

Housing and Homelessness Policy and Accountability Committee Agenda

Tuesday 14 November 2023 at 7.00 pm

Main Hall (1st Floor) - 3 Shortlands, Hammersmith, W6 8DA

Watch the meeting live: [youtube.com/hammersmithandfulham](https://www.youtube.com/hammersmithandfulham)

MEMBERSHIP

Administration	Opposition
Councillor Jacolyn Daly (Chair) Councillor Paul Alexander Councillor Asif Siddique Councillor Sally Taylor	Councillor Adronie Alford

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This meeting is open to the public and press. The building has disabled access.

Residents with an interest in any of the items on the agenda are encouraged to attend and participate in the discussion. If you can't attend in person, you can join remotely. If you would like to attend, please contact: Debbie.Yau@lbhf.gov.uk

Date Issued: 06 November 2023

Housing and Homelessness Policy and Accountability Committee Agenda

14 November 2023

<u>Item</u>		<u>Pages</u>
1.	APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE	
2.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST <p>If a Councillor has a disclosable pecuniary interest in a particular item, whether or not it is entered in the Authority's register of interests, or any other significant interest which they consider should be declared in the public interest, they should declare the existence and, unless it is a sensitive interest as defined in the Member Code of Conduct, the nature of the interest at the commencement of the consideration of that item or as soon as it becomes apparent.</p> <p>Where Members of the public are not allowed to be in attendance and speak, then the Councillor with a disclosable pecuniary interest should withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is under consideration. Councillors who have declared other significant interests should also withdraw from the meeting if they consider their continued participation in the matter would not be reasonable in the circumstances and may give rise to a perception of a conflict of interest.</p> <p>Councillors are not obliged to withdraw from the meeting where a dispensation to that effect has been obtained from the Standards Committee.</p>	
3.	MINUTES <p>To approve the minutes of the previous meeting.</p>	4 - 11
4.	HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION UPDATE <p>This report provides a high-level overview of Homelessness Prevention services within London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham.</p>	12 - 17
5.	COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT IN HOUSING SERVICES <p>This report provides an outline of the complaints management in Housing Services.</p>	18 - 31
6.	GREENING OF THE HOUSING STOCK <p>Hammersmith and Fulham's council housing accounts for 83% of the organisation's operational emissions and 8% of total borough emissions. It is essential to reduce this by driving energy efficiency, decarbonising people's homes, and building energy efficient homes. Greening the</p>	32 - 39

housing stock is therefore important to address these areas and a 'Retrofit Strategy' is currently being developed that will outline the approach to achieve this. The aim of this paper is to explain how the strategy will influence council policy in 4 key areas:

1. Increasing the energy efficiency of H&F homes
2. Transitioning to low carbon heat
3. Supporting fuel poverty
4. Adapting the council's stock

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS

To note the dates of next meetings:

- 30 January 2024
- 26 March 2024

Agenda Item 3

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

Housing and Homelessness Policy and Accountability Committee Minutes



Tuesday 25 July 2023

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Jacolyn Daly (Chair), Paul Alexander, Sally Taylor and Adronie Alford

Other Councillors: Councillor Frances Umeh (Cabinet Member for Housing) and Rowan Ree (Cabinet Member for Finance and Reform) (attended remotely)

Guests:

Troy Francis (Corporate Director of Operations, Southern Housing)
Hardeep Majhail (Head of Region (London), Southern Housing)
Adam Bulewski (St Mungo's United Rep)
Martin Thirlaway (Local resident)

Officers:

Sukvinder Kalsi (Strategic Director of Finance) (attended remotely)
Richard Shwe (Director of Housing)
Ed Shaylor (Assistant Director of Housing Standards)
John Hayden (Assistant Director of Repairs)
Roy Morgan (Assistant Director of Housing Management)
Alice Hainsworth (Head of Homelessness Prevention and Assessment)
Lucy Baker (Prevention and Rough Sleeping Commissioning Manager)
Sam Cunningham (Housing Programme Manager)
Debbie Yau (Committee Coordinator)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Asif Siddique.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES

Matters Arising

The Chair referred to the “Officer responses to actions required arising from the meeting on 20 March 2023” tabled at the meeting and said the document would be attached to the minutes.

NOTE: The Officer responses is attached as Appendix 1

Councillor Adronie Alford raised an amendment to the first sentence of the fifth paragraph under item 4 to read as “Councillor Alford said the Committee should review the Housing Revenue Account on a regular basis to see if some savings could be identified”.

Councillor Alford asked about the income and deficit of the Housing Revenue Account for the final quarter of 2022/23 and the first quarter of 2023/24. In response, Councillor Rowan Ree (Cabinet Member for Finance and Reform) said the final figures would be published in the coming September.

RESOLVED

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2023 were agreed to be an accurate record.

4. ROUGH SLEEPERS AND HOMELESSNESS UPDATE

Alice Hainsworth (Head of Homelessness Prevention and Assessment) presented the report which provided a high-level summary for the Committee on rough sleeping and homelessness. She highlighted the Housing First model, first introduced in the United States some 8 to 9 years ago, that had proven to be the most sustainable method of ensuring former rough sleepers did not return to the street. She noted that a range of services were in place to help prevent rough sleeping and support people to recover and move away from the streets for good. She informed the Committee that at any one time, the number of rough sleepers in the Borough was approximately 5 to 7 people which was low for an inner-London Borough.

Councillor Sally Taylor referred to the success of the work to improve rough sleeping at Shepherds Bush Green last year and asked if similar activities would be held around there this year.

Lucy Baker (Prevention and Rough Sleeping Commissioning Manager) noted that unlike last summer when more people slept out on the Green due to the exceptionally hot weather, only one person was found sleeping out on Shepherds Bush Green in July this year. The Homelessness Prevention and Assessment team would continue tackling rough sleeping through a range of support options and work with the Council’s enforcement team in a multi-disciplinary way. The team attended monthly meetings with the Shepherd’s Bush Green Action Forum, discussing matters relating to the street population and anti-social behaviour in partnership with local residents and the police.

Councillor Adronie Alford asked about the reasons for rough sleeping and the potential for relapsing. Roy Morgan (Assistant Director of Housing Management) noted that it was rare for people who had stayed in temporary accommodation to be referred to the service again. Officers said rough sleepers often faced family or personal challenges – or had fallen victim to external circumstances like being evicted by their landlord.

Noting that the number of households living in temporary accommodation in England had recently hit a 25-year high, the Chair expressed concern about the impact to the Council and its ability to respond to the increasing demand. Roy Morgan said so far in H&F there was only a small increase in the number of people arriving at the front door, however he agreed that more substantial increases in the number of rough sleepers would have an impact on the Council's budget and agreed to provide an update on the numbers at the next meeting.

ACTION: Roy Morgan

Question from the floor

Adam Bulewski (St Mungo's United Rep) addressed the Committee and referred to recent industrial action at St Mungo's (a homelessness charity) that had taken place due to pay disputes. He highlighted the pay disparity between the senior management and frontline workers and said it had made it difficult to retain experienced staff. St Mungo's had a contract with the Council to provide support for homeless people in H&F so he hoped the Committee could look into the matter and intervene.

