

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

21 January 2025

Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness

Portfolio Holder: Councillor L Prenter, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness

Summary

This annual report provides an account of the role of the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness. It details their ambitions for their areas of responsibility, how they have, and how they will undertake political challenge and leadership and what their priorities and ambitions are for the year ahead.

1. Recommendations

1.1. The Committee is asked to note the report.

2. Budget and policy framework

2.1. The areas within the Terms of Reference of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and covered by the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness, as set out in the Council's Constitution are:

- All Housing Services, including Housing Revenue Account (HRA)
- Homelessness and Housing Options
- Medway Development Company
- Private Sector Housing
- Travellers

3. Background

3.1. I am delighted to have taken on the new portfolio for Housing and Homelessness, and I would like to start by expressing my thanks to various members of staff, partners, contractors who, day to day, run council services with exceptional commitment, enthusiasm, and care for our tenants and residents of Medway.

- 3.2. I would also like to say a special thank you to the Tenants Panel who have worked tirelessly with myself, staff and contractors to hold us to account and ensure the voice of the tenant is heard.
- 3.3. It is clear that staff understand the financial situation that the Council currently faces but also the importance of delivering high quality statutory services, while seeking positive outcomes for residents of Medway.
- 3.4. The Housing sector, both nationally and locally, remains challenging. Rising costs for renters, owners and landlords has led to a position whereby the market is inaccessible for an increasing number of people.
- 3.5. The condition of accommodation in both the private and social sectors continues to be important. I know that through my work in both my ward and beyond, there are still challenges with the standard of accommodation in the private sector. To support this, we relaunched our Medway Council Landlord's Forum in November 2024, the first time one has been held since 2019.
- 3.6. Our tenants and residents are also feeling the ongoing challenges of the economic climate within the housing sector. I am pleased to see a continuing focus on support and advice to those that need the Council's help the most. This has been achieved through a number of support programmes, initiatives and guidance which are highlighted in this report.
- 3.7. A positive outcome following the first inspection in the Southeast by the Regulator of Social Housing, resulted in the service receiving the second highest grading; a C2 Judgement.

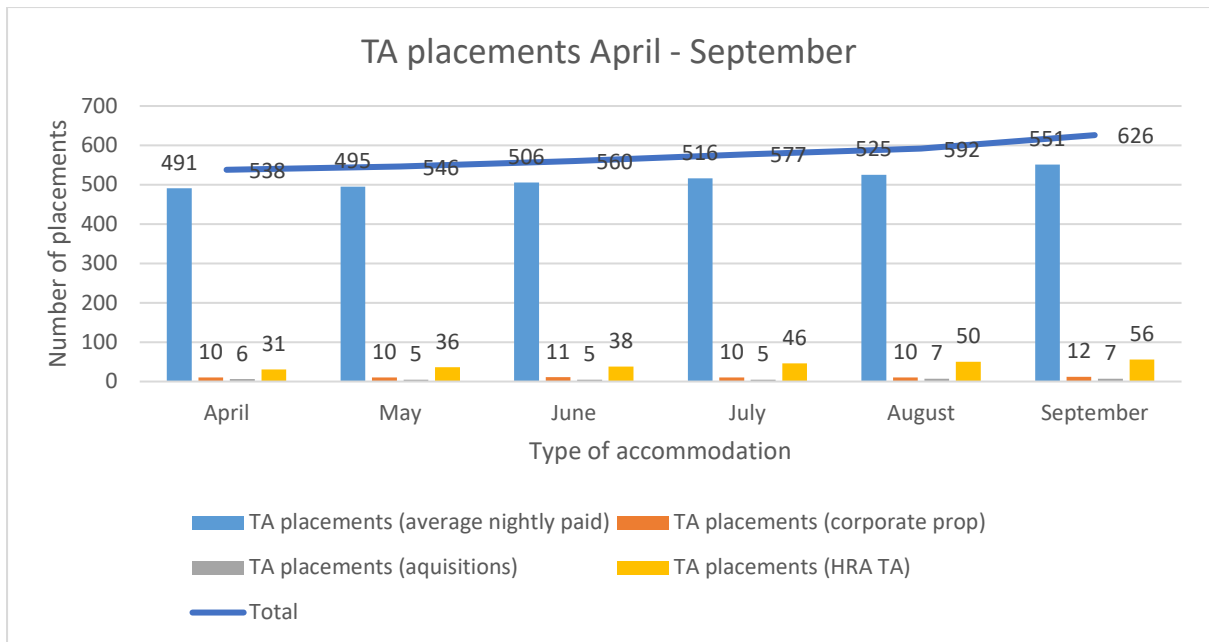
4. Housing Needs

Homelessness, Housing Options and Rough Sleepers

- 4.1 Demand for homelessness services for the Council continues to be high. This is in line with regional and national trends, particularly with households' income being constrained by the rising cost of living and the increase in demand and rents within the private rented sector.
- 4.2 While homelessness approaches have reduced over the last year, the service is still seeing significant numbers, with the average monthly approaches between April and the end of September being 273. However, we have seen an average 18% increase in approaches over the last two months.
- 4.3 The main cause of homelessness continues to be eviction from existing housing, due to Section 21 no fault evictions (28.2%), being asked to leave by friends or family (34.1%) and domestic abuse (9.12%).
- 4.4 The service has a highly experienced Domestic Abuse Officer embedded within the team and, due to a recent vacancy within the triage team, the service has taken the opportunity to recruit a replacement triage officer who will specialise in domestic abuse approaches. This provides resilience within

the team and additional skills to support survivors of domestic abuse in Medway.

