@cbh.org

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – ASB Service Improvement Plan – Overview & Update

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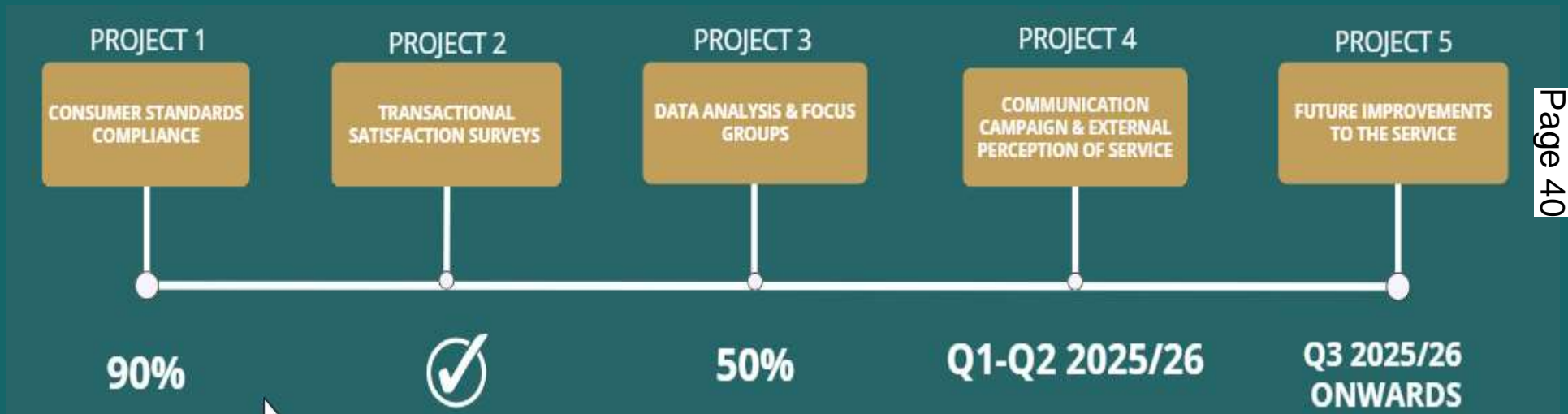
CHELTENHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Appendix 1 ASB Service Improvement Plan – Overview & Progress

Cabinet Housing Committee

19 February 2025

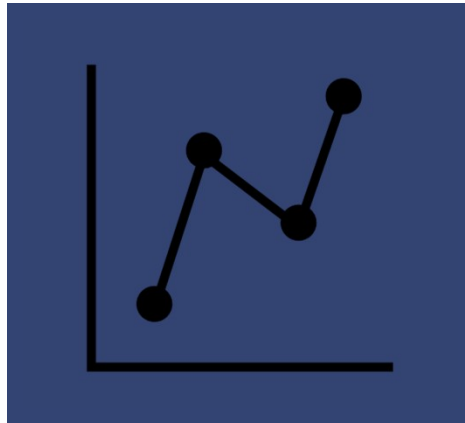
Service Improvement Project - Overview



Project Priorities



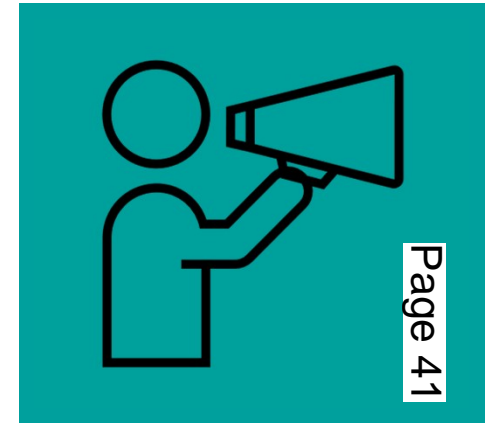
Compliance with the RSH Consumer Standards



Gathering accurate data on customer satisfaction



Involving customers in shaping the Housing ASB service



Develop & deliver an effective communication campaign to improve perceptions of the ASB service

Projects 1 & 2 - Progress

ASB SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

PROJECT 1: COMPLIANCE WITH CONSUMER STANDARDS:



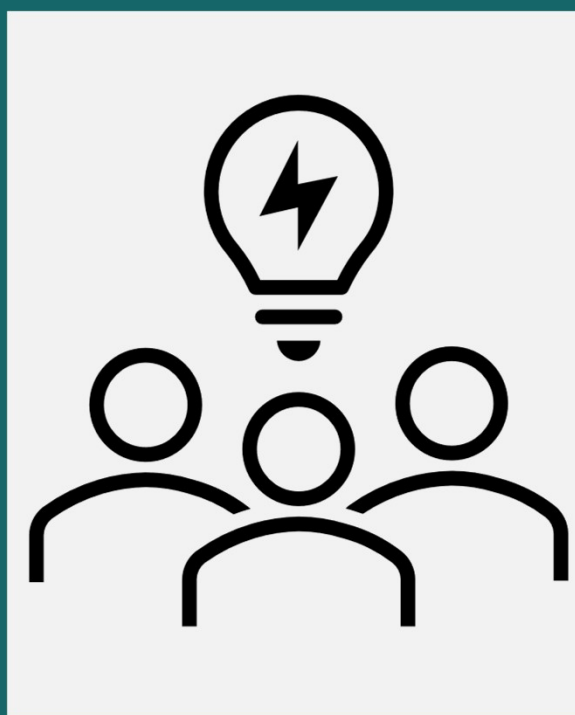
PROJECT 2: TRANSACTIONAL SATISFACTION SURVEYS



Project 1 - ASB Focus Group Feedback

Areas of Strength

- Despite challenges and desired outcomes not always being achieved, participants appreciated the hard work and commitment of the ASB Team in their casework and understood the challenges associated with legal enforcement of ASB
- The draft ASB Policy is clear, comprehensive, well-structured and will empower customers to hold the ASB Team accountable.
- Detail around the role and remit of the Housing ASB Team & other key partners provides clarity on who can assist with a specific issue
- The enhanced focus in the draft policy on the response to hate crime is welcomed



Areas for development

- Timeliness – to prevent escalation of ASB
- Evidence gathering – consider ways to simplify the gathering and sharing of evidence
- Empathy – customers value an empathetic approach and want to feel that their voice is being heard.
- Joint working with Police – there is a perception of expectations and objectives sometimes being misaligned

Project 2 - Transactional Satisfaction Surveys

When a triage action or ASB case is closed in QL, a transactional satisfaction survey is triggered.

