



Report to: Cabinet Meeting – 19 September 2023  
 Portfolio Holder: Councillor Lee Brazier - Housing  
 Director Lead: Suzanne Shead, Director - Housing, Health & Wellbeing  
 Lead Officer: Julie Davidson, Business Manager – Housing Services, Ext 5542

Report Summary	
<b>Type of Report</b>	Open Report, Non-Key Decision
<b>Report Title</b>	Housing Services Resources
<b>Purpose of Report</b>	To set out the current challenges in the Housing Services Business Unit and seek Cabinet approval to increase staffing resources to effectively deliver the tenancy & estate management services.
<b>Recommendations</b>	That Cabinet approve: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) the use of £45,115 from the Housing Revenue Account Service Improvement Reserve to cover the costs of the additional posts for 2023-24; and</li> <li>b) that the budget for the 5 FTE tenancy officers is included in the baseline budget from 2024 onwards.</li> </ul>
<b>Alternative Options Considered</b>	The consideration for temporary resource was discounted due to the continued rise of complex case management, the increase in homelessness duty discharge into our stock and the difficulty accessing support services within the district.
<b>Reason for Recommendations</b>	To ensure we continue to deliver excellent housing services across the district in line with best practice, regulatory compliance and keeping tenants at the heart of our services.  The increase in staffing aligns with our community plan to: “Create vibrant and self-sufficient local communities where residents look out for each other and actively contribute to their local area”. “Reduce crime and anti-social behaviour and increase feelings of safety in our communities”. “Improve the health and wellbeing of local residents”.

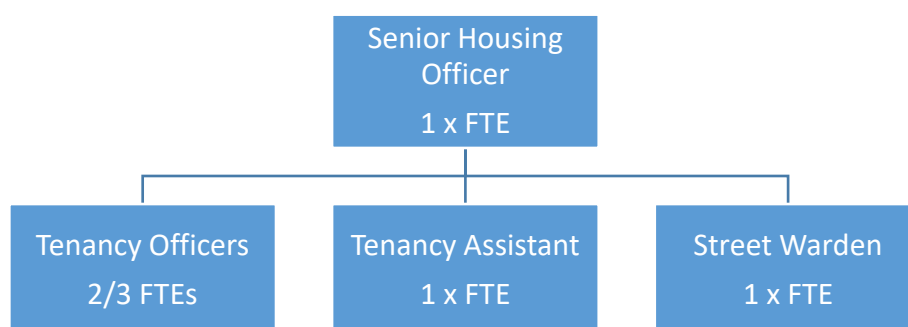
## 1.0 **Background**

1.1 The Tenancy & Estate Management Service is provided to 5554 Council properties, 170 leasehold properties and supporting 29 community centres across both large, high-density urban estates and suburban rural areas.

1.2 The housing stock is managed in four areas:

Patch	Area Covered	Total Properties
Newark 1	Hawtonville & surrounding villages	1535
Newark 2	Newark Central, Yorke Drive, Balderton & surrounding villages	1641
Sherwood 1	Blidworth, Clipstone, Rainworth & surrounding villages	1461
Sherwood 2	Ollerton, Boughton & surrounding villages	1176

1.3 Four teams are aligned to these areas and typically adopt this model:



1.4. On average, Tenancy Officers manage around 500 properties. The remit of the role is far ranging and covers the entire spectrum of support, not just tenancy management.

Tenancy Officers usual activities include:

- Tenancy Sign ups which can take 1 hour plus each, longer for complex cases.
- Assessing, issuing, and recording starting well funds
- Facilitating and completing transfers and mutual exchange activities
- Tenancy changes including investigating assignments and successions when a tenant leaves or dies.
- Signposting including referrals for furniture and food banks, mental health services, social care, Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and support agencies.
- Careline referrals and support
- Working with contractors on introduction or replacement of services i.e., alarms and new kit or new bathrooms and kitchens where tenant support is required.
- Consultations on service changes that may affect tenants in their area.
- Authorising permissions for property alterations and associated paperwork
- Completing 'Getting to know you' visits – a proactive visit to all tenants to check their home is working for them, to update our records, prevent fraud and to ensure the home is free from mould and damp.