- 4.5 Additional front-line resources were allocated to the Housing Options team in April, which allowed the team to recruit a further five Housing Options officers to support the Financial Improvement Transformation Plan target of 25 additional preventions of homelessness per month. I am pleased to advise that the team met its six-month target of additional preventions (150) and continues to work towards its end of year target of 300.
- 4.6 From April to September 2024 the service successfully prevented/relieved homelessness, with the average prevention/relief success rate for their cases being 70%, which is a 7% increase compared to the same period last year.
- 4.7 The service successfully launched One Medway Lettings on 7 November, when the first Medway Council Landlord Forum since Covid took place. This event brought together approximately 50 of Medway's landlords/property owners providing an update on the Renters Rights Bill, health and safety, as well as One Medway Lettings. To date, the team has secured two properties that have provided a settled home for a household who was previously living in temporary accommodation.
- 4.8 The service uses a combination of nightly paid, corporately owned properties, new acquisitions (funded under the Temporary Accommodation Purchase Programme) and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) properties. At present, the main accommodation used for TA is nightly paid, but the team has continued to work hard to reduce the reliance on this form of accommodation. (See section 4.29 – 4.31 for information on the TA acquisitions programme).
- 4.9 Temporary accommodation (TA) use continues to be a significant financial pressure for the Council. The main cause of this pressure (besides the numbers) is the use of expensive nightly paid accommodation, which is provided within the private rented sector.
- 4.10 The number of households in temporary accommodation between April and September 2024 is shown below. There has been a 27.5% increase in the requirement for TA over this period.



4.11 There is no single solution to resolve the use of temporary accommodation and, in particular, nightly paid accommodation. The service has a TA reduction plan that highlights the variety of tools in place to reduce the overall usage and therefore reduction in spend.

- Preventing the need for temporary accommodation in the first place
- Reducing the net cost of temporary accommodation units
- Move on from temporary accommodation

4.12 The Rough Sleepers Initiative continues to work across Medway providing outreach (street based) and navigator services (placement support) while working in partnership to support homelessness provisions.

4.13 On average, between April and September, the team's caseload has been 82.5 clients, with 107 referrals per month which peaked in July at 149 (this is not unusual given the time of the year, with the warmer weather). Monthly verification of rough sleepers has been approximately 14, with October's verification at 10.

4.14 The Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) commenced from 20 November 2024, for the winter period. This provision will be in place 1 January 2025, from this period until 31 March 2025 a temporary homeless refuge will also be available supported by additional Winter Burdens funding being granted by the MHCLG.

4.15 The Homelessness Advisory and Support Team (HAST), from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) carried out an "*in depth diagnostic visit*" on 25 November 2024 of our Housing Options service. This is not an inspection but provides Council's with support and guidance by reviewing processes, approaches, outcomes and use of temporary accommodation. The team is expecting feedback in January 2025. During the visit, no practices or procedures were raised as areas of concern.

Homechoice and allocations

- 4.17 Local Lettings Plans are agreed and put into place to help create sustainable and balanced communities. These are also used to secure direct nominations by the Council where there is a particular need identified.
- 4.18 Over the last 18 months there have been 10 homes secured for Care Leavers and 44 homes for households in Temporary Accommodation via Local Lettings Plans.
- 4.19 The table below shows the number of lets between April and September 2024 (all social housing properties in Medway) and the number of applications currently in each Band, plus the number of applications received each month.

Medway Council - waiting list (Homechoice)	Apr-24	May-24	Jun-24	Jul-24	Aug-24	Sep-24	Total Lets
Lets through Homechoice	34	55	55	48	36	69	297
Numbers in Band A	223	236	238	242	245	250	
Numbers in Band B	598	623	649	675	713	732	
Numbers in Band C	808	861	865	842	856	863	
Numbers in Band D	684	625	634	656	674	692	
Numbers in Band D-Sheltered Only	410	409	415	433	455	496	
Number of applications for Homechoice received	387	365	353	348	346	304	
Number of Homechoice applications assessed	339	396	271	390	339	820	

- 4.20 The average wait times for an allocation is as follows (times will vary depending on size of the property, area and weekly rental as Homechoice allows applicants to choose which properties to bid on):

Property Size	Days on waiting list
1 bed	265 days
2 bed	209 days
3 bed	400 days
4 bed	800 days
5 bed	NA

This is the waiting time on the properties let between April and September 2024.

Housing Strategy

- 4.21 The team has completed the consultation and production of a new Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleepers Strategy, which included an innovative consultation piece produced by Arts and Homelessness International which took lived experience from Medway rough sleepers and used it to produce a legislative theatre event – Co-creating the Homelessness Strategy in Medway. This project was recognised by Kent Housing Group in their Excellence Awards in September.

- 4.22 Medway Housing's Sustainable Warmth response has focussed on what is known as 'fabric first', i.e. improving the thermal of properties through external wall or under floor insulation measures for owner occupiers and private renting households, with low overall household incomes and properties which have poor energy conservancy ratings.
- 4.23 Following the successful grant bid for £2 million to Homes England and the former Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), the Council, in partnership with MHS Homes, has been able to provide a 30-bed space supported housing project for young people which was completed in October.
- 4.24 I was invited to attend the opening of the scheme in Luton. The Sunrise Foyer officially opened in November and provides 30 studio flats for homeless or risk of homelessness young people. MHS Homes will be working in partnership with the Council to nominate and move young people in during December and January 2025.

