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HOUSING AND COMMUNITY

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Report for:	Housing and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Title of report:	Q3 2023-2024 Housing Performance & Tenants' Voice Report
Date:	13th March 2024
Report on behalf of:	Councillor Simy Dhyani, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Property Services
Part:	I
If Part II, reason:	N/A
Appendices:	Appendix A – Housing & Community OSC – Housing Report Q3 2023-24 Appendix B – Compliance Report, December 2023 Appendix C – Tenant Satisfaction Measures (2023-24 mid-year)
Background papers:	None
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	DBC – Dacorum Borough Council SQA Team – Strategy, Quality & Assurance TSM's – Tenant Satisfaction Measures HTIP – Housing Transformation Implementation Project RAAC - Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete is a lightweight material that was used mostly in flat roofing, but also in floors and walls, between the 1950s and 1990s. It is a cheaper alternative to standard concrete, is quicker to produce and easier to install. It is aerated, or "bubbly", like an Aero chocolate bar, but less durable with a lifespan of around 30 years. LGA – Local Government Association

Report Author / Responsible Officer

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on behalf of:

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Corporate Priorities	A clean, safe and enjoyable environment Building strong and vibrant communities Ensuring economic growth and prosperity Providing good quality affordable homes, in particular for those most in need Ensuring efficient, effective and modern service delivery Climate and ecological emergency
Wards affected	All
Purpose of the report:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To provide HOSC with an overview of the performance and the tenants' voice for the Housing & Property Services (as of 31st Dec 2023) 2. To present the interventions and actions undertaken to address any performance concerns
Recommendation (s) to the decision maker (s):	That HOSC consider the report and scrutinise the actions to address any performance concerns highlighted
Period for post policy/project review:	This relates to Q3 2023/24 and is updated every Quarter.

1. Introduction/Background

1.1 This report details the performance of Housing & Property Services during the third quarter of 2023/24, measured against the suite of performance indicators.

1.2 Performance is reviewed monthly via In-Phase reports, which provide an overview of the services.

1.3 The Operational Risk Registers are reviewed by the relevant teams at least quarterly, to reflect any changes internally or externally that have impacted upon the identified risks and to include new risks. Robust mitigations are in place to reduce the risk's likelihood and severity.

1.4 The Housing Regulation Act 2023 legislates the importance of listening and acting on the Tenants' Voice. The feedback we receive from our Tenants is invaluable data which can be used to inform service improvement and deliver tailored services.

1.5 The effective use of the Tenant voice data and insight will not only improve services, but also demonstrate compliance with the new regulatory framework of the Tenant Satisfaction Measure's (TSM's) and the Consumer Standards.

1.6 This report also details the improvement actions to address any areas of concern.

2. The aims of this paper

- To improve service performance within the directorate
- To ensure that services delivered are resident focussed
- To drive service delivery improvements
- To increase efficiency and focus
- Improve the customer experience
- Ensure appropriate scrutiny of the services delivered

3. The Current Position on Performance

3.1 At **Appendix A** is the InPhase report on performance, **Appendix B** is our latest compliance position; and **Appendix C** is our latest TSM report.

3.2 Repairs and Complaints management continue to be two of the most challenging areas across the sector. There is improvement work underway in both areas, which is kept under strict supervision.

4. InPhase Departmental Report (Appendix A)

4.1 There are 3 'red' indicators at the end of Q3:

Percentage of stock condition surveys undertaken as a percentage of stock

This is just short of the target of 20% and we are on-track to achieve the target during Q4.

Average time to re-let a HRA property

The average re-let time was just over target but shows good improvement on historical performance and was hampered with a backlog during the Quarter which was being worked through.

Percentage of responsive repairs completed right first time

This was 84% which was close to the target and did improve during the Quarter. It is an area of scrutiny at an operational level.

5. High Risks Areas

Income Collection

We have collected 99.75% of the rent due as at the end of Q3. This is up on the Q2 figure of 96.52% and is a truer figure after the rent-free weeks over Christmas.

Rent collection processes have been reviewed and a more streamlined approach has been implemented. This is supporting the Income team to take more timely action in cases, although some cases are being delayed due to ongoing court delays, which we have continued to experience post pandemic.

