



ECONOMY, REGENERATION AND HOUSING COMMITTEE

Monday 20th January 2025

REPORT TITLE:	HOUSING UPDATE REPORT
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION AND PLACE

REPORT SUMMARY

This Committee has previously agreed to receive several updates relating to housing agendas and priorities. This report along with any future ones, form part of the housing work programme with updates scheduled and informed by a range of data and performance briefings relating to both the Wirral Plan and the previously agreed and approved Economy, Regeneration and Housing Insight Report.

This report is therefore not intended to replicate the information within those reports, instead it is intended to enhance and provide further insight into a wider range of housing work which fall under the remit of this Committee.

This report primarily links and supports the Wirral Plan themes of people focussed Regeneration and promoting independence and healthier lives.

This is not a Key Decision. This does not have any ward implications.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Economy Regeneration and Housing Committee is recommended to note and endorse the contents of this report.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 The information provided in this Housing report informs the Housing annual work programme.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Other options include individual updates on each subject area, workshops or additional updates being provided. However, it was determined that this was the most effective way of briefing members on highlights by exception, in addition to other performance reports.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Update on National Housing Policy Overview

- 3.1 The King's speech in July 2024 set out the new government's legislative agenda. As expected, a significant number of new bills were announced; some of which relate directly to the housing sector including the Renter's Rights Bill and the Leasehold and Commonhold Reform Bill.

Renters Rights Bill

- 3.2 Following on from significant reform within the Social Housing Sector last year, the Renters Rights Bill will introduce the significant changes to the private rented sector. The Bill is expected to gain Royal Assent by summer 2025. Further details of the Bill have been released recently which include a list of all the Bill's measures including:

- Changes to grounds for possession and an end to Section 21 ('no-fault') evictions;
- The establishment of a Private Rented Sector Landlord Ombudsman;
- Creation of a Private Rented Sector Database, to help landlords understand their legal obligations and demonstrate compliance alongside providing better information to tenants to make informed decisions when entering into a tenancy agreement. This is aimed at enabling councils to appropriately prioritise enforcement activity. Landlords will need to be registered on the database to use certain possession grounds;
- Making it illegal for landlords and agents to discriminate against prospective tenants in receipt of benefits or with children;
- give tenants strengthened rights to request a pet in the property,
- Prohibiting landlords and agents from asking for or accepting offers above the advertised rent. Landlords and agents will be required to publish an asking rent for their property, and it will be illegal to accept offers made above this rate.
- Extending the Decent Homes Standard to the private rented sector. Properties must be free from serious hazards, be energy efficient and have reasonably modern facilities (including kitchens and bathrooms).
- Setting timescales for landlords to make homes safe where there are serious hazards and empowering tenants to challenge unsafe conditions; ;

- Strengthening Councils' enforcement powers by expanding civil penalties, introducing a package of investigatory powers and bringing in a new requirement for Councils to report on enforcement activity.

Leasehold and Commonhold Reform Bill

- 3.3 The Government also confirmed that it will act quickly to implement the provisions of the Leasehold and Reform Act 2024 which was passed by the previous government. A new Leasehold and Commonhold Reform Bill will enact the remaining recommendations made by the Law Commission in 2020. These include the strengthening of leaseholder's rights to extend their lease and buy their freehold (enfranchisement) and take over their freeholder's building management functions (Right to Manage).
- 3.4 The Leasehold and Commonhold Reform Bill will also revisit 'commonhold' tenure (an alternative to leasehold, which is underutilised) and seek to regulate ground rents.

SPECIFIC HOUSING WORK RELATED TO IMPROVING HOUSNG STANDARDS

Damp and Mould Project

- 3.5 The Council has been selected to participate in an MHCLG funded pilot looking at ways to address damp and mould in homes which complements the Public Health funding of three Healthy Homes Officers to work in the community in target areas likely to suffer from concentrations of damp homes. An evidence base has been completed by the Council's Intelligence Team, a team has been recruited and is already on the ground knocking on doors in areas with the highest risk of damp and mould and high prevalence of respiratory related illness. The pilot will limit pro-active door knocking to these areas initially so that the approach and impact can be evaluated.
- 3.6 A landlord training event on how to tackle damp in the home was fully booked out in December 2024 with a waiting list for further events to be run over the winter months. An event for professionals working on the front line was also delivered to raise awareness of the service and the Council's website is being developed to offer help and advice to households. Since 1st April 2024 the Healthy Homes Team have made 497 contacts including 226 visits, door knocking exercises and incoming reports of damp and mould via telephone or e-mail. Of these contacts 209 instances of damp and mould have been identified and either dealt with informally by the team or escalated to the Housing Standards Team for further investigation. An additional 121 referrals have been made to wider support agencies outside the council for further assistance.

