

Public Document Pack

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Chief Officer (Governance)
Prif Swyddog (Llywodraethu)



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To: Cllr Helen Brown (Chair)

Councillors: Pam Banks, Gillian Brockley, Tina Claydon, Geoff Collett,
Rosetta Dolphin, David Evans, Ray Hughes, Dennis Hutchinson, Kevin Rush,
Dale Selvester and Linda Thew

5 October 2023

Dear Sir/Madam

NOTICE OF HYBRID MEETING
COMMUNITY & HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, 11TH OCTOBER, 2023 at 10.00 AM

Yours faithfully

Steven Goodrum
Democratic Services Manager

Please note: Attendance at this meeting is either in person in the Lord Barry Jones Council Chamber, Flintshire County Council, County Hall, Mold, Flintshire or on a virtual basis.

The meeting will be live streamed onto the Council's website. The live streaming will stop when any confidential items are considered. A recording of the meeting will also be available, shortly after the meeting at <https://flintshire.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

If you have any queries regarding this, please contact a member of the Democratic Services Team on 01352 702345.

A G E N D A

1 **APOLOGIES**

Purpose: To receive any apologies.

2 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)**

Purpose: To receive any Declarations and advise Members accordingly.

3 **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING** (Pages 5 - 14)

Report of Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator

Purpose: To consider the Forward Work Programme of the Community & Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee and to inform the Committee of progress against actions from previous meetings.

4 **BUDGET 2024/25 – STAGE 2** (Pages 15 - 20)

Report of Chief Officer (Housing and Communities), Corporate Finance Manager - Cabinet Member for Finance, Inclusion, Resilient Communities including Social Value and Procurement, Cabinet Member for Housing and Regeneration

Purpose: To review and comment on the budget pressures and cost reductions under the remit of the Committee.

5 **TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION HOMELESSNESS AUDIT - ACTION PLAN UPDATE** (Pages 21 - 36)

Report of Chief Officer (Housing and Communities) - Cabinet Member for Housing and Regeneration

Purpose: To provide a progress report on the action plan for service improvement following the audit of the Temporary Accommodation.

6 **PERFORMANCE OF THE WHQS CAPITAL PROGRAMME - ASSURANCE REPORT** (Pages 37 - 46)

Report of Chief Officer (Housing and Communities) - Cabinet Member for Housing and Regeneration

Purpose: To provide an update on progress of the Welsh Housing Quality Standards (WHQS), that the Council is delivering through its Capital Investment Programme.

7 **VOID MANAGEMENT** (Pages 47 - 48)

Report of Chief Officer (Housing and Communities) - Cabinet Member for Housing and Regeneration

Purpose: To provide a detailed update to the Committee on Void properties and the work undertaken to bring the properties back into use.

Please note that there may be a 10 minute adjournment of this meeting if it lasts longer than two hours

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COMMUNITY & HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Wednesday 11 th October, 2023
Report Subject	Forward Work Programme and Action Tracking
Report Author	Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview & Scrutiny presents a unique opportunity for Members to determine the Forward Work programme of the Committee of which they are Members. By reviewing and prioritising the Forward Work Programme Members are able to ensure it is Member-led and includes the right issues. A copy of the Forward Work Programme is attached at Appendix 1 for Members' consideration which has been updated following the last meeting.

The Committee is asked to consider, and amend where necessary, the Forward Work Programme for the Community Housing & Assets Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

The report also shows actions arising from previous meetings of the Community Housing & Assets Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the progress made in completing them. Any outstanding actions will be continued to be reported to the Committee as shown in Appendix 2.

RECOMMENDATION

1	That the Committee considers the draft Forward Work Programme and approve/amend as necessary.
2	That the Facilitator, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises.
3	That the Committee notes the progress made in completing the outstanding actions.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING
1.01	Items feed into a Committee's Forward Work Programme from a number of sources. Members can suggest topics for review by Overview & Scrutiny Committees, members of the public can suggest topics, items can be referred by the Cabinet for consultation purposes, or by County Council or Chief Officers. Other possible items are identified from the Cabinet Work Programme and the Improvement Plan.
1.02	<p>In identifying topics for future consideration, it is useful for a 'test of significance' to be applied. This can be achieved by asking a range of questions as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Will the review contribute to the Council's priorities and/or objectives?2. Is it an area of major change or risk?3. Are there issues of concern in performance?4. Is there new Government guidance of legislation?5. Is it prompted by the work carried out by Regulators/Internal Audit?6. Is the issue of public or Member concern?
1.03	In previous meetings, requests for information, reports or actions have been made. These have been summarised as action points. Following a meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee in July 2018, it was recognised that there was a need to formalise such reporting back to Overview & Scrutiny Committees, as 'Matters Arising' was not an item which can feature on an agenda.
1.04	It was suggested that the 'Action tracking' approach be trialled for the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee. Following a successful trial, it was agreed to extend the approach to all Overview & Scrutiny Committees.
1.05	The Action Tracking details including an update on progress is attached at Appendix 2.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	None as a result of this report.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	In some cases, action owners have been contacted to provide an update on their actions.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	None as a result of this report.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 – Draft Forward Work Programme Appendix 2 – Action Tracking for the Community Housing & Assets OSC.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	Minutes of previous meetings of the Committee as identified in Appendix 2. Contact Officer: Ceri Shotton Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator Telephone: 01352 702305 E-mail: ceri.shotton@flintshire.gov.uk

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	Improvement Plan: the document which sets out the annual priorities of the Council. It is a requirement of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 to set Improvement Objectives and publish an Improvement Plan.

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COMMUNITY, HOUSING & ASSETS OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME
CURRENT FWP

Date of meeting	Subject	Purpose of Report	Scrutiny Focus	Report Author
Wednesday 15th November, 2023 10am	Housing Revenue Account (HRA) 30 Year Financial Business Plan	To consider the proposed Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget for 2024/25 and the HRA Business Plan	Consultation	Chief Officer (Housing & Communities)
Wednesday 13th December, 2023 10am	Council Plan 2023-24 Mid-Year Performance Reporting	To review the levels of progress in the achievement of activities and performance levels identified in the Council Plan.	Assurance Monitoring	Chief Officer (Housing & Communities)
Wednesday 10th January, 2024 10am	Welfare Reform Update /Housing Rent Income	To provide an update on the impacts of welfare reforms and the work that is ongoing to mitigate them.	Assurance Monitoring	Service Manager - Revenues and Procurement / Service Manager (Housing Welfare and Communities)
Wednesday 7th February, 2024 10am	NEW Homes Business Plan Common Housing Register (Single Access Route to Housing - SARTH)	To consider the NEW Homes Business Plan. To provide an annual update on the Common Housing Register.	Consultation Assurance Monitoring	Strategic Housing & Program Delivery Manager Service Manager – Housing & Prevention
Wednesday 6th	Homelessness and	To provide an annual update on the	Assurance Monitoring	Service Manager – Housing

COMMUNITY, HOUSING & ASSETS OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

March, 2024 10am	Rough Sleeper Update Report	work ongoing to mitigate Homelessness and support provided to rough sleepers.		& Prevention
Wednesday 12th June, 2024 10am	Communal Heating Charges 2024/25	To consider the proposed heating charges in council properties with communal heating systems for 2024/25 prior to Cabinet approval.	Consultation	Chief Officer (Housing & Communities)
Wednesday 10th July, 2024 10am	Welfare Reform Update /Housing Rent Income	To provide an update on the impacts of welfare reforms and the work that is ongoing to mitigate them.	Assurance Monitoring	Service Manager - Revenues and Procurement / Service Manager (Housing Welfare and Communities)
Page 10	Council Plan 2023-24 Year-End Performance	To review the levels of progress in the achievement of activities and performance levels identified in the Council Plan.	Assurance Monitoring	Chief Officer (Housing & Communities)