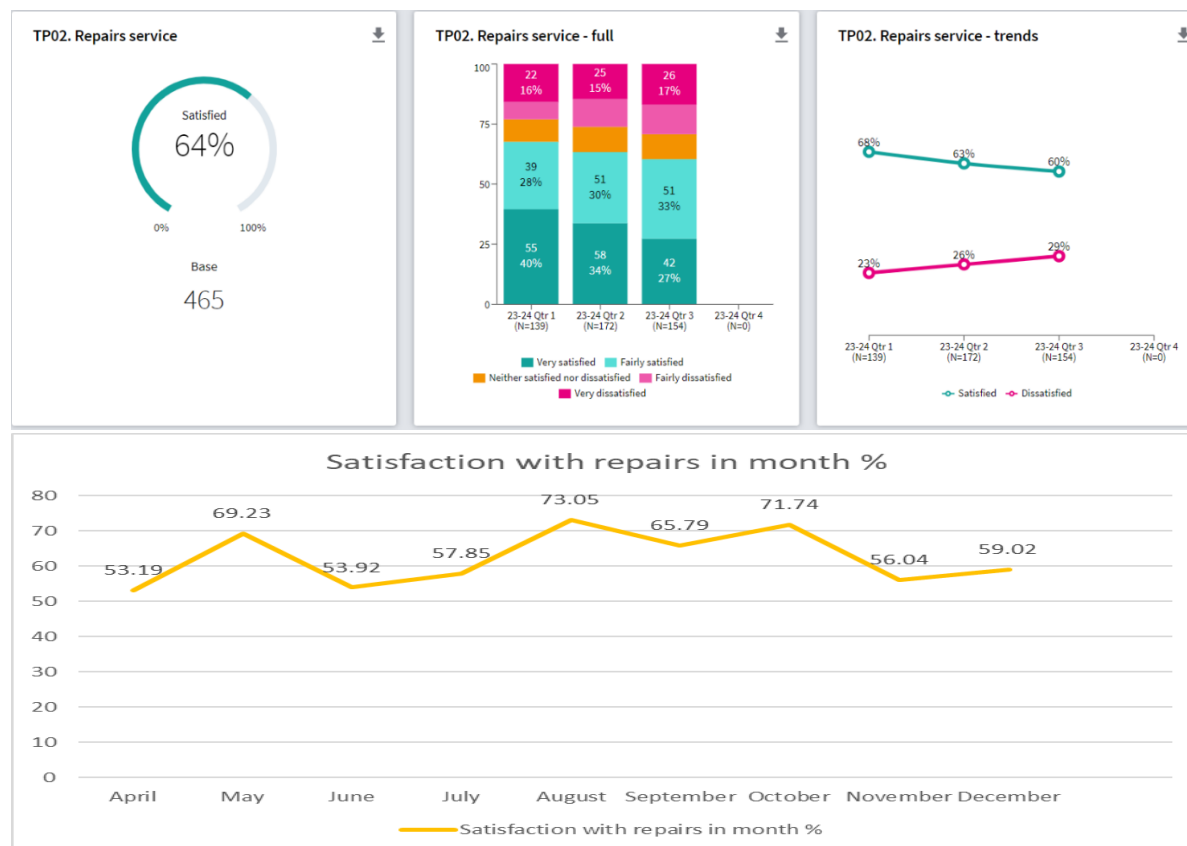
Compliance (including RAAC, Damp & Mould and Disrepair)

The latest compliance report (**Appendix B**) demonstrates particularly good performance on certification and inspection.

Attention is focused on ensuring this strong performance continues and ensuring all arising remedial actions are completed.

Repairs

The TSM results and monthly transactional surveys are disappointing, as seen below:



The transactional surveys are the best indicator of the likelihood of the TSM figures improving in the future. However, the latest monthly figures are close to the TSM perception scores. The area of responsive repairs is very challenging, Osborne Property Services Ltd (OPSL) now have new owners who appear genuinely keen to improve the customer experience. We are working through a jointly agreed service improvement plan. The plan is reviewed each week at operational meetings and progress reported monthly.

