

**North Yorkshire Council**  
**Housing & Leisure Overview & Scrutiny Committee**  
**Housing Review 2023/24**

**10 June 2024**

Report of the Corporate Director of Community Development

**1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To present the Housing Review 2023/24 which incorporates the summary of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures, the complaints self-assessment and a review of management costs. The report is intended to showcase the end of year position in relation to these items alongside demonstrating compliance with the regulatory standard and the requirements to assess complaints as laid out by the Housing Ombudsman service.
- 1.2 Any comments from Scrutiny Board will be verbally reported to the Executive Member for Housing when the report is presented to them.

**2.0 SUMMARY**

- 2.1 Throughout the 2023/24 financial year the housing service has been undergoing significant transformation to both ensure the integrated service is effective when delivering services to customers; but also to ensure that it is aware of and able to meet its statutory, regulatory and legislative requirements; which have also undergone revision leading to greater reporting requirements from the services delivered through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).
- 2.2 In order to demonstrate compliance NYC is required to complete a self-assessment document to review its performance in relation to the Tenant Satisfaction Measures; alongside providing information of its management costs. A single overarching report has been drafted to evidence this compliance alongside highlighting some essential actions that will be delivered throughout the 2024/25 financial year in order to improve future compliance.
- 2.3 At the end of the 2023/24 year a decision to self-refer to the regulator was taken on the basis of NYC being non-compliant with the regulatory standards; primarily regarding its understanding of its stock and the issues posed around understanding the safety aspects of the properties and compliance with the Decent Homes Standard.
- 2.4 The report also contains a summary of complaints handled in relation to the landlord service as compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's complaints reporting requirements. This details the number of complaints received, the nature of the complaints and the associated learning. There is also some discussion concerning the next steps for the management of complaints and actions that will be delivered in 2024/25.
- 2.5 The final section covers the costs associated with the service alongside overhead management costs and financial records.

**3.0 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 As a requirement laid out within the regulations for the landlord service set out by the Regulator for Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman Service all social landlords

must undertake an annual review of customer satisfaction (Tenant Satisfaction Measures) and complete a self-assessment of their complaints handling for the financial year.

- 3.2 In addition the landlord should update the regulator and customers as to the management costs associated with the business (including costs attributable to directors).
- 3.3 The appended documents will therefore demonstrate the compliance with these issues. The report itself is an overview of all items providing key summary points across all areas; whilst supplementary and detailed feedback is provided through the relevant named appendices.

#### **4.0 HOUSING REVIEW 2023/24**

- 4.1 The Housing Review 2023/24 provides a single view of the landlord service and its performance to three key areas of compliance. The first is the Tenant Satisfaction Measures, the second is the accounting position and finally an overview of complaints. Each section is required individually to meet requirements laid out by the Regulator and that of the Housing Ombudsman.
- 4.2 Performance in relation to the Tenant Satisfaction Measures is mixed with seven indicators being ranked in the 2<sup>nd</sup> performance quartile, two within the 3<sup>rd</sup> quartile and three within the 4<sup>th</sup>, when compared to other stock holding authorities within the Acuity benchmarking model. Overall NYC ranked joint 23<sup>rd</sup> out of the 93 organisations used within the model (9<sup>th</sup> out of the 26 Councils)
- 4.3 Areas where the service was ranked in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quartile include the property being well maintained, repairs over the last 12 months, being treated fairly and with respect, being listened to and communal areas being well maintained.
- 4.4 All of these areas overlap with services where it has been recognised that improvements to processes are required or there are gaps in the data. Therefore, it is felt that this will provide a solid basis for the service as it continues to evolve following merger. In particular they reflect positively on the staff undertaking the work; their customer care and level of service they provide.
- 4.5 This contrasts with complaints handling which saw the Council ranked in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Quartile with the exact median satisfaction score of 29%. In this case it was clear that customers expressed concerns with the time taken to respond to complaints and the accessibility of complaints services. In many ways this is in contrast to the feedback received in relation to other aspects of the customer experience and is rightly a priority for the authority to address to ensure customers feel supported when making a complaint and that they feel it will be actioned promptly and efficiently.
- 4.6 The review of complaints identifies a number of inherited weaknesses regarding the processing and management overview of complaints largely born out of the use of different systems, definitions of complaints and approaches to complaint handling. Ultimately over the early part of the year this had a noticeable detrimental effect on the ability to effectively respond to complaints; coupled with services that weren't fully aligned and integrated and a lack of visible information that hindered effective responses.
- 4.7 Over the year a total of 101 stage one complaints have been received with 8 progressing to stage 2. Since a review of complaints was undertaken and a dedicated resource introduced performance has improved however as of the end of the year just 68.32% of stage one complaints were responded to in target time and 0% of stage 2. This is again largely driven by the accessibility of information; especially with regards to stage 2 complaints where managers have struggled to view the necessary information or been

dependent on other services, partners or colleagues to provide appropriate support to aid their investigations. Again, recent improvements to the processing will aim to provide greater assurance with regard to the management of complaints, and support improvements to performance.

- 4.6 Financially the service is strong; and whilst some of the savings are linked to the restructure it should be highlighted that the Council has a strong rent recovery process and arrears figures have consistently been ranked within top quartile across the year via the monthly Housemark benchmarking process.
- 4.7 The yearly outturn for the service was a surplus of £1,775k with the operating margin being 33% against a budgeted 28%. Debt repayments were made within the year as planned.
- 4.8 In terms of spend there was a significant underspend linked to staffing and management costs; again driven by the staffing restructure and streamlining of management structures. Ultimately this has led to a saving of £212k. Once other costs are factored in such as utilities and system / ICT costs a total underspend of £976k has been realised.
- 4.9 This underspend is offset slightly by overspends in relation to the repairs service, which has generated a new overspend of £175k. The areas witnessing the largest overspends include voids works which was over budget by £361k and general repair work which was over budget by £301k. To get to the net overspend position it is recognised that some salary costs have been reduced (£308k direct) and there has been a significant underspend of compensation payments. Over the next few years consolidated and costed standards will likely be introduced that should reduce overspends and budgets become more accurately profiled.