3 questions are sent to the related customers mobile phone as SMS messages:

- (i) On a scale of 1-5 how satisfied are you with the response you received from the CBC ASB Team?
- (ii) What could we do to improve the CBC ASB Service?
- (iii) Would you be willing to have a follow up call to discuss your responses?

Transactional Satisfaction Survey Results

ASB Case Surveys

9 sent
1 response

ASB Case Triage Surveys

25 Sent
3 responses

ASB Cases Satisfaction

Satisfaction is a score of 4 or 5. A score of 3 is regarded as neutral but still counted as a response.

| Survey Date | Sent | Surveys Sent | Response | No Response | Follow Up | % Satisfied with A SB response | % Response Rate |
|-------------|----------|--------------|----------|-------------|-----------|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| 2024 | November | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0.00% | 0.00% |
| 2024 | December | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0.00% | 0.00% |
| 2024 | January | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0.00% | 50.00% |
| Total | | 9 | 1 | 8 | 0 | 0.00% | 11.11% |

ASB Triage Satisfaction

Satisfaction is a score of 4 or 5. A score of 3 is regarded as neutral but still counted as a response.

| Survey Date | Sent | Survey Sent | Response | No Response | Follow Up | % satisfied with A SB triage response |
|-------------|----------|-------------|----------|-------------|-----------|---------------------------------------|
| 2024 | November | 13 | 2 | 11 | 0 | 50.00% |
| 2024 | December | 6 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0.00% |
| 2024 | January | 6 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 0.00% |
| Total | | 25 | 3 | 22 | 0 | 33.33% |

Project 4 – Communication & External Perception Of The ASB Service

Initial Scoping

Customer Engagement

- Quarterly social media engagement around the difference between an ASB report and a service complaint to ensure the difference is clearly understood
- Significant ASB news stories to be publicised at least quarterly via social media, website and tenant newsletter
- Development of an annual programme of publicity around key themes such as ASB Awareness Week
- Quarterly ASB service focus groups

Changing Perceptions

Awareness raising via social media, website & tenant newsletter as well as the point of engagement with the ASB service to educate customers & manage their expectations by:

- Sharing key aspects of our ASB policy throughout the year,
- Sharing information on how we work with our partners to address ASB
- Explaining evidential thresholds for legal intervention, and the part the customer plays in evidence gathering

Cheltenham Borough Council

Housing Cabinet Committee – 19 February 2025

Strategic Housing Risk Register

Accountable member:

Councillor Flo Clucas, Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services

Accountable officer:

Claire Hughes, Director of Governance and Customer Services

Ward(s) affected:

N/A

Key Decision: No

Executive summary:

- This report provides a copy of the Council's Strategic Housing Risk Register detailing strategic housing risks as at 1 February 2025
- The register has been prepared in consultation with Risk Managers and the Senior Leadership Team.

Recommendations:

The Housing Cabinet Committee note the Strategic Housing Risk Register.

1. Implications

1.1 Financial, Property and Asset implications

Poor risk management can lead to increased financial costs therefore it is important to have a robust processes in place.

Signed off by: gemma.bell@cheltenham.gov.uk.

1.2 Legal implications

There are no specific legal implications arising from the report and its recommendations. It is fundamental that the Council has an embedded risk management framework which considers the identification, recording, and management of risks to the Council in the delivery of its housing services.

Signed off by: One Legal

1.3 Environmental and climate change implications

There are no specific environmental or climate change implications associated with this report.

Signed off by: maizy.mccann@cheltenham.gov.uk

1.4 Corporate Plan Priorities

This report contributes to all Corporate Plan Priorities as effective risk management is essential to the achievement of CBC plan.

Signed off by: claire.hughes@cheltenham.gov.uk

1.5 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

Good risk management across all aspects of our business should ensure Equality, Diversity and Inclusion implications are considered and any risks are highlighted, and controls put in place to mitigate.

2 Background

- 2.1 Risk management is the culture, process and structures that are directed towards effective management of potential opportunities and threats to the Council achieving its priorities and objectives.
- 2.2 The Council has a Risk Management Policy, reviewed in October 2024, that sets out the approach to risk management including the roles and responsibilities for Officers and elected Members. The policy also details the processes in place to manage risks at corporate, operational and project levels.
- 2.3 This strategic housing risk report is provided to the Housing Cabinet Committee detailing strategic housing risks. A broader, corporate risk report is reported to the Audit, Compliance and Governance Committee.
- 1.1. A copy of the risk register is attached at appendix 1. There has been the following movement in risks since its last review by the Housing Cabinet Committee:
- 1.2. CH3: Stock Condition Data - If there is a failure to maintain accurate, in date stock condition data then this means we are unable to plan spend, evidence investment, demonstrate accurate decent homes data and provide assurance that tenant's homes are safe. Probability has reduced due to the ongoing work around stock condition surveys.
- 1.3. CH6: Housing Regulatory & Legal Requirements - If we fail to meet regulatory and legal requirements, specifically the Regulator for Social Housing consumer standards and the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code then this may result in intervention and reputational damage. Probability has been reduced by one point from 4 to 3 as a result of the mitigations that are now in place and the response from the Regulator to the councils self-referral.
- 2.4 In addition a new risk has been added:
- 1.4. CH7: Management of Void Properties - If the management of void properties does not improve then this will lead to increased costs associated with additional use of temporary accommodation, reduced rent collection and failure to comply with the statutory timescales in relation to the use of temporary accommodation.

3 Alternative options considered

3.1 None

4 Consultation and feedback

4.1 Risk Managers and Leadership Team.

5 Key risks

5.1 None.

Report author:

Claire Hughes, Director of Governance and Customer Services

Appendices:

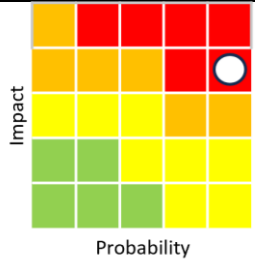
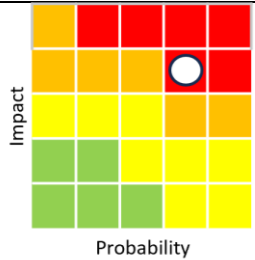
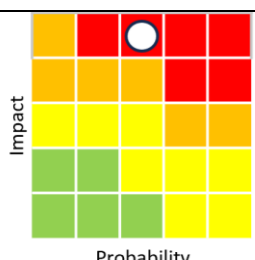
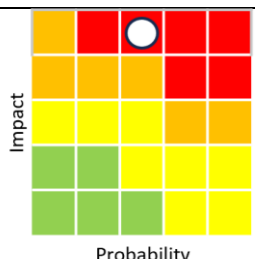
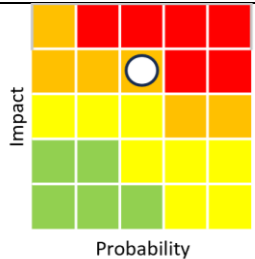
i. Risk Register