Homelessness Provision

The council is experiencing increased demand from households in the borough at risk of homelessness or rough sleeping. This has been caused by a number of factors, which includes the rising cost of living and an increase in households who previously would resolve their own difficulties. In addition, there is increased demand from households seeking advice and help, whom have previously been granted asylum in the UK.

As a result of the above we have seen a rise in households seeking help and being placed into temporary accommodation.

6. Our Performance compared to others

It is important to measure our performance against our peers, not just against our own targets. We are a member of HouseMark (a bench marking club for social housing nationally), to do this. There is naturally a lag in data as HouseMark collects it in from members and then goes through a process of quality assurance.

Performance is generally in the lower quartiles and the associated action plans are designed to address this. The mid-point HouseMark report can be seen at **Appendix C**.

7. The Residents' Voice

7.1 To enable feedback from the TSM's to feed into service improvement, we include a free text question for Tenants and Leaseholders to suggest improvements.

Below is the analysis from M.E.L. Research (who conduct independent surveys on our behalf) of the Q3 free text feedback which is focused on areas to improve (424 tenants were surveyed):

Tenants

1. **Maintenance and Repairs, 41 comments (41%):** Numerous comments highlight dissatisfaction with the maintenance and repair services. Issues included delays, incomplete repairs, and poor workmanship. Tenants express frustration over unresolved problems and lack of timely action.
2. **Communication Issues, 14 comments (14%):** Several comments mention poor communication between tenants and DBC. Lack of information about housing officers, changes in personnel, and failure to receive updates on scheduled surveys are common concerns.
3. **Anti-Social Behaviour and Security, 15 comments (15%):** Complaints about anti-social behaviour, including drug dealing, noise disturbances, and security issues, are prevalent. Tenants express concerns about the safety and well-being of themselves and their families.
4. **Green Spaces and Environmental Concerns, 24 comments (24%):** Comments touch on the neglect of communal areas, overgrown green spaces, lack of tree maintenance, and uncollected bins. Environmental issues, such as mould and damp, are also highlighted, affecting the health and well-being of tenants.
5. **Parking Issues, 13 comments (13%):** Parking problems, including difficulty finding spaces and issues with inconsiderate parking, are mentioned in several comments. This issue particularly affects tenants with mobility or health issues.

Leaseholders (75 responded – not included in the actual TSM results)

1. **Maintenance Issues, 13 comments (27%):** Numerous comments mention various maintenance problems, including lighting issues, leaks, mould, overgrown grass, and general cleanliness concerns.
2. **Communication, 13 comments (27%):** Many respondents express dissatisfaction with the slow and unprofessional communication from DBC. Some mention delayed responses to complaints and issues raised.
3. **Service Charges, 7 comments (15%):** Multiple tenants express concerns about the high service charges, particularly when they feel the services promised are not being adequately delivered.
4. **Gardening and Green Areas, 6 comments (12%):** Several comments discuss dissatisfaction with the maintenance of communal gardens and green areas, with issues such as overgrown bushes, trees, and uncleaned shared spaces.
5. **Financial Concerns, 7 comments (15%):** Several tenants mention financial burdens, such as unexpected bills, high costs for communal repairs, and challenges in understanding and disputing charges.

8 Service Improvement Activity linked to trends:

Communal areas – A pilot Estate Improvement Project will take place at Grovehill East during Q4. The SQA Team are working together with Tenancy and the Tenant Improvement Grant panel to identify and carry out estate improvements in the area.

Fly-Tipping Pilot – This was completed in Q3, and the results are currently being analysed to improve management using GIS mapping, prevent ongoing fly-tipping and assisting in accurate service charges.

Complaints – the SQA Team are carrying out quality assurance checks on all housing complaints. This includes reviewing complaint responses to identify best practice and improve the quality of responses and communication throughout the process.

Communication – A decision has been taken to move over to a new system called CX-Feedback which will capture the TSM's but is also a resident engagement platform. This will improve communication with all residents via push messages, the TSM's and automated transactional surveys.