Items to be scheduled

- **NEW Homes** – Report to be presented to a future meeting as agreed at the March 2023 meeting.
- **Gypsy and Traveller Transit Site** - To report to the Committee on a Gypsy and Traveller Transit Site in the County – moved from 17th May meeting to be scheduled to a new date.
- **Food Poverty Update** – moved from 17th May meeting to be scheduled to a new date.
- **All Member workshop on resettlement and asylum**
- **Car Parking at Council properties** – as suggested by Cllr Dennis Hutchinson at 12.07.23 meeting
- **Housing Management Policy** – Final Policy to be brought back to the Committee later in the year – as suggested at 12.07.23 meeting
- **Rent Income Pilot Scheme** – As suggested at 12.07.23 meeting
- **De-carbonisation Strategy** – workshop for Members as discussed at 12.07.2023 meeting

COMMUNITY, HOUSING & ASSETS OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

REGULAR ITEMS

Page Month	Item	Purpose of Report	Responsible / Contact Officer
Quarterly / Annual	Performance Reporting	To consider performance outturns for improvement targets against directorate indicators.	Chief Officer (Housing and Assets)
Six monthly	Welfare Reform Update – including Universal Credit	To update Members on the impact of Welfare Reform and the cost to the Council.	Service Manager – Housing, Welfare and communities
Six monthly	Update on North East Wales Homes & Property Management	To update Members on the work of the North East Wales Homes & Property Management	Housing Strategy Manager
Annually – September	WHQS Capital Programme – Delivery review update	To provide an update on progress of the Welsh Housing Quality Standards (WHQS), that the Council is delivering through its Capital Investment Programme. Report to include information around the use of local labour and number of apprentices and school leavers.	Chief Officer (Housing and Assets)

COMMUNITY, HOUSING & ASSETS OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Month	Item	Purpose of Report	Responsible / Contact Officer
Six monthly	Update on Housing Rent Income	To provide an update on rent collection and current arrear levels	Revenues Manager

ACTION TRACKING FOR THE COMMUNITY & HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting Date	Agenda item	Action Required	Action Officer(s)	Action taken	Timescale
12.07.2023	4. Forward Work Programme and Action Tracking	In reference to the length of time it has taken for the DWP to respond to the committee's letter sent in February, it was resolved that the local MP's should be contacted in order that they can raise the issue with the Minister.	Ceri Shotton	Response received via Mark Tami MP and circulated to the Committee via e-mail on 03.10.2023	Completed
13.09.2023	5. Disabled Adaptations Policy	Councillor Rosetta Dolphin asked how many Occupational Therapists were employed in Social Services. Jen Griffiths agreed to get this information from the Social Services Portfolio and share with the Committee following the meeting.	Jen Griffiths	Information e-mailed to Community & Housing OSC Members on 26.09.23.	Completed
13.09.2023	6. Homelessness Budget Pressures	That the Chair write to the Welsh Government, on behalf of the Committee, to express its concern around the financial implications to the Local Authority following changes to the Housing Wales Act 2014 (HWA 2014) and the need for appropriate levels of resource and support to be provided to the Local Authority.	Ceri Shotton Martin Cooil Cllr Helen Brown	Letter being drafted to share with Chair.	On-going

ACTION TRACKING

APPENDIX 2

13.09.2023	9. Void Management	<p>Following requests for information on the following areas to be included in future Void Management reports, it was agreed that consideration of the information included in future reports be undertaken during the meeting with the Chair and Vice-Chair around the FWP:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Details of how many properties sent back from each district area; • Breakdown of transfers from Allocation Team to show what the transfers were for and where they transferred to; • Information on how properties are classed as low demand and high demand; and • Low demand properties, per ward. 	Sean O'Donnell / Ceri Shotton	Will be considered at meeting between officers, Chair and Vice-Chair on 11.10.23.	On-going.
13.09.2023	9. Void Management	In response to a question from Cllr Dale Selvester, Sean O'Donnell agreed to liaise with David Barnes around the total loss of Council Tax for those properties that had been empty for over 6 months.	Sean O'Donnell	Information requested and will be shared when available.	On-going



COMMUNITY & HOUSING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Wednesday, 11 th October 2023
Report Subject	Budget 2024/25 – Stage 2
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Housing and Regeneration Cabinet Member for Finance, Inclusion, Resilient Communities including Social Value & Procurement
Report Author	Corporate Finance Manager and Chief Officer (Housing & Communities)
Type of Report	Strategic

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As in past years, the budget for 2024/25 will be built up in stages.

The first stage has been concluded by the establishment of a robust baseline of cost pressures together with Member workshops to ensure Members had a full understanding of service budgets including current cost pressures and risks.

In September, Cabinet and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee received an updated position on the budget for 2024/25, which showed that we had a minimum additional revenue budget requirement estimated at £32.386m.

The report also provided an update on the work undertaken by portfolios over the Summer to review pressures, the outturn position and to consider further proposals for efficiencies to be considered as part of strategy to balance the budget.

The review by Overview and Scrutiny Committees throughout October and November of budget pressures and proposed efficiency options will form Stage 2 of the budget setting process, alongside the receipt of the Welsh Local Government Provisional Settlement on 20th December - Stage 3 will be the identification of the full set of budget solutions required to ensure a legal and balanced budget is set.

A further meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee (open to all members) will be held on 16th November 2023 which will summarise the work undertaken so far to meet the budget gap.

The details of the cost pressures and proposed efficiency options for the Housing and Communities Portfolio, which fall within the remit of this Committee are included within

this report. The Committee is invited to review and comment on these cost pressures, proposed efficiencies and associated risks.

The Committee is also invited to advise on any additional areas of cost efficiency it believes should be explored further and the reasoning behind the request.

A slide presentation will be made at the meeting.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	Review and comment on the Housing and Communities portfolio's cost pressures.
2	Review and comment on the Housing and Communities portfolio's options to reduce budgets.
3	To advise on any areas of cost efficiency it believes should be explored further.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE BUDGET POSITION 2024/25
1.01	The first stage for budget setting was concluded in September where we established a robust baseline of cost pressures. The review by Overview and Scrutiny Committees throughout October and November of these cost pressures and proposed efficiency options will form part of stage 2 with stage 3 being the identification of the full set of budget solutions required to ensure a legal and balanced budget is set.
1.02	<p>In September, Cabinet and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee received an updated position on the budget for 2024/25, which showed that we had a minimum additional revenue budget requirement estimated at £32.386m.</p> <p>The report also provided an update on the work undertaken by portfolios over the Summer to review pressures, the outturn position and to consider further proposals for efficiencies to be considered as part of strategy to balance the budget.</p>
1.03	<p>The purpose of this report is to set out in detail the cost pressures and proposed efficiency options for the Housing and Communities portfolio, for consideration by the members of this Committee.</p> <p>Given the scale of the potential budget gap all services have been tasked with generating options to manage their service with a reduced budget. These options are included in the report for consideration by members of this Committee.</p>

