



Joint Audit and Governance Committee  
26 September 2024

## ADUR & WORTHING COUNCILS

Key Decision [/No]

Ward(s) Affected: All Adur

### **Housing Improvement Plan: September 2024 Progress Report**

### **Report by the Assistant Director for Housing and Homelessness Prevention**

#### **Executive Summary**

##### **1. Purpose**

- This report provides the latest progress review of the Housing Improvement Plan for Adur Homes, following the self-referral to the Regulator for Social Housing. It updates Members on the specific progress being made to improve performance and meet the required standards.
- This work contributes to the delivery of the Council's mission to ensure that everyone has a safe, secure and sustainable home.

##### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 Members are asked to note the good progress being made to ensure that Adur Homes becomes fully compliant with regulatory standards that led to the self-referral to the Regulator for Social Housing and the work underway to significantly transform Adur Homes to ensure residents have safe, secure and sustainable homes.

## **1. Background context**

- 1.1. Members are reminded that reports are presented to this committee to provide an update on the work in progress following the self-referral to the regulator for social housing. This work is being developed through the Improvement Plan, which is now over halfway through the first year of a two year plan.
- 1.2. Our focus is on the delivery of good, safe and sustainable homes for all our residents, whose safety and wellbeing is paramount. There is a strong commitment to ensuring that our social housing in Adur meets this ambition.
- 1.3. Whilst this initial plan is work being carried out over the medium term, it is important to state that programme to improvement will require significant medium to longer term transformation and work is being developed and referenced in this report.
- 1.4. Officers continue to meet with the Regulator for Social Housing on a monthly basis to review the elements of the improvement plan that relate to the self-referral, notably health, safety and compliance, decent homes and damp and mould.
- 1.5. Members are also reminded about the legislative change underway through the new Social Housing (Regulation) Act. Preparations are underway to ensure that Adur Homes is compliant with these changes.

## **2. Adur Homes Improvement Plan - Areas of focus**

- 2.1. The Adur Homes Improvement Plan sets out a number of key priorities for the service, which primarily address the concerns of the Regulator (around compliance and decent homes) and also include wider-ranging priorities to ensure the whole service is transformed, including: systems, workforce, governance, asset management, health and safety compliance issues, tenancy management and engagement, complaints and FOIs.
- 2.2. **Service Redesign - Establishing the right leadership and workforce**
  - 2.2.1. Since the last update to this committee, as part of the Council wide Organisation Development the wider Housing Service has been through a formal consultation and redesign with a number of changes to roles. We are now in the implementation stage of

the redesign and progressing recruitment to a number of essential roles. These include Asset Manager, Technical Officers in key disciplines areas and growth to our Tenancy Services teams. We have created a small number of apprenticeship and trainee roles to help “grow our own” staff for the future. Colleagues in these roles will go through formalised training as part of their roles.

- 2.2.2. This new structure aligns with others across the wider Council to support residents including Income and Debt Team and Proactive team within Resident Services.

### **2.3. Gas Surveys**

- 2.3.1. We continue to focus on those that do not provide access and now tackle these with prompt and relevant actions with warrants being obtained quickly. Properties with overdue surveys can be for a number of reasons including a resident in prison and not communicating, or having moved to nursing homes. Of these cases work is undertaken between property and tenancy services regarding tenancy positions. We still follow up to obtain warrants to gain entry and waiting for court dates

The main reasons for non engagement for surveys has been debt on meter, overdue rent, resident failed to communicate, resident location (prison, nursing home). We had 4 overdue surveys at the end of August with court dates pending for access for each.

### **2.4. Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR)**

- 2.4.1. We continue to work through surveys in this area and have a multi faceted approach to scheduling these survey works including letters, door knocks. There are a perceived high number of cancelled appointments (50 cancelled by residents) and no access responses (420 with no contact) so work is underway to better understand this and consider alternative options for further improved compliance

### **2.5. Fire Risk Assessments**

- 2.5.1. We have reached 100% compliance in this area when we last reported to the regulator in August

### **2.6. Achieving Decent Homes**

- 2.6.1. Following the temporary delay due to the election, work restarted in the procurement and governance process to develop tenders and contracts for both planned and cyclical

works.

