

Report Title: Update on recent housing audits with limited assurance.

Report for: Audit Committee

Item number: 8

Report authorised by: Jonathan Kirby, Interim Director of Placemaking and Housing

Lead Officer: Jahedur Rahman, Operational Director of Housing Services and Building Safety

Ward(s) affected: All

Report for Key/Non-Key Decision: For information.

1. Recommendations

That the report be noted.

2. Describe the issue under consideration.

2.1 This report provides Audit Committee with details of the progress made by Housing Services in implementing the key recommendations of the recently completed Housing Services audits conducted by Mazars, the Council's independent internal auditors, which received a limited assurance rating. The relevant audit areas are as follows:

- Right to Buy
- Tenancy Management
- Damp and Mould.

2.2 The report provides a summary of the key issues and unmitigated risks for each audit. It also provides updates on progress against both Fundamental and Significant recommendations. It should be noted that as the audits are quite recent, and a number of recommendations are complex and have completion dates set some way in the future, as expected, progress to date is relatively limited in some areas.

3. Right to Buy

3.1 The areas reviewed in this audit were:

- Policies, procedures and enquiry response times
- Assessment of Right to Buy applications
- Compliance with Right to Buy requirements.

- Discounts on sales
- Cost floor calculations
- Money laundering training
- Sales receipt reconciliations.
- Notifications for buybacks.

3.2 There were three recommendations, one of which was Fundamental, and 2 x Housekeeping recommendations.

3.3 In respect of the one Fundamental recommendation:

Delayed Section 125 (statutory) notices to Right to Buy (RTB) applicants – management update October 2024

The Assistant Director of Capital Programme and Property has confirmed that the backlog position has improved, and external valuers have been procured that the Homeownership Team can instruct if unable to produce valuations internally in the future. There were 49 outstanding RTB valuations in September 2024, 23 of which were received since July, and 26 of the longer standing ones. The Homeownership team and the internal valuers meet monthly to monitor performance and compliance with statutory deadlines.

4. Tenancy Management

4.1 The areas reviewed in this audit were:

- Tenant data on NEC (the housing IT system)
- Tenant interactions
- Tenancy audits
- Identifying tenancy fraud
- Granting of tenancies.

4.2 7 recommendations were made, of which: 0 x Fundamental recommendations; 5 x Significant recommendations; and 2 x Housekeeping recommendations.

4.3 In respect of the Significant recommendations:

Completion of tenancy audits - management update October 2024

2 out of the 3 new visiting officers have been recruited with the focus on clearing the backlog. Progress is being made in terms of case closures with the aim of clearing these by the end of Q3. Seniors will triage and allocate the highest risk properties to the extra resources.

Triaging fraud related audits for completion - management update October 2024

The fraud team have shared access to the Housing system NEC and provide advice to Tenancy Management on the level of risk. The Heads of Service for Tenancy Management and Audit and Risk Management are meeting at the end of October to discuss risk among other issues. For the next year's tenancy audits, fraud will be incorporated as part of the existing risk matrix.

Formal training/support on completion of tenancy audits and the identification of fraud - management update October 2024

The Fraud Team have attended the Tenancy Management team meeting to give an overview of the service and how to identify risk. A plan will be put in place to address individual training needs. The Heads of Service for Tenancy Management and Audit and Risk are meeting on 30.10.24 to identify risks and further training. Seniors will also carry out spot checks and the results of these discussed at 121's.

Policies are outdated and lack key procedures - management update October 2024

The Tenancy Management Policy is scheduled to be considered by the Residents Voice Board in December and by Cabinet in January 2025.

5. Damp and Mould

5.1 The areas reviewed in this audit were:

- Identification, management and remediation
- Property data
- Complaints
- Reporting
- Risk management.

Recommendations and management response (actions)

5.2 3 x Category 1 (Fundamental) Recommendations were made by Mazars. These covered damp and mould cases, root cause analysis and complaints. The details of the recommendations, the management response (actions), and the status in relation to these as of October 2024 are set out below:

Damp and mould cases - management update October 2024

- A new Damp and Mould case management (CRM) system was established in the Granicus IT system in Feb 24 for all new cases, replacing the previous tracker. Further work is underway to link it up with the housing system NEC and Total Mobile Connects. The introduction of the new system has created a method of reporting and monitoring of damp and mould cases against the agreed process timescales in the Damp and Mould policy. This allows the

storage of documentation and photographs from relevant stages of the damp and mould process. It also allows the recording of cases where damp and mould has been found not to be present.

- The Damp and Mould team have been working with the Disrepair team to ensure quicker resolutions for customers and aid the wider process to achieve the audit's recommendations.

Root cause analysis - management update October 2024

- The Housing Repairs team have a team of surveyors which carries out inspections of all properties that have reported damp and mould and provides reports containing details of the cause and root issue in cases where that can be established. These reports include photos, descriptions, scope of works and any recommendations to the customer. Where damp and mould is discovered the team complete a wash/treatment to remove the hazard and if the report has identified further works to remove the risk of recurrence the works are picked up either by responsive repairs service or if more complex works are required, they are passed to a contractor to remedy.
- Damp and mould sensor pilot options have been explored and will be part of the role of the new Commercial Manager when recruited to implement.

