

Annual Report 2023/2024

Introduction by Lisa Keating, Director of Housing

I am pleased to introduce housing's annual report for 2023-2024. I joined the council as Director of Housing in July 2024. During my time at Slough, I have had time to review the service and consider plans for improving customer satisfaction and building trust. The year ahead will be challenging as we continue to work through our financial situation as a council.



Social Housing Regulator

The Social Housing Act 2023 received royal assent in July 2023. This was a significant year as it saw the preparation for one of the biggest changes in social housing regulation for over a decade.

As part of these changes, the new Consumer standards came into force on 1 April 2024. The standards emphasise strengthening the resident voice.

In 2023 we also saw stronger links between the Regulator and the Housing Ombudsman. Giving the ombudsman powers to require landlords to go beyond the scope of individual complaints and seek to address any wider issues.

Resident Involvement

In December 2023 we developed our Housing Resident Involvement Strategy. This three-year strategy was approved by cabinet in December 2023 and the action plan to bring it to life was developed with our Resident Board. We have started making progress implementing the action plan with greater accountability of staff and councillors to residents.

Our Resident Board members will play a key part in monitoring our progress in making improvements and meeting standards. We have started to pull together a database of involved tenants whom we will keep involved throughout the process.

Tenant Satisfaction Measures

2023 saw the introduction of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures Standard, all social housing providers are required to collect and report on 22 performance measures. Twelve of these are related to perception surveys and 10 relate to housing management performance. Throughout the year our research partner MEL Research carried out the surveys and managed to get views from 1,040 tenants. These were all collated and ready for submission to the regulator in July 2024. The TSM results have highlighted several areas for improvement. I have begun to put in place a housing improvement plan which will be shared with the Resident Board and wider residents.

Improving Homes

Providing safe and decent homes for residents is high on the agenda for us at Slough. Throughout the year we continued improvement works across the borough both replacing roofs and windows; as well as installing solar panels in some of our bungalows and over 60s blocks. The improvements have been received well by residents in helping reduce heating costs.

Damp and Mould

Following the tragic death of two-year-old Awaab Ishak; the adverse effects of damp and mould continue to be highlighted in local and national news. As a local authority, we know it's our responsibility to ensure our residents live in homes that are safe and of a decent standard; residents rely on us to look after homes effectively and meet

requirements designed to protect them from harm.

Throughout the year our repairs partner continued to see a high increase in calls relating to damp and mould. To respond to this, they created a dedicated taskforce responsible for prioritising and carrying out the necessary checks and treatment to resolve the issues.

Alongside this, as a council we have worked closely with our NHS partners and held local damp and mould advice sessions for families with young children across the borough.

Cardo Group takes over Osborne Property Services

March 2024 saw the change over from Osborne to Cardo Group. We are aware that the impact of Covid and Brexit saw a decline in the service provided by Osborne. Cardo is a reputable organisation and has lots of experience in repairs and maintenance. Cardo's senior management is committed to improving services for the duration of the contract.

Community Safety

Throughout the year our teams have worked with Thames Valley Police (TVP) to put in place a number of closure orders where criminal activity has been taking place on our estates. A closure order is a legal process which prevents people entering the premises they have been living in for a certain period of time.

Housing Management Information System (NEC)

The implementation of our new housing management information system, called NEC, is progressing. April 2023 saw the recruitment of the new project manager to speed up the implementation of the different modules to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of recording and accessing information on council residents and properties.

Resident Involvement



During 2023/24, we delivered on our plan to work with residents and staff to develop our Housing Resident Involvement Strategy. This three-year strategy was approved by cabinet in December 2023 and the action plan to bring it to life was developed with our Resident Board. We have made a good start on delivering the action plan covering the following five themes.

- Resident Involvement Culture.
- Strengthen the Resident Board and resident influence.
- Range of options for resident involvement.
- Appropriate resources and support to enable effective involvement.
- Inclusive and accessible engagement.

This new strategy was timely as we recruited a new Independent Chair of the Resident Board, Tim Blanc in December 2023. Tim has vast experience of working in the field of resident involvement and has been working with the Resident Board to monitor the effective delivery of the strategy.