Damp and mould – DBC was a key partner in a research project funded by the LGA for the Net Zero innovation programme including, St Albans City Council, University College London and London South Bank University. The aim was to understand issues with Damp, Mould and Condensation (DMC) from the residents' view, exploring the relationship between property design, heating systems and household activity.

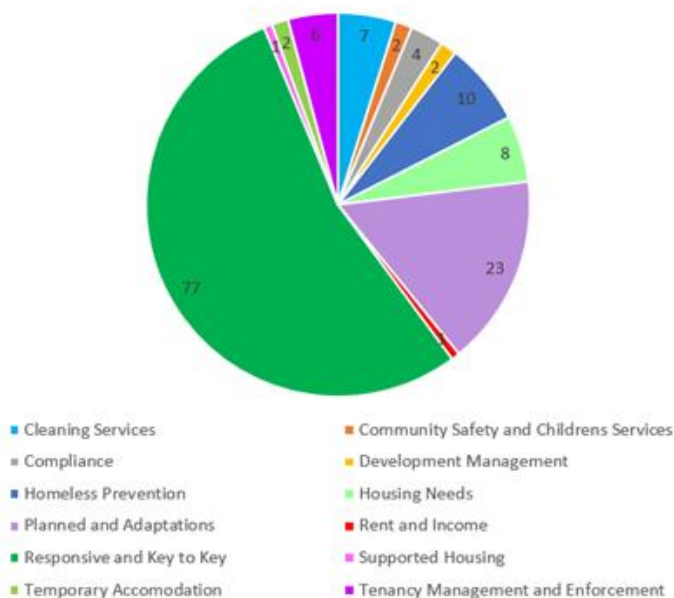
Most social housing tenants involved in the events had a good awareness of the causes of condensation and mould issues, but many demonstrated behaviours that were not conducive to eradicating mould growth. The research team observed several "lightbulb" moments where tenants were able to gain a better understanding of actions to take in tackling mould growth (depending on the building archetype). Despite issues around behaviours, some building types (and those with defects awaiting remedial works) present issues that are difficult to address with behavioural change.

Many of the social housing tenants were desperate to voice their concerns and to be heard, not just by the local authority but also by other tenants and community stakeholders and valued the opportunity to be part of the research project. There was a sense of helplessness from many participants, due to the complexities involved and time taken for effective action in tackling building defects.

Communication with social housing tenants and the structure by which they are engaged (on mould issues in particular) is extremely important. The project identified opportunities for clarifying the roles and responsibilities within local authorities for managing communication, and the actions proposed and taken.

9. Housing & Property Services Complaints Complaints received – During Q3 we received 143 Stage 1 Complaints, and 25 of these have been escalated to Stage 2- this works out to 17%, demonstrating that the majority are being resolved at Stage 1.

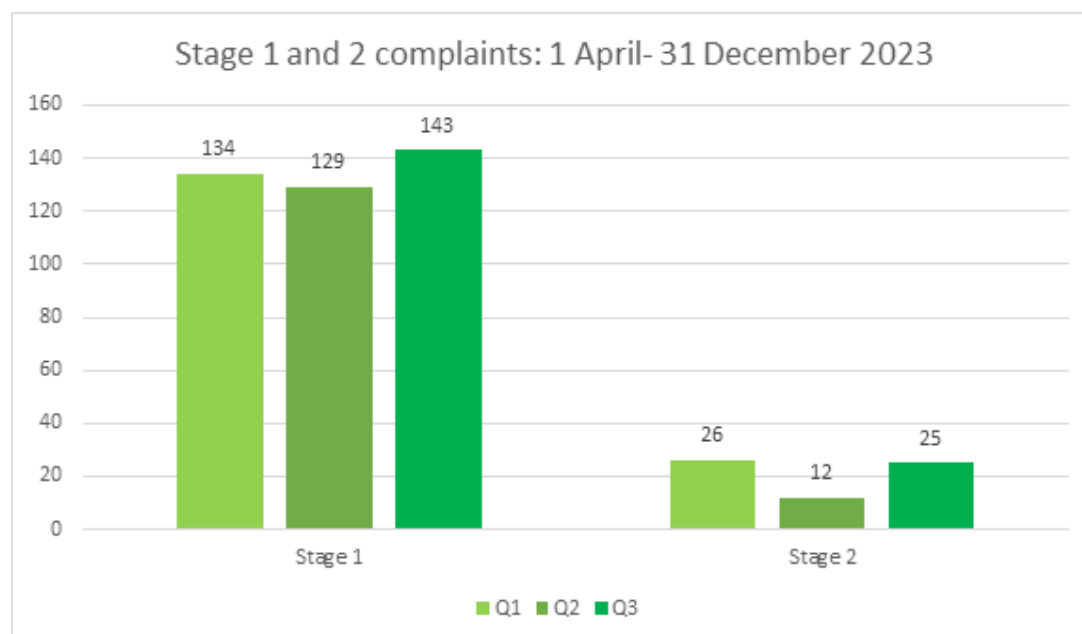
Stage 1 Complaints Received: 1 October- 31 December 2023