Councillor Paul Alexander thanked Adam Bulewski for bringing up the matter and said the Committee would look at this more closely as the industrial strike might affect the Council's delivery of homelessness prevention services.

Richard Shwe said he understood the issue and undertook to discuss the matter with Adam Bulewski further outside the meeting.

ACTION: Richard Shwe

Summing up, the Chair reiterated her request for the team to report on the impact of an increasing number of homeless households and placements into temporary accommodation on the Council's budget at the next meeting.

ACTION: Roy Morgan

RESOLVED

That the Committee noted the report.

5. **PRIVATE AND SOCIAL HOUSING STANDARDS**

Troy Francis (Corporate Director of Operations, Southern Housing) briefed members on the Council's partnership with Southern Housing which was a new housing association formed in December 2022 by a merge between Optivo and Southern Housing Group. He then outlined its vision, mission, and strategic objectives for 2023-26. With a turnover of £592m, Southern Housing currently owned or managed 77,000 homes in England, among them 30,000 were in London. It put residents at the heart of its services, as exemplified by the Resident Governance structure and its support to vulnerable residents. Troy Francis highlighted the patchless and patch models specifically designated for H&F with the former offering more flexible one-stop service while the latter allowed more integration. He went through the profile of its 1,147 homes in H&F and its local priorities.

NOTE: Southern Housing's presentation is attached as Appendix 2

Councillor Adronie Alford asked about the outcome of their work on damp and mould. Troy Francis advised that damp and mould was one of the challenges they faced in terms of both services and contractors and said they needed to grip the issue and deliver results. In response to Councillor Alford's question about the scheme of independent living for old residents, Troy Francis said that the scheme had not attracted the expected number of applicants. He considered that it was necessary for the Council to strike the right balance and commission different forms of housing to respond to local need. Replying to Councillor Alford's further enquiry, Troy Francis said that the scheme managers would conduct on-site visits about 3 to 4 times a week.

The Chair asked about the subletting situation among Southern Housing leaseholders. Troy Francis noted that they had received information through various channels about leaseholders subletting properties without notifying Southern Housing. Hardeep Majhail (Head of Region (London), Southern Housing) added that they were monitoring the situation and made visits to the properties concerned.

Private Housing – Licensing and Enforcement

Richard Shwe (Director of Housing) explained that Ed Shaylor (Assistant Director of Housing Standards) reported directly to the Strategic Director of Environment and acted as a critical friend to the Director of Housing to ensure that proper checks and balances were in place to monitor the work of the Council as a landlord.

Ed Shaylor noted that deficiencies in low quality housing could be dealt with by the Council using property licensing and statutory enforcement powers. He discussed the new licensing schemes approved for implementation from June 2022, which included additional licensing for houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) outside the scope of mandatory HMO licensing, and selective licensing for rented dwellings in 24 specified streets. He also outlined the enforcement actions taken by the Council against those committing housing offences.

Addressing the Chair's question, Ed Shaylor noted that H&F had approximately 5,000 residential leasehold properties of which over 2,000 were rented out to tenants and that leaseholders were required to notify the landlord for subletting the property. Sometimes tenants would approach the Council for assistance because of landlords' inaction. The Council would mediate between the parties and allow the landlords an opportunity to fix the problem. Those landlords who breached the regulations could face enforcement action by the Council.

On the Chair's further enquiry about rogue landlords, Ed Shaylor referred to the difficulties of dealing some landlord business models and it was not an easy task to track down who the landlord or property owner was.

NOTE: Additional information on rogue landlords is attached as Appendix 3

Councillor Alford referred to properties being subdivided and having unsafe staircases and cramped conditions - with cookers sitting next to beds, for example. She raised concerns that prosecutions and enforcement action did not seem to be taking place against the owners.

Ed Shaylor said that the Council had taken 20 successful prosecutions in the last 9 years and now imposed financial penalties for managing an HMO without a licence or breaching HMO regulations up to £30,000 which was often higher than the fines set in the Magistrate Court.

The Chair was concerned about maintaining housing standards across the borough as she had observed a number of unfit premises. Ed Shaylor said all new built properties should be developed according to national housing standards. However, converted properties presented problems. Officers assessed the condition of a range of rented properties and follow-up action would be taken if any of them had space or overcrowding issues.

Councillor Sally Taylor asked how residents could report overcrowding issues anonymously. Ed Shaylor said whistleblowers could contact officers through the Council's website or email the housing teams responsible for managing Council housing blocks. Richard Shwe added that the website would soon be revamped to incorporate more joined-up initiatives with the Environment Department.

Councillor Frances Umeh said the Council was committed to raising housing standards for residents in the borough and to hold landlords to account. She appreciated the work of the housing team and the Committee in highlighting the issue of good housing standards for residents.

Councillor Paul Alexander noted that some Council or Housing Association tenants had seen major repair issues take many months to resolve. He was keen to see a partnership approach going forward to identify the causes and fix issues far quicker. Richard Shwe assured members that the team had put new processes and procedures in place to raise standards and resolve issues faster.

Question from the floor

Adam Bulewski (St Mungo's United Rep) said being a member of the Renters' Union, he had witnessed many changes for property renting in the last 15 years and believed the situation would get even worse in the next 10 years. Richard Shwe pointed out that housing had been a national crisis for decades. Local authorities had sought to improve the situation locally, for example, by turning around voids faster, putting residents first, improving repairs, and improving the relationship between the Council and its contractors.

Councillor Umeh said she agreed that housing was a challenge and a national crisis. She said social housing was a vital springboard to social and economic prosperity, and the Council had committed to building 3,000 homes in the next 4 years.

Concluding the discussion, the Chair requested the housing team to provide further information in respect of licensing.

ACTION: Ed Shaylor

RESOLVED

That the Committee noted the report.

6. REPAIRS IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Richard Shwe (Director of Housing) introduced that he had become the permanent Director of Housing on 23 March 2023. He presented the report, including a review of the current situation, how the Council was putting things right, six key interventions made under the Repairs Service Improvement Plan, improvements to complaint management, enhancing capacity and quality, and investing in the Council's housing stock.

NOTE: Presentation on Repairs Improvement Plan is attached as Appendix 4

The Chair remarked on the improvement to the reception arrangements at 145 King Street with regard to security. In response, Richard Shwe noted that the Tenants' Association was very upset with previous performance but there began to see some improvement at the meeting two weeks' ago. He considered the matter needed a year to improve properly. He was pleased to note that 11 contractors turned up at the Association's meeting, which was an example of better service model through which things could be done better and quicker. In this regard, Councillor Sally Taylor said she had received positive feedback from a participated resident and she really appreciated the work of the housing team.