- 2.6.2. The appointment of a multidisciplinary consultant to manage the contracts going forward is being tested against in-house provision with some initial costs still to be confirmed and a fully assessed proposal being worked through by officers.
- 2.6.3. The current procurement governance process allows us to review existing frameworks set up specifically for work areas and appoint a contractor under these arrangements, this being either a direct award to the top ranked contractor under the framework or undergoing a mini tender with all or a selected number of the approved contractors.
- 2.6.4. This process eliminates the requirement for a full open tender thereby saving the council time in appointing a contractor and the associated costs.
- 2.6.5. Governance reports will be shared via the appropriate route for approval as soon as possible to progress this work

## **2.7. Stock Condition Surveys**

- 2.7.1. Works progressing well with a third of surveys completed. Original programme completion date is end of October with a further month for data validation. There have been no issues raised to affect the planned completion of this work being met.
- 2.7.2. As these surveys are undertaken we are being notified of areas that need urgent intervention prior to the full results being collated in the Autumn.
- 2.7.3. We have planned and developed how we will store and import the data, and will be undertaking a sample import of data to test the setup that has been built. From this any changes will be made to be ready to import the data into the assets interface when it is made available from the contractor.

## **2.8. Damp and Mould**

- 2.8.1. We currently have 100 properties awaiting survey and 123 with ongoing works currently ongoing.
- 2.8.2. Numbers are reducing and the new process is embedding well with a clear plan of action being adopted by both the team and contractor.
- 2.8.3. We will be providing updated detail around the current intervention plan to the Regulator to ensure we are aligning our work with known vulnerabilities of tenants.

## **2.9. Void Properties**

- 2.9.1. Data as of the end of July shows 139 void properties with 21 currently being worked on and 14 made ready to let in the month. A significant number are awaiting either asbestos surveys or

removal works to be completed.

- 2.9.2. The team has placed a greater emphasis on completing the specification work in advance of allocating to the contractors. We are considering how we can bolster this work and considering adding to the number of contractors currently supporting this area.
- 2.9.3. We have been tasked by the Regulator to provide them with a measurable plan to reduce the number of void properties currently being worked through. This will be reported to them at the September meeting and also to our Members in the next report period.

## **2.10. Systems and Data**

- 2.10.1. Following the wider housing service redesign we have a fully resourced Systems and Applications team. Alongside other officers in the Adur Homes team they have worked through improvements to our compliance system. Following the successful completion of the EICR transfer, the remaining compliance areas will be reviewed and updated/incorporated into the new system with an anticipated completion of all compliance areas being completed by end of December 2024. This will also include where possible, other key areas of monitoring that are deemed appropriate to include where data is collected and stored in other systems, thus providing one central point of access and reporting.
- 2.10.2. In advance of the stock condition surveys being completed later this year we have been preparing an appropriate database to support the use of this data. This will be subject to testing in advance of the final datasets being received

## **2.11. Complaints**

- 2.11.1. Our new Housing Complaints Policy was approved by JAGC in July and it has been signed and published on the website. A requirement to remain compliant with the code is to publish our annual complaints report which will be considered by JAGC in September. As a service we are currently missing some key roles across the organisation, Complaints Manager and a specific Housing Complaints Officer. Following the wider organisation redesigns involving Resident Services and Housing both these roles are being recruited to but are currently vacant.
- 2.11.2. In the meantime we know we have significant work to do regarding the timeliness of responses and the significant issues that lead from this including low satisfaction rates from residents.