Private Sector Housing – housing standards

- 4.25 The Council operates a predominantly reactive service that responds to complaints from private sector tenants who are concerned about the safety of their home. The Private Sector Housing Team acts to improve the conditions by working with landlords and tenants by offering support and guidance on their legal obligations.
- 4.26 Private sector tenants are able to raise disrepair requests, and are then visited by an officer to assess against the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System ([HHSRS](#)), used to identify specific hazards, depending on the outcome of an assessment and a number of actions can be taken including enforcement. The table below shows the disrepair requests received between April and September and the subsequent action taken, along with work undertaken with Kent Fire and Rescue Service (KFRS) and Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMO).

Housing Standards	Number
Disrepair request	240
Category 1 Hazards (HHSRS) - identified	37
Category 2 Hazards (HHSRS) - identified	383
Category 1 Hazards (HHSRS) - resolved	14
Category 2 Hazards (HHSRS)-resolved	173
Enforcement notices	154
Financial penalties	4
Warrants	14
Notice of entries	280
Schedules of works	59
Partnership working - KFRS	247
HMO licenses - issued	52
HMO licenses - renewed	13
HMO - enforcement	109

Private Sector Housing – Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) and adaptations

- 4.27 DFGs and adaptations allow Medway residents and tenants to remain independent in their homes. Between April and September, the team has assisted 89 households at a cost of £912,000 to remain in their homes.
- 4.28 There is a further commitment (works in progress) of £988,000 to assist 92 households with an estimated £1m to be spent on an additional 64 households before the end of the financial year.

Temporary Accommodation Acquisition Programme

4.29 Following agreement from Cabinet in January 2024 to support a capital borrowing programme of £42million to acquire 150 properties for the use as temporary accommodation by March 2026, I am pleased to confirm the following acquisitions as of December 2024:

- 12 properties have been purchased to date (exchanged and completed)
- 26 properties were exchanged with completion due during January 2025 – Rainham Road and Solomon Road
- 12 properties were exchanged in December with completion due during January 2025 – Bridgeside
- 7 properties exchanged in December with completion due During January 2025 – North Street
- 2 street purchases with legal
- Total by end of January 2025 – 59
- Pipeline 2025 +
 - 14 units in Gillingham
 - 33 units in Chatham
 - 7 units in various locations (street purchase)

- 4.30 It is important to note that all acquisitions follow due diligence including red book valuations, cash flow modelling and full property and legal searches.
- 4.31 Monitoring of acquisition is undertaken as part of my monthly portfolio holder meetings.
- 4.32 Attached in Appendix A shows an example of how the financial investment in our capital programme proves beneficial for the Council in comparison to spend on nightly paid temporary accommodation.

5. Housing Revenue Account (Landlord) Tenant Services

- 5.1 The Tenant Services team covers income and arrears management, leaseholder and tenancy management, provision of Homes for Independent Living (HIL) housing ICT and performance and resident engagement.

Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs)

- 5.2 Since 1 April 2023, social housing landlords have been required to collect and report on 22 tenant satisfaction measures, covering five themes. Ten of these are measured by the landlord directly (technical requirements) and 12 are measured by the landlord by carrying out perception surveys.
- 5.3 Our first submission was completed in June 2024 following a baseline perception survey in March 2023 and our first initial survey in October 2023. There were two key areas of improvement noted from these two surveys, satisfaction of complaint handling and satisfaction of anti-social behaviour case management.
- 5.4 Improvement plans for both areas were drafted in conjunction with the new Consumer Standards gap analysis to support the service preparation process for regulatory inspection. This has supported an overall improvement in our 2024/25 survey which was completed between September and October 2024. The table below highlights the overall improvement in satisfaction across all twelve measures including the median.

Tenant Satisfaction Measures Outcomes - Perception Survey				
Tenant Satisfaction Measure	TSM 2023/24	TSM 2024/25	Variance	Median 2023/24
Overall Satisfaction	69%	70.70%	1.70%	71.30%
Satisfaction with repairs	70.60%	74.70%	4.10%	72.30%
Satisfaction with the most recent repair	66.90%	73.10%	6.20%	67.40%
Satisfaction with how well your home is maintained	68.80%	73.20%	4.40%	70.80%
Satisfaction with how safe your home is	69.80%	76.20%	6.40%	76.70%
Satisfaction that the landlord listens to tenants views	51.30%	64.50%	13.20%	60.40%
Satisfaction that the landlord keeps tenants informed	61.80%	74.20%	12.40%	70.30%
Satisfaction that the landlord treats tenants fairly	67.70%	74.40%	6.70%	76.80%
Satisfaction with complaints handling	26.20%	32.90%	6.70%	34.50%
Satisfaction with how well communal areas are kept clean and well maintained	63.60%	66.90%	3.30%	65.10%
Satisfaction with the landlord making a positive contribution	53.60%	60.50%	6.90%	63.10%
Satisfaction with how ASB cases are handled	45%	51.90%	6.90%	57.80%

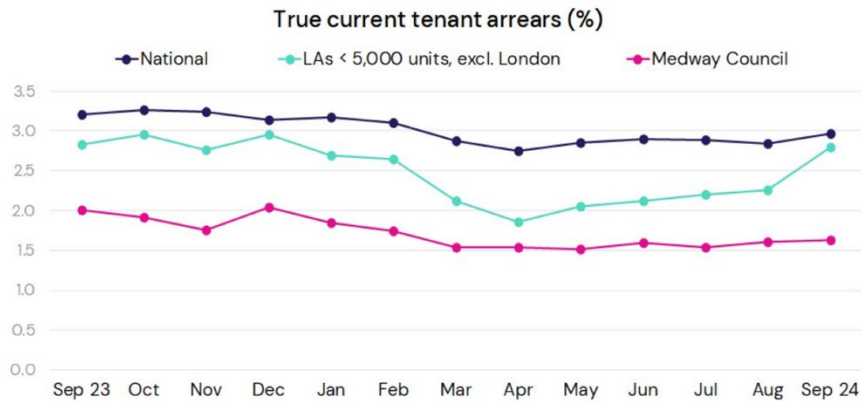
5.5 A full report will be provided to the Tenants Panel and HRA Governance Group in February 2025 with a summary report being published online in March 2025.