Complaints - management update October 2024

- There is no categorisation for damp and mould cases on the Corporate complaints system at present. The Council is implementing a new Corporate complaints system in the future, and this will form part of the requirements for the new system. Corporate complaints are managed by the Customer Feedback Team which sits outside of the Housing Repairs Service (HRS) and it has been agreed to manage complaints through the Council's RESPOND complaints system until such changes are introduced.
- A specific review of complaints has not been completed within the agreed timescale. This will be prioritised for completion before the end of November 2024. The regular review of complaints within Housing Repairs management meetings with involvement from all senior managers has helped get a better understanding of themes and areas where improvements are needed. The review will include Corporate complaints colleagues to ensure that each level of the complaints system is covered.
- The HRS Complaints Manager is looking into the development of a system which facilitates the review of trends across HRS including damp and mould to share findings and discuss trends. This will be progressed initially for Stage 2 cases and then extended to Stage 1 and Ombudsman cases. Trends are currently discussed within management meetings.

- 5.3 Six Significant recommendations were made in respect of roles and responsibilities, training monitoring, tenants' feedback, a reporting protocol, reporting to management, and a risk register. The recommendations, actions and the status in relation to these as of October 2024 are set out below.

Roles and responsibilities - management update October 2024

There is a specific Damp and Mould team dedicated to managing the risk with this process and there is a Damp and Mould policy and guidance for people working within the team. Further actions are ensuring that all of the team from frontline operatives and back-office support staff are familiar with the process and have access to appropriate literature to share with customers.

Training monitoring - management update October 2024

- There is a dedicated section in the Repairs handbook on damp and mould and this is now available on the Council's website.
- The Training Manager post will be advertised in January 2025.

Tenants' feedback - management update October 2024

- Quarterly lessons learned sessions have been completed by the Housing Complaints team with the Housing Repairs management team with specific cases identified to enable a comprehensive review of the issues, process and outcomes and then discuss improvements. Feedback e-mails are also shared at the end of all complaints process with specific recommendations for improvement.
- 'My conversation' documents and meetings include a training and development section where any training needs are recorded and monitored through to completion. Team talks are also completed to allow staff to discuss training needs and to build a better understanding of the specific requirements for each role.

Reporting protocol - management update October 2024

- Damp and mould communications are shared on the Council's website and within our internal literature. Frontline teams have technology which enables them to report any concerns including damp and mould which is managed by the Damp and Mould team and processed within the Damp and Mould process.
- A 6-weekly update with operatives includes re-enforced messaging, all other management meetings include a damp and mould update/discussion and include messaging about reporting and management of new/existing cases.
- A new CRM IT system has been developed to include all contact with customers regarding damp and mould issues. Full roll-out is expected by March 2025

Reporting to management - management update October 2024

- Damp and mould case numbers and performance information are reviewed at the monthly Repairs Performance Improvement Board, for which there is an action log and meeting documents are recorded.
- All performance dashboards are completed by Tuesday of each week with discussion at weekly management meetings and escalation of information to senior team with commentary.

Risk register - management update October 2024

A specific risk register is being developed by each team within the Housing Repairs Service and will be updated and reviewed each month.

6. Quarterly monitoring

- 6.1 Quarterly monitoring of progress of delivery of Housing Services audit recommendations and actions is carried out by the Transformation team on behalf of the Operational Director of Housing Services and Building Safety. This is reported to the Housing Services senior management team meeting on a quarterly basis to enable remedial action to be taken as appropriate.

7. Contribution to the Corporate Delivery Plan 2022-2024 High level Strategic outcomes?

By delivering improvements to housing conditions and services Housing Services and Building Safety are contributing to meeting Theme 5 of the Corporate Delivery Plan – Homes for the Future.

8. Carbon and Climate Change

N/A

9. Statutory Officers comments (Director of Finance (procurement), Head of Legal and Governance, Equalities)

9.1. Finance and Procurement

Finance

Finance notes the audit findings and recommendations in this report. This report on its own does not have any financial implication. However, the implementation of any recommendation might have financial implication. It is expected that such will be contained within the already approved budget /virement from HRA reserve. Approval for such spend will be subject to the usual governance process.

Procurement

Strategic Procurement note the contents of this report and the support required in respect of procurements relating to the damp and mould sensors and remediation.

9.2. Head of Legal & Governance

The Assistant Director of Legal and Governance has been consulted in the preparation of the report and has no objection to the report progressing.

9.3. Equality

The Council has a Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act (2010) to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share those protected characteristics and people who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share those characteristics and people who do not.

The three parts of the duty apply to the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy/maternity, race, religion/faith, sex and sexual orientation. Marriage and civil partnership status applies to the first part of the duty.

Although it is not enforced in legislation as a protected characteristic, Haringey Council treats socioeconomic status as a local protected characteristic.

The proposals outlined in this report to reduce and prevent damp and mould in Council homes in Haringey will have a positive impact on residents from Black, Asian and other ethnic minority backgrounds, older people, disabled people, women and low-income households because these groups are disproportionately represented among current Council tenants. In addition, many of these groups are more likely to be affected by issues which can cause or exacerbate damp and mould, including fuel poverty and overcrowding. Therefore, the proposals will help to address health inequalities which arise from poor housing.

The recommendation regarding meeting statutory deadlines for Right to Buy applicants is not anticipated to have any equalities impacts on groups with protected characteristics.

If the proposals to reduce tenancy fraud result in an increase in the supply of available Council housing, they have the potential to positively impact groups with the highest level of housing need. This would help

homeless Haringey residents, a disproportionate number of whom are Black or LGBT (the latter specifically the case amongst the homeless youth).

10. Use of Appendices

None

11. Background papers

None