## **2.12. Tenant Satisfaction Results**

- 2.12.1. The results from the survey and the management measures have been received and shared with residents through residents meetings, a summary of the results has been shared

in our newsletter and the full set of results have been provided on a new dedicated webpage. We met with survey providers in August to agree the survey approach for 2024 and following a review of learning we intend to follow a similar approach to 2023 (to be undertaken in October/November using online, telephone and postal responses).

2.12.2. The results have confirmed our understanding of the areas needing additional focus for improvement. We know there is still much to do which our development around participation and engagement approach below seeks to improve.

### **2.13. Tenant Participation and Engagement**

2.13.1. Our tenant participation and engagement commission is progressing well and feedback from the Regulator was incorporated. A call to potential providers has been made and 9 have registered their interest. The commission will be shared with them in the coming weeks and applications will be scored by a staff team including housing officers, the new neighbourhoods team and resident representatives. We anticipate awarding the contract in October.

### **2.14. Policies and Procedures**

2.14.1. We have made progress in reviewing all our policies and procedures and we are developing an overall plan of review. The following documents have been drafted and will be consulted on with residents and members in the autumn.

- Tenant Policy
- Tenant Handbook
- Tenancy Agreement
- Recharge Policy
- Repairs Policy

2.14.2. With regard to consultation, we are proposing that the Tenancy Policy, the Responsive Repairs Policy and the Tenant Handbook are consulted with residents through a simple consultation and feedback page on our website and tenant and leaseholder representation at the Adur Homes Advisory Board. We are currently taking legal advice on the process for updating the tenancy agreement for new tenants only.

2.14.3. Following the above consultation, the drafts of these documents will be taken to the Adur Homes Advisory Board for final comment and feedback before being agreed and adopted by the Joint Strategy Committee.

## **3. Engagement and Communication**

5.1 In undertaking this work a range of engagement and communication has been carried out, as referenced above as part of the Improvement Plan. In addition, members have been briefed about this work throughout.

5.2 A communication and engagement plan has been developed and a newsletter developed to inform residents about the work underway.

#### **4. Financial Implications**

- The resources to ensure compliance with the regulator's standards must be found within the Adur HRA which is a ring-fenced account. Overall, the HRA has a significant budget available to it (£15.3m) and every endeavour will be made regarding best use of this existing resource to deliver the improvement plan.
- Previously changes have been made to the calculation of depreciation which has been of benefit to the HRA's financial standing. Specifically, increasing the proportion of the overall valuation on council properties applied to residual value (the remaining value of an asset after depreciation) from 30% to 40%. It's important to note that residual value itself is not subject to depreciation. This adjustment is based on professional judgement, considering the limited availability of land in the South East of England.

Furthermore, the introduction of a de minimis value for componentisation (breaking down an asset into its individual components for accounting purposes), means components valued below £10,000 are now depreciated along with the main structure. This change follows benchmarking, which highlighted that our depreciation charge per dwelling was higher than that of similar-sized councils. The resulting annual depreciation charge is now directed to the Major Repairs Reserve (funds set aside for significant property repairs), contributing approximately £400,000 per year to the HRA's capacity. However, any capital resources used to support the revenue budget will need to be replaced by borrowing at an estimated revenue impact of £45,000 per £1m additional borrowing in a full year.

- Development of a new Housing Revenue Account Business Plan is being undertaken and will be informed by the stock condition survey information expected to be received by the end of the calendar year. The business plan will support the management of resources to deliver

against the government's Decent Homes Standard and to ensure compliance in all other service areas.

## 5. Legal Implications

- Under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972, the council has the power to do anything that is calculated to facilitate, or which is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of its functions.
- Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 empowers the council to do anything an individual can do apart from that which is specifically prohibited by pre-existing legislation.
- Section 3(1) of the Local Government Act 1999 (LGA 1999) contains a general duty on a best value authority to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- Section 8 of the Housing Act 1985 continues to place a duty on every local housing authority to consider housing conditions in its district and the needs of the district with respect to the provision of further housing accommodation.