5.6 The technical measures [\[TSM Guidance\]](#) are collected at the end of the financial year and will be published on our website followed by formal publication by the Regulator of Social Housing in November 2025.

Income and arrears management & tenancy sustainment

5.7 The HRA has seen a steady increase of Universal Credit (UC) claimants over the last year, with a 12.96% increase in the number of tenancies that are now claiming UC. This equates to 1316 (43% of tenancies) council tenants on UC. The numbers will continue to increase as further migration of legacy benefits on to UC between now and 2025.

5.8 Rent arrears (HRA) at the end of Quarter 2 stood at £286,691 which is approximately 1.63% of the annual rent debit, exceeding our annual target of 1.65%. The graph below shows the team's performance against organisations of a similar size and nationally, with our performance being significantly better than both. [Source is Monthly Pulse from Housemark].



5.9 Tenancy sustainment (financial support), despite not having a full staffing complement for the last six months (a team of two officers) have continued to work with our tenants to help gain access to grants, discretionary housing payments, backdated benefits, as well as maximising income and has resulted in £62,295 additional income for tenants, of which £ 32,053.75 has been directly to tenants rent accounts.

Tenancy and estate management

5.10 A full review of anti-social behaviour case management has been undertaken following a negative Housing Ombudsman outcome. The Head of Tenant Services has completed the review, updated the continuous improvement plan and implemented new training programmes.

5.11 Monthly quality inspections are undertaken to ensure cleaning standards in communal areas are maintained. The current contract is due for retender in Summer 2025, with works commencing with the Tenants Panel to ensure a tenant led approach. Recognition of the service provided by the Norse Estate Wardens was recognised at the Kent Housing Group Excellence Awards held in September when the Estate Warden Supervisor was recognised for his excellence in service provision.

Tenant and resident engagement

5.12 The Tenants Panel was formed in June 2023 to ensure tenants an opportunity to have their voice heard, reviewing policies and strategies, including the HRA 30 Year Business Plan, as well as scrutinising areas of our landlord services that they feel need a deeper review.

5.13 I am pleased to confirm that in July the Tenants Panel took over full responsibility of their activities with the appointment of a Chair, Deputy Chair and a number of Champions to cover key service areas, repairs, gas contract servicing, events and communication, as well as health and wellbeing.

5.14 The Panel has recently completed its first formal scrutiny in which it chose to investigate the complaints process including the review of responses provided

by officers to complainants. A full report will be considered by the HRA Governance Group in February 2025.

- 5.15 The Big Door Knocks introduced in October 2022 to support the introduction of the new TSMs has continued to adapt and change to support the delivery of landlord services. This started with the increase in frequency in June 2023 to monthly (except for December) from the previous quarterly events. Over the last six months the survey questions have been adapted to provide the opportunity for fluid conversations while ensuring key questions on damp and mould, repairs, complaints and reasonable adjustments are asked.
- 5.16 Between April and September, the HRA team has knocked on 1,249 doors, accounting for 42% of our properties with 449 tenants spoken to and surveys left with a note regarding our call. This programme is engaging, providing tenants the opportunity to talk to the team while providing visibility across our neighbourhoods. I attended the BDK in Twydall on 8 August and enjoyed watching the team discuss matters that are important to our tenants while also checking in.
- 5.17 Tenant Services officers have attended a number of cross service/directorate events between April and September, speaking to 420 residents about our services in total. The events included the Welcome to Medway event, Child Friendly Medway creature trail and the successful pensions event held in Chatham.
- 5.18 The team also supported a number of events during Anti-Social Behaviour Week to tackle a number of ASB perceptions and feeling safe in your home.

6. Housing Revenue Account (Landlord) Property and Development Service

- 6.1 The Property and Development team covers asset, energy, compliance, planned works, voids and repairs to our council homes, as well as development and enabling (supporting the delivery of affordable housing within in Medway). The team is responsible for a variety of health, safety and quality control of the Council's homes as well as delivering our own affordable housing developments.

New repairs and compliance contracts

- 6.2 The HRA procured several new repairs and maintenance contracts, all of which went live on 1 September 2024. This procurement activity proceeded in collaboration with HRA residents, with Cabinet and Procurement Board approval.
- 6.3 The service procured specialists contracts as bulleted below
- Repairs, Planned work, Voids and Energy - Mears
 - Gas services - Swale Heating
 - Electrical service - RGE Services
 - Fire Risk Assessments (FRA) - STG

- FRA Remedial Works - Bell
- FRA Servicing - RGE Services
- Asbestos Surveying - Acorn
- Asbestos Remedials - Rhodar
- Water Management - Envirocure

6.4 The service also extended its compliance consultancy agreement with Phoenix Compliancy Management (PCM) who assist the HRA with monitoring statutory compliance responsibility for water, gas, lifts and electrical.

