

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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<b>COMMITTEE</b>	Communities, Housing and Public Protection Committee
<b>DATE</b>	30 May 2024
<b>EXEMPT</b>	No
<b>CONFIDENTIAL</b>	No
<b>REPORT TITLE</b>	Council Housing Improvement Activity – May 2024
<b>REPORT NUMBER</b>	F&C/24/176
<b>DIRECTOR</b>	Eleanor Sheppard
<b>CHIEF OFFICER</b>	Stephen Booth and Jacqui McKenzie
<b>REPORT AUTHOR</b>	Stephen Booth
<b>TERMS OF REFERENCE</b>	1.1.1

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report implements a previous committee instruction to look at ideas to improve planned maintenance and capital improvement works to Council homes along with providing an update on the improvement activity being progressed within the Housing Improvement Group/Housing Board.
- 1.2 This report aims to consolidate all activity within the one report to ensure consistency across all improvement activity.

### 2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Committee:-

- 2.1 Notes that the Housing Improvement Group was replaced by the Housing Board, established on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2024 to oversee all improvement activity relating to Housing, including capital works;
- 2.2 Instructs the Executive Director Families and Communities to bring back to this Committee bi-annual reports providing oversight on Housing Improvement Activity ; and
- 2.3 Instructs the Chief Officer – Corporate Landlord to pause any new applications under the Council House buy-back scheme in light of wider resource pressures and the funding and voids impact and bring a report on the Acquisition and Disposal policy and buy-backs progress to a future meeting of this Committee, no later than 21 November 2024.

### 3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 On the 16 May 2023 the Committee considered a report by the Housing Improvement Group on Capital improvement works and in September 2023 considered a second report on planned maintenance. Links to the reports are noted below.

<http://councilcommittees.acc.gov.uk/documents/s144549/HIG%20-%20Capital%20Worksv2.pdf>

<http://councilcommittees.acc.gov.uk/documents/s148674/Planned%20maintenance%20report.pdf>

3.2 Over the last year the Housing Improvement Group has considered a number of Pilot projects designed to improve housing performance including but not limited to the following: -

<b>Improvement Activity</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
Minimum Letting standard	The minimum letting standard was reviewed and improved.
Community Walkabouts	A series of community walkabouts were established with key community individuals, staff, and Elected Members. This will be reviewed to identify improvements.
Environmental Hit Squads	A pilot project established an environmental hit squad to pro-actively react to environmental issues. Now funded solely by HRA and able to focus on areas of persistent problems. This resource can also respond to unexpected issues. This will be reviewed to consider wider and ongoing benefit.
Review of street lighting	Review of lighting level when LED's are installed across HRA areas.
Planned Maintenance Programme Development	Planned maintenance works were agreed and an initial pilot project started at Summerhill. The project has since been delayed due to RAAC resourcing. Works undertaken to date include: - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Painting to common areas</li> <li>• LED lighting replacement in common areas.</li> </ul>
Routine Housing Service Inspections	Review of housing inspection procedure to improve inspection activity throughout tenancies, prioritise inspection on a risk based approach and increase resources to support inspections and support at end of tenancies.
Stair Cleaning Pilot	Improved cleaning programme in shared blocks as test of change to see if owners and tenants would contribute to costs. 33 blocks identified. Indicative costs of £40k and no appetite from occupiers to continue. The pilot ended in June 2023.
Community Caretaker Service for multi's	Project still being progressed although posts have been difficult to fill.
Ukraine Housing project	Over 500 void properties have been made available for let.

Tenant led inspections	Programme of tenant led inspections throughout multi-storey buildings.
Multi – storey option appraisal	Option appraisal works have been undertaken including stakeholder engagement on city centre multi-storeys. These works have been put on hold whilst RAAC issues are taken forward.
Multi-storey Fire safety group	<p>The Group was established to review any actions that may have arisen from the Grenfell Public enquiry with an initial focus on improvement to fire safety in multi-storeys to improve compliance and reduce false alarms. Number of workstreams established including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvement and upgrade to fire alarm systems and panels</li> <li>• Contract management improvements</li> <li>• Signage improvements</li> <li>• Fire door upgrades</li> <li>• Significant reduction in false alarms (650 plus per annum to 100 to 150 per annum)</li> <li>• Occupier communication and behaviour work</li> </ul>

- 3.3 The planned maintenance project at Summerhill was to be used as a pilot to consider how better to engage with tenants to have works undertaken and with owners to have improvement works in common areas advanced. It has not been possible to advance these works whilst officers have considered and dealt with RAAC. This work will be progressed during late 2024.