## **5.0 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN AND RESPONSES**

- 5.1 In gathering the TSM data views were sought from customers via a multi-channel survey. Whilst this survey will support future decisions regarding the development of the HRA service it does not inform specific decision within this report.

## **6.0 CONTRIBUTION TO COUNCIL PRIORITIES**

- 6.1 The housing review supports the following Council Plan priorities:
- Place and Environment
    - Good quality, affordable and sustainable housing that meets the needs of our communities.
  - Organisation
    - Good quality, value for money services that are focussed and accessible to all.
- 6.2 The self-assessment will help demonstrate the ability of the housing stock and housing services to meet the needs of NYC's communities whilst also highlighting aspects of cost and quality of service.
- 6.3 The assessment will also serve as a compliance report; helping maintain reporting standards and ensuring regulatory bodies are informed as to the performance of NYC and therefore that it continues to meet the principles adopted by the authority through this first year of operating to be 'safe and legal'.

## **7.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 7.1 As a statutory requirement, options are limited. Given the nature of the returns and the requirement to make the information publicly available it has been decided that

incorporating all items in one report will not only help customers to have a better understanding of the authority's performance in these areas; it would also support the regulator and ombudsman in understanding how the service is operating overall; supplemented by more detailed appendices documents that provide more in depth analysis and detail regarding compliance.

## **8.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 There are no financial implications attached to this report and members will not be expected to make financial decisions on its basis. Any financial considerations for improvements linked to the findings and analysis within this report will be presented through appropriate channels when required.

## **9.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 This report ensures compliance with the regulatory standards for housing alongside the requirements laid out by the Housing Ombudsman Service

## **10.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 Throughout the collation of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures consideration of equalities impacts has been at the forefront of the survey design and of the analysis of the results; including analysis of age and gender splits; alongside a multi-channel survey design which allows for a variety of mechanisms for customers to provide their feedback. The results mirror industry trends in terms of satisfaction levels between different demographic groups (i.e. older people being more satisfied etc).

## **11.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 There are no climate change implications attached to this report.

## **12.0 PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS**

12.1 The report focuses on performance issues. The TSM regulations require reporting of customer satisfaction alongside KPIs attached to compliance with safety requirements; whilst the complaints self-assessment details how the authority has managed customer complaints in terms of the timeliness of responding to customers; outcomes and Ombudsman determinations.

## **13.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

13.1 As identified one of the major challenges facing the service pertains to the alignment of services into one integrated service operating through clear and consistent policies and procedures. Through this work steps have been already taken to support this integration of policies and procedures; namely in relation to the management of complaints, however, there are further improvements that will be identified using the TSM results to support integration of policies and procedures across the housing service; in particular linked to the management of health and safety compliance, management of anti-social behaviour and neighbourhoods and the handling of repairs.

## **14.0 RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

14.1 This review identifies areas of improvement and non-compliance; consequently it will have a likely impact on both the reputation of the council and the performance of the service. It is hoped that by maintaining transparency through this process any reputational risks can be

effectively managed by the authority being open and honest about its current status and the steps it hopes to take to improve.

- 14.2 In order to better manage the risks posed by the data challenges a number of initiatives have been introduced. The first is a 'Housing Improvement Framework' which will ensure sufficient oversight and scrutiny of performance and activity to align services and the second is a comprehensive action plan that ties all aspects of the identified improvement works together in a single location where dependencies, impacts and overlap can be accurately identified and managed.

## **15.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

- 15.1 Through the TSM survey customers have been asked for their views regarding how the authority handles ASB and if it has a positive impact on its communities. Results from both questions will likely overlap in to work around community safety and the service will continue to work with colleagues to develop appropriate solutions using this insight and intelligence as required.

## **16.0 CONCLUSIONS**

- 16.1 This report and its appendices provide the first annual review into the performance of the housing service. Due to the challenges faced throughout the year it provides a clear rationale for the reason to self-refer to the regulator alongside an honest appraisal on the current service. Despite the challenges it has identified it does also highlight aspects of positive performance and outlines plans for further improvement. During the 23/24 financial year the team has worked tirelessly to bring the legacy services together and much of this work has focussed on establishing a consistent and clear baseline from which management decisions can be taken. It is expected that as the 2024/25 year progresses improvements should become far more noticeable for customers alongside generating far greater confidence from the regulator in regard to the improvement plans and their impact; especially in light of the strong financial position which will be carried into the new year.

## **17.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 17.1 This report details the end of year position for the landlord services as required under its regulatory requirements, as such the report and its associated appendices should be accepted as a true and accurate statement relating to the service and therefore should be published as required.

## **18.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 18.1 It is recommended that:
- i) the report be noted and feedback provided, prior to the self-assessment being submitted to the regulator and ombudsman as required.
  - ii) Provide any questions as required for discussion with the Executive Member for Housing.

### **APPENDICES:**

- Appendix A – Tenant Satisfaction Measures Report
- Appendix B – Complaints Self-Assessment
- Appendix C – Complaints Policy
- Appendix D – Complaints Guidance for Staff
- Appendix E – Final Outturn Revenue Monitoring HRA
- Appendix F – Housing Review 2023/24

**BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:** None

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Note: Members are invited to contact the author in advance of the meeting with any detailed queries or questions.