- Advocating on behalf of tenants with Council services
- Dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour and other tenancy breaches, which often includes working with partner agencies.
- Dealing with safeguarding and child protection cases in partnership with other agencies
- Tenant surgeries
- Responding to emails/communications/phone calls from agencies/tenants
- Enabling essential servicing to be completed through supporting complex cases with access for gas and electric services.
- Supporting the income team with visits for rents and other arrears
- Attending days and nights of action and walkabouts.
- Encouraging, promoting, and working to involve tenants in service scrutiny and promoting involvement opportunities.
- Oversight of community centres in the tenancy officer's patch (NEW)
- Eyes and ears in homes, looking for hazards and health and safety issues (NEW)

1.5 The demand for Council properties is increasing and combined with the significant increase in applicants bringing with them a variety of vulnerabilities and complex needs has seen Officers stretched to capacity when delivering core landlord functions. This is exacerbated on our larger, higher density estates of Hawtonville and Boughton. It is also worth noting the geographical nature of our district provides an additional challenge for officers as the impact of travel time on their daily duties can often be excessive, despite our best efforts.

1.6 As mentioned above, officers frequently need to go above and beyond what could be considered landlord core functions due to their visibility in the communities in which they serve. This then can result in the less critical elements of their job becoming less of a priority. However, the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) requires the council to meet its duty to tenants and comply with the regulatory standards. A consequence of these conflicting priorities can sometimes see officers attending child protection meetings over involving our tenants at a coffee morning, engagement with tenants is a requirement of the regulator, but also as a good landlord and Council, there is a commitment to meet our safeguarding and child protection duties.

1.7 The socio-economic picture of the district varies with areas of affluence and areas of recognised deprivation. In these latter areas, the needs can be far more complex and resource hungry. Nottinghamshire is ranked ninth out of the 26 shires in England on the deprivation scale. The table below demonstrates the five most deprived areas within Newark and Sherwood and these areas also have a high density of Council owned social housing stock.

Area	Rank within District
Boughton	1
Hawtonville	2
Yorke Drive	3
Blidworth	4
Clipstone	5

- 1.8 Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and tenancy management are core landlord functions and ASB cases continue to increase year on year:

Year	Case Numbers
2021/2022	146
2022/2023	258
Projected outturn for 23/24	300

- 1.9 ASB cases can often take months to resolve and needs the tenancy team to work together with the Police and other agencies to help resolve matters. This is an important yet time consuming part of their role and is a key priority for Newark and Sherwood District Council to ensure a safer community and to improve on the tenant satisfaction of this service, which from the Survey of Tenants and Residents was 47.8% compared to our peers at 58%.
- 1.10 Tenancy management caseload is difficult to accurately assess due to the limitations of the current Housing Management System and whilst this will be better captured in our new housing management system via Customer Relationship Management (CRM) modules, it is estimated that the team deal with 84 cases related to tenancy management and sustainment per month.
- 1.11 Linked to the challenges outlined above, there will also been additional workload to test and implement the new Housing Management System due to be implemented by August 2025 which will reduce duplication of data entry and help officers work in a more agile way.

## 2.0 **Changes in the Sector**

- 2.1 Over the last two years, the wider housing sector has seen the emergence of various drivers for change. These external influences include the tragedy of Grenfell, the death of Awaab Ishak and the sad circumstances surrounding the death of Sheila Seleone among others.
- 2.2 These failures have reinforced the need for landlords to be regularly involved with tenants and keep their voice at the centre of everything the Council do, safe in their homes that are warm, free from damp and mould and when things go wrong, responding swiftly and appropriately to make things right again. We have already taken a great step towards this through the introduction of 'Getting to know you' visits, which enables us to engage with tenants in a proactive way, not just when things have reached crisis point.
- 2.3 The value of these 'Getting to know you' visits cannot be underestimated in the support of all the drivers mentioned above, but it is noted that the original programme was over a two-year cycle, however due to pressures detailed in this report it is envisaged it will take four years to complete the programme with current resources, partly in response to the circumstances we find when we visit, and the support and signposting that tenants require.

