

## Housing Directorate – Changes & Improvements 2019 - 23

Housing Landlord Services – Jody Bulman		
Change / Improvement	Link to Corporate Plan	Benefits
Roll out of a new Housing Management System – MRI Software	<p>Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.</p> <p>Put our customers first.</p>	<p>Providing staff with a system that enables them to work effectively out on the field and provides streamlined processes and workflows. The new system enables managers to better capture their team's workload and behaviours by providing a red, amber, green (RAG) rating worklist and bespoke reporting. It also provides tenants with a digital offering that enables them to access more services at a time that is convenient to them and not the Council.</p>
Restructure of the Sheltered Housing Team	<p>Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.</p> <p>Put our customers first.</p>	<p>The revised structure now reflects roles and the service being provided and officers now have more ownership and responsibility of their team and feel empowered with their roles. In implementing a new structure, an annual saving of £153,000 was achieved. Whilst restructuring, the name of the service changed to reflect modern services and ensure all schemes are included not just those for older people.</p>
Introduction of Capital Projects	<p>Put our customers first.</p>	<p>A dedicated project for addressing all the outstanding issues with rear accessways was created and rolled out in conjunction with Waste Management. In addition to this, a capital project to revamp and redecorate our Independent Living schemes was also introduced to make them more modern and welcoming.</p>
Implementation of Allpay, increasing the payments options for tenants	<p>Put our customers first.</p>	<p>Historically, tenants were only offered two dates within a month to set up a direct debit. The introduction of Allpay provides tenants with greater options and flexibility for paying their rent on dates and times that best suit them. The introduction of Allpay saw an immediate increase in the uptake of direct debits of 9.38%.</p>
Introduction of new Rent Income Analytics Systems	<p>Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.</p>	<p>The Housing Income Service has used analytical software to help predict when tenants may fall into arrears and therefore, help officers focus their time on those who may need their support the most. Whilst implementing the new housing management system, the opportunity was taken to review the software used, with a view to purchasing a system that could integrate with the new software, which has been achieved whilst also delivering a saving of approximately £25,000 per year when compared to the software costs of the former system.</p>
Introduction of a new rent Arrears Policy	<p>Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.</p>	<p>Whilst there was a policy in place to manage arrears, it was out of date, and therefore the policy was updated to ensure it reflected legislation and reflected relevant working practices such as early intervention and prevention. The new policy sets out what is expected of staff and tenants.</p>
Cessation of the Tenant Contents Insurance Scheme that was not fit for purpose.	<p>Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.</p> <p>Put our customers first.</p>	<p>The tenant insurance scheme had been in place for a number of years and, when introduced, probably provided value for money. However, in the current climate, it did not represent value for money, and it was labour-intensive to manage for very little gain. Therefore, after consulting with tenants, the scheme was discontinued to give tenants greater choice and freedom over which insurance provider they choose.</p>

<p>Joint working with the Communities Directorate</p>	<p>Put our customers first.</p> <p>Create clean, welcoming neighbourhoods and parks and an attractive town centre.</p> <p>Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.</p> <p>Safeguard residents</p>	<p>Delivered a Winter Support Fund for our tenants which was led by the Tenant Engagement Team, ensuring that some of our most vulnerable tenants were able to access support, particularly focusing on food vouchers.</p> <p>Developed an SLA so Environmental Services and Housing are clear on roles and expectations when dealing with noise complaints. This has led to an improved service for tenants who are now clear that the housing team will lead on any noise complaints relating to council tenants.</p> <p>Regular joint meetings with Environmental Services and Waste Management to tackle issues important to our tenants such as fly-tipping. This enables us to work collectively to quickly and effectively take issues such as fly-tipping in our neighbourhoods.</p>
<p>Implemented an Estate Inspection programme</p>	<p>Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.</p> <p>Create clean, welcoming neighbourhoods and parks and an attractive town centre.</p>	<p>These were previously either not being carried out or for the few staff that were doing them, they were inconsistent and ad-hoc. Regular inspections ensure that issues on our estates are dealt with quickly and effectively. Estate Inspections are set out in advance for the year and publicised on our website and we actively encourage tenants to join us on inspections. 289 estate inspections have been carried out so far this year.</p>
<p>Review of Tenant Engagement Team</p>	<p>Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.</p> <p>Put our customers first.</p> <p>Create clean, welcoming neighbourhoods and parks and an attractive town centre.</p>	<p>Increased staff members to enable meaningful engagement to be delivered and changed the name of the service to better reflect current regulatory requirements.</p> <p>Increased Tenant Engagement, events such as St Patrick's consultation, Denton Community Day, and Joint Days with the Police at Wallis Park and Lancaster Court. This helps to tackle issues such as ASB and fly-tipping.</p>
<p>Increased Tenant Engagement including the development of a tenant and leaseholder</p>	<p>Provide a proactive, supportive and</p>	<p>Meaningful tenant and leaseholder engagement is essential, and it helps us shape the services we provide to meet the needs of our tenants. Increased tenant scrutiny, providing tenants and leaseholders with the</p>