April 2023 saw the introduction of Tenant Satisfaction Measures, a requirement for all social landlords to begin to collect and submit data for each financial year. Slough's research contractor MEL Research began surveying residents using mixed methods (online and telephone). Throughout the year they surveyed 1,040 tenants.

Plans for 2024-25

- Develop a Resident Involvement Policy with the Resident Board.
- Submit and publish Tenant Satisfaction Measures results.
- Recruit permanent staff to support the implementation of the action plan.
- Strengthen the current Resident Board and recruit new members, providing training and support.
- Improve and strengthen resident engagement.

Allocations and lettings

The council continues to experience a high demand for housing services from residents, and the number of applications on the housing register has doubled in the last year. The allocations team is continuing to work through and assess a backlog of applications. We have been working through the outstanding council voids with council colleagues, to speed up the viewing and letting process and working with Cardo our void contractor to ensure residents move into their new homes as quickly as possible.



199 homes were let in 2023-24

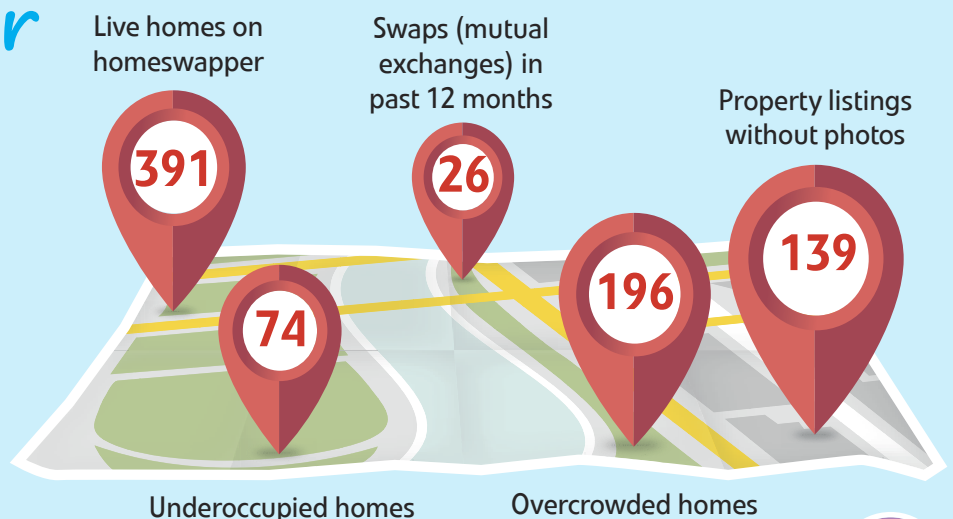
Plans for 2024-25

- Clear the backlog of housing register applications to ensure all households that need to have their applications assessed are notified of the assessment outcome.
- Continue to work through remaining elements of data cleansing from move to new Housing IT system.
- Develop a roadmap to deliver an online housing register application form, which will make the process of applying quicker and easier for residents, with the aim of delivering this form in 2025/26.

HomeSwapper

Homeswapper is the easiest way for tenants to swap (mutual exchange) council homes and housing association properties. The best way to get an opportunity to swap homes is by ensuring you have included as much information as possible i.e, contact details, photographs etc.

Home swapper shows that Slough currently has:



Communications and customer contact

Throughout the year we continued to keep you updated on housing news via our regular newsletter. Housing Highlights is an online newsletter, however as the year went on, we arranged for housing staff to begin distributing the printed newsletter to our de-designated blocks and to those who do not have access online. The hard copies can also be found in our libraries and hubs. The newsletter is published bi-monthly and can be found at www.slough.gov.uk/housing-highlights

In the early part of the year, we began holding monthly surgeries in our libraries and community hubs. Dates and times were publicised in our newsletter, our website as well as on social media.

The council's Customer Service Department provides the front door for residents contacting the council. They provide advice and support for the following services: Adult Social Care, Council Tax, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Support, Housing Services, Environmental Services, School admissions and Electoral Services. The channels of contact are by telephone, face to face, email/Eforms. The team also process bus passes and blue badge applications.

Throughout 2023/2024 the new 'Interactive Voice Response' (IVR) was implemented. The queue options were improved to promoting online and self-serve take up, by removing dependency on temporary members of staff.

Introduced SARA (chatbot) for services relating to School Admissions, Council Tax and Environmental Services.