6.5 The new contracts came with a new suite of KPIs that officers will use to monitor contractors' performance. MLAPs (minimal levels of acceptable performance), financial penalties for at fault complaints and dis-repair cases, as well as at fault void rent loss, were also embedded into the new contracts.

6.6 Strategic meetings have taken place with Mears, Swale Heating and RGE and will continue to do so quarterly going forward. Officers review each contract's mobilisation plan; key promises document and KPIs during these meetings to ensure successful contract delivery. Monthly operational meetings are also held with each contractor to discuss day to day operational activity and contract performance.

Repairs, planned and voids

6.7 Repairs performance continues to be good throughout the period of the old contract finishing and the new contract starting. Out of hours, emergency, urgent and routine repairs completed on time are consistently sitting between 90-100%.

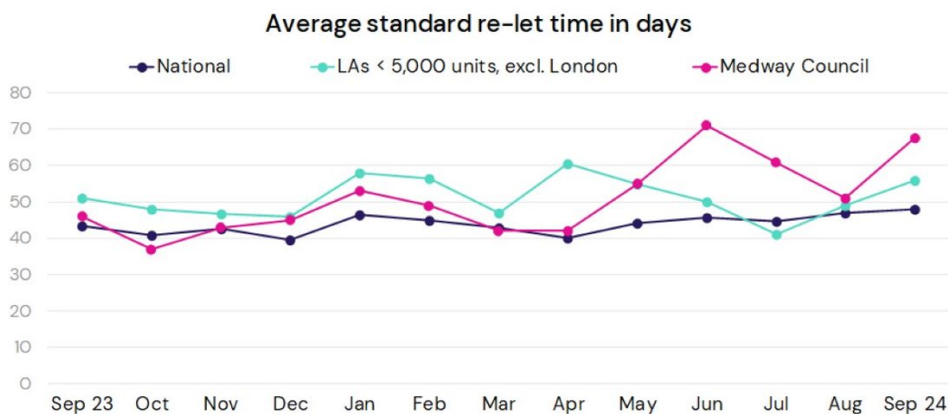
KPI	Target	Performance 2023/24	Performance April to September 2024
% Customers satisfied with the overall repairs service	85%	89.40%	92.53%
Average calendar days to complete a responsive repair	11 days	16.3 days	15.5 days
Gas compliancy record	100%	99.96%	97.97%
Emergency repairs completed on time	100%	99.40%	98.9%
Urgent repairs completed on time	100%	98.98%	97.62%
Routine repairs completed on time	99%	95.15%	90.19%
Repairs appointments kept	99.50%	98.5%	99.6%
Responsive repair recalls	<=1%	0.06%	0%

6.8 The percentage of customers satisfied with the overall repairs service and the service provided by Mears is also constantly sitting between 90-100%.

6.9 The average start to end time for responsive repairs has reduced in comparison to the previous year whilst the percentage of calls being answered is comparable with the previous year at around 95%.

- 6.10 The average call waiting time for Mears on responsive repairs is 15 seconds which is incredibly low when benchmarked against other housing providers of a similar size.
- 6.11 The current void turn around (time to relet a vacant council home) was 68 days at the end of September. The voids over the last six months have fluctuated with a peak in June 2024 (74 days). The team has been working closely with Mears to support the reduction in days; this has included the use of Mears Task Force, a multi-trade team that support areas that need to improve performance.
- 6.12 However, void performance remains in keeping with the rest of the sector when benchmarked. The service is undertaking some analysis to establish what the causes for voids are and will be looking at what interventions can be made to reduce the number of voids and improve the condition they are being handed back in. [Benchmark data via Housemark’s monthly pulse – Medway Council.]

Re-let times



Source: Monthly Pulse

- 6.13 The amount of works that are in progress is steadily reducing after spiking at the beginning of the year. This was mainly due to some severe weather coinciding with Mears experiencing resourcing issues and the service adopting a more proactive approach to repairs identification by way of Big Door Knocks and proactive contacts.
- 6.14 The service is in the process of creating a no access task force to combat hard to access properties and understand why some tenants are refusing to have planned works undertaken to their properties.

Compliance and building safety

- 6.15 The service continues to perform exceptionally well when it comes to compliance and building safety. The HRA Compliance Project Manager's sole purpose is to ensure that the service remains compliant with its statutory obligations.
- 6.16 The service also utilises the services of a specialist compliance consultant (PCM) who audits, provides advice and training, and informs the service of any changes in regulation or legislation.
- 6.17 The service has a compliance tracker which monitors compliance across 47 different compliance workstreams, states what is in and out of compliance and prompts what is due to come out of compliance in the next 30 days. The service is exploring a cloud-based solution for this system as recommended during the regulatory inspection.
- 6.18 Compliance statistics are provided to me on a monthly and reviewed and scrutinised by the Tenants Panel and then the HRA Governance Group. Officers also hold regular compliance progress meetings, ensuring that non-compliant works or works due to fall out of compliance are in hand and being actioned.