### **Changes to organisation structure around Housing**

- 3.4 Council approved a new organisational structure in early 2024. This change sees Corporate Landlord, Housing, Education and Lifelong Learning and Children’s Social Work come together into the Families and Communities Function. This change will enable more thorough consideration of the wider determinants of health on our tenants due to the consolidation of almost all housing activity within the same directorate.
- 3.5 The re-organisation established the role of Chief Officer Housing so that far greater focus can be given to housing and tenancy management improvements and has brought housing strategy into the Housing Cluster.
- 3.6 The re-organisation also brought Facilities Management and Building Services into the Corporate Landlord Cluster. In real terms, this has reduced the number of decision makers across our housing stock and created clearer accountability.
- 3.7 Both Corporate Landlord and Housing are currently reviewing Cluster structures to ensure that the two structures ideally support the delivery of high quality housing services and are complementary.

## **Establishment of the Housing Board**

- 3.5 Officers gave consideration to how best to plan, coordinate and monitor progress around housing related activity given the number of interdependencies that exist. It was agreed that the establishment of the Housing Board, comprising Officers from Housing, Finance, Data Insights HDRCA, Corporate Landlord and Capital would be beneficial. The Board meets monthly and is chaired by the Executive Director Families and Communities. The Terms of Reference are attached as Appendix 1. This Board replaces the Housing Improvement Group previously in place.
- 3.6 The Housing Board first met on the 26<sup>th</sup> March 2024 and have agreed Terms of Reference and a process for working together including regular monitoring and focussed 'deep dives' into areas identified for improvement.
- 3.7 The Housing Board will monitor the delivery of housing related commissioning intentions and oversee performance against agreed service standards and KPIs. The Board will also lead on the delivery of the Council's response to emerging issues e.g. managing the presence of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) following the immediate response phase.

### **Progress to date**

- 3.8 The Board has agreed an iterative high level plan which will focus on the following key areas for improvement: -
- i. Co-ordination of all Housing Activity**  
Bringing together all senior officers with a housing remit to review and co-ordinate Strategy, Improvement and performance.
  
  - ii. Data Management, project evaluation and reporting**  
The systems which manage housing information including tenancy management, asset management and repairs are being reviewed as part of a wider transformation project to increase cost effectiveness and better align them. The provision of accurate data has been prioritised. Data is being consolidated through the development of a Housing Dashboard commissioned from Data Insights HDRCA. The Dashboard will enable better monitoring of trends and provide Elected Members with clear information on progress.  
  
The Health Determinants Research Collaborative has agreed to support an evaluation of Choice Based Lettings and of the Minimum Letting Standard. Both evaluations are currently being scoped and will be progressed over the coming weeks.
  
  - iii. Co-ordination of Housing Strategy**  
The Board will ensure links between the Housing Needs and Demand Assessment, the Local Housing Strategy, the HRA's Asset Management Plan and the 30 year Business plan. The Board are reviewing the specification for the Asset Management Plan and are currently procuring external expertise to assist in delivery.

**iv. Improvement to tenancy management**

The Board will review a range of improvement actions in this area and report back as these develop.

**v. Tenant Participation**

Mapping work is underway to capture all tenant engagement. This will help identify improvements and help us appropriately resource our engagement with tenants. Engagement is also planned with the Tenant Housing Service Review Group to explore findings following their review of Tenant Participation.

**vi. Stock management**

End-to-end processes for work undertaken to Housing stock, for example response repairs, planned maintenance, voids, and capital works, have been reviewed in collaboration with the Transformation Board. A refreshed process for planned maintenance is in the final stages of development.

**vii. Voids Management**

Housing voids have also been prioritised for action with ownership of the void stages agreed. Responsibilities related to housing voids are also being considered as Cluster structures are finalised for review by the Board. This will help the Housing Board collectively determine if the right structures are in place to realise improvement. A reviewed process map outlining the voids process will be tabled for consideration at the next Housing Board.

**viii. Homelessness**

The Board will review a range of improvement actions in this area and report back as these develop. Our multi agency plan focused on preventing homelessness in Aberdeen, in partnership with the Homewards programme, is captured through the development of a new stretch outcome (12) included in the refreshed LOIP.