Senior management carried out deep dive exercises for the council's high contact generating areas Housing Services, Adult Social Care and Council Tax. This highlighted areas for service improvements.



Plans for 2024-25

- Housing staff plan to continue housing surgeries in local libraries and hubs.
- Customer services to review customer facing inbox and respond within 5 working days, corporate target is 10 days.
- Plan to raise % of overall call target from 75% to 80%.
- Improve quality of service by setting objectives linked to the council's corporate plan.
- Cross skilling our team to build resilience within the service.
- Quality monitoring to ensure the learning is embedded.
- Holding Service Improvement meetings with housing specialist teams to talk through improvements.
- SARA chat box to handle electoral roll and housing related queries.
- Implement Live Chat.

218,460

contacts received
between April 23
and March 24



150,015 (68.7%)

(Housing Service calls -
9,083 calls offered
within an answer rate
of 61.9% (5,623))



**12mins
40secs**

Average wait time
(against target of 8 mins)



8,075 (3.7%)

Appointments only
measured; (residents
walk are not currently
captured)



60,370 (27.6%)
(Email/Eforms)

Resident safety

Keeping people safe has been high on the agenda for us and all local authorities. There are six big housing safety compliance areas - asbestos, fire safety, legionella, gas, electrics and LOLER (lift and hoisting equipment).

The Building Safety Act 2022 received Royal Assent on 28 April 2022. Grenfell was a primary reason for this act. Cladding material and installation; fire protection between flat floors; general fire protection; repairs and resident engagement all contributed to the failures at Grenfell. The act focused on blocks over 18 meters in height. Most of the issues highlighted in the act were well known before. We have two blocks (Broom and Poplar) which are affected by the act, both of which had extensive building work carried out. These were completed to ensure compliance. We are continuing to carry out fire risk assessments and monitor our blocks given the ever-changing fire regulations.

Independent fire risks assessments are carried out throughout the year, along with regular checks and inspections by our neighbourhood officers. In particular around the communal areas to ensure items are not stored there, keeping all exit routes clear in the event of a fire.

Our two high rise buildings Broom and Poplar have a dedicated neighbourhood officer who is responsible for continuous engagement with them as well as our eight de-designated blocks across the borough.

All blocks that have a 'Stay Put' policy have been written to and housing staff have been asking residents to complete personal emergency evacuation plans (PEEPs). The fire brigade will have access to the PEEPs in the event of a



237
fire risk
assessments



5,304
emergency
lighting tests



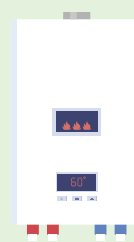
623
asbestos
surveys



645
water
safety
tests



180
lift safety
inspections



157 boiler
replacements



1,647 electrical
installation condition tests

8 fixed wire installation
tests for communal areas
of blocks

fire and know who will have difficulty getting out of their flat and the building.

We are continuing to invest in fire safety as we are still upgrading flat entrance doors, communal doors, loft compartmentation, fire stopping, signage, etc.

The stock condition survey carried out during the year highlighted the need to upgrade lifts, particularly in our over 60's de-designated blocks.

Gas safety checks continue to meet a legal requirement. In 2023/24 we carried out 7,044 safety checks. These can only be carried out with your cooperation, so thank you for helping us to keep you safe.

Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (Amendment) Regulations 2022 require additional smoke detector alarms to be installed in living rooms and additional areas depending on property size. This work has begun and continues in the year ahead.

Plans for 2024-25

- Building Safety Resident Engagement Strategy.
- Cardo to ensure every property which is being tested has an additional smoke detector device installed.
- Cardo to undertake Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR) for 2057 properties.
- Begin the annual lift upgrades programme.

Preventing fraud

The UK's housing crisis is continuing to affect communities and driving families and keyworkers into financial hardship. Ensuring we have measures in place to deal with housing fraud is even more critical.

The fraud team work closely with housing staff and are constantly looking for information that will help us to recover properties from perpetrators. To report fraud, complete our online form or call 01753 787876 (24 hours). This can be done anonymously.

During 2023/2024 the fraud team recovered four properties returning them back into stock. In two properties, the tenants had left the UK and two properties were unoccupied as elderly relatives were living with family. These two cases also produced recoverable overpayments of Council Tax Support.