Area	Workstream	Frequency	Number due	Number completed	Number outstanding	Due within next 30 days	% compliant
Electrical	PIR - Communal - 10 Year	10 Years	197	197	0	0	100.00%
Water	Water Risk Assessment Review	1 Year	17	17	0	5	100.00%
Electrical	PIR - Domestic - 10 Year	10 Years	3070	3069	1	3	99.97%
Fire	Fire Risk Assessment - Combined	2 Years	196	181	16	8	92.35%
Lifts	Domestic Lifts - Insurance Inspection	6 Months	96	96	0	8	100.00%
Lifts	Domestic Lifts - Service	1 Year	96	95	1	35	98.96%
Electrical	PIR - Domestic - 5 Year	5 Years	3070	3002	68	127	97.79%
Gas	Landlord Gas Safety Record - Domestic	1 Year	2799	2788	11	67	99.61%
Asbestos	Asbestos Management Survey	1 Year	187	166	21	1	88.77%
Lifts	Passenger Lifts - Service	Monthly	8	8	0	8	100.00%

The table above shows compliance at end of September 2024 (Q2)

Assets and energy

- 6.19 The service undertakes a variety of surveys to both residential and communal buildings, including full stock condition surveys, Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) surveys, decency surveys and HHSRS assessments.
- 6.20 The service has stock condition data for 99.61% of the housing stock with the remaining properties having cloned asset data. The Service is working towards achieving 100% 5-year valid stock condition surveys by the end of 2025. The service also has 100% valid 5-year stock condition surveys (SCS) for all blocks and communal areas.
- 6.21 The service recently appointed a second in house Stock Condition Surveyor to accelerate the number of surveys being completed. The two HRA Stock Condition Surveyors are working alongside STG and an external consultant to complete a large proportion of surveys between now and the end of the financial year.

SCS - Domestic Properties	Current Position	
Description	Number	% of Stock
Properties with a SCS completed	3045	99.61%
Properties with cloned data	12	0.39%
Valid SCS within last 5 years	598	19.56%
Properties without Valid SCS but had a Decency Survey in last 5 years	1218	39.84%
Properties without Valid SCS and no Decency Survey but has been void in last 5 years	448	14.65%
Sub Total: Properties Visited in last 5 Years	2264	74.06%
On Programme to have full SCS in 2024/25	1122	36.70%
On Programme to have decency survey done in 2024/25	70	2.29%
Properties to be surveyed as part of SHDF Works	99	3.24%
Sub Total: Properties to be Visited in 2024/25	1291	42.23%
Total Stock	3057	

- 6.22 The service recently reviewed and published the HRA's Asset Management strategy which outlines the approach the HRA will take when it comes to managing, investing in and maintaining HRA housing assets. All associated policies and procedures have also been reviewed and updated since the implementation of the new contracts.
- 6.23 The service has made good progress on obtaining valid Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) data on the HRA housing stock, with 665 EPC surveys completed, equating to 22% of the stock having a new EPC completed in the last 12 months.

6.24 The HRA's housing stock is performing well from an EPC and Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) standing point, with 74.58% of properties already achieving an EPC C or above. [See the table below].

EPC Rating	Number	% - Total Stock	% - Properties EPC Summary
A	0	0.00%	0.00%
B	134	4.38%	4.41%
C	2146	70.20%	70.64%
D	732	23.95%	24.09%
E	23	0.75%	0.76%
F	2	0.07%	0.07%
G	1	0.03%	0.03%
Total EPC	3038	99.38%	100.00%
Valid EPC	2946	96.37%	
Non Valid EPC	92	3.01%	
No EPC	19	0.62%	
Properties	3057		

6.25 The HRA obtained £1m of funding through a successful SHDF Wave 2 bid which was match funded by the service. The bid was made in conjunction with Mears and will focus on improving the fabric to 190 of the HRA's worst performing properties (poor EPC ratings). Works are due to complete September 2025.

6.26 Works are underway to the 190 properties, with 68 of properties completed as at the end of September 2024.

Development and enabling

6.27 The HRA Development Strategy was published in 2020 and sets out our aim to increase the HRA housing stock by 1% year on year to help meet Medway's housing needs and provide high quality, sustainable Affordable Housing.

6.28 To maximise opportunities for increasing the housing stock, several development options are considered:

- Land led schemes where land is acquired, planning permission secured and the build contract put out for tender.
- Obtaining planning permission and building on existing HRA/Council owned land.
- Turnkey acquisitions where we purchase a new build development direct from a Developer.
- Open market purchases.
- Buy back of former HRA/Council owned homes.

- Section 106 Affordable Housing acquisitions (where there is no take up by Registered Providers).
- 6.29 Comprehensive cash flow modelling is carried out prior to all development/acquisition opportunities to ensure value for money and financial viability in line with the HRA Business Plan.
- 6.30 Wherever possible, the HRA Development Team explores funding opportunities to assist with the financial viability of developments/acquisitions and has already secured just over £770k of funding through the Brownfield Land Release Fund. A grant application is currently being submitted to the Homes England Affordable Homes Programme for our Phase 5 development to deliver some of these homes at Social Rent.
- 6.31 Since March 2023 the Council has participated in the Local Authority Housing Fund Rounds 2 and 3, with the HRA Development Team delivering eight homes for households on the Afghan Resettlement schemes and 12 properties for Temporary Accommodation as part of Round 2 (funding of £2,576,362 was allocated to Medway). Round 3 started in August 2024 and will cover 2024/25 and 2025/26 with a delivery target of 5 homes for resettlement households and 22 properties for Temporary Accommodation (funding of £4,104,714 has been allocated to Medway).
- 6.32 Since the HRA Development Strategy was published, 79 council homes have been delivered by HRA developments or acquisitions.
- 6.33 The following developments and acquisitions have either been started or due to complete during 2024/25:
- Phase 5: we entered into contract in August 2024 for the build of 37 new Affordable Homes across two sites. This includes 19 houses at Lennox Wood in Twydall and 18 flats at Aburound House in Gillingham. These sites are due for completion in early 2026 and will be a combination of social and affordable rented homes.
 - Phase 6: the build of a new block of 44 flats at Britton Farm, Gillingham (known as 'Truro Manor') for Affordable Rent. This is being delivered by Medway Development Company as their off-site affordable housing contribution for Chatham Waterfront, with the HRA acquiring the block. These homes are due for completion in March 2025.
 - The acquisition of Block B, Ingram Court, Gillingham, which will provide nine flats for affordable rent, following on from the acquisition of Block A, Ingram Court in Dec 2020. This acquisition is due for completion in May 2025.
 - The acquisition of a new build shared house in Gillingham for use by the Adult Social Care Flight Supported Living Service, which supports adults with

disabilities and autism to maximise their independence. This acquisition is due for completion in January 2025.