2.4 The drivers outlined above form the spine of the Social Housing Bill which received Royal Assent in July 2023. This places responsibility on landlords to improve its performance and services for tenants, with the Social Housing Regulator adopting a stronger, proactive regulatory regime to drive up standards in the sector.

These include:

- a) putting tenants at the heart of decision making
- b) effective complaint resolution
- c) ensuring accommodation is a decent quality and safe.
- d) ensuring homes are allocated appropriately and fairly and making the best use of housing stock.
- e) working with partners to make communities and neighbourhoods clean and safe; consulting with tenants on how their neighbourhoods inc. communal areas could be improved.
- f) knowing who is behind the door - a strong focus on supporting the vulnerable and those with additional needs.
- g) Addressing anti- social behaviour, including increased partnership working and protocols.
- h) Introduction of tenant satisfaction measures from April 2023.
- i) Introduction of professional standards for the sector
- j) New consumer standards
- k) New inspection regime from April 2024

2.5 This new legislation places extra pressure on housing services teams to ensure that they continue to display professional curiosity in all their dealings with tenants and leaseholders, ensuring that issues such as mould and other defects within properties are reported swiftly and resolved promptly.

### **3.0 Proposal/Options Considered**

3.1 The proposal is to reflect the additional workload that some areas of the district present in the number of tenancies an officer is responsible for.

3.2 A review of the patches determined that each tenancy officer manages an average of 500 households, plus the estates and any community centres. This is cited as good practice within the recent Peabody Report (following the death of Sheila Seleone), however as detailed within the report several areas within the district requiring more intense case management.

3.3 This report has considered the challenges facing front line housing staff in 2023 and applied a weighting to take account of the significant increase in complex housing management cases and focus on tenancy sustainment; there is not an option to do nothing. Being able to support the most vulnerable in our communities and ensure they are living in homes that are of good quality is a must. Service failures also draw the Housing Ombudsman and Regulator to inspect our services sooner.

- 3.4 This weighting means that for properties in the highest areas of need, one home is counted as the equivalent of two properties for the purposes of housing management. The table below demonstrates our rationale and workings; the property weightings have been applied to the specific areas only:

Patch	Total Homes	Current FTE	Total Homes with Weighting Applied	Deprived Area Ranking	Revised FTE	Additional Officers
Newark 1*	1535	2.6	2535	2	5	2.4
Newark 2**	1641	3.4	1962	3	3.9	.5
Sherwood 1***	1461	3.0	1915	4 & 5	3.8	.8
Sherwood 2****	1176	2.0	1552	1	3	1.0
<b>Additional officers required</b>						<b>4.7</b>