1.04	<p>Housing and Communities – Cost pressures and proposals for budget reductions</p> <p>These are set out in the paragraphs which follow.</p>																					
1.05	<p><u>Table 1: Housing and Communities – Cost Pressures</u></p> <table border="1" data-bbox="288 412 1409 689"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="288 412 1129 450">Cost Pressure Title</th> <th data-bbox="1129 412 1289 450">£m</th> <th data-bbox="1289 412 1409 450">Note</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="288 450 1129 488"></td> <td data-bbox="1129 450 1289 488"></td> <td data-bbox="1289 450 1409 488"></td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="288 488 1129 526">Strategic Decisions</td> <td data-bbox="1129 488 1289 526"></td> <td data-bbox="1289 488 1409 526">.</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="288 526 1129 564">Homelessness demand</td> <td data-bbox="1129 526 1289 564">2.000</td> <td data-bbox="1289 526 1409 564">1.</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="288 564 1129 602">Benefits – Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS)</td> <td data-bbox="1129 564 1289 602">0.518</td> <td data-bbox="1289 564 1409 602">2.</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="288 602 1129 640"></td> <td data-bbox="1129 602 1289 640"></td> <td data-bbox="1289 602 1409 640"></td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="288 640 1129 689">Total Cost Pressures</td> <td data-bbox="1129 640 1289 689">2.518</td> <td data-bbox="1289 640 1409 689"></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Notes:</p> <p>1. Strategic Decision – Homelessness demand (£2.000m)</p> <p>Following significant growth in demand for emergency accommodation for homeless persons and families which commenced in October 2022 and has continued significantly from the start of 2023, there is a significant projected overspend of over £2.7m within the Housing Solutions service in 2023/24, A number of potential mitigation measures are currently being considered with the intention to accelerate the rate at which homeless persons and families can be moved on from emergency accommodation into permanent accommodation. The key demand influences include the shortage of affordable supply in the private rented sector together with increasing numbers of no-fault evictions and an expectation of future growth arising from mortgage repossessions.</p> <p>2. Strategic Decision – Benefits – Council Tax Reduction Scheme £0.518m</p> <p>Although there is currently a small projected underspend for the CTRS in 2023/24, a 2024/25 budget pressure exists due to the expected impact on the current cost base of the level of increase in Council Tax to be determined for 2024/25.</p>	Cost Pressure Title	£m	Note				Strategic Decisions		.	Homelessness demand	2.000	1.	Benefits – Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS)	0.518	2.				Total Cost Pressures	2.518	
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1.06	<p>Potential budget solutions/budget savings workstreams</p> <p>Following the Member workshop held on 31st July, a number of workstreams were established to seek to identify potential solutions to reducing the current budget gap. As part of the workstream to review reserves and balances, an opportunity has been identified which may enable removal of the pressure item for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.</p>																					
1.07	<p>Budget Reduction option for consideration</p> <p>Following approval of carry forward of underspends against the budget for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme in previous years there is currently an amount of £0.877m in reserves being held as a buffer against potential future pressures. It is considered that the CTRS pressure sum for £0.518m can be funded in 2024/25 only by use of £0.518m from the reserve. It should be noted</p>																					

	however that a knock-on impact of this approach would be to increase the amount of the pressure identified for the CTRS within the MTFS for 2025/26.																		
1.08	<p>Budget Timeline</p> <p>An outline of the local budget timeline at this stage is set out in the table below:</p> <p><u>Table 5: Budget Timeline</u></p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Date</th> <th>Event</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>October/November 2023</td> <td>Overview and Scrutiny Committees</td> </tr> <tr> <td>19 December 2023</td> <td>Welsh Government Draft Budget</td> </tr> <tr> <td>19 December 2023</td> <td>Cabinet</td> </tr> <tr> <td>20 December 2023</td> <td>Provisional Local Government Settlement</td> </tr> <tr> <td>11 January 2024</td> <td>Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee</td> </tr> <tr> <td>16 January 2024</td> <td>Cabinet – Budget Review</td> </tr> <tr> <td>20 February 2024</td> <td>Cabinet and Council – Final Budget Setting</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1 March 2024</td> <td>WG Final Budget/Settlement</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Date	Event	October/November 2023	Overview and Scrutiny Committees	19 December 2023	Welsh Government Draft Budget	19 December 2023	Cabinet	20 December 2023	Provisional Local Government Settlement	11 January 2024	Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee	16 January 2024	Cabinet – Budget Review	20 February 2024	Cabinet and Council – Final Budget Setting	1 March 2024	WG Final Budget/Settlement
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1 March 2024	WG Final Budget/Settlement																		

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	<p>Revenue: the revenue implications for the 2024/25 budget are set out in the report.</p> <p>Capital: there are no new implications for the approved capital programme for either the current financial year or for future financial years – the capital programme will be subject to a separate report</p>

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cabinet • Member Budget Briefings July and October 2023 • Specific Overview and Scrutiny Committees • Corporate Resource Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meetings

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	As set out in the report.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	None.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MTFs and Budget 2024/25 Cabinet Report July 2023 • MTFs and Budget 2024/25 Cabinet Report September 2023 • Member Briefing Slides

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	<p>Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS): a written strategy which gives a forecast of the financial resources which will be available to a Council for a given period, and sets out plans for how best to deploy those resources to meet its priorities, duties and obligations.</p> <p>Revenue: a term used to describe the day to day costs of running Council services and income deriving from those services. It also includes charges for the repayment of debt, including interest, and may include direct financing of capital expenditure.</p> <p>Budget: a statement expressing the Council's policies and service levels in financial terms for a particular financial year. In its broadest sense it includes both the revenue budget and capital programme and any authorised amendments to them.</p> <p>Budget Requirement: The amount of resource required to meet the Councils financial priorities in a financial year.</p> <p>Forecast: An estimate of the level of resource needed in the future based on a set of demands or priorities.</p> <p>Capital: Expenditure on the acquisition of non-current assets or expenditure which extends the useful life of an existing asset.</p> <p>Revenue Support Grant: the annual amount of money the Council receives from Welsh Government to fund what it does alongside the Council Tax and other income the Council raises locally. Councils can decide how to use this grant across services although their freedom to allocate according to local choice can be limited by guidelines set by Government.</p> <p>Specific Grants: An award of funding from a grant provider (e.g. Welsh Government) which must be used for a pre-defined purpose.</p> <p>Welsh Local Government Association: the representative body for unitary councils, fire and rescue authorities and national parks authorities in Wales.</p> <p>Financial Year: the period of 12 months commencing on 1 April.</p> <p>Local Government Funding Formula: The system through which the annual funding needs of each council is assessed at a national level and under which</p>

each council's Aggregate External Finance (AEF) is set. The revenue support grant is distributed according to that formula.

Aggregate External Finance (AEF): The support for local revenue spending from the Welsh Government and is made up of formula grant including the revenue support grant and the distributable part of non-domestic rates.

Provisional Local Government Settlement: The Provisional Settlement is the draft budget for local government published by the Welsh Government for consultation. The Final Local Government Settlement is set following the consultation.

Funding Floor: a guaranteed level of funding for councils who come under the all-Wales average change in the annual Settlement. A floor has been a feature of the Settlement for many years.



COMMUNITY AND HOUSING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Wednesday 11 th October 2023
Report Subject	Temporary Accommodation Homelessness Audit – Action Plan Update
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Housing and Regeneration
Report Author	Chief Officer (Housing and Communities)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an update on progress with the Temporary Accommodation Audit Action Plan. The audit was presented to Communities and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee in February 2022 and Governance and Audit Committee in March 2022. The report was categorised as a red audit report and highlighted areas for improvement.

An action plan was developed in response to the internal audit and the Council's Audit Team will be commencing a follow up review of the service to assess progress against the action plan. Communities and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested an update in advance of this follow up audit work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That the Committee note the contents of the report ahead of the follow up audit work to be completed by the Councils Audit Team.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION HOMELESSNESS AUDIT RESPONSE
1.01	<p>Background to Temporary Accommodation</p> <p>Temporary Accommodation is ‘interim housing’ provided to people who are homeless (singles / couples / families) and are owed duties under the Housing Wales Act (2014) by Flintshire County Council. The service was previously delivered through the Homeless Team within the Housing and Prevention Service and had a small core team of two staff and a senior manager supporting operational delivery. The team currently report to the manager for the Housing Register, however, as part of the Housing and Prevention Service restructure, the ‘interim housing’ function will be managed through a newly formed Homefinder Team and the Housing Register Manager will assume the role of Homefinder Manager with responsibility for:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Housing Advice2) Common Housing Register3) Interim Housing4) Move On <p>The established portfolio of properties for ‘interim housing’ is a mix of houses of multiple occupation (HMO), self-contained flats and houses which are leased from private landlords, along with a small number of Council HRA properties. However, due to additional demands on the homeless service, and like the majority of Welsh Local Authorities, a significant number of bed and breakfast and hotel placements are now necessary to meet demand.</p> <p>As of August 2023, there were a total of 220 homeless households assisted with ‘interim housing’. 187 of these had a 1 bed need and 33 were families.</p> <p>138 households were placed in bed and breakfast and hotel settings and five households within other holidays type lets. A number of these are secured by way of block bookings but in recent months the growth in demand has required an increase in one off booking arrangements. Whilst this present challenges operationally with securing accommodation, it avoids the Council being locked into higher levels of block bookings with hoteliers as there is no commitment when rooms are not required. Hotels and holiday lets are classed as emergency housing, and occupation is via a licence agreement.</p> <p>At the end of August 2023 there were 17 homeless households housed within Council housing properties and 34 households within private sector leased accommodation. These properties are secured through a lease or management agreement and then licenses for occupation or occupation contracts as per the Renting Homes Wales Act 2016 are issued to those people who reside in the properties. Properties are dispersed across the county and often located within or close to larger towns in Flintshire to</p>