Background information:

None

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Cheltenham Borough Council – Strategic Housing Risk Register – 1 February 2025

| Ref | Status | Risk Details | Risk Manager | Current Assessment | Change from Last Assessment | Risk Action | Current Control Details | Review Date |
|-----|---|--|---------------|---|---|-------------|---|-------------|
| CH3 |  | Stock Condition Data - If there is a failure to maintain accurate, in date stock condition data then this means we are unable to plan spend, evidence investment, demonstrate accurate decent homes data and provide assurance that tenant's homes are safe. | Paul Jones | Impact - 4 Probability - 4 Score - 20 | ↓ Probability reduced due to controls now in place. | Reduce | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Effective oversight of property compliance performance by senior officers, Cabinet and Housing cabinet committee. - Maintaining up to date stock condition data. - Using data to prioritise property investment and address decency / H&S issues. - Effective use of resources | 28/02/2025 |
| CH2 |  | Property Compliance - If there is ineffective management of property compliance then this will result in regulator intervention and reputational damage. | Paul Jones | Impact - 4 Probability - 4 Score - 16 | ↔ No change | Reduce | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Effective oversight of property compliance performance by senior officers, Cabinet and Housing cabinet committee. - Robust delivery model for each of the big 6 property compliance areas + damp, mould, and condensation. - Ensure delivery meets property compliance policy. - Development of systems to evidence delivery through consistent data and record keeping. - Assurance processes to ensure delivery meets legal requirements. | 28/02/2025 |
| CH6 |  | Housing Regulatory & Legal Requirements - If we fail to meet regulatory and legal requirements, specifically the Regulator for Social Housing consumer standards and the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code then this may result in intervention and reputational damage. | Claire Hughes | Impact - 5 Probability - 3 Score - 15 | ↓ Probability reduced due to mitigations now in place and response from Regulator. | Reduce | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-referral made to regulator – no regulatory judgment issued. - Effective oversight of regulatory performance by senior officers, Cabinet and Housing cabinet committee. - Delivery of Consumer Standard Improvement Plan - External expertise in place to support compliance with the standards including mock inspection. - Annual self-assessment of compliance with the Complaints Handling Code (published to tenants and HO). | 28/02/2025 |
| CH4 |  | Housing Properties Health & Safety - If we do not manage health and safety management of our housing properties, then we may be putting tenant at risk of serious injury or death. | Paul Jones | Impact - 5 Probability - 3 Score - 15 | ↔ No change | Reduce | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear health & safety procedures in place with evidence these are followed. - Regular independent assurance that health and safety is being management effectively. - Effective oversight of health and safety performance by senior officers, Cabinet and Housing cabinet committee. | 28/02/2025 |
| CH5 |  | Tenant Satisfaction - If there is a decline in the quality of services delivered to tenant's, then this may result in reduction in customer satisfaction (evidenced through the TSMs) affecting the quality of life experienced by residents in Cheltenham and leading to referral to the Housing Ombudsman and/or Regulator for Social Housing. | Claire Hughes | Impact - 4 Probability - 3 Score - 12 | ↔ No change. | Reduce | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Effective oversight of service delivery performance by senior officers, Cabinet and Housing cabinet committee. - Review and monitoring of service standards. - Effective tenant voice and listening and acting on tenant feedback. - Learning from complaints. - Review of nation TSM data | 28/02/2025 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|--|---------------|---|----------------------------|--------|---|------------|
| CH7 | | <p>Management of void properties - If the management of void properties does not improve then this will lead to increased costs associated with additional use of temporary accommodation, reduced rent collection and failure to comply with the statutory timescales in relation to the use of temporary accommodation</p> | Claire Hughes | <p>Impact – 3 Probability – 3 Score – 9</p> | New Strategic Housing Risk | Reduce | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Procuring new contractors to carry out void work - Active monitoring of turn around times - Interim manager in place to provide additional support and guidance | 28/02/2025 |
| CH1 | | <p>Housing Revenue Account - If the housing revenue account becomes unviable then this may result in the council being unable to fund service delivery, investment in existing homes and the delivery of new housing.</p> | Gemma Bell | <p>Impact - 4 Probability - 2 Score - 8</p> | <p>← No change.</p> | Reduce | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure effective controls are in place. - Ensure effective controls are in place. - Ensure 30 year HRA financial model is in place and is reviewed and updated by regular stress testing. | 31/03/2025 |

Tenant Engagement Update, Housing Services, Cheltenham Borough Council

February 2025

Tenant Panel:

- In December, Pennington delivered compliance awareness training to the panel, providing an overview of how CBC should demonstrate compliance and outlining the responsibilities of customers.
- In January, the panel approved the final version of the Complaints Scrutiny Review, conducted between October and December 2024. This review is now under consideration and will be brought back to the panel for final approval in the near future.
- The panel also agreed on the focus of their next scrutiny review: **“How can CBC Housing better ensure equality of access to services?”** They will be working closely with the Equality and Diversity lead to assess the accessibility of services and develop a deeper understanding of how people from minoritised groups engage with CBC Housing.

Leaseholder Panel

- In January, the leaseholder panel reviewed the leaseholder handbook to assess whether it meets their needs. However, during the discussion, the panel agreed that their immediate priority is Section 20s, as this is a key concern for all members.
- To support this, Matt Ward, Head of Housing Services, will attend the February meeting to provide leaseholders with information on Section 20s, address their questions, and explore ways to improve the process for leaseholder customers.

Matters arising from last meeting:

Resettled Families

- Following on from concerns raised by our leaseholder rep, Bozena, at the last meeting. Ellen Pollicott, Community Investment Manager, put together the following information.
- In March 2024, The Community Investment Team approached GARAS to enquire whether any communities required additional support. GARAS introduced our officer to a group of resettled Syrian families, and after meeting with them, it became clear that they needed assistance in several areas. The families expressed a desire for support in setting up Arabic classes, men's mental health groups, and IT skill development to improve their employment prospects.
- The officer connected the group with the TES team, who have since organised a variety of tailored courses, including a monthly VISA drop-in session and several employment-related workshops. 90% of the beneficiaries of this are female.
- To further support the community, our officer assisted them in applying for Healthy Communities funding, successfully securing £3,000. She also introduced the group to GRCC, who are helping them draft a formal constitution. The group has now named themselves "Homeward Horizons" and are actively welcoming other newly resettled communities.
- We secured free venue space through the Quaker movement, allowing the group to meet on weekends for Arabic classes and men's mental health sessions, with a plan to start a women's group and a father's with children group.