- 6.34 For information, Affordable Housing includes homes for rent or sale and is for people whose needs are not met by the private market. Tenures can include social rent, affordable rent, intermediate rent, shared ownership, First Homes, discounted market sale homes, rent to buy and other low-cost homes for sale.
- 6.35 The HRA Development Team works closely with Registered Providers, Developers and Planning colleagues to ensure that the right type of Affordable Housing is delivered to meet the needs of Medway residents in terms of property type, size, number of bedrooms, location, tenure and specialist housing such as homes for older persons and wheelchair user/adaptable properties.
- 6.36 The Affordable Housing is secured via a Section 106 legal agreement, and in the case of rented homes, Nomination Agreements are set up to secure 100% nomination rights from the Medway Housing Register on the first let.
- 6.37 The forecasted number of affordable homes due to be completed in 2024/25 is around 423. This is due to some large schemes being completed including Chatham Waters and The Wharf at Rochester Riverside.

One Medway Social Value

- 6.38 The service also created the 'One Medway Social Value Initiative' as part of this procurement activity. The social value initiative aims to improve the lives and neighbourhoods across the HRA's housing stock. It will be used to improve social cohesion, reduce social isolation, and provide tenants with the skills and facilities to have a positive impact on their lives.
- 6.39 Each contractor will make an annual financial contribution for each year of the contract in addition to the £40k that the HRA provides towards environmental improvements across the stock. This budget has increased to an average of £165k per annum because of this procurement activity.
- 6.40 The first One Medway Social Value partnership meeting took place in October with representation from our new contractors, council officers and the chair and deputy chair of the Tenants Panel. This initial meeting was to review how projects will be considered, reviewed (Tenants Panel) and agreed (HRA Governance Group). Work is continuing on a communications plan and application/referral process, with year one funding being set from April 2025.
- 6.41 This new approach to social value has been recognised and is being adopted by other authorities and housing providers across the sector. I am also pleased to say it won the Innovation and Bright Idea award at this years Making a Difference Awards.

7. Medway Development Company

- 7.1. Following a decision at the July 2023 Cabinet meeting, a Cabinet Sub-Committee for Medway Development Company (MDC) was set up in January 2024 and meets quarterly. Through this Committee so far key outcomes include but are not limited to, a new Scheme of Delegation and Memorandum of Understanding being agreed (in line with those of other LATCOs), and the MDC Business Plan 2030 which has been approved. Through the Cabinet Sub-Committee, Board members also have access to detailed quarterly reporting which focuses on financial and progress KPI updates that are both measured against the approved Business Plan. This is complemented by monthly update meetings with MDC and my attendance at the quarterly MDC Board.

- 7.2. 2024 has seen continued progress with MDC residential schemes and 115 homes have been completed at the Garrison Point scheme. The Chatham Waterfront scheme is within its construction delivery stage is now in its phased completion stage where three blocks are now finished and the final two will be complete by February 2025. Between these sites is significant public realm and green space; the Paddock, which completed in summer 2024. MDC is coordinating improvements that will transform this area to create and augment places where people can relax and enjoy. The Paddock will integrate with the adjacent Mountbatten House scheme that will provide 164 high quality homes. The Britton Farm residential scheme is also within its construction phase and will provide 44 high quality, affordable homes.

8. Travellers

- 8.1. Unauthorised encampments (UEs) are defined by the Government as "encampments of caravans and/or other vehicles on land without the landowner or occupier's consent and constituting trespass". Unauthorised camping is not a criminal offence, it is a civil offence (trespass), giving landowners the right to repossess their property using the due process of law. The prevention of trespass is the responsibility of the landowner.

- 8.2. The Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful to treat someone less favourably than others because of their protected characteristic, including race (which includes a person's ethnic or national origins and nationality). The Public Sector Equality Duty, under s149 of the Equality Act 2010, applies to the police (as a public authority) and places a duty on the police to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and foster good relations between persons of different racial groups.

- 8.3. The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 gives Local Authorities in England and Wales powers to make directions to leave land being used by itinerant groups (section 77). It is offence to fail to comply with such a direction. If a direction to leave is not complied with, a Local Authority can apply to the Magistrates Court for an order requiring the removal of vehicles and any occupants from the land (section 78).

- 8.4. Medway Council Community Safety Team seek to immediately attend a site to carry out a welfare check and risk assessment. They will then serve verbal and written notice for the encampment to vacate, subject to a satisfactory welfare assessment.
- 8.5. In 2024 the Community Safety Team has received and investigated 31 reports of unauthorised encampments, resulting in 14 Section x 77 notices; 13 required an escalation to a Section 78 notice; 1 required support by the Community Safety Team to a social housing provider due to the caravan being in situ on private land. When the Council has had to utilise Bailiffs to assist with an eviction, these costs totalled £8,397.50.
- 8.6. In certain circumstances a senior Police Officer has the discretion to order the travellers to leave and remove any vehicles and other property they may have with them (sections 61 and 62 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 and Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003). One encampment required Kent Police to utilise section 61 powers due to an increased level of ASB associated with the encampment.
- 8.7. Officers continue to target harden sites, with concrete bollards being installed at the former Curtis Way coach park.