Stage 2 Complaints Received: 1 October- 31 December 2023

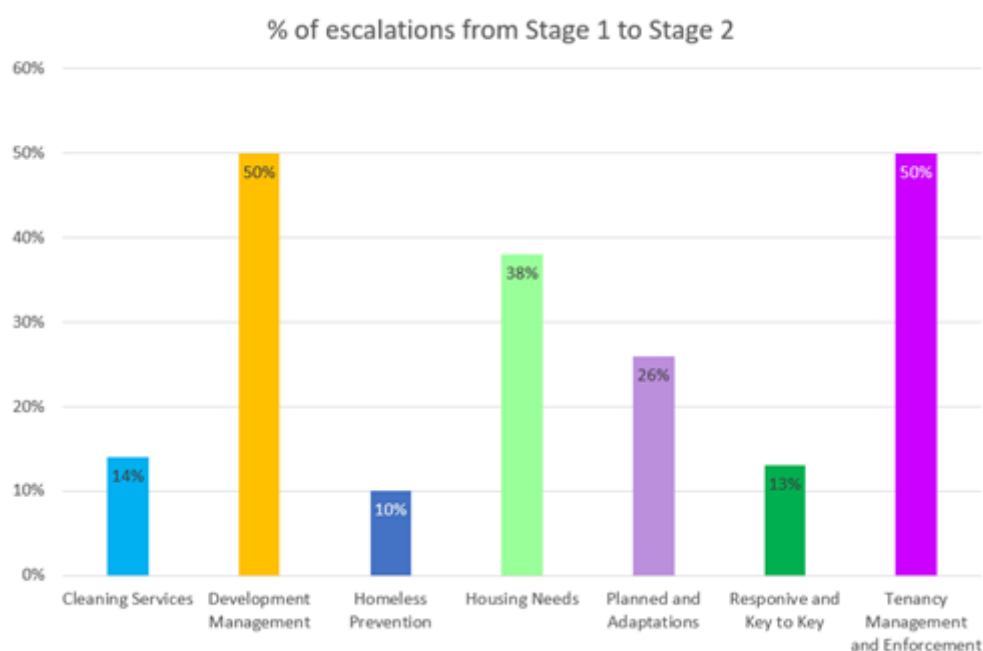


Number of Stage 1 and 2 complaints across Q1-3



Responsive repairs and Key to Key have received 54% of all Stage 1 Complaints made to the Housing service in Q3, down slightly (2%) from the first two quarters. They have also received 40% of all Stage 2's, down from 26% from the first two quarters.

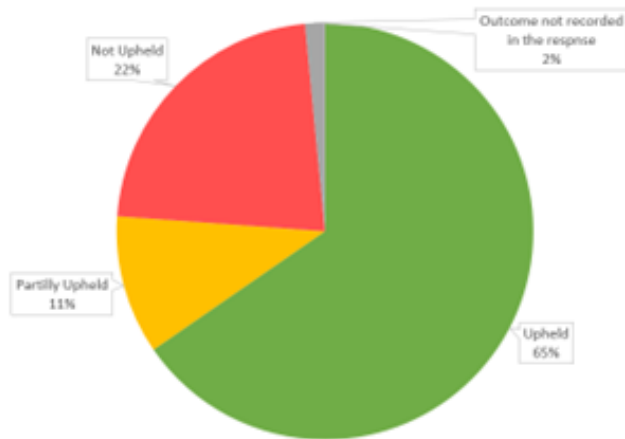
While Responsive and Key to Key received most complaints, they are not the team responsible for the highest percentage of escalations from Stage 1 to Stage 2, they were the second lowest. Other teams (Development Management, Tenancy Management and Enforcement) had higher percentages of escalations, although from much lower base numbers.