	<p>enable access to local public services and community infrastructure for homeless households.</p> <p>The Glanrafon Homeless Hub provides accommodation and support for 26 single people and is routinely at 100% occupancy. Residents are issued licence agreements for this accommodation.</p> <p>Demand for homeless accommodation has grown significantly during the calendar year. This can in part be attributed to changes in legislation with the introduction of the 11th category of ‘Priority Need for Rough Sleepers’ (and those at risk of rough sleeping), the cost-of-living crisis, increases in people’s complexity of needs linked to the established priority needs categories and an increasingly difficult private rented sector which is unaffordable for many, and which has significantly reduced supply.</p> <p>Demand is likely to continue to grow in the short to medium term, and there are limited homes to meet the needs of homeless households.</p>
1.02	<p>The Audit Findings</p> <p>As outlined in the audit report shared with Overview and Scrutiny Committee in February 2022 the key findings of the audit were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The service embraced the change in legislation in response to the COVID 19 pandemic to ensure no individual was homeless and sleeping on the street. • A Temporary Accommodation Policy was not in place to provide guidance on how the service objectives will be achieved. • Processes were not in place to provide guidance on how to deal with refused offers for permanent accommodation, to oversee rent income, arrears and write off, or to monitor contract agreements. • Management information is limited and does not demonstrate effective monitoring of service delivery performance. • The Open Housing System was not being utilised to manage stock, tenancies, repair work or rental income to be able to effectively deliver on service objectives. • Lack of evidence of management information being used to inform decision making and service planning. • Quality of data underpinning risk indicators may not be reliable. • Decision making controls are not documented or evidenced as operating consistently.
1.03	<p>Responding to the Audit Findings</p> <p>A detailed service improvement plan was developed to pick up on all the actions required to deliver on the audit recommendations with a stronger focus placed on the core principles of housing management, support for those in interim housing and move on options in line with the principles of Rapid Rehousing.</p> <p>Policy, procedures, and systems improvements were all key elements of the response to the audit alongside a move away from single person dependency, greater transparency and accountability for decision making and the improved use of data within the day-to-day operational management of interim housing and service planning.</p>

	<p>A copy of the audit action plan as updated at the end of September 2023, is attached to this report as Appendix 1.</p> <p>Whilst progress has been made on all actions there have been significant challenges impacting on the delivery of the action plan and some completion dates have been pushed back. The reasons for this are listed below within the resources section of this report (Section 2).</p>
1.04	<p>Audit Follow Up Work</p> <p>Senior management have met with the Council's Internal Audit Team in recent weeks and those actions that are completed will soon be tested and evidence of completion reviewed and revised dates for completion of outstanding actions have been considered. Communities and Housing Overview and Scrutiny and Governance and Audit Committees will receive further updates.</p>

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	<p>The following issues have impacted on the ability to respond to the audit recommendations and service improvement process and have clear resource implications:</p> <p><u>Staff capacity and turnover</u> There have been several staff changes and ongoing challenges regarding staffing in the Housing and Prevention Service as reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in previous reports relating to homelessness. Most notably a change in management personnel in the Homeless Team, sickness absence and turnover within the service and core staff for temporary accommodation. The restructure of the Housing and Prevention Service and the creation of the new 'Homefinder Team' will address these concerns moving forward.</p> <p><u>Management capacity (including project management)</u> Due to a significant period of sustained growth in demand for homelessness services and other strategic pieces of work, management capacity to address some of the issues within the audit plan has been limited.</p> <p><u>Demands on the temporary accommodation service</u> In the months January 2023 through to August 2023 (8 months) the need for emergency accommodation placements (hotels and bed and breakfasts) has increased by 134% (61 in January 2023 to 143 in August 2023) and the resources required to manage these operational pressures has been a significant pressure for the service. Ensuring service delivery, officer support and management, guidance for front line workers to sustain support for people in homeless accommodation and securing additional emergency housing has been a huge challenge.</p> <p><u>ICT support service capacity</u></p>

	<p>Whilst the initial audit action plan focussed on the implementation of the Open Housing Private Sector Module for the ICT system improvements needed for managing temporary accommodation, other portfolio projects has meant limited ICT resources have been available. Further consideration was given to how the existing homeless case management system could be utilised to integrate homelessness systems functionality to seamlessly link with the management of temporary accommodation. Significant work has been done to the 'back office' to enable the functionality required by front line staff and to enable case work, management reporting and oversight but further work is required.</p>
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3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	<p>As previously reported, by way of additional context to the audit, the following risks and mitigations were identified as part of the planned response to the temporary accommodation audit findings.</p> <p>Risk: The initial audit identified a number of risks associated with the previous ways of working and operating practices</p> <p><i>Mitigation: Successful delivery of the service improvement plan has addressed several significant areas of risk and strengthened service delivery and management oversight. Increasing demand for homeless support and accommodation continue to be a risk area as outlined in the Corporate Risk Register, but greater visibility of management information is enabling far more robust planning and oversight of budgetary pressures as reported to Communities and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 13th September 2023.</i></p> <p>Risk: Historic poor management practices and control measures relating to the temporary accommodation portfolio mean opportunities such as joining the Welsh Government Private Sector Leasing Scheme will be too high risk and potentially missed.</p> <p><i>Mitigation: Successful delivery of the service improvement plan has addressed several significant areas of risk and strengthened service delivery providing opportunity for Flintshire to have confidence to engage in the roll out of the Welsh Government Private Sector Leasing Scheme and this will be revisited later in 2023/2024. Significant work is already under way to take on more properties to the existing Flintshire Lease Scheme for use as Temporary Accommodation via lease arrangements and additional properties such as The Swan Inn (Connahs Quay) and Duke Street flats (Flint) have already been brought into use as temporary accommodation with a further four flats in Park Lane due for completion in August 2023. In addition, a number of long-term leases are being explored with private landlords across the county.</i></p> <p>Two further risks have been identified in relation to successfully delivering the audit action plan and enabling the long-term desired outcomes for the accommodation needs of the Homeless Service.</p>

	<p>Risk: Failure to embed the positive practices delivered so far by not resourcing the service appropriately following significant increases in demand for interim housing within the last nine months.</p> <p><i>Mitigation: The restructure of the Housing and Prevention Service has been reviewed with consideration given to additional core temporary accommodation staff and the use of existing wider service support staff to compliment support service delivery. Additional funding and changes to the restructure will enable an increase in staffing capacity. There is also an additional focus on Housing Support Grant (HSG) funded staff and financial resources supporting delivery of temporary accommodation services through a ‘whole service’ approach to ease the financial burden on the Council Fund. Completing the audit action plan and enabling time to embed positive practice on the back of this work will improve service delivery further over time.</i></p> <p>Risk: Failure to respond to the significant increased pressures on homeless accommodation through a lack of move on plans and access to housing to support households to exit homelessness through social housing and private sector housing options.</p> <p><i>Mitigation: Delivery of the Rapid Rehousing Plan and continued commitment to initiatives such as the 50% homeless direct lets approach for the Common Housing Register and the sheltered housing review, along with other responses to the supply challenge, will ensure Flintshire’s social housing stock better meets the needs of homeless households across the county and that the local private rented sector remains a viable housing option for those who experience homelessness.</i></p>
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4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
4.01	None.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1: Temporary accommodation service improvement plan including progress to date (as at end Sept 2023).