- The CI Team has prioritised the group's access to children's activities, including the popular HAF holiday programmes.
- To address the community's IT needs, an officer coordinated with Adult Education to deliver IT courses for individuals with English as a second language at Oakley and Hesters Way community centres. These sessions have been running since October 2024 and continue to support the community. She also arranged for two Syrian women, who completed the courses, to receive donated laptops.
- Recognising language barriers as a significant challenge, Bekka simplified the sign-up process for activities, enabling the group to successfully apply for 18 free ice-skating tickets through Move More as part of the HAF programme.
- In addition to IT support, Pauline, a dedicated volunteer at Oakley, delivers a weekly reading group aimed at refugees and asylum seekers to support their English language development. This initiative has recently expanded to Springbank Resource Centre.
- CBC housing is providing venue space at St Paul's hub, allowing Adult Education to run ESOL and "English for Work" courses throughout 2024 and 2025.
- Further collaboration efforts have seen the community investment team establish a relationship with Alliance for Equality, a new organisation supporting individuals from Eastern Europe. They have recently taken over the lease of St Mark's Community Centre.
- We have delivered sessions at Glos College, helping individuals sign up to the portal and easing communication with CBC regarding their housing issues.
- Hanan, a resettled Syrian who is a key figure in the community, sits on our tenant panel.

Cabinet Housing Committee Forward Plan 2024-2025

| Title | Objective | Format | Officer/Interested Party/Partner |
|---|--|------------------------------|--|
| Council – 21 February 2025 | | | |
| 2025/26 Final Budget Proposals – HRA and General Fund | | | |
| 17 March 2025 - (Deadline 24th February) | | | |
| Property Compliance Performance and stock condition project update | <i>To provide the Committee with an understanding of our property compliance status and the planned improvements needed to address areas of non-compliance</i> | Information/Discussion Paper | Interim Housing Transformation Director / Head of Technical and Investment |
| Consumer Standard Improvement Plan | <i>To provide the Committee with a copy of the Improvement Plan developed to resolve areas of non-compliance with the Regulator of Social Housing’s Consumer Standards.</i> | Information/Discussion Paper | Director of Governance and Customer Services |
| Housing and Tenancy Fraud Annual Update | <i>To provide the Committee with an overview of the Counter Fraud Enforcement Unit’s work on housing and tenancy fraud over the previous year.</i> | Information/Discussion Paper | Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit, Head of Service |
| Updates from the Tenant and Leaseholder Panels | <i>To highlight the ongoing activities of the Tenant and Leaseholder Panels and provide an additional opportunity for tenant and leaseholder voices to be heard.</i> | Information/Verbal Update | Tenant and Leaseholder Representatives |
| Review of the Housing Committee Forward Plan | <i>To provide the Committee with opportunities to identify any additional areas they may wish to scrutinise.</i> | Information/Discussion | Director of Governance and Customer Services |
| Briefing Note - Housing Sector Insight | <i>To provide the Committee with an overview of recent developments in the housing sector and provide opportunities for horizon scanning.</i> | Information | Director of Governance and Customer Services |
| 23rd April 2025 – (Deadline 8th April) | | | |
| Quarter 4 2024 – 25 Housing Performance Report | <i>To provide the Committee with key performance information relation to voids, arrears, day to day repairs, ASB and complaints.</i> | Information/Discussion Paper | Director of Housing – Customer and Community Services |
| Quarter 4 2024 - 25 Housing Complaints and Compliments Report | <i>To provide an overview of housing related complaints and compliments from quarter 4, identifying key areas of dissatisfaction and areas for learning and service improvement.</i> | Information/Discussion Paper | Director of Housing – Customer and Community Services |

Cabinet Housing Committee Forward Plan 2024-2025

| Title | Objective | Format | Officer/Interested Party/Partner |
|--|--|------------------------------|--|
| Updates from the Tenant and Leaseholder Panels | <i>To highlight the ongoing activities of the Tenant and Leaseholder Panels and provide an additional opportunity for tenant and leaseholder voices to be heard.</i> | Information/Verbal Update | Tenant and Leaseholder Representatives |
| Review of the Housing Committee Forward Plan | <i>To provide the Committee with opportunities to identify any additional areas they may wish to scrutinise.</i> | Information/Discussion | Director of Governance and Customer Services |
| Briefing Note - Housing Sector Insight | <i>To provide the Committee with an overview of recent developments in the housing sector and provide opportunities for horizon scanning.</i> | Information | Director of Governance and Customer Services |
| 11 June 2025 – (Deadline 27th May) | | | |
| Property Compliance Performance and stock condition project update | <i>To provide the Committee with an understanding of our property compliance status and the planned improvements needed to address areas of non-compliance</i> | Information/Discussion Paper | Interim Housing Transformation Director / Head of Technical and Investment |
| Consumer Standard Improvement Plan | <i>To provide the Committee with a copy of the Improvement Plan developed to resolve areas of non-compliance with the Regulator of Social Housing’s Consumer Standards.</i> | Information/Discussion Paper | Director of Governance and Customer Services |
| 6 monthly Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) Tracker Update | <i>Feedback and insight from the phone surveys with tenants carried out on behalf of CBC by Acuity. These surveys provide our results for the perception-based Tenant Satisfaction Measures.</i> | Information/Discussion Paper | Director of Housing – Customer and Community Services |
| End of Year 2024-25 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget Monitoring Report | <i>To provide a monitoring position statement for the HRA against the budget approved by Council on 23 February 2024, highlighting any key variances.</i> | Information/Discussion Paper | Director of Finance and Assets / Head of Finance and IT |
| Housing Risk Register | <i>To review the strategic risks relating to housing from the Council’s Risk Register.</i> | Information/Discussion Paper | Director of Governance and Customer Services |
| Updates from the Tenant and Leaseholder Panels | <i>To highlight the ongoing activities of the Tenant and Leaseholder Panels and provide an additional opportunity for tenant and leaseholder voices to be heard.</i> | Information/Verbal Update | Tenant and Leaseholder Representatives |