9. Providing political leadership and challenge

- 9.1. My portfolio impacts significantly on all residents of Medway, from our own provision of council homes, to providing support and advice for residents who experience homelessness, despair or require adaptations to their homes.
- 9.2. Since taking on the Portfolio Holder responsibilities for Housing and Homelessness I have worked with the HRA Landlord Services as they have been the first local authority landlord in the Southeast to be inspected by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) as part of their new (since April 2024) inspection programme. I have had the privilege to work alongside the team and the Tenants Panel during this six-month process, working consistently with tenants to provide evidence of good practice and service delivery which ensures that our tenants are at the heart of our service.
- 9.3. I meet monthly with the Assistant Director, Chief Housing Officer and the Heads of Service to discuss progress against service and council plan objectives, as well as setting the direction for initiatives that will increase the prevention of homelessness, improving standards in the private sector and ensuring council homes are safe and well maintained.
- 9.4. I chair the HRA Governance Group, including members, tenants and officers to ensure that the HRA is meeting its strategic objectives. The Group oversees the progress of the planned works programme, arrangements for ensuring housing stock is compliant and safe, including remedial works and works in progress, complaints and the revised continuous improvement plan following the RSH inspection.

- 9.5. I have undertaken visits with teams to understand their working practices, procedures and pressures, as well as attending meetings with other council officers, statutory partners and landowners to ensure progress in relation to challenging the provision of safe, good quality, affordable homes for Medway.
- 9.6. I was pleased to address the Council's first Landlord Forum since Covid, which saw the attendance of 50 local landlords to discuss disrepair, affordability, health and safety as well as launching our new One Medway Lettings service.
- 9.7. To support the systematic challenges of homelessness and the financial burden of nightly paid accommodation, I have been involved in supporting the team in progressing the purchase of 38 new build properties (due for handover and occupation in January/February 2025) plus street purchases. With an on-going pipeline supported by the Local Authority Housing Fund to support our ambitious purchase programme of 150 properties by March 2026.

10. Championing the Interests of Medway residents

- 10.1. In delivering a range of statutory services, the interests of the residents must be central to the way services operate. Through a range of mechanisms, I am able to receive feedback regarding the way in which the Council operates and work with the senior leadership team to improve outcomes.
- 10.2. I have overseen the development of a refreshed Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleepers' Strategy which has seen a move towards collaborative and partnership working; while also making it clear what the Council's ambition is to reduce homelessness, rough sleeping and the use of temporary accommodation.
- 10.3. I had the privilege to participate in a homelessness prevention workshop which was held in July 2024. This workshop looked at the following themes: priorities for the next five years to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping, jargon busting and use of plain English, turning priorities identified into actions and identifying how we will measure success against the priorities. The workshop participants included commissioned services, public health, voluntary sector, children's service, population health, RSI team, peer supporters and people with lived experience.
- 10.4. Holding our Landlord Services to account via the HRA Governance Group supported by the Tenants Panel ensures senior and collaborative scrutiny, ensuring that the service is delivering against Priority 5 of our One Medway Council Plan while ensuring our tenants have the voices heard.

11. Support for key service areas

- 11.1. Medway Council has a core statutory duty to provide housing advice and assistance. I have instructed officers to keep me abreast of any developments that will have a positive or negative impact on our service delivery and financial burden from temporary accommodation.

- 11.2. I have supported officers to establish a new temporary accommodation action plan which is monitored as part of my monthly updates to ensure scrutiny and challenge within this high-risk provision.
- 11.3. Going forward, there is an increased inflationary pressure on projects due to both national and international events outside of the Council's control. Counterfactors have been considered to deal with issues the best way we can. Contractors continue to cite resource issues with labour and the ability to source materials. We are identifying issues on our dashboard risk registers and will continue to look at monitoring and mitigation. The Council is now aware of inflationary pressures of market estimate prices from the updated RICS BCIS indices.

12. Conclusion

- 12.1 The services within my Portfolio play an integral part in making Medway a safe, secure and affordable place to live. While recognising and seeking to address the current financial challenges, there are significant opportunities to provide long-term benefits for Medway and I look forward to working with colleagues and partners to bring these to fruition.

Lead officer contact

Becs Wilcox, Chief Housing Officer, Housing Services, 07970346119 and rebecca.wilcox@medway.gov.uk

Appendices

Appendix A –An example of how the financial investment in our capital programme proves beneficial for the Council in comparison to spend on nightly paid temporary accommodation.

Appendix A

Financial comparison single unit of nightly TA v single unit purchase

	Private Nightly Paid (2bed)		Aquisition (2bed)
Gross cost per night	£55.15		
Gross annual cost	£20,129.75		
Net cost per night	£25.30		
Net annual cost	£9,234.50		
Net cost over 50yrs	£461,725.00		
Purchase Price		£	231,000.00
Loan rate	5.30%		
Debt repayment		£	543,333.00
Assumed costs		£	320,127.67
Assumed rent loss (void)		£	33,558.79
Assumed income		-£	1,118,626.41
Net cost over 50yr		-£	221,606.95