Upheld vs not upheld –

Over two-thirds of Stage 1 complaints were upheld, indicating that there were services failures, but also an open culture to take responsibility.

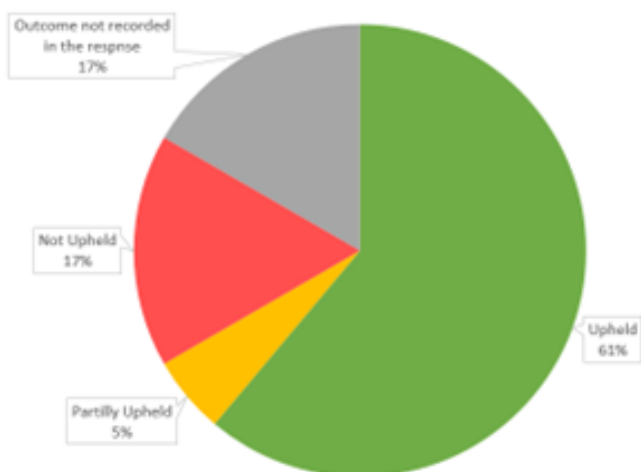
Outcome of Stage 1 Complaints: 1 October- 31 December 2024



Broadly, two out of three Stage 2 complaints were upheld or partially upheld. This indicates a potential failure within the investigation of the stage 1 complaint or a failure to follow through with actions promised.

In a minority of cases the **outcome was not explicitly recorded** within the complaint response. This will be addressed via an audit of responses to ensure the customer knows where they stand. It also improves the quality of our data, and it is a key recommendation by the Ombudsman.

Outcome of Stage 2 Complaints: 1 October- 31 December 2024



What have we learnt from the data?

There has been a focus in this report on the complaints process to ensure that supports customer friendly responses to dissatisfaction. As part of the new digital platform being introduced, by the summer, a new complaints module will be built allowing us to streamline complaint handling, produce real time reporting and record any lessons learned.

The Quality of complaint responses

A number of complaint responses have been independently audited by the SQA Team. The initial examples demonstrated that there was one common issue, the timeliness of responses. Comparing our audit and the satisfaction survey responses from residents, we have found a direct correlation between late responses and “very dissatisfied” scores. This continues to be a key area of focus and is reported to HSLT monthly.

There were minor issues with other aspects of the responses, but no other key themes were identified from these. Overall, the quality of what was audited was consistently good.

Once the issue with response times have been addressed, a focus group will be established to deeper dive into other potential issues.

Changes made during Quarter 3

- Following approval from HSLT, the Stage 1 responder is now accountable for ensuring any works or actions promised in the response are followed through to completion.
- Weekly drop-in sessions with Osborne have been arranged at the Forum, to tackle existing repair issues which have been a driver of complaints. This service allows customers the chance to speak to someone face to face about their concerns, something which the Housing Open Day attendees told us was important to them.
- The SQA Team are helping deliver a Neighbourhood Engagement Day as part of a Neighbourhood Improvement Plan. Osborne have been invited to our first event and their operatives will be able to carry out minor repairs on the day.

10. Involved Tenants feedback

Tenant & Leaseholder Committee

- 30 November - a presentation on repairs and maintenance by Cardo Group and Osborne, providing constructive feedback in Q&A session around performance and future aspirations.
- Provided input into the 2022-2023 Annual Report to Tenants and Leaseholders, enabling us to brand the document ‘Resident Approved’.

Coffee with a cop!