The Chair noted that in February 2023, the Government had tabled amendments to the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill to require landlords to investigate and fix damp and mould in their properties within specified timeframes. She asked about the Council's response. John Hayden (Assistant Director of Repairs) briefed members on the Council's two-tier approach to deal with damp and mould. Having validated the need to tackle

the problem, the dedicated Damp and Mould Team would offer a “Home MOT” service to residents of affected properties. This aimed to provide a suite of additional home services, ensuring the inhabitant's dwelling remained fully functional and fit for purpose. Officers would contact the residents to manage the progress of improvements. Richard Shwe added that through the housing officers’ regular visits aimed at resolving the problems effectively, the “Home MOT” was also a strategic tool to cultivate a more trusting relationship and enhance residents’ satisfaction with the housing service.

Responding to Councillor Paul Alexander’s question about voids and disrepair, and issues relating to retrofitting boilers in some flats, John Hayden referred to the level of disparity of work for different void specifications. While four extra contractors had been engaged to start in September, high quality product specifications would mean related works might take 3 to 4 years to complete. The Council aimed to clear the backlog while measuring residents’ satisfaction of the new “Home MOT” initiative under the Repairs Improvement Plan.

Councillor Frances Umeh thanked the Committee for their feedback and support for the new housing repairs services. She expected that the housing team would continue to listen to the residents and improve the delivery of the service.

Members noted that under the Complaint Management Strategy, a dedicated resolution team had been established to deal with all cases that reached the Housing Ombudsman. Resident, Martin Thirlaway, was concerned that team members might become victims of their own success and be made redundant when they were no longer needed. Richard Shwe assured him that the housing team aimed to provide high quality services and good officers would find suitable roles.

In conclusion, the Chair welcomed the strategy and initiatives under the Repairs Improvement Plan and the housing team’s commitment to providing better housing services for residents.

RESOLVED

That the Committee noted the report.

7. WORK PROGRAMME

Members noted the work programme, and the Chair’s suggestion to discuss the following items at the next meeting on 14 November 2023:

- Greening the Housing Stock
- Voids Management
- Homelessness Prevention
- Housing Ombudsman

8. DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Committee noted the dates of future meetings:

- 14 November 2023
- 30 January 2024
- 26 March 2024

Meeting started: 7.00 pm

Meeting ended: 9.30 pm

Chair:

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Links to Appendices

- Appendix 1 – [Matters arising – Officer responses](#)
- Appendix 2 – [Southern Housing's Presentation](#)
- Appendix 3 – [Additional information on rogue landlords](#)
- Appendix 4 – [Presentation on Repairs Improvement Plan](#)

Agenda Item 4

Report to: Housing and Homelessness Policy and Accountability Committee

Date: 14th November 2023

Subject: Homelessness Prevention Update

Report author: Alice Hainsworth, Head of Homelessness Prevention and Assessment
Roy Morgan, Assistant Director Housing Management

Responsible Director: Jon Pickstone, Strategic Director of Economy
Richard Shwe, Director of Housing

SUMMARY

This report provides a high-level overview of Homelessness Prevention services within London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham.

We have seen a 25% increase in homelessness presentations in the last six months.

We provide a range of preventative interventions such as enabling residents to stay within their existing accommodation including mediation with relatives and negotiation with landlords or move on to properties within the Private Rental Sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For the committee to review, feedback and comment on the report of Homelessness Prevention.

Background Papers Used in Preparing This Report

We benchmarked our performance against other West London Local Authorities as part of sharing good practice.

Benchmarking data for Q1 2023/24 is attached as **Appendix 1** and **Appendix 2** case studies.

STATUTORY FRAMEWORK OF HOMELESSNESS LEGISLATION

- 1.0 Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 is the primary homelessness legislation and sets out the local authority's duties to prevent homelessness and provide assistance to people who are actually homeless or threatened with homelessness.
- 1.1 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 ("HRA") came into force in April 2018, changing the way that local authorities deliver homelessness services. Many local

authorities including Hammersmith and Fulham were already working to prevent homelessness, but the Act puts prevention of homelessness on a statutory footing.

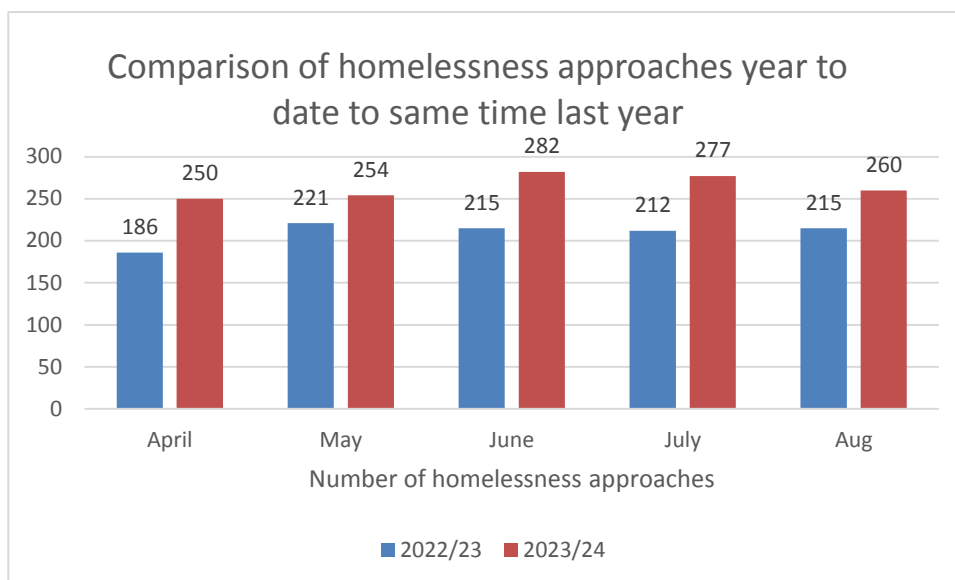
- 1.2 The introduction of the 'prevention duty' requires Hammersmith and Fulham and other local authorities to develop a personalised housing plan with residents who will be homeless in the next 56 days, giving us the opportunity to prevent their homelessness by helping them to remain where they are or to find suitable accommodation. This includes Temporary Accommodation (TA), Private Rented Sector (PRS) and supported accommodation.
- 1.3 We have seen the recent interest rate rises that are having an impact on private tenancies as landlords are passing the increased mortgage costs to tenants through significant rent increases. The average rental increase in the last 12 months since June 2022 in London was 9.3%.

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS SERVICES

- 1.4 At Hammersmith and Fulham, we have four teams specifically delivering homelessness prevention services:
 - H&F Link Team
 - Homelessness Assessment and Prevention Team
 - Rough Sleeping Team
 - Neighbourhood Services
- 1.5 H&F Link provides a range of services including benefits advice, budgeting support, support to access discretionary housing benefits, tenancy sustainment support and referrals to Beam for training, employment and private rented sector move on. The team also coordinates floating support provision for all borough residents working with Hestia. Residents also have access to employment skills and training opportunities through H&F Works.
- 1.6 Homelessness Assessment and Prevention Team delivers Part 7 of the Housing Act including providing alternative accommodation via Temporary Accommodation, Private Rental Sector or Supported Housing as needed. This team also prevents rough sleeping by receiving referrals from statutory partners including hospitals, Job Centre Plus, H&F Law Centre and Citizen's Advice, for anyone at risk of rough sleeping as part of the Duty to Refer.
- 1.7 Rough Sleeping Team works with Street Link and borough-commissioned services to provide supported hostel provision for rough sleepers to prevent the recurrence of rough sleeping in the borough.
- 1.8 Neighbourhood Services works very closely with the homelessness prevention team to identify early interventions to support residents to manage their tenancies. Tenancy audits are being carried out to identify the resident's support needs and where instances of hoarding have been identified, we make arrangements to clear the hoarded items. In some cases referrals are made to Adults Social Care. We also support residents who are having financial difficulties with their rent or experiencing cost-of-living issues.