Plans for 2024-25

- Recruit two permanent Housing Tenancy Investigation Officers to work closely with Housing Services Teams and to provide advice and guidance in the areas of fraud awareness prevention and the management of situations where fraud is suspected.

Right to Buy

During 2023/2024 the team continued to progress Right to Buy (RTB) applications for our residents wishing to purchase their homes. The number of properties sold was slightly up on the previous financial year, despite the number of applications going down. This is partly due to applications received in the previous financial year completing and the process being managed more efficiently.

Plans for 2024-25

- The Home Ownership Section is being upgraded on to the new NEC Housing IT system. This will include various modules going live this year, which include the service charges, Right to Buy and arrears modules. The new Housing system will allow homeowners to pay their service charges by Direct Debit for the first time.
- Recruit permanent staff into the Home Ownership team.



Housing Management

We are aware that having well maintained estates and homes has a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of residents. Our officers are regularly out and about visiting residents and estates. Estate inspections are important for keeping and maintaining standards, dealing with health and safety risks, and ensuring risks identified through independent inspection are addressed.

84% of block/estate inspections judged to be of a "good" standard

346 block/estate inspections



Plans for 2024-25

- Review tenancy audit process, agreeing criteria to determine tenancies to be audited.
- Agreeing housing officer tenancy audit targets.
- Minimising void periods through improving the viewing and sign-up process of ready to let properties.
- Improve estate inspection arrangements to include tenants, technical officers, Cardo staff and the grounds maintenance service staff.

Complaints

2023 saw the relationship between the Housing Ombudsman and Regulator of Social Housing strengthened. The figures show we have not been good at responding to complaints in a timely manner and not delivering the services our residents expect from us. We are committed to implementing the requirements of the complaints handling code to ensure we improve our service.

Plans for 2024-25

- Review our complaints process.
- Implement training for staff responding to complaints.
- Improve response time and standard of responses.
- Implement process for learning from complaints.



328 complaints received by the council relate to housing repairs (this remains the highest complained about area)



26% of repairs complaints were closed within the timescales



42 complaints were received for housing management

More than half of the complaints received were in relation to lack of response and communication

33% of housing management complaints were responded to on time



Homelessness

Slough, along with most other local authorities in the South East, is facing a considerable increase in presentations, to try to prevent homelessness. The main reason for this is an increase in S21 notices being issued by landlords who require their properties back, via the 'no fault' eviction process.

Added to this the lack of affordable rental properties within Slough, which makes prevention more difficult and harder for residents to seek alternative properties in the private sector.

Plans for 2024-25

- To employ further staffing and restructure, to enable cases to be dealt with in a timely manner and to reduce waiting times in Temporary Accommodation.
- To work with Government to ensure the No Fault eviction process comes to an end. Currently there is no set time frame for this to come to legislation.
- To make full use of the Homeless Prevention Grant funding from Government, to prevent homelessness, whenever realistically possible.

2,767 approaches from households at risk of homelessness in Slough in 2023/24, compared to 2,086 last year (2022/23), showing an increase of just over 32%



119 preventions this year, compared to 122 in the previous year

Dealing with anti-social behaviour

Anti-social behaviour (ASB) in your neighbourhood can make life miserable. It is unacceptable behaviour that comes in many forms - such as noise, abusive behaviour, littering or fly tipping and we always want it to stop.

In 2023/24 we secured a contract with Mediation Bucks to train and support staff to intervene in anti-social behaviour cases to prevent things escalating. We also became members of Resolve, a specialist organisation who provide advice and expertise on managing anti-social behaviour.



In 2023-24 the council ASB enforcement teams have issued:



34 Community Protection Notices (CPN) warning letters

5 full CPN letters

3 Criminal Behaviour Orders obtained

11 Closure Orders obtained

1 Public Spaces Protection Order, in place to tackle street drinking

Plans for 2024-25

- A community initiative "Clear Hold Build" in Langley is a chance for partners and organisations to work together to improve life in Langley by tackling and addressing serious organised crime - building up the area through community initiatives, partnership work and community spirit. This is being jointly managed by TVP and the council.
- Launch of Mediation Service by Thames Valley Police (TVP) called Alternatives to Conflict that will be available for council referrals when dealing with escalating ASB cases.
- Overarching SBC ASB Policy to be finalised, allowing all officers investigating ASB cases to work to the same standards.
- Staff training to improve the management of Anti-Social Behaviour
- Continued use of closure orders and enforcement to recover properties.