Cabinet Housing Committee Forward Plan 2024-2025

| Title | Objective | Format | Officer/Interested Party/Partner |
|--|--|------------------------------|--|
| Review of the Housing Committee Forward Plan | <i>To provide the Committee with opportunities to identify any additional areas they may wish to scrutinise.</i> | Information/Discussion | Director of Governance and Customer Services |
| Briefing Note - Housing Sector Insight | <i>To provide the Committee with an overview of recent developments in the housing sector and provide opportunities for horizon scanning.</i> | Information | Director of Governance and Customer Services |
| 16 July 2025 – (Deadline 30th June) | | | |
| Property Compliance Performance and stock condition project update | <i>To provide the Committee with an understanding of our property compliance status and the planned improvements needed to address areas of non-compliance</i> | Information/Discussion Paper | Interim Housing Transformation Director / Head of Technical and Investment |
| Consumer Standard Improvement Plan | <i>To provide the Committee with a copy of the Improvement Plan developed to resolve areas of non-compliance with the Regulator of Social Housing’s Consumer Standards.</i> | Information/Discussion Paper | Director of Governance and Customer Services |
| Quarter 1 2024 – 25 Housing Performance Report | <i>To provide the Committee with key performance information relation to voids, arrears, day to day repairs, ASB and complaints.</i> | Information/Discussion Paper | Director of Housing – Customer and Community Services |
| Quarter 1 2025 - 26 Housing Complaints and Compliments Report | <i>To provide an overview of housing related complaints and compliments from quarter 1, identifying key areas of dissatisfaction and areas for learning and service improvement.</i> | Information/Discussion Paper | Director of Housing – Customer and Community Services |
| Updates from the Tenant and Leaseholder Panels | <i>To highlight the ongoing activities of the Tenant and Leaseholder Panels and provide an additional opportunity for tenant and leaseholder voices to be heard.</i> | Information/Verbal Update | Tenant and Leaseholder Representatives |
| Review of the Housing Committee Forward Plan | <i>To provide the Committee with opportunities to identify any additional areas they may wish to scrutinise.</i> | Information/Discussion | Director of Governance and Customer Services |
| Briefing Note - Housing Sector Insight | <i>To provide the Committee with an overview of recent developments in the housing sector and provide opportunities for horizon scanning.</i> | Information | Director of Governance and Customer Services |

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Briefing Note

Committee name: Cabinet Housing Committee

Date: 19 February 2025

Responsible officer: Matt Ward - Head of Housing Services

This note provides information to keep Members informed of matters relating to the work of the Cabinet or a committee but where no decisions from Members are needed.

If Members have questions relating to matters shown, they are asked to contact the officer indicated.

This briefing note is designed to provide Committee Members with an update of information on Right to Buy (RTB) applications since the announcement in Budget in October 24 of the reduction of the discount.

Executive summary

The Right to Buy was introduced by the Conservative Government in 1980 and is covered by the 1985 Housing Act. It enables secure tenants with a minimum tenancy period to buy their home at a discount.

The discount is determined by the length of tenancy and is capped at an upper limit. There are exclusions such as sheltered accommodation, or properties specifically suitable for elderly or with accessibility needs.

Changes in legislation

The New Labour Government re-introduce a new cap to the RTB in the Autumn 2024 budget, changing the existing maximum discount of £102,500 to £38,000. The discount will be capped at £30,000 for CBC. This reduction of discount came into effect on **21st November 2024**, all applications prior to this date will have the old discount applied.

History of applications in CBC

CBC completions vary each year. Since 2021 there has been 73 completions.

| | |
|---------------|----|
| Flats | 27 |
| Houses | 45 |

Current applications following announcement

The changes announced in the Autumn budget by the Labour Government, created a substantive increase of new applications from Tenants in November 24. The Leasehold team received 65 applications in since the budget, which is the same number as would normally be received over a 2–3-year period. Virtually all local authorities are in the same

position seeing an influx of applications. Larger authorities are seeing applications in the thousands.

Initial checks were completed to ensure that any that did not meet the requirements were denied. A total of 3 applications were a denied on the initial checks.

Application breakdown since budget

| | |
|---------------|----|
| Flats | 21 |
| Houses | 44 |

Breakdown by property type

| Property | Number of applications |
|----------------|------------------------|
| 1 Bed Flat | 3 |
| 2 Bed Flat | 18 |
| 2 Bed Bungalow | 1 |
| 2 Bed House | 4 |
| 3 Bed House | 33 |
| 4 Bed House | 6 |

Right to Buy Process

There are strict guidelines in legislation to ensure that application is process in an efficient and concise manner. There are penalties if these timescales are not achieved.

Risks

Based on 60 applications, and timescales are delay by 4 weeks and an average rent of £100.00, there would be potential total compensation of £24,000 for all the applications (£400 per application). We are mitigating this risk by dealing with applications in date order, and tenants that are living in houses, as offer letters need to be issued within 8 weeks of the admin or deny stage.

A simple summary of the stages is shown below:

| Stage | Timescale | Summary | Risks |
|-------------------|--|---------------------------------|---|
| Step one | 4 weeks | Admit or deny | Increased chase up calls |
| Step Two | 8-12 weeks | Gathering information for Offer | Delay in offer letter can result in tenant claiming 1 weeks rent for each week of delay |
| Step three | From date of application 8 weeks house or 12 if flat | Offer letter | Delay in offer letter can result in tenant claiming 1 weeks rent for each week of delay |

| | | | |
|------------------|--------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Step Four | No timescale | Conveyancing could take 9-12 months. | Impact on one legal volume of applications. Increase level of complaints Review process with one legal |
|------------------|--------------|--------------------------------------|--|

Checks are being undertaken as normal to ensure applications can proceed. Applicants have been advised due to the volume of tenants asking to buy that potentially that there could be a delay in responding.

The focus in the short term will be application from tenant living in houses as there is a shorter timescale to produce the offer letter and there is no service charge information that would need to be included in the offer letter.

Each of the stages relies on other department of the Council to provide information or checks to ensure that the Right to Buy application is process correctly and in accordance with legislation. The increase of application will have impacts on all the departments that provide this information and ensure that each of the milestones are achieved.

All departments have been informed of the potential increase in workload.