High Risk tall buildings work

- 3.7 Five buildings in Wirral were identified following the Grenfell fire as they were clad with non-conforming material. This is lower risk than aluminium composite material cladding but still a fire hazard. Progress to remediate these properties is reported to MHCLG as required periodically by the Council's Housing Standards team, who has temporary dedicated staff funded from Burdens grant which is due to end on 31st

March 2025. It has been suggested that the Government will make further new burdens funding available to mayors and local authorities for additional activity to accelerate remediation in 2025/26, which will support the implementation of Local Remediation Acceleration Plan. This will be targeted on the highest risk properties in the LCR, and therefore is unlikely to be directed at the Wirral properties.

This officer will continue to oversee the remediation of these buildings as well as other considered high-risk accommodation and ensure compliance with regulations. Three of the buildings are operated by Magenta Living currently have works on site and have progressed well with removing the cladding and work nearing completion. The other two properties are operated by the NHS and whilst cladding is still in situ pending further discussions significant work has been done to reduce the fire risk of the properties including fire separation, fire doors and frames replaced, upgraded fire detection systems and a reduction in the occupancy to 40%.

Selective Licensing

- 3.8 A 4th Selective Licensing Scheme was introduced in Wirral on 1st April this year and EHR Committee approved a further statutory consultation exercise for a 5th Selective Licensing Scheme for Wirral on 6th December 2024. To date over 4177 properties have been licensed, 3004 of these have been inspected and around one in three of the properties found to be none compliant with licensing conditions requiring formal or informal action. In Scheme 4, 118 hazards have been found during 135 inspections and 24 enforcement actions have been initiated in the first few months of the new scheme alone. There have been 75 prosecutions altogether for all the Selective Licensing Schemes and 1 banning order, the latter being one of the first in the North West. This approach is proven to be effective in addressing poor performing landlords.

Enforcement

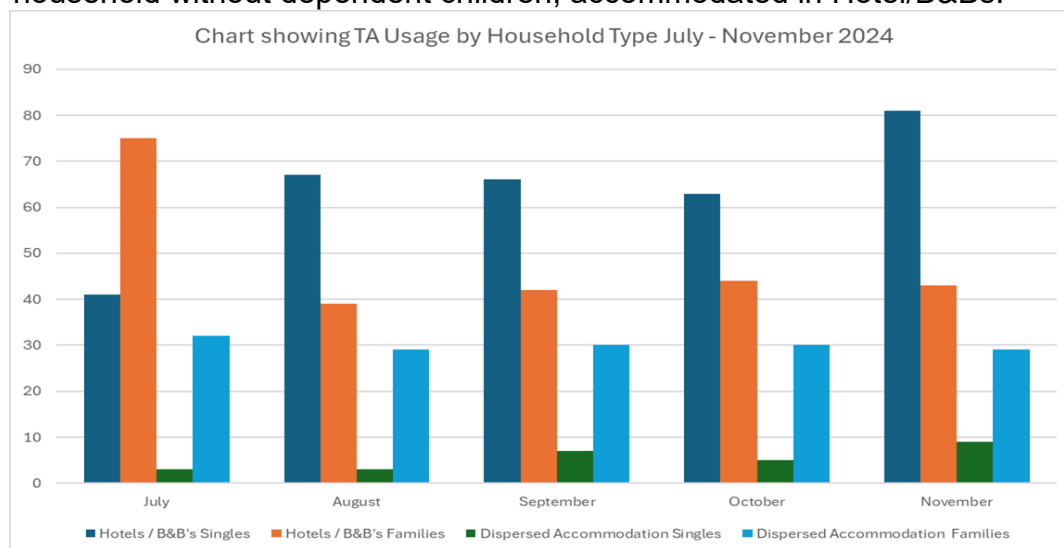
- 3.9 A full review of the Council's Housing Standards Enforcement Policy Statement has been completed with a draft new policy about to be consulted on after which a report will be presented to this Committee in March 2025. Proposed changes in legislation and determinations from Courts and Residential Tribunals, coupled with changes in national policy for robust enforcement in housing conditions that involve damp and mould have made it necessary for the Council to have a stand-alone policy which sits alongside the Corporate Enforcement Policy. The draft policy reflects the new national policy requirements and make it easier for updates to be made following any new legislation deriving from the Renter's Rights Bill over the next 12-18 months.
- 3.10 The draft policy will:
- Provide guidance to Members, officers, property businesses, and the public, on the range of options that are available to achieve compliance with legislation enforced by the Council's Housing Standards services;
 - Set out specifically, the Council's objectives and methods for achieving compliance and the criteria to be considered when deciding the appropriate response to a breach of legislation;
 - Provide the Council's Housing Standards service with a strategic delivery framework, which includes working with third party internal and external agencies