\*Weighting applied to Hawtonville only

\*\*Weighting applied to Yorke Drive and Chatham Court only

\*\*\*Weighting applied to Clipstone and Blidworth only

\*\*\*\*Weighting applied to Boughton only

- 3.5 The additional resources will relieve the pressure on existing staff, but also be available to be redirected as priorities and/or areas change or require a more intensive housing management approach.
- 3.6 To do nothing and continue with the current arrangements is likely to increase the exodus of experienced tenancy officers from this service. In the last two years, two colleagues have moved from the team, and more are looking for alternative roles within the Council citing the workload as a factor which is a reverse of previous trends. The health and wellbeing of staff is of paramount importance to us as a Council; the increased number of complex cases impacts on colleagues so adding resource and resilience to the team will support us retain staff and keep them healthy.
- 3.7 The consideration for introducing a temporary resource has been discounted due to the continued rise of complex case management, the increase in homelessness duty discharge into our stock and the decreasing access to support services within the district.
- 3.8 Public Protection Business Unit have also requested an additional anti-social behaviour resource due to the increase in demand for support on ASB. Whilst there is strong and successful joint working that takes place, this report focuses on a holistic tenancy management service that goes wider than the remit of ASB officer.
- 3.9 These resources will be reviewed annually and when a vacancy arises; the need to replace will be discussed and agreed between the Director and Business Manager.
- 3.10 A review of team resources will also be undertaken 12 months after the implementation of the new housing management system, as the system will allow for increased agile working, processes will be improved and streamlined with more tenants being able to self-serve.

#### **4.0 Implications**

In writing this report and in putting forward recommendations officers have considered the following implications: Data Protection, Digital and Cyber Security, Equality and Diversity, Financial, Human Resources, Human Rights, Legal, Safeguarding, Sustainability, and Crime and Disorder and where appropriate they have made reference to these implications and added suitable expert comment where appropriate.

#### **4.1 Financial Implications – FIN23-24/5729**

The cost of an additional 5 (FTE) Tenancy Officers is £191,080 including on-costs at the top of the existing scale (pay award pending).

The additional costs of £45,115 which assumes recruitment from the beginning of quarter 4 can be met from Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Service Improvement Reserve. The budget for future years will need to be included in the baseline budget from 2024/25 onwards.

There will be a need for additional ICT equipment and licences due to the increase in the permanent establishment.

#### **4.2 HR and Equalities**

The rationale for requesting approval for additional FTE is sound in that it will support the team to effectively meet the continued increasing workload and, therefore, continue to provide a high level of service for tenants, ensuring that we continue to meet our responsibilities as a landlord. There are increased expectations on Tenancy Officers to be aware of issues wider than ones which they may normally deal with, or that are the purpose of a particular contact with a tenant. It's vital that postholders have the capacity to do this effectively.

4.3 In addition to ensuring the wellbeing of our tenants, an increase in FTE will also support the wellbeing of our staff. The Tenancy Officer role is a front facing one and postholders are regularly in a position where they are trying to support tenants with a wide range of difficult issues. This not only means that they are managing a high workload and competing priorities daily but there can also be a significant impact on their own resilience and wellbeing. Weighting tenancies that sit within areas of higher need will help to ensure that individuals are not overwhelmed with the issues that they face as, if they are, this can lead to feelings of stress of work, increased absences, increased turnover, and compassion fatigue which impacts on the quality of service provided to tenants.

4.4 Prior to recruiting to fill the additional posts, it is recommended to speak with existing part-time Tenancy Officers to ask whether there is a desire from any to take any additional hours. There is also a possibility that existing Housing staff may apply and be successful for some of the new posts which will require backfilling to the roles individuals leave.

4.5 Recruitment will be undertaken in line with the Council's recruitment and selection policy to ensure that processes are transparent and that no one is put at a disadvantage due to having any protected characteristics. A recruitment plan will be agreed in order to increase the likelihood of success in recruiting to all posts.

#### **4.6 ICT Implications**

The proposed restructure will result in an increase to the establishment of 4.7 FTE which requires additional ICT equipment and licenses - noted in financial implications.

The digital strategy action plan has a major inflight project replacing the Housing Management System which is likely to affect the Tenancy and Estates team. However, based on the coverage of roles, this system improvement is unlikely to significantly reduce this by digital transformation or process re-engineering.

#### **4.7 Tenant Implications**

A discussion was held with the chairs of the Local Influence Networks regarding the need for additional resource, who supported the proposals especially in Newark 1 and Sherwood 2. There was also discussion that consideration be given to resource being flexible as detailed in 3.2 but to include project work across the district. The chairs agreed this additional resource would add value to tenants' district wide.

#### **Background Papers and Published Documents**

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

None.