DEMAND FOR HOUSING SERVICES

- 2.0 We have seen a 21% increase in homelessness approaches this financial year, compared to the same period in 2022/23 as outlined in the table below.



- 2.1 We had 2,599 homelessness approaches in 2022/23 financial year. For the last 5 months we have had 1,323 (compared to 1,049 last year for the same period). We are seeing an increasing trend of more people presenting themselves as homeless and it is imperative we review how we deliver our homelessness and prevention service to meet the current and future demands.

PREVENTION OF HOMELESSNESS SERVICE OFFER

- 3.0 Our homelessness prevention service is tailored to all of our residents' needs e.g. single people, families, those fleeing domestic violence, refugees, ex-offenders.
- 3.1 Referrals to the H&F Link service continues and the team has an active caseload of over 100 households at any one time. 63 households referred from April this year have been prevented from becoming homeless. These outcomes had been achieved through landlord/tenant negotiation, often assisted by Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) or awards of Household Support Fund (HSF), combined with sustainable repayment agreements. Interventions are tailored to the particular situation to assist with budgeting, debt management or employability support where relevant.
- 3.2 In addition, we work jointly with Job Centre Plus, Hammersmith and Fulham Law Centre and Citizen's Advice Bureau on specific cases, to prevent and resolve homelessness.

- 3.3 The below table shows the percentage of cases this financial year 2023/24 where we have prevented homelessness within the Prevention and Assessment team.

KPIs	Year to Date (August 23/24)
KPI - 60% of homelessness cases prevented	62%
KPI- 50% of prevention cases closed within 56 days	45%

- 3.4 The target is 60%. We are required to prevent homelessness within the 56-day timeframe, our target for this KPI is 50%. The 56-day timeframe is as specified within the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017).
- 3.5 We are behind our KPI target for closing cases within the required time frame of 56 days. This is due to ever increasing workloads within the team and back log of cases due to residents not providing or required information to assess their homelessness applications.
- 3.6 In November 2023, we are piloting new case handling processes within the team, which will improve decision-making on homelessness applications.
- 3.7 We have also brought in additional resources to close off all outstanding cases by the end of March 2024. This is being funded from the homelessness prevention grant from (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) DLUHC.

BENCHMARKING EXERCISE

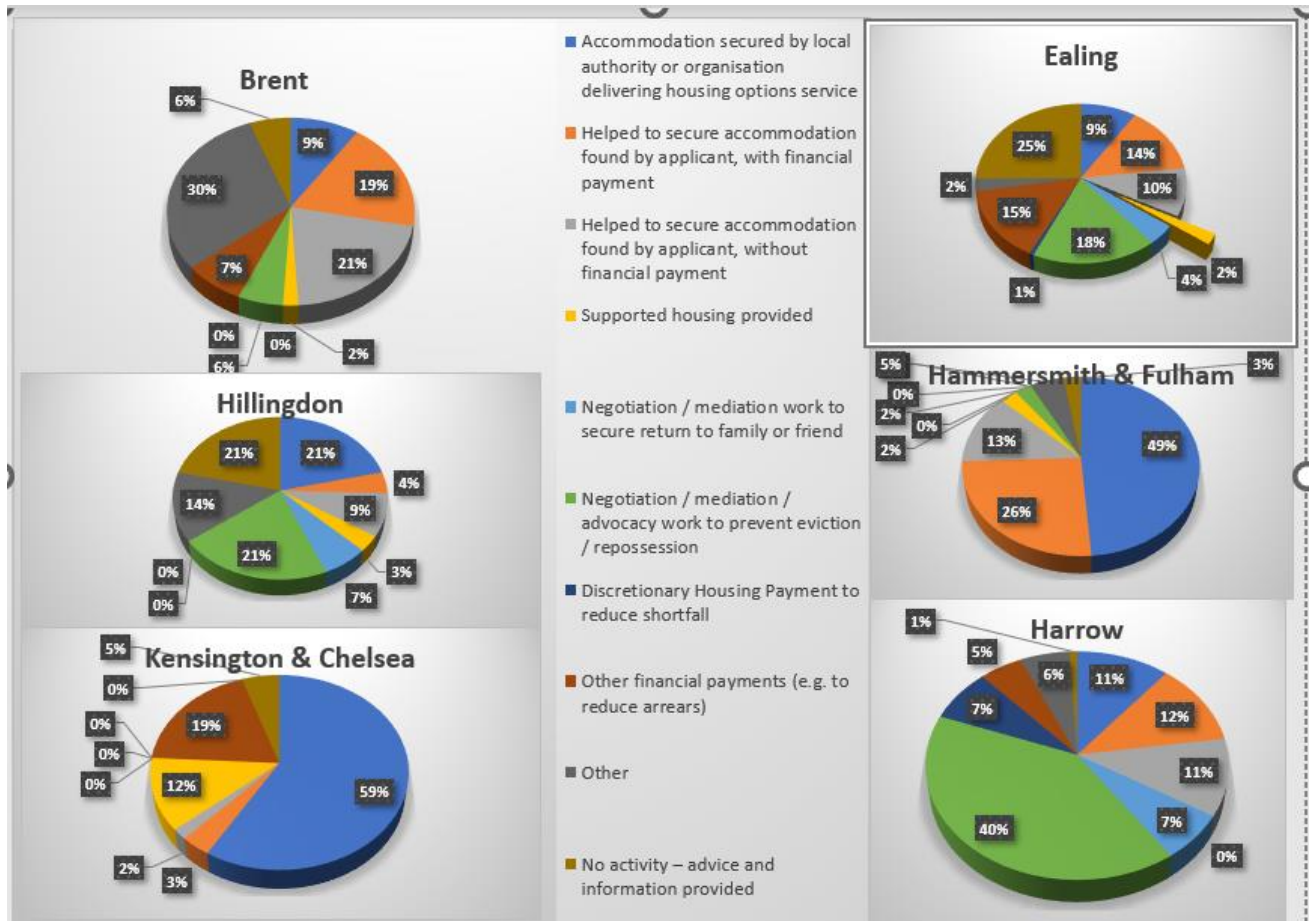
- 4.0 We benchmarked our performance against other West London Local Authorities as part of sharing good practice.
- 4.1 Comparing our homelessness and prevention statistics with other West London Local Authorities, we can review our practices to further improve our performance in doing more early intervention and prevention.

The benchmarking data showed that Hammersmith and Fulham needs to focus more on negotiating with landlords and mediation with families.