Supporting the vulnerable

Our Tenancy Sustainment Officers (TSO) work within the housing teams and closely with partner agencies, supporting council tenants who are experiencing difficulties which impact their ability to manage their tenancy positively.

They are part of the 'Poverty Forum', an initiative where partners and stakeholders regularly meet to look at how they can support residents facing financial difficulties.

Our TSOs are usually found in resident's homes, listening to their stories and hearing what support they feel they need. This personal approach is often the key to enabling residents to make positive, sustainable changes.

They offer advice and support across various areas including benefit applications, access to grants, basic budgeting support, aids and adaptations within the home and signposting to other agencies and partners. The team has a wealth of experience working with people from all different backgrounds, facing various difficulties. One of the most important qualities in our TSOs is their ability to build relationships with, and advocate for, tenants who can struggle to engage.

Highlights include supporting residents who had been found in poor living conditions to access services which improved their physical and mental health; to apply for grants to replace broken



141 council tenants offered support



appliances - enabling them to cook nourishing meals and wash their clothes, and to begin to engage in social groups. This helping hand at the initial crisis point allowed the residents to gain confidence in their ability to manage going forward.

Two Occupational Therapists were employed to work closely with Tenancy Sustainment Officers and the repair, maintenance and investment contract team to:

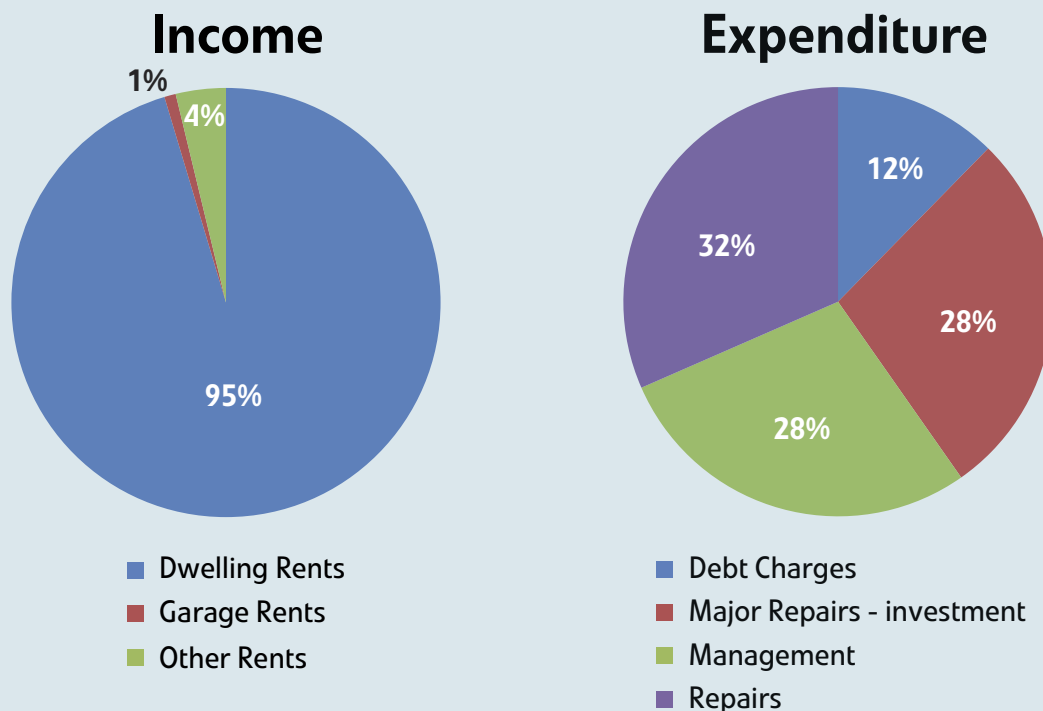
- a) visit void properties with prospective tenants to determine whether suitable or whether adaptations need to be specified
- b) ensure existing tenants have specified the correct adaptations so they can remain in their homes
- c) advise on equipment needs for residents.

Appointed a dedicated Senior Neighbourhood Officer to have a lead and responsibility for the over 60's de-designated properties.