## Background Papers

- [Adur Homes Compliance with Housing Regulator Standards - Joint Audit and Governance Committee March 2024](#)
- [Regulatory Compliance Notice for Adur Homes - Joint Audit and Governance Committee 30 May 2023 and Adur Joint Strategic Sub-Committee 15 June 2023](#)
- [Regulatory Standards](#)
- [Decent Homes Standards](#)
- [Housing Strategy: Enabling communities to thrive in their own home” 2020-2023;](#)
- [Social Housing Act summary](#)

## Officer Contact Details:-

Rob Jarvis, Assistant Director for Housing and Homelessness Prevention

Email: [Rob.Jarvis@adur-worthing.gov.uk](mailto:Rob.Jarvis@adur-worthing.gov.uk)



## **Sustainability & Risk Assessment**

### **1. Economic**

- 1.1 Thriving Economy is one of the four Missions identified in Our Plan and will therefore become one of the key documents informing the direction and prioritisation of the council's work with regard to Adur Homes.
- 1.2 Providing a decent home that is secure, affordable, warm and modern, supports the wellbeing of our residents, enabling those who are able to work to enter and sustain employment and contribute to economic activity.

### **2. Social**

#### **2.1 Social Value**

- 2.1.1 Residents and communities are central to Our Plan and 'Thriving People' is one of the four Missions identified in Our Plan. This mission aims to ensure people are healthy, resilient and resourceful, that they can access the right help when they need it and everyone has a safe, secure and sustainable home.
- 2.1.2 One of the three overarching Principles in Our Plan is Participative, which is based on the explicit intention to work more closely with citizens to involve them in deeper and more meaningful conversations about service design and delivery. Our work to meet the Decent Homes Standard (and the other housing standards linked to tenant participation) therefore forms a central part of the council's commitments.

#### **2.2 Equality Issues**

- 2.2.1 The council is subject to the general equality duty set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. This duty covers the following protected characteristics: age, gender, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, and sexual orientation.
- 2.2.2 In delivering housing services the council must have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Advance equality of opportunity between different groups
- Foster good relations between different groups

2.2.3 The participative principle in Our Plan describes the council's commitment to providing truly inclusive services by listening to underrepresented voices, creating equal access and meeting our equality duties.

2.2.4 The council's legal duties (Equality Act 2010) will inform the development and delivery of the improvement plan, in relation to eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations.

2.2.5 Decisions, actions and areas of investment relating to implementation of the improvement plan, may require Equality Impact Assessments.

## **2.3 Community Safety Issues (Section 17)**

2.3.1 The council is committed to the promotion of communities as safe places. Our Plan seeks to progress delivery of the council's community safety commitments by strengthening working partnerships with the Police, communities, businesses and multidisciplinary teams across the council.

2.3.2 As part of our ongoing work to meet the Neighbourhood and Community Housing Standard will see to keep the neighbourhood and communal areas associated with the Adur Homes clean and safe, co-operate with relevant partners to promote the wellbeing and help prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour.

## **2.4 Human Rights Issues**

2.4.1 The actions set out in the report will enable the council to identify solutions that will enable our residents, communities and neighbourhoods to flourish.

## **3. Environmental**

3.1 Thriving Environment is one of the four Missions identified in Our Plan and key actions include achieving net zero carbon, resilience to climate change and increased biodiversity by restoring natural habitats and minimising waste.

3.2 The improvement plan, as part of the wider work plan for Adur Homes, will as part of these commitments actively contribute to carbon reduction, waste minimisation and biodiversity improvement objectives.

#### **4. Governance**

4.1 In line with the constitution this report is being taken to the Joint Audit and Governance Committee to note and comment. Additional engagement has been undertaken with the Adur Joint Strategic Sub-Committee and the Adur Homes Management Board.

4.2 Further updates, including the improvement plan will be brought to the Joint Audit and Governance Committee on a quarterly basis.