- During October’s Hate Crime Awareness Week, the Community Safety Team and local Police joined up to run an informal coffee and chat session in The Forum’s reception area.
- The event was well-received by members of the public, who were able to learn more about what hate crime is, its impact on victims and what to do if they were affected. Find out more at www.report-it.org.uk

Housing Open Day – 3-7pm, 29th November 2023 the Forum

- Attended by approximately 400 adults and 100 children
- Great positive feedback from attendees – they were able to access all the information they needed, staff were so friendly and helpful, everyone really went the extra mile etc.



Building Safety Act – Resident Engagement Strategy Events

- The SQA and Compliance teams coordinated events at all five high rise blocks. These were supported by teams across the directorate and well-attended by residents. Using resident feedback, we have developed tailored online portals on 'Engagement HQ'.
- The newly appointed Building Safety Manager, Toby Gilden, will take on responsibility for ensuring that residents know how to report safety concerns and are listened to.

Cutting the ribbon at Wilstone – October



- Our Housing Development Team proudly handed over six new village homes in Wilstone, including a fully wheelchair-accessible house.
- The new tenants joined Councillors, contractors and staff at a celebratory ribbon-cutting event.

Supported Housing Events

- Supported Housing tenants enjoyed a fun Christmas bingo session and lunch in Adeyfield in December, organised in partnership with Community Action Dacorum and SunRealm.
- A Merry Fishmas event was also held on 15th December
- The team asked residents what kind of events they enjoyed, and the favourites were quizzes and fish & chips.
- Around 60 tenants representing teams from every scheme around Adeyfield came to Evelyn Sharp House for our event, sponsored by Osbornes.
- The team was also delighted to be joined by Councillor Simy Dhyani who popped by to say hello and ended up staying for the whole afternoon.



11. Improving Services

The TSM's are outcome focussed and an improvement plan has been agreed to improve scores via service improvements. This will lead to improved perceptions over time.

TSM	Q2 Score	Responsible Person	Improvement Actions	UPDATE (as at 6 FEB 24)
Overall Satisfaction	59%	HSLT	Main drivers are Repairs and complaint handling SQA Team to review all transactional surveys to support key front-line service delivery by Nov 23	SQA team has introduced transactional complaints satisfaction fed back to HSLT monthly.
Repairs Service	63%	IK	Improvement plan in place Re-procurement of service underway (will last 12/14 months) Improved oversight via monthly composite reporting	New permanent Head of Service now in place. Service improvement plan being worked through.
Time taken for repair	63%	IK	See actions above	
Home Well Maintained	57%	MP	See actions above and note Asset Management Strategy / business plan refresh 24/25	
Home Being Safe	65%	RL	Resident Engagement Strategy for High-Risk blocks being rolled out to all high-rise blocks by end October 23 Information on website to be updated Be-spoke articles required for Dacorum Life	Completed and ongoing engagement via web portal. See above.

				Built into annual communications plan with Lou Fuller
Listening to views and acting on them	43%	HSLT	Be-spoke articles required for Dacorum Life on 'You Said, We Did' Piloting an Estate Improvement Plan in October 23	Built into annual communications plan with Lou Fuller Ongoing.
Keeping tenants informed	57%	SW	Dacorum Life monthly TPAS Smart Review underway	Built into annual communications plan with Lou Fuller Completed and next steps agreed by HSLT on 1 Feb 24 including further assistance from TPAS
Fair & Respectful treatment	64%	HSLT	No specific actions underway other than work on corporate values	
Complaint Handling	22%	SW	Current approach being reviewed by SQA for HSLT/SLT in Oct 23 To introduce tracking of promises made in complaint response to ensure completion All DMC complaints now tracked separately	New working practices introduced and being reviewed in April 24. Agreed at HSLT that Stage 1 complaint responder retains responsibility to see through all actions promised. Ongoing and monitored on In-Phase.
Neighbourhood Management	45%	OJ	Introduced 4 area inspectors Piloting an Estate Improvement Plan at Grovehill East in November 23 SLA between Housing & Cleaner, Safe & Green	Planning work completed and first residents meeting in mid-February 24
Making a positive contribution to neighbourhood	52%	OJ	Piloting an Estate Improvement Plan at Grovehill East in October 23 Building Safety, High Risk visits will incorporate estate improvement elements (7 blocks by end Nov 23)	See above and new performance measures introduced for grading communal areas of our estates.
Approach to handling ASB	53%	JS	This improved from Q1, as number of potential points of failure have been removed	Introduced measures into In-Phase to monitor.
Management Indicators - Complaints		AT	Agreed for SQA team to lead on improving quality, monitoring transactional satisfaction, and improving performance monitoring during Q3	Ongoing.
Management Indicators - Compliance		RL	Headline figures are strong A scorecard of underlying actions to be shared at HSLT for further assurance, with first one attached to this report	Ongoing. Quarterly reports shared with HSLT & OSC.
Management Indicators - ASB		JS	Statistical returns only	
Management Indicators - Repairs		IK	See actions above in Repairs (perception) section	
Management Indicators - Decent Homes		MP	Plans in place to be 100% as at 31/3/24.	