- 4.2 We are developing a homelessness prevention toolkit to equip frontline officers, with the necessary means to enable more move-on to private rented accommodation or in-situ resolutions. The toolkit includes affordability assessment calculator, access to Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP), Household Support Fund (HSF) and other prevention funds. It will also contain an improved incentive package to make our procurement offer more competitive and support our residents into sustainable housing.

4.3 We are planning to realign the entire Homelessness Prevention and Assessment Service for 2024/25 to make it more efficient, creating specialism where necessary, and to manage demand and reduce TA spending.

APPENDIX 1



APPENDIX 2

CASE STUDY 1

Resident A came out of prison in April 2023, after serving a 2-year sentence. He approached the Homelessness Assessment and Prevention Team, looking for support as he had found a property within the Private Rented Sector but didn't have any money for the deposit and was unclear on his benefit entitlement. The Housing Advisor supported him to understand his benefit entitlement and because he had been in prison, he was exempt from the single room rate (where under 35s receive less housing benefit as it's assumed they can house-share). The Housing Advisor arranged for payment of his rental deposit of £1,120 and his first month's rent. This work prevented the resident from going into Temporary Accommodation.

CASE STUDY 2

Resident B, a disabled mother with 2 children approached the Homelessness Assessment and Prevention team as her relationship with her partner had broken down and he moved out, so she now had a shortfall on her rent. She was on Personal Independent Payment (PIP) due to disabilities and there was an approximately £400 shortfall every month in her income and her landlord was threatening to evict her if she couldn't pay the full rent. The Housing Advisor arranged for Discretionary Housing Benefit to pick up the difference in her income and the rent and this was awarded to her until the end of her tenancy. Once her tenancy ended, she approached the council again and we supported her to find alternative private rented accommodation by providing her deposit to the new landlord.

Agenda Item 5

Briefing Note

Title	Complaints Management in Housing Services – PAC Brief
Date	14/11/2023
Lead Officers	Lisa Keating / Richard Shwe
Report Authors	Samuel Cunningham
Report Type	Brief

1. Summary:

We are committed to improving our existing complaints handling approach to address residents' concerns more effectively and promptly.

This brief provides an outline of the complaints management in Housing Services.

2. Initiation of Change:

The Housing Hub was established in June 2023. The objective was to significantly enhance the repairs service and complaints handling efficiency by setting up a dedicated team to lead long-term improvements that meet residents' expectations.

The Complaints and Disputes Resolution team was formed within the Housing Hub by amalgamating several specialist teams. This unified entity is now responsible for managing all repairs-related complaints and Housing Ombudsman cases.

3. Complaints Process and Performance:

To streamline complaints resolution, the Complaints and Disputes Resolution team introduced a standardised approach for both Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints. This is to ensure consistency and expedite the resolution process, with the aim of fair treatment for all residents. This centralised approach has facilitated better coordination among staff and more timely complaint resolution. Since the introduction of the team, there have been zero overdue repair complaints as of the end of September 2023.

A crucial aspect of our strategy is fostering a proactive culture in handling complaints, underpinned by continuous training. A comprehensive training programme has been launched, covering proactive complaint handling, empathetic communication, recognition of resident vulnerabilities, and understanding the regulatory framework, aiming to equip our team to handle complaints effectively and swiftly. **Appendix A** has our recent complaints performance data.

4. Next Steps:

Currently, the team handles repairs-related complaints and housing ombudsman cases. From November, the team will also handle housing management related complaints.

5. List of Appendices:

- Performance
- Complaints and Disputes Resolution

Appendix A: Performance

Date	Stage	% overdue	Total open
3/11/2023	1	0%	101
3/11/2023	2	0%	33
29/09/2023	1	0%	83
29/09/2023	2	0%	39
31/08/2023	1	15%	67
31/08/2023	2	25%	40
13/06/2023	1	12%	81
13/06/2023	2	67%	85

Complaints and Dispute Resolution Team

PAC Update – 14th November

Introduction

Issues and Complaint Escalation:

- Challenges in LBHF's repairs service; due to a number of issues, led to a surge in repair related complaints.
- Inadequate complaints handling escalated cases, ultimately leading to an increase in associated Housing Ombudsman cases.

Regulatory Scrutiny and Findings:

- In May 2023, a Paragraph 49 investigation by the Housing Ombudsman began, alongside inquiries by The Regulator for Social Housing regarding consumer standards breaches.
- Both organisations highlighted several instances where H&F failed in its duty to provide suitable accommodation to our tenants. It also highlighted issues regarding our contractors, which forms a part of a previous Repairs Improvement Plan presented at PAC.

Initiation of Change and Service Redesign:

- Changes to the Housing Service had started in February 2022, however these were increased in Autumn 2022 which eventually culminated in the introduction of the Housing Hub in June 2023. This aims to enhance repairs service and complaints handling efficiency.
- Both investigations have further highlighted the need for a **resident-centric** complaints handling.

The Housing Hub

Housing Hub Overview

Objective:

- Establishing a dedicated team to evaluate complaints and repair systems, with the aim of driving long-term enhancements.

Hub Services:

- Specialist teams converged in a single location to deliver comprehensive solutions for service improvement. Core areas of focus include complaint management, repair services enhancement, safeguarding, addressing overcrowding, and combating fuel poverty.

Unified Teams:

- Customer Contact Centre, Service Improvement and Business Development.

New Team:

- **Complaints and Disputes Resolution Team** (Stage 1, Members, MPs, FOI, SAR's, Stage 2 & Ombudsman cases).

Complaints & Disputes Resolution Team

Unified Complaints Unit:

- Consolidated all housing complaints all and all Housing Ombudsman cases within a single Team

Replicable Strategy:

- Applying a proactive approach uniformly across Stage 1 and 2 complaints to ensure consistency and efficiency.