Impact on departments

| Service | Impact | Risks | Solutions |
|-----------------------------|--|---|--|
| Legal | Increased referrals from us and other council's | Unable to meet timescales | Possible outsourcing to solicitors |
| Housing | Tenancy checks by Housing Officers | Checks not completed correctly | Administration officers completing checks |
| Counter Fraud Unit | Fraud checks - increased referrals from us and other council's | Team provides services for several councils | No solutions specific service |
| Leasehold | Increased workload | Level of services to leaseholders | Focus on Right to Buy activity |
| Asset and Investment | This is required for S125 notices in relation to Major works and Service charges for Leasehold estimates | Due to the complexity of information this process is time consuming to ensure data is correct and can only be done by the Technical and Investment Team | Cost profiles need to be the focus for the Technical and Investment Team Repair summary completed by leasehold team |

| | | | |
|-----------------|------------------|--|---|
| Property | Valuation report | Valuation process and creation of report takes half a day per property | Possible outsourcing to RICS surveyor Any previous RTB template will be used |
|-----------------|------------------|--|---|

Current Position

An overview of applications as at the 14th January 2025 are as follows: (Due to the nature of the application process the application numbers will fluctuate).

| | |
|---|---|
| Applications live prior to October 24 | 48 |
| RTB Completions in 2024 | 15 |
| Value of properties | Total value £2,328,000.00 Discount of £1,196,654.50 Total funds received £1,131,345.50 |
| Applications received November 24 | 65 |
| Applications received in December 24 and January 25 | 2 |
| Applications refused in December and January 25 | 4 |
| Applications withdrawn in December 24 and January 25 | 9 |
| RTB Completions in December 24 and January 25 | 0 |
| Value of receipt from sales between December 24 and January 25 | £0 |
| Tenants accepted and solicitors processing sale | 16 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Number of applications at application stage (checks) | 34 |
| Applications at Valuation stage | 30 |
| Offers issued in December 24 and January 25 | 7 |
| Offers failed to be accepted overall | 9 |
| Total live applications January 25 (Including with solicitors, pending checks, and at valuation stages, offers issued) | 106 |

Recycling of Grant

| | |
|---|-------|
| Potential sale/receipt value if 50 RTB application completed *Based on assumption of £97k per property receipt | £4.8m |
|---|-------|

Update on Sales receipt and recycling of grant

Confirmation of recycling of Right to Buy receipt as highlighted in Guidance Retained Right to Buy receipts and their use for replacement supply: guidance Updated 30 July 2024. The updated guidance now includes the increased flexibilities on the use of RTB receipts which were announced on 30 July 2024 for the two financial years 2024-25 and 2025-26:

- The maximum permitted contribution from RTB receipts to replacement affordable housing has increased from 50% to 100%.
- RTB receipts will be permitted to be used with section 106 contributions.
- The cap on the percentage of replacements delivered as acquisitions each year (currently 50%) has been lifted.

Capital Receipts of £4,125k this year for 100% of Acquired Properties costs. This includes a brought forward amount of £1,908k and RTB Receipts of £2,217k for 24/25.

Any extra amounts would be carried forward to 25/26 to spend on Acquired Properties.

Future impact

It is likely that following the initial rush, that future RTB application will decrease significantly. However, the impact of having as many applications in one month as two years will have an immediate impact in 25/26.

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| Asset and Investment | Reduction in future liabilities and older stock that would need investment for carbonization | £1.2million (based on £20k investment per property for 60 sales) |
| Rental income | Reduction of rental income | £600k per year |
| Housing Stock | Reduced stock levels | 55 -70 homes out available for rental |
| Leaseholder stock | Increased number of leaseholders | 16 New leaseholders |
| Revenue from Disposal/RTB sale | Potentially large income in 25/26 financial year. CBC can retain 100% of these sales receipts for applications received after the announcement. | £4.8 million (after discount). This is an estimate based on £97.5k sales receipt per property |

*Above information based on assumption of 50 sales, with valuation of £200k property. Maximum discount £102.5k

Future of RTB

The Right to Buy/Acquire has been suspended or removed in Wales and Scotland. It is unclear if any future removal of the RTB will come into effect in England, however it is predicted that further constraints will be introduced to make it difficult to purchase under this scheme in the future.

Contact Officer: Matt Ward – Head of Housing Services
 Email: Matt.Ward@cbh.org

Briefing Note

Committee name: Cabinet Housing Committee

Date: 19 February 2025

**Responsible officer: Claire Hughes, Director of Governance and Customer Services,
Claire.Hughes@cheltenham.gov.uk**

This note provides information to keep Members informed of matters relating to the work of the Cabinet or a committee but where no decisions from Members are needed.

If Members have questions relating to matters shown, they are asked to contact the officer indicated.

Government Strategy and Announcements

- a. The government has confirmed that Awaab's Law will come into force in October 2025, with the legislation expanding through a number of phases over the years that follow, to allow social landlords to fully prepare and test the enforcement methods for compliance.
 - October 2025 – landlords will be required to fix damp and mould hazards within fixed timescales and repair all emergency hazards within 24 hours
 - 2026 – the law will cover a wider range of hazards including excess cold and heat, structural collapse, fire risks and hygiene hazards.
 - 2027 – the law will apply to all remaining hazards within the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), excluding overcrowding.

Earlier in the month a government official speaking at the National Housing Maintenance Forum conference acknowledged that it had "*vastly underestimated*" the cost of implementing Awaab's Law. They revealed that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) had received over 1,000 responses to its consultation on the legislation.

The announcement has been met with some concerns, with Shelter warning that delaying the full legislation until 2027 could lead to tenant deaths and the Local Government Association (LGA) calling on the government to provide adequate funding to help councils reach compliance with the new requirements. The Housing Ombudsman has also warned that landlords should not wait until the legal deadlines to act.

- b. The Renters' Rights Bill has successfully passed its' first stage in the House of Commons, and began review by the House of Lords on 15 January. The bill aims to improve the current private rental system to provide greater security and stability so renters can stay in their homes for longer, build lives in their communities and avoid the risk of homelessness. The reading in the House of Commons led to a number of amendments, including:
- Landlords will no longer be able to demand multiple months' rent in advance as a condition for securing a home. There is currently no limit on how much rent a landlord can request upfront, and some renters are being asked to pay up to a years' worth of rent, amounting to thousands of pounds before even agreeing a tenancy.
 - A new rule to protect students which will stop tenants from feeling pressured to sign a lease for a new house so early into an academic year, discouraging landlords from pressuring students into early commitments. Students will no longer be locked into an agreement more than six months in advance of moving in
 - Closing potential loopholes in rent repayment orders (RROs), ensuring superior landlords can be liable for RROs if an offence has been committed even if the rent was not paid directly to them, but through an agent or intermediate landlord.
 - Fees paid by landlords will directly fund the creation and work of the private rented sector Ombudsman, providing renters and landlords with access to an effective and fair dispute resolution service.
- c. The government has announced an additional change to the Right to Buy (RtB) cost floor rule. This rule reduces the discount buyers receive if the home has recently been purchased or built by the landlord, or if they have spent money on repairing or maintaining it. Where the cost floor is higher than the sale price or higher than the market value, the discount amount is adjusted. For all RtB applications before the 21 November 2024 this was reviewed over a 10-year period (or 15-years for homes build or acquired by the landlord after 2 April 2012). Going forwards the cost floor will be considered over a 30-year period instead (except for assured tenants of registered providers buying under the Preserved Right to Buy legislation which is always considered over 15-years, regardless of when it was built).