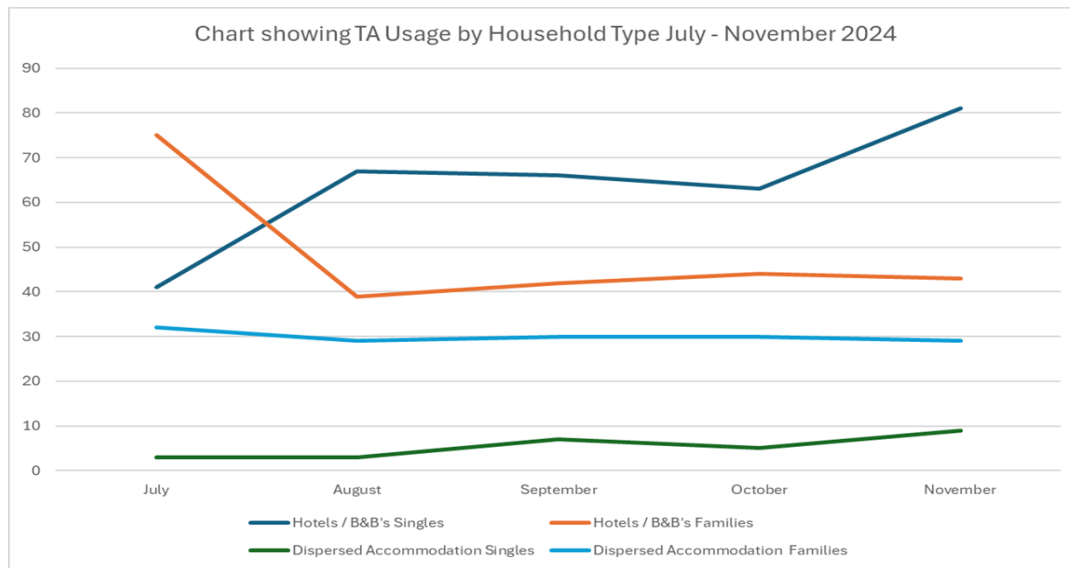
and the expectation to use the Policy to establish enhanced procedures and resourcing to deliver the requirements of the Policy.

SUPPORTING VULNERABLE HOUSEHOLDS AND THOSE WHO NEED REHOUSING SERVICES

Homelessness

- 3.11 The service continues to see an increase in presentations from across the community. Since April 2024 the Team has seen the numbers of live applications in the region of 1,000 households at any one time, which is substantially higher than the average of 840 in 2021/22 and 900 in 2022/23 Homeless applications continue to increase because of referrals from agencies (internal and external). Pressure from national government initiatives has also contributed to the increased including Home Office Asylum decisions and prison releases. The continued use of no fault eviction notices is another factor, this being the highest reason for approaches from households.
- 3.12 The overall lack of available, affordable housing in the borough means that less people can source their own accommodation and as such are applying to the Council for assistance. For those households where the council has a legal duty to provide temporary accommodation, the number of applicants (and their families) in Temporary Accommodation continues to rise as a result. In quarters 1 and 2 of 2024-2025 the Council has supported 327 homeless household into temporary accommodation of which:
- 295 have been accommodated in hotels; and
 - 32 have been accommodated longer term in self-contained accommodation.
- 3.13 The graph below demonstrates the usage of Temporary Accommodation (Hotels/B&B and Dispersed accommodation) by household type for the period July –November 2024. There has been overall increase month by month on those accommodated in Temporary Accommodation and more specifically the number of single, couples or household without dependent children, accommodated in Hotel/B&Bs.