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	Not applicable.

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	<p>Contact Officer: Martin Cooil – Housing & Prevention Service Manager Telephone: 07880 423234 E-mail: martin.cooil@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
8.01	<p>Housing (Wales) Act 2014 The legislation the underpins the homelessness system within Wales including peoples’ statutory rights and Local Authorities duties and responsibilities.</p> <p>Rapid Rehousing Rapid rehousing is an approach for people whose first and most important need is to access housing; with a lack of it often the main reason why they are homeless. Rapid rehousing helps people settle quickly back with family or friends, into private rented, social housing or other affordable and safe long-term housing options.</p> <p>Housing Support Grant (HSG) The HSG programme brings the historic funding streams for Supporting People, Homelessness Prevention and Rent Smart Wales grants into one single funding stream.</p> <p>Open Housing The Capita based system used for Housing Management and Housing Applications by Flintshire County Council for HRA housing and property management as well as for applications for the Common Housing Register.</p> <p>Back Office This in-house ICT system linked to the Council’s Customer Relationship Management (CRM) solution is used to manage housing triages, homelessness case management and now temporary accommodation. This bespoke in-house IT solution enables a seamless integration of client data when residents are accessing multiple services within the Housing and Prevention Service.</p>

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Temporary Accommodation Service Improvement Plan (Progress @ September 2023)

Task	Lead	Deadline	Completed	Rec Ref	%	Commentary
Identify financial resources and staff capacity needed to deliver on the Service Improvement work to respond to Temporary Accommodation Audit Findings	Service Manager	March 2022	Jan 2022	--	100%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Funding identified for Service Improvement /Project Manager ● Funding for Restructure in HSG Delivery Plan ● Priority Tasks delegated to Team Leader for Action ● 2 days per week additional officer support for Service Improvement (HJ) ● FURTHER UPDATE ● Ongoing pressures relating to overall implementation of the action plan due to significant service pressures
Review procedures for Out of Hours placements within Temporary and Emergency Accommodation	Service Manager	March 2022	Feb 2022	--	100%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● OOH Staff Group engaged to identify challenges relating to OOH service delivery ● New procedures adopted and clearly documented for all staff and to be reviewed routinely through OOH Staff Group ● FURTHER UPDATE ● Procedures revised to enable Pilot of OOH service delivery with The Wallich from June 2023 ● Service Level Agreement to be signed off with The Wallich subject to successful review of the Pilot in Quarter 3 23-24
Develop procedures for repairs and maintenance of Temporary Accommodation and ensure processes in place for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● property inspections ● repairs for service 	Service Manager	March 2024	IN PROGRESS	2	80%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Core repairs responsibilities identified ● Temporary Accommodation guidance and procedural notes in place for all aspects of repairs and maintenance ● Repairs liabilities for Service and Landlords clearly stipulated in Lease Agreement (if unfulfilled by landlord process in place to be actioned by HRA and recharged)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> repairs for landlords health & safety compliance 						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contractor for Fire Safety Compliance appointed through HRA contract to deliver services for all Temporary Accommodation Routine Inspection regime developed and to be implemented across all homeless accommodation once staff capacity allows (HMO settings already prioritized) Service Level Agreement for Responsive Repairs awaiting sign off Workflow process and prompting for H&S compliance (Gas and Elec Certs) to be actioned within Back Office and Open Housing
<p>Develop procedures relating to Void Management for Temporary Accommodation including Service Level Agreement as required with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> FCC Housing Assets Service Cleaning contracts 	Service Manager	March 2024	IN PROGRESS	2	80%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voids standard developed in line with the Renting Homes Wales Act 2016 requirements (Homes Fit For Habitation – HHSRS) Temporary Accommodation guidance and procedural notes in place for all aspects of void property maintenance HRA Repairs team continue to deliver and where possible fast track Temporary Accommodation Void Works Actively test market at “point of purchase” for property furnishings (beds, sofas, blinds, whitegoods) as required through range of suppliers for vfm and availability as required Service Level Agreement for Voids Maintenance awaiting sign off
<p>Develop procedures relating to Responsive Repairs for Temporary Accommodation including Service Level Agreement as required with:</p>	Service Manager	March 2024	IN PROGRESS	2	80%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Core repairs responsibilities identified Contractor for Fire Safety identified and included on HRA contracts and where needed (HMO settings) Contractor for CCTV identified and linked into HRA processes and monitored where possible through FCC CCTV suite (Swan Inn)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FCC Housing Assets Service Cleaning contracts Fire Safety Services Leased Landlords 						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Procedure for consideration of new Lease Properties and “take on” in place Service Level Agreement for Responsive Repairs awaiting sign off
Develop clear processes for Renewal and Review of Leases for the Temporary Accommodation	Service Manager	March 2022	June 2022	2	100%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing dialogue with Landlords underway for Lease Renewals and cost implications factored into budgets Lease Renewal Decision Record developed with management approval process in place Lease Agreement refreshed to reflect the Renting Homes Wales Act 2016 Expired leases “rolled over” whilst negotiating new lease costs
Review arrangements for “Take On” of FCC and Housing Partners properties for use as Temporary Accommodation through a Memorandum of Understanding or Management Agreement	Service Manager	March 2024	IN PROGRESS	2	80%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional properties taken on from HRA successfully and processes developed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Swan Inn (6 flats purchased and refurbished to HRA standard with WGOV Phase 2 Grant – Handover April 2022) Duke Street (2 flats built to HRA standard with WGOV Phase 2 Grant – Handover June 2023) Park Lane (4 flats built to HRA standard with WGOV Phase 2 Grant – Handover Sept 2023) Memorandum of Understanding for refresh and sign off with HRA for properties
Develop Policy for Income Management relating to the Temporary Accommodation Portfolio to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rent Collection Service Charge Collection 	Service Manager	March 2024	IN PROGRESS	2	80%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff procedural guidance notes in place Homeless Accommodation Policy in Draft with sections on Income Management activity to enable 1 Policy for all aspects of Homeless Accommodation Management Awaiting the development of the Accounts Payable and Accounts Receivable feature within the Back Office for Income Collection

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrears management – current and former • Income Maximisation and Support • Arrears Write Off 						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance Dashboard for Income Maximization to be implemented through Back Office
<p>Improve and enhance excel spreadsheet to capture all information in relation to temporary accommodation.</p> <p>ADDITIONAL ELEMNT: Move away from Spreadsheets for accommodation casework and adopt Back Office</p>	Service Manager	Additional Element March 2024	March 2022	4	100%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spreadsheet work complete • Additional tabs on Spreadsheets for collection of data relating to Performance Information for length of stay • HB Monitoring information linked to TA placements spreadsheets • ADDITIONAL ELEMENT • Migration over to the Back Office system for management of all forms of homeless accommodation – commenced May 2023 • Complete training for all Staff working on Back Office functionality for Temp Accom Staff • Performance Management functionality to be developed for reporting via Back Office
<p>Review reasons for refusal of permanent accommodation and develop process to manage “unreasonable refusals”</p>	Service Manager	March 2022	March 2023	5	100%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refusal reasons identified as in significant part due to lack of guidance on Offer Process and inappropriate offers in regards to “suitability assessment” • Suitability Checklist in place along with Direct Lets Nomination Form • Clear process for Homeless Direct Lets now in place with dedicated officer leading the matching process • Nominations report and suitability assessment require management sign off • Refusals managed through the statutory instrument of Housing (Wales) Act 2014 s.85 Right to Review and “Independent Reviewer” appointed • Processes and Homeless Policy Statement demonstrate the commitment to “end evictions into