engagement strategy with a three-year action plan	financially efficient housing service.  Put our customers first.	opportunity to hold us to account regarding the services, we provide to make suggestions as to how we can do things better. So far this year we have carried out 122 different tenant engagement activities.
Entered into a partnership with the Money Advice Network	Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.  Put our customers first.  Safeguard residents	This partnership is probably more important now than ever given the economic climate. Housing staff can directly refer tenants to help increase their opportunities to pay their rent and get support with their finances before commencing legal action.
Implemented a new Decant Policy	Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.  Put our customers first.	To provide staff with a clear procedure to follow ensuring that the correct legal processes are followed, and tenants know what to expect from the decanting process. The policy also clearly sets out the support that we will provide to tenants during the decanting process.
Introduced Neighbourhood Housing Manager, Housing Team Leader and Housing Assistants to the team.	Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.  Put our customers first.	To provide better support and structure to the housing management team, providing the team with a clear management structure and an increased focus on key performance indicators (KPI's) and customer satisfaction. The managers provide weekly reflective practice sessions to support learning and development for the team.
Introduced a new ASB Policy with Risk Assessment	Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.  Put our customers first.  Safeguard residents	Ensures that staff have a clear and up-to-date policy to follow so that any cases of ASB are managed effectively, in a timely manner and with victim support at the forefront of any ASB case.
Award Winning – The team have won multiple awards. In 2021, Housing Income won 'Team of the Year' at KHG Excellence Awards and in	Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.	Continued staff investment and focus through a praise and reward system.  Tenants are recognised through a praise and reward system, which empowers them to continue tenant engagement activities.

2022, James Newman, Specialist Housing Officer, won 'Young Professional of the Year' and our tenants at Lorton Close won 'Unsung Community Heroes' at the KHG Excellence Awards	Put our customers first.	<p>Raised profile of the housing team within the housing sector throughout Kent.</p> <p>The award nominations were put through by the Service Manager to reflect the great work of the Housing Income Team keeping rent arrears at a low level, in fact, one of the lowest in Kent; to raise the profile of the great work that James Newman had carried out by improving the relationship we have with the Gypsy and Traveller Community in the borough and to ensure that our dedicated, hard-working team who support the communities in which they live, get the recognition they deserve for all of the wonderful support that they provide.</p>
<b>Housing Operations – Nicole Arthur</b>		
<b>Change / Improvement</b>	<b>Link to Corporate Plan</b>	<b>Benefits</b>
Introduced Phase 2 expansion of the workforce	<p>Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.</p> <p>Deliver a skilled in-house building management team.</p>	The expansion of the workforce allowed the council to bring a number of workstreams back in-house such as the Electrical Testing and Upgrade Programme which saved £260k per year. LED upgrades, electrical light testing, roofing and some drainage work generated just over £300k in revenue savings in the first year. Bringing this work in-house has not only generated financial savings but has also allowed greater control of the work to ensure the quality of service provided.
Implementation of Active Housing online repairs diagnostic and reporting system	<p>Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.</p> <p>Put our customers first.</p> <p>Digital innovation</p>	Active Housing is an online repair reporting service which allows tenants to diagnose their repair, self-appoint, and manage their appointment in terms of cancelling and re-scheduling. The system has allowed for a more accurate diagnosis and a far better service when reporting repairs online compared to what was previously provided. The system also offers self-help information/ videos and guides and makes the service much more accessible. Since April 2022 there have been 1,600 jobs raised through the site with an average journey time of 39 seconds. 3,000 appointments amended.
Localz system	<p>Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.</p> <p>Put our customers first</p> <p>Digital innovation</p>	Localz is a real-time customer update and mobile operative tracking feature, similar to the Uber app, which delivers live alerts so that tenants are kept up to date on their scheduled appointment. Tenants also receive a follow-up text message after the appointment to complete a satisfaction survey and rate their engineer out of a possible 5 stars. So far 72% of appointments have received a 5-star rating. The service not only makes it easier for tenants it has also reduced the no-access rates for appointments by 26% which saved £9,000.
Aids & Adaptation Policy	Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.	The policy outlines how the Council will support tenants to remain as long as possible independently in their current home and also in carrying out essential daily activities which may be hampered by long-term health issues or disability, or, if this is not possible or practical, to assist them in finding suitable alternative accommodation. The policy confirms the council's commitment to meeting the needs of tenants as well as