- 3.14 Within the 327 the majority of these have a local connection to Wirral however 36 applicants are those who have been given Leave to Remain via the asylum process. This equates to over 10% of the total.
- 3.15 The stock of Temporary Accommodation has been increased since the Quarter 2 statistics with now over 40 self-contained properties secured through expansion of lease arrangements and purchases, with a further 5 properties to come on-line by March 2025. Several opportunities are currently being pursued to increase units further. However, the increase in demand for temporary accommodation will mean a reliance on hotel accommodation for the foreseeable future, albeit it will secure more avenues for the use of hotel and bed and breakfast located within the Borough, meaning the use of out of borough placements for family cases, have not increased at the scale and pace which it could have. The use of Temporary accommodation and Bed and Breakfast is a national problem and one which is difficult to resolve in the short term due to lack of turnover of affordable housing in the market.
- 3.16 In regard to the issue of rough sleeping in the borough the annual count, as required by legislation was conducted on the 12/13th November. This reported an increase in the numbers of rough sleepers when compared with the previous year. In November 2023 the Council reported 3 rough sleepers and this increased to 7, which is reflective of the regional and national situation. The Council continues to invest in services to respond to the needs of this client group including the provision of mobile outreach services, however due to the limited availability of permanent accommodation for those already living in hostel settings and who are ready to live independently, fewer hostel beds are becoming available to enable rough sleepers to move in off the streets.
- 3.17 Officers continue to work collaboratively with specialist Rough Sleeping advisors from MHCLG to explore alternative accommodation options and linked funding which will form the basis of further reports to members.

Property Pool Plus (PPP) Choice Based Lettings System

- 3.18 Demand for social housing via PPP continues to be strong and far outweighs the amount of property available via PPP. The amount of social housing stock in the

borough is approximately 24,000 but in 2023-2024 there were only 983 properties advertised via PPP. The number of properties advertised is likely to be lower during 2024-2025 as most providers are effectively at maximum occupation. For example, the largest provider Magenta Living has less than 50 empty homes from their stock of around 12,500.

- 3.19 There are currently 5,247 registered applicants on Property Pool Plus of which:
- Band A 543 (of which 106 are Care Lavers, 165 are health or welfare, 249 based on homeless assessment, 23 Housing First);
 - Band B 1758 (of which 1515 are health or welfare, and 243 are based on homeless assessments); and
 - Band C 3126 (No assessed need)
- 3.20 This will mean that many households currently registered on Property Pool Plus in either additional preference (Band A) or Reasonable preference (Band B) will wait longer to be offered accommodation to meet their housing need.
- 3.21 Engagement will commence on 20th January on proposed changes to the Policy reflecting recent statutory changes to the code of guidance for allocations and also further priority to be given to people who are homeless or have been homeless and currently reside within commissioned support services, This will enable more cases to have a greater chance to secure accommodation and release the much needed support services for other people coming into the service which need it more. A final report will be brought to this Committee for endorsement of the final proposed policy amendments, with feedback on applicants and partner agencies views.

Extra Care

- 3.22 The Council has worked with several partners over the years to develop a broad range of extra care provision in various locations across the borough, including the recently completed Spinnaker House (102 units) Extra Care scheme in Rock Ferry. A total of 602 units of extra care have been developed so far in the borough. Of those, 484 are for older people, with the remaining 118 units for specialist provision for people with learning disabilities, mental health or complex needs.
- 3.23 An extra care gap analysis has identified a need to continue to increase the borough's extra care provision over future years with a requirement for an overall total of 785 units by 2035. Work continues therefore to progress opportunities to develop new extra care provision in the borough including the provision of an 80-unit extra care scheme on the Wirral Growth Company promoted site in Pasture Road, Moreton. Officers in Housing work closely with Social Care colleagues to understand their commissioning requirements and new models of extra care to shape and inform future development opportunities.

Disabled Facilities Grants/Adaptations

- 3.24 While performance is already reported in the Wirral Plan, it is important to highlight the increased demands on the service with the number of enquires increasing substantially year on year. The allocation for this year was

£5,135,810 and due to increased efficiencies with the delivery of the service, the spend at the end of Quarter 2 was £3,330,295 which represents almost 65% of the total annual budget.

- 3.25 Additional capital borrowing was approved by Policy and Resources Committee on 6th November 2024 for an additional £250k to help meet the demand and a review of cases, with those at a lower risk likely to experience delays in the completion of works as cases are approved in line with the available budget on a month-by-month basis.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 This report is for information and planning purposes only, therefore there are no direct financial implication arising. However, there may be financial implications arising because of work programme items.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. However, there may be legal implications arising because of work programme items.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 There are no direct implications to Staffing, ICT or Assets

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 Not applicable

8.0 ENGAGEMENT / CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Not applicable

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATION

- 9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.
- 9.2 This report is for information to Members and there are no direct equality implications.

10. ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 This report is for information to Members and there are no direct environment and climate implications.

11. COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 This report is for information to Members and there are no direct environment and community wealth implications.

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APPENDICES

None

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Renter’s Rights Bill
Leasehold and Commonhold Reform Bill.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

This report is being considered by the Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee in accordance with Section 4.2(h)(iv) of its Terms of Reference, the Authority’s role and functions to strategic and private sector housing policies and as the housing authority including licensing schemes.

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date