						homelessness” – Homeless Services to be leading by example
Develop “Tenancy Start Up” Factsheets and Support for residents so they have a clear expectation of what help they will get when accessing Temporary Accommodation	Service Manager	June 2022	August 2023	--	100%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shelter Cymru Guide on Temporary Accommodation issued to those accessing homeless accommodation Support Workers allocated if required to enable people to have dedicated housing related support and “point of contact” whilst occupying homeless accommodation Housing Support Staff working from hotels and B&Bs at least 1 days a week for drop in and advice services
Develop processes in relation to “Accommodation Placements” a ensure a consistent approach and decision making based on roles and responsibilities	Service Manager	March 2022	March 2022	7	100%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accommodation Placement Decision Record created and successfully piloted with Homeless Team since January 2022 Consultation with staff for fine tuning of the process based on staff and management feedback Approval and placement process now integrated into the Back Office system for request and approval processes relating to accepting “interim housing” duties from April 2023 New risk matrix developed for the Back Office to mitigate risks within homeless accommodation and reduce risk of challenge on grounds of “unsuitability” to go live October 2023
Develop procedures relating to “Lease Take On” and promote this housing product to local landlords to increase supply of temporary accommodation	Service Manager	December 2023	IN PROGRESS	2	90%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Template for Lease Take On Decision Record Complete Core Offer for Landlords (90% LHA – minimal repairs liability – hassle free management etc) but not attractive enough for many Landlords so needing to negotiate and factor into budgets to secure accommodation due to costly PRS Discussions with interested landlords ongoing Links with Empty Homes Officer in Public Protection developed and processes in place and budgeted for

						<p>“invest to save” property take on process targeting long term empty properties.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lease Option and other Landlord Incentives promoted at the Regular Landlord Forum Housing & Prevention Hub webpages to be updated with information about the Lease Scheme for homeless accommodation
<p>Create a specific team for Property Management and Private Rented Sector engagement with responsibility for the sourcing and management of Temporary Accommodation and future Leased Services (PRS Leasing Scheme)</p> <p>Page 34</p>	Service Manager	March 2024	IN PROGRESS	1	50%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Job Descriptions complete for key staff and to be managed through a new “Homefinder Team” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Homefinder Manager Homefinder Accommodation Officer x2 Private Sector Access Officer x2 Landlord liaison Officer x1 Posts fully costed and accounted for within the Housing & Prevention Service Restructure (Council Fund and Housing Support Grant) Recruitment ongoing following changes in internal personnel and restructure of Service (Job Evaluation process on hold)
<p>Review and refresh Performance Management Framework for all of the following and ensure appropriate routine KPIs captured:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Portfolio Capacity Income Management Repairs Voids Routine Inspection Tenancy Support Length of Stay 	Service Manager	March 2024	IN PROGRESS	3	50%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial measures scoped but require method statements and this requires a fully functioning system via the Back Office which is not ready for full adoption

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenant Move On • Property Compliance H&S • Lease Arrangements 						
Approve implementation plan for move to Open Housing System with IT Support Services	Service Manager	June 2022	March 2023	4	100%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreed with IT that this is a priority within the Services Digital Transformation Workstream • No capacity within IT for commencement of work until June 2022 • Further delays due to IT capacity and other competing pressures within portfolio Dec 2022 • Now not using the Open Housing PSL Module and instead moved to the Back Office system
Develop “Homeless Accommodation – Temporary and Emergency Policy” for the Homeless Service	Service Manager	December 2023	IN PROGRESS	1	80%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In final draft and to be adopted when all elements of Back Office functionality in place and Staff Guidance and Procedural notes updated to reflect system changes • Changes in process to respond to the Renting Homes Wales Act 2016 already adopted June 2023
Full migration to new IT system (Open Housing) with all functionality required to manage the Temporary Accommodation Portfolio	Service Manager	March 2024	IN PROGRESS	4	50%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move to Open Housing Aborted • Back Office system in place but not fully operational for all aspects of service delivery • Also requires work on Back Office for performance management reporting • System set up to populate WGOV periodic performance returns and will save staff time of report burden
Complete full “end to end temporary accommodation process mapping” to be mapped to assign roles and responsibilities, identify process delays and	Service Manager	June 2024	IN PROGRESS	2	0%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be completed once all aspects of Back Office functionality are in place • System and process training to be completed with all staff who support delivery of the homeless accommodation placements, management and support:

inefficiencies as well as document controls						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Homeless Team requesting placement - RARE ○ Homefinder Team managing accommodation and housing management functions - BREIF ○ Housing Support Team delivering bespoke housing related support - UNREPEATED
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LEGEND FOR PROGRESS AND TASK MONIOTIRING	RAG
COMPLETE	8
ON TRACK FOR COMPLETION	10
OFF TRACK FOR COMPLETION	--
NOT STARTED – NO CONCERN	1



COMMUNITY & HOUSING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Wednesday 11 th October 2023
Report Subject	Performance of the WHQS Capital Programme – Assurance Report
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Housing and Regeneration
Report Author	Chief Officer (Housing and Communities)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Council's delivery of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) through the Capital Investment Programme.

The Council were successful in delivering the WHQS programme of works to all Council stock, a major capital investment of over £100m. The Council are now in the maintenance phase of the programme, delivering further investment works to those components within our properties where required.

The report focuses on what has been delivered to date and outlines the focus of the next phase of the Councils WHQS investment programme.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That the Committee note the Capital Investment Programme in its next phase of compliance as it moves towards the updated Welsh Housing Quality Standards (WHQS 2023) and its requirements.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD
1.01	<p>The Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) is a national quality standard for public sector homes in Wales as set out by the Welsh Government.</p> <p>All tenants in Wales should have the opportunity to live in good quality homes, which meet the requirements of each household. The Housing Assets Capital Works Team is responsible for delivering internal and external upgrades to all Council owned properties and for compliance with the WHQS.</p> <p>The Council achieved compliance with WHQS in December 2021. Having achieved compliance with WHQS it is important that the Council ensure the standard is maintained and investment is planned accordingly. There is an ongoing investment programme to maintain the standard and enable the scheduled replacement of components when needed.</p> <p>An updated version of the existing WHQS guidance is due to go live in late 2023 and the Council must prepare itself for the changes that will be required to remain compliant.</p>
1.02	<p>The existing capital investment programme has continued as scheduled, to ensure the Council remain compliant with the existing WHQS standards; however key changes will need to be implemented as smoothly and efficiently as possible.</p> <p>To ensure the Council is prepared for the new WHQS 2023 requirements the Housing Assets Capital Works Team have commenced a number of key actions / milestones that must be achieved before implementation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree the HRA Business Plan with Welsh Government • Completing an in-house Stock Condition Survey (both internally & externally) • Procuring an independent Stock Condition Survey targeting a percentage of the housing asset stock to provide assurance • Consultation with Elected Members • Conducting Tenant Federation workshops • Conducting Tenant consultation workshops in our local Connects Centres • Requesting feedback via an online questionnaire and comments section on Council's WHQS & decarbonisation works • Ensuring our existing contracts are compliant with OJEU regulations and able to accommodate the new WHQS standards / specifications seamlessly • Tendering additional work streams, where required, to target new work elements (i.e., Intelligent Energy Metering, Heat Metering and Energy Performance Devices)
1.03	<p>The WHQS capital programme has been created to ensure all Flintshire County Council properties will comply with WHQS, as required by Welsh</p>

Government and to ensure those properties maintain those standards and remain compliant.

Each quarter, the Housing Assets Service are required to report progress to the management teams, the wider portfolio and Council, along with Housing Programme Board members and Welsh Government.

Our quarterly and annual returns to Welsh Government track the Councils progress in terms of how many components are WHQS compliant or subject to an Acceptable Failure.

To assist our wider understanding of stock condition, we have recently procured software and begun to pilot in-house Stock Condition Surveys. This will mean we will be able to update our housing asset components remotely and update our future investment plans. This will ultimately involve surveys of all HRA council owned properties both internally and externally, to confirm the asset data we currently hold. This information, on a property-by-property basis, will also inform discussions with those tenants on the housing waiting lists, by more accurately matching the home to their specific needs, and in doing so, reduce the number of refusals.