Housing Minister, Matthew Pennycook MP also confirmed in response to a written question that 65% of Right to Buy (RtB) receipts must be used for replacement social housing, while the remaining 35% can be spent on any capital purpose by local authorities. The Chancellor had announced in 2024's Autumn Budget that councils no longer need to return any portion of RtB receipts to central government, allowing them to retain full control over sales proceeds. Pennycook's response clarifies that approximately two-thirds of these receipts are ringfenced for replacement social housing to ensure councils reinvest a significant proportion into maintaining and expanding affordable housing stock. Further reforms to the RtB framework are being considered following consultation.

- d. At the end of January the Government published a new white paper outlining proposals to streamline the infrastructure planning system for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) in England. The white paper seeks to facilitate the construction of 1.5 million homes during the current Parliament, improve economic

growth and improve progress on clean energy targets. The white paper sets out legislative changes to the Planning Act 2008 and stakeholders have been encouraged to provide feedback on the proposals, which will inform the forthcoming Planning and Infrastructure Bill.

- e. The government has announced plans to empower local councils across the country to buy cheaper land through the use of Compulsory Purchase Orders. The proposed changes mean that local authorities and other public bodies, including Homes England, will be able to directly take control of vacant and derelict land from landowners paying a fair price rather than inflated 'hope value' costs if the purchase is in the public interest. 'Hope value' estimates the cost land could be worth if developed on in the future which can lead to lengthy disputes. The proposed changes are now being consulted on and include proposals that aim to speed-up decision making, reduce the cost of the process and ensure the compensation paid to landowners is fair. The consultation will close on 13 February with responses used to inform the forthcoming Planning and Infrastructure Bill.
- f. The government have also launched a 12-week national consultation on land use to ensure that the delivery of 1.5 million homes and essential infrastructure aligns with food security and environmental priorities. The Land Use Framework will be published as part of the Plan for Change later this year and will aid decision-makers through the use of advanced mapping and spatial planning to guide local and national policies. The consultation will seek input from farmers, landowners, businesses and environmental groups.
- g. The government consultation on the rent settlement ended on the 23 December and, whilst feedback is still being analysed, some key initial messages have emerged from the responses:
 - A 10-Year Rent Settlement: the current proposal for a five-year CPI+1% rent settlement is welcomed but considered insufficient to provide the long-term stability required by the sector. It has also suggested that this settlement should be enshrined in law which would mean any changes to the policy would require approval in parliament and provide an opportunity for scrutiny and debate.
 - Reintroduction of Rent Convergence: the policy, which ended in 2015/2016 was intended to gradually align social housing rents to ensure people pay similar rents for similar properties (whilst remaining below market rates). It has been estimated that this could increase rent income by £11.6 billion for local authorities and £10.7 billion for housing associations over 10 years.
 - Holistic reviews of housing costs, funding mechanism and policy reform
 - Energy Efficiency Integration: it has been suggested that rents could be linked to energy efficiency of homes to incentivise retrofitting while ensuring tenants in less efficient homes do not bear disproportionately high utility costs.
- h. The government has removed UK Armed Forces veterans from local connection or residency requirements for social housing to increase their access to housing support regardless of where they have lived. The changes to the regulations will eliminate the five-year local connection requirement to address the unique challenges veterans face in establishing ties to specific areas.

- i. Following an evidence session on the 7 January the Chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government (HCLG) Committee, Florence Eshalomi MP, wrote to Angela Rayner MP (Secretary of State for MHCLG). The letter raises concerns about:
- The continuing Local Housing Allowance (LHA) freeze and whether it will mean more families are unable to afford rent and contribute to increased homelessness. They asked whether an equality impact assessment had been carried out before the decision was made. They also asked if a broader impact assessment had been conducted on the LHA freezes and increased National Insurance (NI) contributions and the impact these will have on funding adult social care.
 - Further detail on the planned legislation the government is considering to increase the pace of building remediation and implement the Grenfell Inquiry recommendations, including the timetable for the legislations introduction. The letter also asked what action the government is taking to ensure the £600m pledged by developers towards remediation is actually delivered.
 - How many of the government's 1.5 million homes target will be wheelchair accessible and whether the provisions in the Equality Act 2010 to address the shortage of accessible housing will be implemented.
 - The committee also noted that no response had been received to its earlier report on the financial pressures on housing providers and risks undermining the sustainability of the sector.

The committee requested a response to the issues raised in the letter by 26 February.

- j. The HCLG Committee also recently launched a new inquiry into land value capture (LVC) and its potential role in funding essential public infrastructure and delivering the government's target of 1.5 million new homes. The inquiry will explore how policies that capture increases in land value can be reformed to better support affordable housing, local services, and infrastructure development. The inquiry will consider whether existing mechanisms such as planning permission, the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and section 106 agreements are effective in capturing land value for public benefit. Written evidence can be submitted until the 5 March with public evidence sessions expected to begin later that month.
- k. In response to a written question Housing Minister, Matthew Pennycook MP, stated that the government will outline details of the next phase of investment to succeed the 2021-26 Affordable Homes Programme during the upcoming multi-year Spending Review due to be carried out in 2025. The Minister confirmed that the roles of local authorities, including unitary councils, in engaging with new funding for social and affordable housing are under consideration and will also be included in the Review.

Regulator of Social Housing (RSH)

- l. The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) published its 2024 Global Accounts report in January revealing that social housing providers in England have been significantly impacted financially by substantial investments in repairs, maintenance and remediation work on existing homes. The accounts, which cover the period until 31

March 2024, showed that total expenditure on repairs and maintenance reached a record £8.8 billion, marking a 13% (£1 billion) increase from the previous year and a 55% (£3.1 billion) rise compared to the pre-pandemic level in 2020. This increased spending is attributed to a focused effort on improving tenants' homes, including fire remediation, building safety enhancements and energy efficiency measures. Despite this the sector also delivered 54k new social homes - a 3% increase on the previous year and surpassing pre-pandemic numbers. The financial pressure of remediation work is also shown in the underlying surplus, which has fallen from £2.2 billion to £1.6 billion – the lowest level since the RSH began collecting this data in 2018.