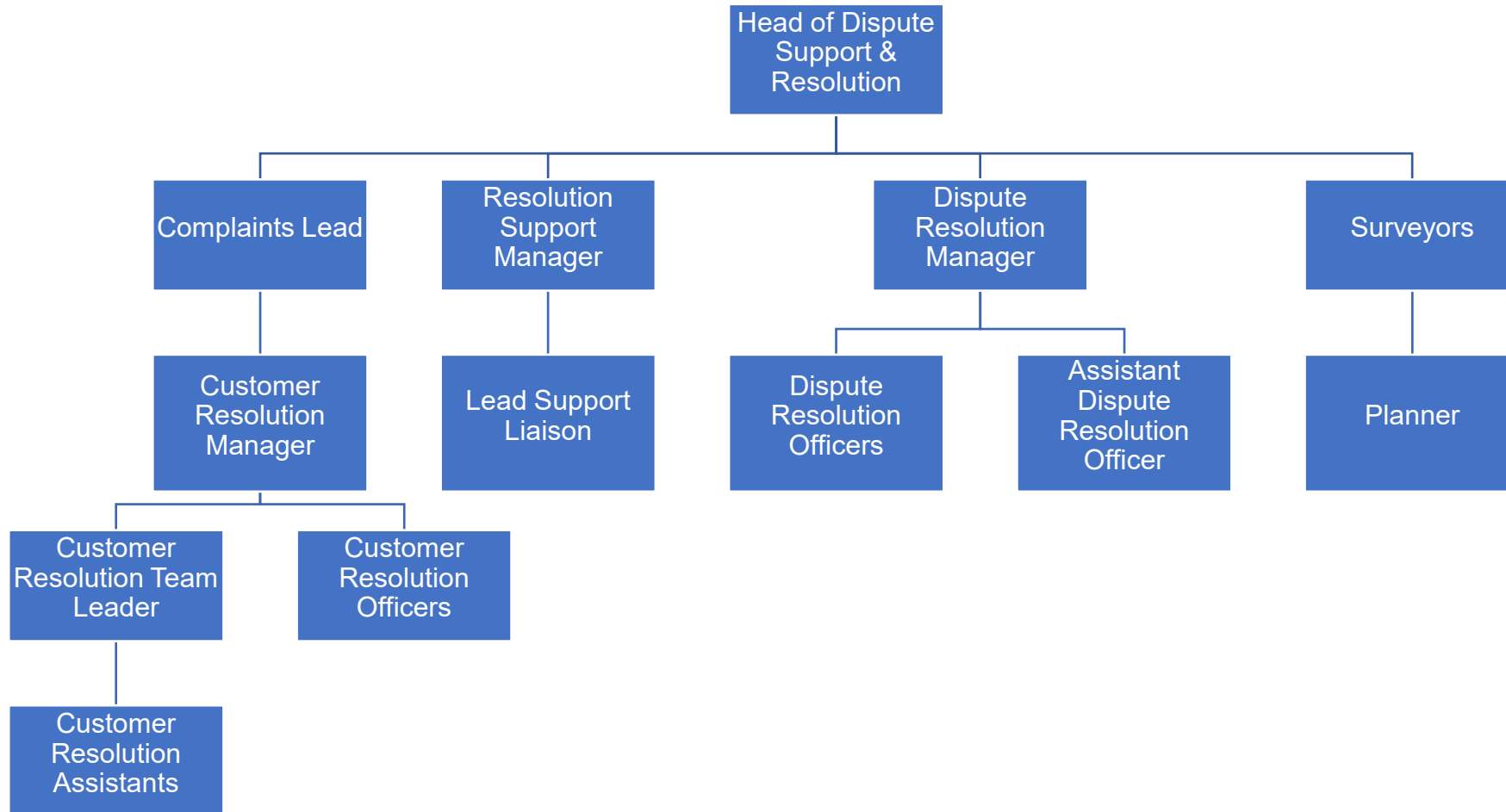
Cultivating Proactive Culture:

- Promoting a proactive complaint handling culture, bolstered by continuous training support to upskill the team.

Resident-Centric Approach:

- Concentrating on recognising vulnerabilities, enhancing communication among residents, and upgrading record keeping, all corroborated by regular in-service audits for continuous improvement.

Organisational Chart



Complaints Process & Performance

Complaints Performance

Date	Stage	% overdue	Total open
3/11/2023	1	0%	101
3/11/2023	2	0%	33
29/09/2023	1	0%	83
29/09/2023	2	0%	39
31/08/2023	1	15%	67
31/08/2023	2	25%	40
13/06/2023	1	12%	81
13/06/2023	2	67%	85

Complaints Process

Stage 1:

- Residents initially report repairs to the Contact Centre.
- If dissatisfaction arises due to service quality or a delay in repair completion, a Stage 1 complaint can be lodged.
- H&F policy states that a response will be made to a Stage 1 complaint within 15 working days.

Stage 2:

- If residents believe the complaint remains unresolved at Stage 1, escalation to Stage 2 is warranted.
- A response for a stage 2 complaint is provided within 20 working days.

Ombudsman:

- In some circumstances, residents have the right to escalate their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman.
- Our complaints policy is also in line with the Ombudsman Complaint Handling Codebook.

Complaint Resolution & Compensation Protocol:

- Under the new process, upheld complaints trigger a thorough review or "MOT" to address and action the necessary repairs, aiming for a swift resolution.
- Occasionally, in alignment with our compensation policy (which is guided by the Housing Ombudsman's recommendations), compensation payments are made to ameliorate any inconvenience caused.

Complaint Performance (2)

Objective Achieved:

- Successfully cleared all overdue Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints related to Housing Repairs by end of September 2023 as targeted in our Service Improvement Plan.

Evidence of Success:

- The zero overdue Stage 1 or Stage 2 complaints showcase our robust mechanisms in addressing all complaints effectively and punctually.
- Continual diligence in monitoring all tasks and related issues, ensuring they are completed and approved by residents, underpins our enduring commitment to service improvement and resident satisfaction.

Next Steps

Next steps

Continued Servicing of Ombudsman Cases:

- Prompt Response: Continue to prioritise timely responses to Ombudsman inquiries and recommendations to uphold the council's commitment to effective dispute resolution.
- Case Analysis: Continue to analyse each Ombudsman case to garner insights for preventing similar issues in future.
- Feedback Loop: Continue to operate a feedback loop to communicate Ombudsman findings to relevant teams, fostering continuous service improvement.

Enhanced Dispute Resolution:

- Capacity Building: Invest in training and resources to enhance the capacity and competency of the Disputes and Resolution Team.
- Process Optimisation: Review and refine the dispute resolution process to ensure it remains efficient, fair, and resident-centric.

Performance Monitoring:

- Metrics Tracking: Continue to monitor KPI's regarding complaint monitoring and compliance.

Agenda Item 6

LONDON BOROUGH OF HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM

Report to: Housing and Homelessness PAC

Date: 14/11/2023

Subject: Greening of the housing stock

Report author: Rob Kyle, Sustainability Asset Manager

Responsible Director: Jon Pickstone, Strategic Director for Economy

SUMMARY

Hammersmith and Fulham's council housing accounts for 83% of the organisation's operational emissions and 8% of total borough emissions. It is essential to reduce this by driving energy efficiency, decarbonising people's homes, and building energy efficient homes. Whilst reducing emissions is vital, H&F residents are also facing other challenges, such as fuel poverty and hotter more frequent heat waves. Greening the housing stock is therefore important to address these areas and a 'Retrofit Strategy' is currently being developed that will outline the approach to achieve this. The aim of this paper is to explain how the strategy will influence council policy in 4 key areas:

1. Increasing the energy efficiency of H&F homes
 2. Transitioning to low carbon heat
 3. Supporting fuel poverty
 4. Adapting the council's stock
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RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are requested to comment on the report and its policy implications and provide feedback to officers.