During the past few years, the Capital Works Team have completed a major data cleansing exercise of all asset and component data. This has resulted in our overall WHQS compliancy figure increasing as below:

Year	Compliancy rate %
2017	0.3
2018	27.9
2019	63.15
2020	78.1
2021	100
2022	100
2023	100

Our internal work streams (kitchens & bathrooms) continue to have the highest number of tenant refusals or no access (**Acceptable Fails**). Welsh Government classes any property subject to an Acceptable Fail as compliant in terms of achieving the WHQS.

The Capital Works Team have allowed for a **20%** Acceptable Fail within each component scenario within the Capital Programme.

Acceptable fail properties will be addressed in future years and be introduced back into the Capital Programme at the earliest opportunity.

1.04

The main WHQS contracts of the capital programme were re-procured in 2020, to ensure the Council would remain compliant with the existing WHQS requirements. A new procurement exercise will be carried out in 2023/24.

	<p>Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and following government guidance, the Council were instructed to delay all WHQS work contracts in 2020 resulting in delays and works needing to be rescheduled.</p> <p>Those delays were due to a number of reasons including, but not limited to, resource and material availability.</p> <p>The Council are still experiencing delays due to the extended impacts of the pandemic but can work more flexibly now the COVID working restrictions have been lifted.</p> <p>In order for the Council to remain compliant and safely implement WHQS works to Council properties, the Capital Works Team need to ensure the criteria set out below and considerations are continually met:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Split work streams where feasible into smaller work bubbles • Carefully plan works to Sheltered stock due to vulnerability and risk • Carefully plan materials and deliveries to site (minimising travel where possible) • Constant review of guidance and work • Zero snags to minimise travel and visits to tenants' homes
1.05	<p>The Welsh Audit Office (WAO) report (2017/2018) - Flintshire County Council followed a review focussing on the experience of council tenants in the degree of choice experienced within the delivery of WHQS both before, during, and after the work was commissioned. It also reviewed how tenants had been consulted on the future plans of the council to achieve WHQS by the deadline.</p> <p>From the audit and final report, the Council received no recommendations.</p> <p>Following the audit, the team have built upon the positive report and the achievement of WHQS compliance in December 2021 and continued the Council capital investment programme into the maintenance phase, targeting those properties that will fall out of compliance if the works are not completed in a reasonable timeframe.</p>
1.06	<p>Internal Audit Review (2018/2019) - our Internal Audit Team also completed an audit of the WHQS programme and delivery of the works. The final version of the audit report along with its recommendations have all been agreed, accepted, and implemented within the agreed timescales.</p>
1.07	<p>The team have set a new target level of 96% for our annual WHQS Tenant Satisfaction Surveys. Our intervention level is set at 94%.</p> <p>Last year's satisfaction result on the Capital Works Team was finalised at <u>96%</u></p>

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	<p>Staff - There are concerns staff retention may be difficult to maintain. Given that the construction industry is an ever-changing sector, staff may seek opportunities elsewhere i.e., new build, private sector etc. There has also been a significant change in expectations and behaviour, because of the pandemic. Staff wish to work more flexibly and are reviewing the industry they work in and if it is right for them.</p> <p>The Capital Works Team have made adjustments to the team's structure to incorporate a degree of resilience, succession planning and robustness to the delivery model and departments risk register.</p>
2.02	<p>Budgets – When developing our delivery programme, budget estimates were made for the required upgrade works to our existing properties with contingency sums included for unforeseen work such as structural repairs etc.</p> <p>Further works have been undertaken with colleagues in Finance and we have begun forecasting our budget requirements for the next tranche of works. Material costs have increased significantly, and availability is low.</p>
2.03	<p>Procurement – Procuring the various WHQS works can be challenging. The Council must ensure all contracts are measured, not only by cost but by quality. Quality forms an important part of the assessment process where the Capital Works Team interviews all contractors and assesses Quality Submission Papers before any contracts are awarded. The team have been able to secure further efficiencies by merging some contracts so that internal and external resources can be shared.</p> <p>There is a risk that many contractors are opting for new build contracts rather than refurbishment contracts. Engaging with our supply chain early and sharing our Capital Investment Programme aspirations with our Contract Framework Partners assists us to procure longer term contracts and therefore reduces risk of inflated costs based on long term contract arrangements.</p> <p>As the Capital Works team has procured certain contracts through the Procure Plus consortium, it has been shielded from certain uplifts in costs and are supported by Procure Plus with any disputes.</p>

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	<p>The Welsh Government has committed to achieving a carbon neutral public sector by 2033 and to coordinating action to help other areas of the economy to make a decisive shift away from fossil fuels. The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 requires the Welsh Government to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs) in Wales by at least 80% by the year 2050, with a system of interim emissions targets and carbon budgets.</p>

	<p>The Welsh housing stock is older than the UK housing stock, with only a smaller proportion built in recent years.</p> <p>Approximately:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 32% of the Welsh housing stock was built before 1919, when there were no construction standards in terms of thermal performance. • 10% of Welsh homes were built in the last 18 years, during which time performance requirements have changed dramatically. • 0.1% levels of demolition. <p>A further priority has been to maintain, sustain and build on the improvements delivered through the WHQS programme, particularly to improve the energy efficiency of our homes. We aim to continue to improve our asset base, while developing an understanding of what measures can be implemented to ensure our current assets achieve a high energy rating.</p> <p>As a Council, we will be required to ensure our homes meet the highest possible thermal efficiency and energy performance (EPC level A). Currently as part of the existing WHQS requirements, our properties must meet a minimum of SAP 65 (EPC level D).</p> <p>Discussions with Welsh Government are continuing, but there will be a requirement to procure and deliver a large retrofit programme comprising of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal & external wall insulation • Floor insulation • Air Source & Ground Source Heating Systems • Solar photovoltaic panels • Solar thermal panels • Triple glazing • Heat recovery units • Improved ventilation systems such as positive input ventilation • Improved heating controls such as intelligent heating programmers • LED lighting <p>Over the next 12 months the Housing Assets Service will be focusing on finalising plans as part of the wider asset management and decarbonisation programme for members to consider which shall encapsulate the investment challenges and options for consideration.</p>
3.02	<p>Everyone accepts that living in a quality home brings benefits to both the physical and mental wellbeing of those who live in them.</p> <p>The purpose of the Welsh Housing Quality Standards 2023 (WHQS2023) is to improve the quality of social homes in Wales. All social homes in Wales are required to meet and maintain the standard.</p> <p>Over the last two decades the Council has invested millions of pounds to significantly improve and maintain the quality of its homes across the</p>

	<p>county and WHQS2023 will replace the existing WHQS Standard that the Council are currently working to.</p> <p>The existing standard requires updating to reflect changes to how people live, work and feel about their homes, and to start decarbonising the Welsh social housing stock at scale.</p> <p>Parts of the existing WHQS standard remain unchanged but some elements have been modified to reflect updated legal requirements. Some parts are new such as increased requirement for floor coverings, consideration of biodiversity and water poverty have also been included.</p> <p>The existing WHQS contained energy efficiency (affordable warmth) requirements, but these have been boosted significantly to reflect decarbonisation ambitions and to minimise energy bills for tenants.</p> <p>Welsh Government wants to continue to drive up the standard of existing social housing, and WHQS2023 is a demanding standard which all social landlords in Wales will be legally obliged to meet.</p> <p>The Council have been in discussions with Welsh Government and have fed back on key areas of the new standards. Consultation on the standards has now ended and we are in the process of awaiting further feedback, leading to the implementation of WHQS 2023 later this year.</p>
3.03	<p>Through our existing contracts, the Council has overachieved targets set by Welsh Government with regards to the use of local labour and apprenticeships. The Council are required to submit multiple returns for each contract which covers the following measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contract Value <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Percentage spent in Wales ○ Percentage spent locally (Flintshire) ○ Percentage spent on local labour ○ Percentage spent with local material suppliers ○ Percentage of invoices paid on time to all • Labour total <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Percentage of labour/staff live in Wales ○ Percentage of labour/staff who live locally ○ Percentage of labour/staff previously unemployed ○ Percentage of labour/staff retained • Resources, Community Benefits & Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Energy usage and Waste Tonnage ○ Percentage of waste diverted from landfill ○ Travelling - CO emissions ○ Value of Cash or Sponsorship to Local businesses/charities ○ Value of free labour in cost & hours • Training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Number of apprenticeships created ○ Number of apprenticeships that secure full time employment ○ Number of weeks allocated to work experience placements