Plans for 2024-25

- Continue supporting vulnerable residents, signposting to relevant support organisations.
- Continue to provide advice and support in claiming benefits.
- Investigate opportunities for supporting tenants who need help with their gardens.
- Investigate opportunities to set up or support an existing furniture recycling project.
- TSOs to support housing officers in viewing and sign-ups of vulnerable new residents.

Repairs and Maintenance and Housing Revenue Account Budget



Management costs

The directors' remuneration and management costs for 2023/24 is £577k. This includes an Executive Director and two interim housing directors.

Tim Blanc, independent chair of the Resident Board, started in December 2023. £2,022 has been charged for four months of 2023/24.

Cardo Annual Report 2023/2024

CARDO



55,307
calls answered
(target is 5% or less
abandoned. Average for
Sept 23-Aug 24 was 9%
abandoned).



13 days
on average to first
appointment (the target
is 10 days. Additional
resource has been
recruited to offer more
appointments.)



Complaints
received **311**
Complaints
closed **238**



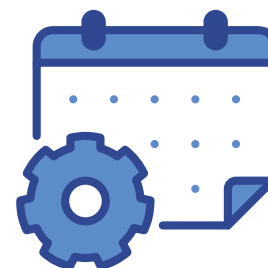
80%
Satisfied customer
based on most
recent repair



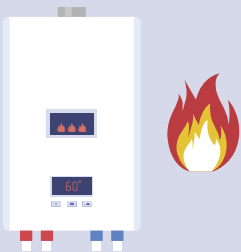
**19.8
days**
average for
Cardo to
complete voids
(target 20 days)



16%
Follow up
appointments



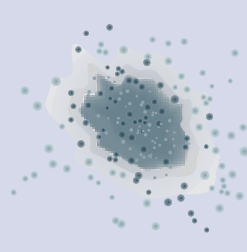
**20.8
days**
Average time
to complete
non urgent
repairs



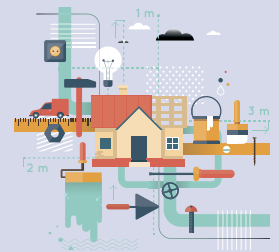
99.9%
Gas compliance



22,132
Repairs raised

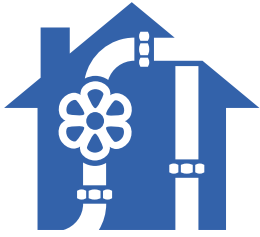


1,608
Damp and
mould repairs



£10m
Planned maintenance
programmes completed

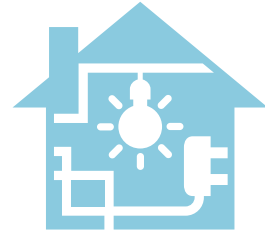
Top three repairs issued



4,629 (21%)
Plumbing



4,214 (21%)
Carpentry



3,188 (53%)
Electrical

Repairs

Damp and mould continues to be a high priority with 27% of all properties reporting issues. We are now working towards longer term solutions to alleviate the issue of damp and mould. These solutions include sensors within a property to identify more specific issues, PIV systems (Positive Input Ventilation) as well as upgrades to existing loft insulation and extractor systems. This will continue throughout the year to reduce the impact of damp and mould in people's homes.

We have seen another annual increase on repairs over the last 12 months. The increase of approximately 6%, coupled with the damp and mould reported,

continues the trend of a high demand in the service and year on year increase.

We have recruited additional operatives and contractors to support the increase in demand. This will allow for greater appointment slots, and we can deal with repairs received quicker.

Customer satisfaction

Satisfaction with the Repairs service improved slightly from the previous year. Our focus continues to be on improved communication, staff training and development.

Planned Works

Planned works has seen another increase in terms of projects and spend - much of this is attributable

to essential works such as fire doors and alarm systems. There has also been a significant increase in roof replacements, changing many of the roofs that have caused leaks and repairs in properties for many years. Upgrade works at De-Designated blocks has been a large project that is to run throughout the year. The quality and scale of the work is a real positive for Cardo and SBC.

Compliance

Compliance continues to perform at a high level, month on month ensuring the housing and communal areas are safe and to standard. Our voids team continue to offer a good home for people to move in to and it is pleasing to note improved turnaround times.