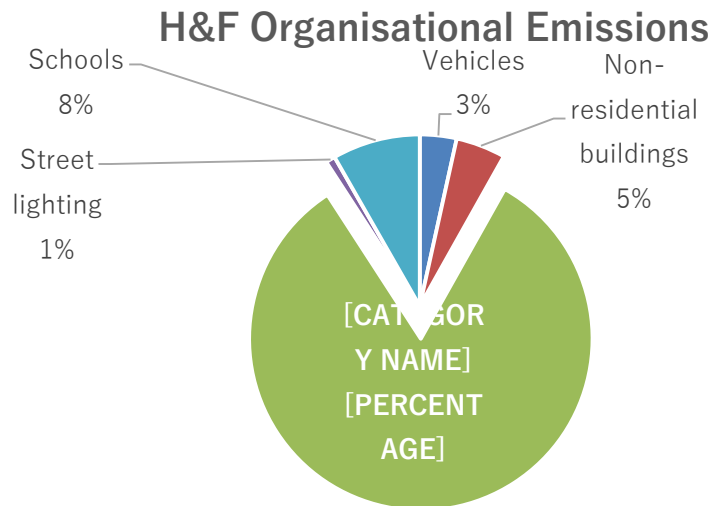
Background Papers Used in Preparing This Report

H&F Climate and Ecology Strategy - [H&F 2030 Climate and Ecology Strategy \(lbhf.gov.uk\)](#)

H&F Fuel poverty strategy - [A - HF Fuel Poverty Strategy Final.pdf \(lbhf.gov.uk\)](#)

BACKGROUND

H&F Council declared a climate and ecological emergency in 2019, pledging to reduce its carbon emissions and meet Net Zero Carbon by 2030. As shown below, the largest proportion of H&F’s organisational carbon emissions are a result of the council-owned housing stock. Thus, a key pathway to achieving net zero will be to retrofit council-owned homes to be more energy-efficient and rely on clean, low-carbon energy.



Whilst reducing carbon is essential, H&F Council and its residents are also facing an unprecedented number of challenges, from fuel poverty, to experiencing more severe impacts of climate change such as hotter and more frequent heat waves. Examples such as the Hammersmith Bridge structural issues during 2022 and the 1,500 homes that flooded in 2021 show the urgency of this situation. If no action is taken, heat-related deaths in the UK are expected to increase to 12,000 deaths per year this century, a 500% increase from current levels.

The picture is clear: H&F Council needs to act now to protect our residents and borough, and ‘retrofitting’ council-owned homes is a major part of the answer.





Retrofit

The definition of retrofit is to ‘*add (a component or accessory) to something that did not have it when manufactured.*’ Traditionally in the environmental industry this is largely focussed on decarbonisation. However, H&F buildings also need to be adapted for a changing climate and therefore retrofit should include measures to address this. Whilst these measures are largely focussed on mitigating impacts of, for example overheating and flooding, they can also support with making buildings more attractive, increase biodiversity and provide more green space for people to enjoy.

Progress so far

As the formal approach for retrofit is being developed through the strategy, progress is still being made on reducing emissions from the housing stock as shown below.

- Retrofit is built into the councils Capital works improvement programme with opportunities to increase the energy efficiency considered on a project-by-project basis.
- An innovative deep retrofit project, EnergieSprong is currently onsite at the West Kensington Estate.
- Proposals to install a full air source heat pump (ASHP) system at a housing block is being put forward.
- Success with multiple grants, including over £5million from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund and over £200,000 from the London Energy Accelerator.

 <p>Energy efficiency Increasing the energy efficiency of H&F buildings can reduce carbon and energy bills.</p>	 <p>Low Carbon Heat Transitioning the stock to a heating source that is low carbon is essential to fully decarbonising the stock.</p>	 <p>Fuel Poverty Fuel poverty is increasing. H&F has recently embedded a fuel poverty strategy for which retrofit is a key part.</p>	 <p>Adaptation The climate is changing, and H&Fs housing stock needs to be adapted to make it more resilient.</p>
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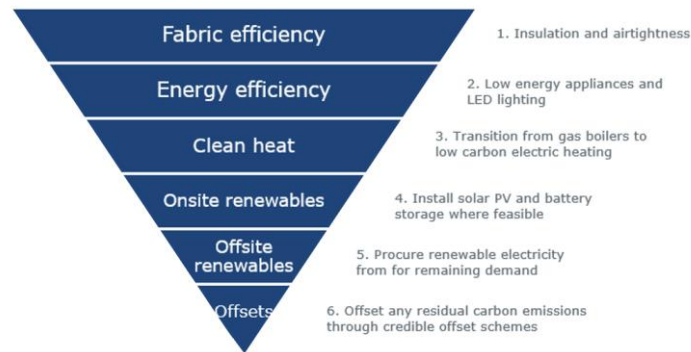
Retrofit Strategy

At the end of 2022 it was agreed that the Asset Management team would develop a 'Retrofit Strategy' that would agree the best approach to decarbonise the councils housing stock. Given the unsettled government policy and challenging financial landscape the strategy will be a live document that can be updated if necessary. The final strategy is still being developed; however, this paper will look at how it is likely to influence council policy in 4 key areas relating to H&Fs housing and tenants.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND LOW CARBON HEATING

Fabric first

To decarbonise a building, the most common approach is to increase the energy efficiency, before introducing low carbon heat (clean heat) and renewable energy. The energy hierarchy provides an overview on a home's journey to net zero carbon:



This is referred to as a 'Fabric First' approach and is accepted as best practice to decarbonise buildings. Upgrading the fabric increases energy efficiency and reduces demand for energy and carbon emissions. It also prepares the building for the transition to low carbon heat, and often reduces the cost of installation through reduced systems sizes and future electricity consumption.

The benefits of focussing on the fabric are:

- It reduces tenant energy bills, supports with fuel poverty, and ensures bills remain the same when low carbon heating is installed.
- It future proofs the stock against future government regulation. The current government target is for all social housing to be EPC C by 2030.
- It will allow more time for the low carbon heat market to mature and costs to come down (see below for more detail).
- It will allow more time for 'district heating' to be embedded in the borough (see below for more detail).
- It is more akin to the central government strategy and therefore more grant funding is available for fabric now.
- It reduces financial pressure on the council as most of the cost of decarbonisation is in low carbon heating.
- It ensures that new heating systems are sized for the post retrofit heat demand, which usually enables smaller and cheaper systems to be purchased.

Given this the approach of fabric first is likely to be proposed as part of the retrofit strategy.

Low carbon heating

Whilst low carbon heating is a critical part of decarbonising H&Fs homes, transitioning the stock in the short term would provide 4 key challenges.

1. **Current stock** – over 70% of H&Fs boilers are not due to come to end of life until 2028. In most circumstances boilers will also continue to work beyond

this timeline. Starting the transition to low carbon heat now would mean removing these boilers. Not only would this mean H&F would lose the value of removing the boiler before it has fully depreciated, but there would also be an 'embodied carbon' cost.