Will Perry, Director of Strategy at RSH, said: *“The sector as a whole has so far proven resilient as it grapples with competing financial pressures, managing to stabilise operating margins this year while investing record amounts on existing homes and building much-needed new homes. However, forecasts indicate this could become more challenging in the future as rising levels of debt and cost of capital, as well as sustained high levels of investment in existing stock, impact providers’ surpluses. As these challenges intensify, providers must monitor and mitigate risks, including alerting us of any material issues. We will take action if we have concerns about a landlord’s viability. We know that this continued close scrutiny is key to maintaining investor confidence, as well as protecting tenants and providing new homes across the country.”*

Housing Ombudsman

m. The Housing Ombudsman (HO) has published an evaluation of its Spotlight report on Knowledge and Information Management (KIM), assessing how 50 landlords have implemented recommendations and sharing practical examples of how others can also adopt these improvements. The original report, released in May 2023, made 21 recommendations. The evaluation sets out some of the key changes landlords have made in response to the recommendations, as well as the main areas where they have faced barriers or challenges. Key findings from the analysis includes:

- 26% of respondents said they were having issues accessing the information required to inform decision making, compared with 56% in the original survey in 2022
- Of these respondents, 81% said issues related to accessing information impacted on their ability to meet complaint handling timescales
- Most respondents cited poor quality or vague information, and databases not synchronising or talking to each other as the main barriers – both 19%
- 89% of those that had undergone system changes following the report had experienced positive improvements
- 80% of respondents reported that KIM was either very or quite important to their organisation.

The report comes as the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) have also launched a new campaign called the Ripple Effect campaign, aiming to help social landlords protect residents’ data. Recognising that residents are often at higher risk when data breaches happen the ICO have produced new resources and messaging to help frontline staff ‘stop the ripple effect’ and protect data. This includes best

practice around data handling, updating systems and minimising the risk of human error.

- n. The HO has published its latest report – ‘Learning from Severe Maladministration’. Based on 35 investigations, the report highlights systemic failings in how social landlords handle requests for essential home adaptations, with significant delays, poor communication with vulnerable residents, and failures to comply with Equality Act 2010 obligations. The report concludes that social landlords must do more to ensure vulnerable residents can live safely and independently in their homes and that poor communication and maladministration doesn’t continue to cause significant distress for many tenants.
- o. The HO has announced that it will release its first Good Practice guidance later this year, with an emphasis on improving relationship management between landlords and residents. This initiative stems from new powers the HO has gained through the Social Housing (Regulation) Act, which aims to improve effective communication and rebuild trust where relationships have broken down. The decision to focus on relationship management was strongly supported in a consultation conducted last year, with feedback from 163 stakeholders, including landlords, residents, and other key participants.

Research and Campaigns

- p. Three months after the Public Accounts Committee launched an inquiry into homelessness, it has published a critical report raising concerns about the lack of a clear strategy for homelessness prevention in England, insufficient consideration of impact when setting Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates, the overreliance on temporary accommodation and the dwindling and increasingly expensive-to-maintain housing stock. The report set out a number of recommendations to the MHCLG. The chair of the Committee, Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, wrote in the report’s conclusion: *“Worryingly, there seems to be no desire to move away from an unsatisfactory short-term system, leaving local authorities attempting to save a sinking ship with a little more than a leaky bucket.”*
- q. The impact of the housing crisis was underlined when research by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Households in Temporary Accommodation released evidence that temporary accommodation has contributed to the deaths of at least 74 children in England over the last 5 years. Figures from the NHS-funded National Child Mortality Database revealed that 58 of those children were babies under the age of one. The report found that child deaths were more likely to occur when homelessness was combined with overcrowding, mould and a lack of access to safer sleep options, such as cots and Moses baskets (government guidance changed in 2024 recommending that local authorities should help homeless families to access cots for children under the age of two).

The report was published in the same week that official figures showed almost 6k households with children were being housed in B&Bs, of which almost 4k had been there for longer than the statutory 6-week limit.

- r. Surveys conducted by Southwark Council found that 91% of councils are experiencing severe financial strain, with two thirds of English councils that manage housing stock raising concerns that they will not be able to present a balanced Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget within the next 5 years. 10 councils described this risk as substantial, with 41 councils considering it as reasonably likely. Research shows that many councils may be forced to sell homes, cut back on maintenance, halt housebuilding projects or deplete their reserves before the end of the current parliament.

A spokesperson for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) said: *“We know that local government has suffered from years of short-term decisions, which is why we have already set out important steps to help them deliver the homes we need. That includes overdue reforms to the right-to-buy scheme and an extra £500m for the affordable homes programme, and we will soon set out further measures.”*

- s. Homes England confirmed that more than 200 landlords, including 70 local authorities, have signed up for the new Section 106 (s106) clearing service since it was launched in December 2024. The service was established following concerns from housebuilders that a decreasing number of social landlords were purchasing s106 properties, causing delays in private housing developments. The clearing service enables registered landlords to view information about potential acquisition opportunities regularly.
- t. Sheffield Hallam University has published a study that found that 70% of social housing tenants are only just managing to meet rent payments, despite the majority prioritising rent payments over other essential living costs. The report calls for the government to make significant changes to Universal Credit, extend the Housing Support Fund (HSF) and introduce a minimum income standard. Researchers also noted that increasing rent arrears have wider implications for housing associations, reducing their ability to invest in building new homes.

The findings come alongside a report from YouGov on behalf of Shelter that has found that 21% of people in England struggled to keep up with mortgage or rent payments last year. The survey found that 67% of people with housing costs reported at least one housing pressure over the past year – equivalent to 19.9 million people across England. This includes struggling to keep up with housing costs, having to cut back on essentials, worrying about eviction, poor insulation, damp and mould or health and safety hazards.

- u. The District Councils’ Network (DCN) has published a report arguing that district councils, which play a crucial role in housing delivery across England, need greater powers and resources to meet rising housing demand. The report highlights that waiting lists for district areas now stands at 303k households and the current housing system is failing local communities, particularly key workers, young people and older residents. It makes a number of recommendations to the government focused on increasing council-owned homes, boosting the supply of affordable housing, optimising the planning system, and making better use of existing homes.

- v. The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) has published a study that warns the government's failure to raise the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate will push an additional 90,000 families into poverty over the next year. The report estimates that almost 1m children in the UK are at risk of falling into poverty as a result of reduced government housing support, a lack of investment in social housing, and rising rents, with those in the private rented sector (PRS) experiencing a poverty rate twice as high after housing costs than those in social housing.

Contact Officer: Claire Hughes, Director of Governance and Customer Services

Email: Claire.Hughes@cheltenham.gov.uk