TLC have requested an increase in the number of transactional survey results to build upon the current customer voice data and insight. They have also scrutinised the HouseMark mid-point data and have prioritised areas for future 'deep dives'.

The TPAS Smart Review of Tenant Engagement at Dacorum has concluded and TPAS has been engaged to help re-engineer the engagement service with residents.

Ongoing oversight and scrutiny of the repairs service via Quarterly performance reporting, and operationally with monthly management information.

This report will be shared within operational teams and within scrutiny forums to ensure the tenants' voice is factored into operational decisions.

12. Risks

The Operational Risk Register has been revised and aligned with the performance information, management information and service plans.

Certain key functions are outsourced to OPSL. There is a lack of central oversight of their customer care performance. We will include their average call handling times, the range of answering times and some evidence of the quality they provide for the Quarter 4 report.

13. Financial and Value for Money implications

As members will be aware the impact of the pandemic, inflation and interest rates have significantly impacted the sector and we are experiencing unprecedented price increases across all areas of Council activity. This fiscal impact is compounded in key areas by the lack of skilled people and materials driving continued escalation of costs. These two factors alone will create a significant cost pressure on available budgets.

This is being fed into the 24/25 business plan, along with other demands to assess the impact on current and future budgets and detailing what additional mitigating actions may need to be introduced.

14. Legal Implications

We are required to comply with all statutory and regulatory legislation relating to the delivery of Housing & Property Services. This includes the statutory functions for management of Compliance activity, Homelessness and interim (temporary) accommodation, Housing Allocations, Strategy and Private Sector Housing. This also includes the regulatory functions for the consumer standards and rent setting.

15. Equalities, Community Impact and Human Rights

Community and equality Impact Assessments are developed whenever there is a requirement to change or create a new policy or procedure or significant change to service delivery

Human Rights – There are several services that are provided to tenants, residents and leaseholders which involve entering their homes. The policies adopted by the Council are subject to consultation or oversight to make sure that the right to respect for private and family life is considered and balanced against other landlord responsibilities for health and safety.

16. Sustainability implications (including climate change, health and wellbeing, community safety)

Investment programmes are contained within the HRA Business Plan, and an element of budget provision has been allocated to future stock sustainability. The performance report includes the responsibilities of the Housing Service in relation to community safety and the health and wellbeing of some of the most vulnerable tenants and residents.

17. Council infrastructure (including Health and Safety, HR/OD, assets, and other resources)

The HRA and general fund stock management of the asset is undertaken across the housing service. In line with the HTIP further work is underway to develop a stock investment review process and programme, which will inform future investment decisions.

The management of health and safety related matters are reported into the Corporate Health and Safety Working Group.

18. Conclusions:

This report provides an overview of service performance, the tenants' voice and interventions implemented to address key areas of performance. Key performance challenges will be subject to ongoing monitoring via the Housing Services Leadership Team, ensuring a collaborative approach to service delivery and ongoing performance.

19. Next steps

1. Utilise data better. We have improved the quality and quantity of what we input into HouseMark and In-Phase with bespoke reports being tailored to key audiences.
2. Introduce CX-Feedback to collect real time resident data and enable be-spoke communications in time for 2024/25.
3. To share this report with HTIP to help ensure their improvement plans are designed to meet the continuing and emerging needs of the business.
4. To agree if this report covers the main issues or if additional elements need adding in the future.