2. **Capital cost** – 75% of the cost of decarbonising the stock comes when changing the heating source. Currently the preferred technology is 'heat pumps' as they are the most efficient energy solution (if a building is well insulated); however, they are currently three times more expensive than gas boilers as well as being about two times more expensive to maintain.
3. **Technology and energy bills** – in many cases electrifying heat will result in increased energy bills if not considered alongside the buildings energy efficiency. Air source and ground source heat pumps whilst very efficient can still lead to an increase in bills unless the building is insulated. Solutions such as electric boilers can result in bills that double if not triple in cost. This could increase the amount of people in fuel poverty as well as increasing the financial pressure on those already in it. Given this upgrading the heating should never be done without ensuring the building is as well insulated first. District heating, where heat is shared across buildings through underground pipework, is a potential solution and likely cheaper than individual heat pumps across large parts of H&F. However, implementing these can only be done in the medium term due to the complexity and required planning. See 'Clean heat masterplan' for more details on this.
4. **Grid capacity** – the grid is currently experiencing capacity issues due to high demand. Issues are already materialising in the outer West London area where larger developments along the A40 corridor are struggling to secure connections. As a result, only efficient solutions such as ASHP or ground source heat pumps can currently be considered. 'District heat networks' are an option for the medium term.

Clean heat masterplan

Whilst focussing on energy efficiency is the proposed first step, continuing to look at ways to decarbonise heat should also be considered. A good example of this is the 'Clean heat masterplan' which is looking at the viability of 'district heat networks' in H&F.

Heat networks, also known as district heating, supply heat from one or more central sources to consumers through a network of underground pipes, usually carrying water, which deliver space heating and hot water to individual buildings. This avoids the need for individual heating systems installed in every building. The central heat source can be one of many technologies. Common low carbon examples are very large heat pumps, geothermal sources, or waste heat from data centres. Heat networks present a cost-effective way to reduce carbon emissions from space and water heating in many urban areas, and modelling undertaken by the Centre for Sustainable Energy for H&F in 2023 shows that heat networks are likely cheaper (based on whole life cost) than individual heat pumps across the vast majority of H&F, including almost all of the HRA housing estates.

However, heat networks require greater upfront capital investment and take many years to develop, usually requiring detailed feasibility studies, detailed project development (DPD) and complex procurement exercises to fully establish. It is likely that smaller heat networks would be developed initially, and then these would expand and interconnect over time, following the model of countries like Denmark which now heat most large urban buildings using heat networks.

RETROFIT AND FUEL POVERTY

Decarbonising H&F's housing stock by focussing on a fabric first approach will also support with Fuel Poverty and align closely with H&F's Fuel Poverty strategy. This has been developed by the Climate Team, in collaboration with the Public Health team, and focuses on support provided to residents who are struggling with energy bills and/or living in a cold home. There are two key avenues to addressing fuel poverty:

- **Maximising household income** – this includes ensuring residents are accessing all benefits and financial support they are eligible for, as well as supporting people into work where this is possible.
- **Improving energy efficiency** – this means retrofitting housing to ensure that residential buildings are efficient, reducing energy demand and thus both reducing bills for residents and reducing energy waste and carbon emissions related to heating and powering a home.

The Fuel Poverty strategy looks at a range of interventions to support residents in accessing energy efficiency improvements, particularly for residents living in private rented or owner-occupied properties. This works hand in hand with the Retrofit Strategy which looks at equivalent energy efficiency pathways for our Council-owned stock. In England, 17.3% of households living in social housing were fuel poor, compared to 13.4% across all tenures, so retrofitting council housing and reducing energy usage is critical to addressing fuel poverty, with strong alignment to H&F's Fuel Poverty strategy. It should be noted that when the transition to low carbon heating begins it will be vital to ensure that there is no risk of increasing the amount of people in fuel poverty if electricity prices remain as high as they are.

ADAPTATION

Globally and locally, we are beginning to feel the impacts of climate change. More intense rainfall events are occurring in the UK, increasing the risk of flooding. Summer temperatures are also rising, in which London has already seen a mean summer temperature increase of 1.9C since 1960. Heatwave events will also become more common, increasing risk to residents in terms of overheating and drought. Locally, in H&F, we've seen these impacts through instances such as the Hammersmith Bridge structural issues during heatwave days and the 1,500 homes that flooded in 2021. Most of H&F is considered to face some level of surface flooding risk.

Urban areas such as London experience an especially high risk to the effects of climate change due to various factors such as the Urban Heat Island effect, increased soil impermeability and lower levels of biodiversity and ecosystem

services. Additionally, urban areas face challenges such as air pollution, water and energy provision, food security, and habitat fragmentation. This greatly increases residents' risk to heat-related illnesses and deaths, disproportionately impacting vulnerable residents.

The retrofit industry has mainly focussed on decarbonisation in the past and only in recent times is adaptation beginning to be focussed on in more detail. It is however clear about ensuring our residents and buildings will be able to withstand the effects of climate change. To combat this within our housing stock there are several solutions, such as:

- green (biodiversity, flood resistance and cooling), blue (flood resistance), and white roofs (cooling)
- external shutters
- solar shading (shading built into new glazing of new windows)
- water butts

The housing sector has not yet defined performance metrics to strategically manage flooding and overheating risk in homes. There is also limited data to baseline and measure performance. As part of the Retrofit Strategy the first step is to ensure adaptation measures are considered on a case-by-case basis within our capital improvement programme. Alongside this establishing better data and metrics and having an agreed approach will then form key actions in the strategies action plan.

New developments and adaptation

A good example of where adaptation principles are being applied can be seen in the council's development programme.

The direct delivery programme is on track to deliver 1,134 new homes across 17 sites, with a minimum of 65% of the homes being affordable. In addition, the development programme will renew key community facilities including community/tenants' halls, schools, nurseries, and civic spaces. The first two projects, Springvale completed in May 2022, and delivered 10 social rent homes, while the first phase of Ed City is due to see the completion of the first 24 genuinely affordable homes within the next month. This will be followed by the Youth Zone, new Ark school and office building shortly thereafter.

The next three projects in the direct delivery programme are Hartopp and Lannoy, where our appointed contractors are on-site having concluded planning pre-commencement conditions, while the Lillie Road and Farm Lane projects have been given planning permission and we are currently procuring construction partners for each scheme.

Like Hartopp and Lannoy, both Farm Lane and Lillie Road sites are designed to a Passivhaus standard, which will deliver significant reduction in on-site carbon, and result in significant savings to energy bills. However, alongside this the buildings are also designed to prepare for a changing climate. With increasing temperatures, it is

important to mitigate the risk of overheating. External elements like balconies provide shading to the flats below, whilst a lower level of glazing will be installed to reduce the amount of solar gain. Due to the high levels of insulation, mechanical ventilation will be used to keep the air fresh. This system incorporates a 'summer bypass' where cooler air from the outside is allowed to pass into the building on hotter days.

When considering water, the schemes will incorporate monitoring and control measures, with mains water meter for the entire building and sub-meters per home. The sustainable urban drainage (SUD) strategy will include an underground attenuation tank which will accommodate 1 in 100 year rainfall event, plus a 40% allowance for climate change. In addition, there will also be permeable paving to provide surface water treatment and significantly improve existing runoff rate. At Farm Lane, a 'blue roof' will be created on the main building, which will also assist with the interception and retention of precipitation, thus, helping reduce the flow rate and volume of surface water runoff.

These are but a few of the measures that are being incorporated into H&F's new developments. Whilst we cannot expect to retrofit the councils' older buildings to this level, many of the solutions are possible and will continue to be investigated as the retrofit strategy is delivered.

LIST OF APPENDICES

None