	<p>With regards to the main measures above, the Council have overachieved and continue to deliver the following averages:</p> <p>Percentage spent locally - 83% Percentage of local labour - 77% Percentage of waste diverted from landfill - 97% Number of apprenticeships - 15 per annum delivered against a target of 6.</p> <p>Each contractor procured must complete a detailed report each quarter, detailing each person employed within the contract (name, home address, position, employment dates etc.) with each report audited by Welsh Government.</p> <p>Each contractor has their own targets to achieve in addition to the Councils, with each having an excellent relationship with the local colleges and local supply chain and is managed at Contractor Progress meetings.</p> <p>This is a critical part of the performance management process and forms part of any contact extensions and work allocation.</p>
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4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	<p>Prior to the Capital Investment Programme commencing, the team held Member workshops, where most Members attended and were actively involved in the design and delivery of the current Capital Programme.</p> <p>We also held Tenant Federation workshops where we engaged with the federation with regards to what priority and which order the works should be completed, along with holding tenant consultation workshops in our FCC Connects Centres and community centres engaging with our tenants and discussing the Capital Programme along with ascertaining what order tenants would prefer to have components of their home upgraded first.</p> <p>Moving forwards, and as part of the next phase of the Capital Programme and decarbonisation retrofit programme, the Capital Works Team will again be consulting with Members, tenants and tenant groups to ensure that each is engaged with and to ensure their preferences and any concerns with regards to this next phase are considered and implemented as we have previously.</p>
4.02	<p>In addition to the work detailed within this report, there is a wider issue that needs to be considered around the potential to undertake regeneration schemes on some of our estates rather than continue to commit funding to assets that will be expensive to continue to maintain and run, have high numbers of voids and which are expensive to heat and run for the tenant.</p> <p>This will also include a significant focus on tenant 'behaviour change'; which will be a key factor in reaching targets and lowering tenant's energy bills and will run parallel to any Decarbonisation work.</p>

	Consultations will need to be held with members and tenants as the Council progresses with its investment plans and this will be completed prior to any works being procured and delivered.
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5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	None.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	https://www.flintshire.gov.uk/en/Resident/Housing/Welsh-Housing-Quality-Standard-WHQS.aspx
6.02	https://gov.wales/decarbonisation-homes-wales-advisory-group#content
6.03	https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2021-06/welsh-housing-quality-standard-summative-evaluation.pdf

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	Contact Officer: Sean O'Donnell, Service Manager - Housing Assets Telephone: 01352 701642 E-mail: Sean.O'Donnell@flintshire.gov.uk

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
8.01	<p>Capital Programme: The Council's financial plan covering capital schemes and expenditure proposals for the current year and a number of future years. It also includes estimates of the capital resources available to finance the programme.</p> <p>The Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS): is a national standard of quality for homes. This is set by the Welsh Government. It means that all tenants in Wales should have the opportunity to live in good quality homes which meet the requirements of that household.</p> <p>Acceptable Fail: Welsh Government understand that some homes cannot receive the WHQS works due to 4 reasons, listed below:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Works are physically impossible to complete 2. It is not cost effective to do the works 3. Timing (works due in near future already) 4. Tenant refuses the improvements <p>Wales Audit Office: works to support the Auditor General as the public sector watchdog for Wales. They aim to ensure that the people of Wales</p>

know whether public money is being managed wisely and that public bodies in Wales understand how to improve outcomes.

Financial Year: the period of 12 months commencing on 1 April.

Budget: a statement expressing the Council's policies and service levels in financial terms for a particular financial year. In its broadest sense it includes both the revenue budget and capital programme and any authorised amendments to them.

PDA Solution: Mobile handheld device used for capturing stock data directly linked to our asset database.

Contract Framework: A Contract Framework is an agreement between one or more contracting authorities and one or more economic operators. These frameworks have Contractors, Consultants and Suppliers that have been successful in joining the specific work categories. The Council often uses these frameworks to procure works that have already gone through a tender process in line with OJEU and can be utilised to procure works or services.

They are often the most economic advantage in terms of value for money and local training provision.

HRA: The Housing Revenue Account.

Open Housing System: An electronic database system which is used by the Housing Assets Team where its assets are recorded along with tenant details, components, works tickets and tenant requests for works or inspections and other services.

Components: A part or element such as an asset's amenities (Kitchen Bathroom, Boiler, Roof, Windows, Doors etc.).

RAMS: Risk and Method Statements used in construction works to enable a Contractor to safely plan and identify how any risks will be mitigated or complied with.

PPE: Personal Protective Equipment.

Decarbonisation: Referring in this instance to Welsh Governments requirement for all Local Authorities in Wales to reduce its Carbon emissions and usage.

EPC: Energy Performance Certificate.

SAP: Standard Assessment Procedure.



**Communities and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee
 Voids Management Update
 Reporting period: September 2023**

Key figures			M	A	M	J	J	A	S
Number of new void properties in reporting period			26	24	25	28	20	20	26
Number of properties completed ready for allocation			23	18	30	30	39	33	28
Breakdown of total void figures	Housing Assets	Major voids	129	137	132	142	134	107	101
		Minor voids	57	50	52	60	53	45	34
		TBC	73	81	79	59	55	82	97
	Housing Management	Demand	158	173	169	171	165	153	129
		Low demand	93	90	92	90	77	79	101
		TBC	8	5	2	0	0	2	2
Property Type	General Needs		118	125	120	122	109	113	120
	Sheltered		141	143	143	139	133	121	112
Property Type	1 bed		87	89	90	91	87	77	72
	2 bed		99	100	98	96	92	89	91
	3 bed		70	76	71	69	57	61	63
	4 bed		2	2	3	4	5	6	5
	4 bed plus		1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Capital District Areas	Buckley		23	26	26	29	25	26	24
	C'Quay & Shotton		56	61	62	60	58	57	54
	Deeside & Saltney		33	35	34	31	32	33	34
	Flint		57	53	54	51	49	43	45
	Holywell		59	61	56	55	47	48	49
	Mold		31	32	31	35	31	27	26
Total voids			259	268	263	261	242	234	232

<p>Key activity against void action plan</p>
<p><i>Bullet point list of activity against action plan in reporting period</i></p> <p>B3 - Management and performance monitoring of Void Refurbishment Framework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocation of work to newly commissioned contractors in line with their capacity to deliver • Progress meetings scheduled over the next 12 months to monitor performance and quality • Contractors Performance meetings set up for the next 12 months - to monitor target times, quality of work, capacity, and general performance. • All meetings will be recorded to evaluate and provide ongoing evidence of performance standards.
<p>Next steps</p>
<p><i>Bullet point list of activity planned against action plan in next reporting period</i></p> <p>D4 – Undertake benchmarking against other local authorities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commence with contacting local authorities • Ascertain different void standards and categories
<p>Any other information</p>
<p><i>Provision of other information to Overview and Scrutiny Committee</i></p> <p><i>Allocated Budget for this year:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £4.6m Overall Total Voids Budget <p><i>Void properties require major investment:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 70% <p><i>Top reasons for terminations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>September</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Deceased (6) ○ Transfer to FCC property (5) ○ Residential Care (3) <p><u>In-house DLO Team - Work Allocation</u></p> <p><i>Number of operatives within the DLO team</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 32 operatives (working on approximately 25-30 Voids) <p><i>Number of Team Leaders who manage the DLO</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 Team Leaders <p><u>Contractor - Work Allocation</u></p> <p><i>Number of Contractors</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 Contractors (working on approximately 50 Voids) <p><i>Number of Team Leaders who manage contractors</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 Team Leaders <p><i>Number of Capital Works Surveyors who manage contractors</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 Surveyors