**ix. Regulator engagement**

The Board have identified a requirement to establish a strong link with the Housing Regulator to support the Council in taking forward improvement activities but also in seeking support in areas of key challenge such as Homelessness, RAAC support and statutory compliance. The Chief Officers are meeting with the Regulator regularly to discuss these issues.

The Council are also providing monthly updates on meeting Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR) testing to the regulator.

**x. Capital Works delivery**

The Board will review a range of improvement actions in this area and report back as these develop.

**xi. New build programme**

- Summerhill New Build has now achieved Practical Completion for all blocks
- Tillydrone New Build has now achieved Practical Completion for all blocks

- Cloverhill New Build is progressing as planned
- Kaimhill New Build is nearing completion,
- Greenferns and Greenferns Landward are progressing to achieve RIBA 3 completion
- Craighill New Build is out to tender
- Kincorth New Build tender documentation is being finalised; and
- 206 Union Street works have commenced.

It is proposed that bi-annual reports of Housing Board progress be presented to this Committee to enable Members to have oversight of progress.

### **Buy-Backs**

- 3.9 The Council currently has a policy for the buy-back of former council houses. Since the policy changed in 2019 almost 1000 applications have been made and 455 properties have been purchased, with 40 in legal process and around 74 pending applications. These purchases have been supported by grant from Scottish Government, through the affordable housing supply programme which may not be available in 2024/25.

<https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/services/housing/buy-back-scheme>

- 3.10 The policy has been popular, particularly as market conditions have slowed and it has been a cost effective way to bring council housing into the stock at reasonable cost. The policy has however created a number of unintended consequences in adding demand to our voids process and has created additional workload in managing expectations when properties do not meet the criteria. The cost to put properties back into the stock has also been influenced by construction cost inflation. In making an application there are also costs to homeowners in commissioning a Home Report, Title Deeds etc.
- 3.11 Due to the budgetary changes as identified, the ongoing voids pressure and the costs on owners to make an approach officers recommend that the buy-back scheme be paused with immediate effect and a report with an updated policy be brought to a future meeting of this committee.

## **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 No financial implications have been identified at this time although this will require to be addressed in follow up reports. Proposed studies will be met by current resource.
- 4.2 Any specialised or additional resource requirement will be identified within the HRA budget setting process.

## **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations of this report. The legal implications of any future recommendations will be addressed in future reports.

## **6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising out of this report.

## 7. RISK

7.1 The assessment of risk contained within the table below is considered to be consistent with the Council's Risk Appetite Statement.

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H)  *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
<b>Strategic</b>	Quality of housing may reduce without effective maintenance, repairs, and capital improvements	Implementation of recommendations in this report.	M	yes
<b>Compliance</b>	Failure to provide quality housing will breach requirements of legislation and the Scottish Housing Regulator.	Implementation of recommendations in this report.	M	yes
<b>Operational</b>	Provision of housing is a priority for residents of Aberdeen City. Failure to ensure there is an adequate supply of good quality housing may result in people seeking to be housed elsewhere.	Implementation of recommendations in this report.	M	yes
<b>Financial</b>	None at this time	n/a	M	yes
<b>Reputationa l</b>	Failure to improve the quality of Council homes may harm the Council's reputation if the properties need repairs.	Implementation of recommendations in this report.	L	yes
<b>Environmen t / Climate</b>	Improvements to homes have a positive impact on carbon reduction. Failure to effectively implement the proposals may result in increased carbon emissions.	Implementation of recommendations in this report.	L	yes

## 8. OUTCOMES

<b><u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</u></b>	
<b>Impact of Report</b>	
<b>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</b>	The proposals will have no impact on the Council Delivery Plan.
<b>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan</b>	

Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	The proposals within this report support improved healthy life expectancy by setting out steps towards achieving improvements in the housing stock.
Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes	The proposals within this report support reducing Aberdeen's carbon emissions and improving the standard of housing by setting out steps towards achieving better quality housing.

## 9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
<b>Integrated Impact Assessment</b>	No assessment required. I confirm this has been discussed and agreed with Stephen Booth, Chief Officer Corporate Landlord on 20 May 2024.
<b>Data Protection Impact Assessment</b>	Not required
<b>Other</b>	None

## 10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

## 11. APPENDICES

**Housing Board – Terms of Reference**

## 12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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