	<p>Put our customers first.</p> <p>Safeguard residents</p>	effectively using the council's existing housing stock and ensuring a fair distribution of aids and adaptations within finite resources
Introduction of an Estate Management Policy	Create clean, welcoming neighbourhoods and parks and an attractive town centre.	The policy was developed to ensure that standards on council-managed estates become more focused and transparent. The policy helped to develop a more proactive approach to the management of our properties, estates and neighbourhood. It also set appropriate estate management standards whilst also ensuring that all residents are aware of their respective responsibilities. Since the implementation resident complaints have greatly reduced with only one complaint being received in 2022/2023.
Introduction of Rate my estate inspection and guide	Create clean, welcoming neighbourhoods and parks and an attractive town centre.	The monthly inspection and guide to help improve the caretaking service. The guide describes caretaking standards using a combination of text and visuals. These descriptions form a clear framework, against which caretaking standards can be fairly assessed and any area of improvement can be managed. Since the implementation 1056 inspections have taken place with all tower blocks in the Borough now one a green rating.
Introduced a monitored CCTV provision	<p>Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.</p> <p>Put our customers first.</p> <p>Safeguard residents</p>	The Council entered into an agreement with Kindy to provide an 'observational and retrieval function' of the CCTV cameras on the estates. All of which has helped promote the health, and safety security of residents and staff as well as deterring vandalism. The move to this service has been greatly appreciated by Kent Police who have used the CCTV as evidence for several prosecutions, therefore reducing ASB on our estates. It has also allowed Landlord Services in some instances to take action against the tenancy.
Introduction of an Energy & Sustainability Team	<p>Put our customers first.</p> <p>Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.</p> <p>Carbon Neutral Borough</p>	<p>A dedicated and experienced resource to manage the programmes relating to the decarbonisation of the housing stock in line with the Council's 2030 net zero targets.</p> <p>Think this could be expanded a bit – to make it clear that without them, the carbon reduction work would not be possible. To date, the programmes of work delivered by the team have resulted in an annual carbon reduction of 650 tCO2.</p>
Successfully securing £1.5 million of funding through various Government funding streams to retrofit the housing stock.	Put our customers first.	Securing grant funding has allowed the acceleration of the retrofit programme and has resulted in a larger volume of work to be completed than if only Council budgets were to be utilised. The funding has also resulted in the Council leading the way in Kent concerning retrofit being only one of two Council's within the county to receive funding through the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF). Tenants who will benefit from the

	Carbon Neutral Borough	retrofit measures will see improved thermal comfort within their homes as well as savings on their energy bills. The works will also result in improved Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) ratings. Based on estimated figures from the Energy Saving Trust, the tenants who will benefit from these insulation measures will also see estimated bill savings of £258,720 a year.
Delivered Kent's first Ground Source Heat Pump scheme at 16 Independent Living flats.	Put our customers first.  Carbon Neutral Borough	Tenants have benefitted from improved heating and hot water facilities within their properties as well as seeing savings on their energy bills by roughly a third. The heating systems provide better flexibility and control for the tenants allowing them to programme their heating whereas the previous electric heaters would charge during the night and discharge the heat during the day.  The project was a great success with positive feedback given by the tenants and it received excellent media coverage being featured on Channel 5 News, BBC Radio 4 and Local Authority Building & Maintenance Magazine. The project and delivery team also received the Highly Commended award at the Kent Housing Group Excellence Awards 2022.
Exploring alternative ways to generate electricity by installing Solar PV panels at Carl Ekman House and Chantry Court to power the communal areas	Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.  Carbon Neutral Borough  Deliver a more resilient, creative and cost-effective council	For the Solar PV at Chantry Court, to date, we have generated 2,000 kWh since its installation in late October. The panels generate 19,720kWh per annum with annual CO2 savings of 4,502kg. For the Solar PV at Carl Ekman House, to date, we have generated 7,000 kWh since its installation in June. The panels generate 20,780 kWh per annum with annual CO2 savings of 8,323 kg. These systems power the communal electricity in both blocks consisting mainly of the communal lighting and lifts which will result in cheaper electricity bills for the Council. Remote monitoring has also been implemented to enable the team to remotely view the performance and statistics from the system.
Completion of Whole House Retrofit works to the Council's first net zero homes	Put our customers first.  Carbon Neutral Borough	Improved heating to both properties that are off-gas with efficient Air Source Heat Pumps and Solar PV. The properties have also had new insulation which improved the thermal efficiency of these homes.  The works have resulted in improved EPC ratings from their original of E to A, with both properties being classed as officially net zero and the estimated annual fuel bill savings for each property being around £2k.
Introduction of seven new policies and Management Plans covering Gas Safety, Fire Safety, Electrical Safety, Lift Equipment, Water Hygiene, Asbestos and Construction & Maintenance	Safeguard residents  Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.  Put our customers first	Gravesham Borough Council recognises its duty of care and is committed to creating a safe and healthy environment for its residents and visitors within its housing stock. The policies outline how DSO Building Management will meet compliance with the general requirements of current legislation, regulation and approved codes of practice  The management plans provide clear specific guidelines, processes and procedures for day-to-day operations and ensure the safety of residents, employees, contractors and visitors from the risks associated with fire, gas, electricity, lifts, asbestos, legionella and construction and maintenance within Council buildings.
Commenced a five-year programme to upgrade Fire	Safeguard residents	Gravesham Borough Council has a duty to safeguard its tenants in case of fire and to ensure its premises are equipped with appropriate fire detection and fire alarm systems. Early detection and warning are essential

<p>Detection to all properties within the housing stock.</p>	<p>Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.</p> <p>Put our customers first</p>	<p>components to ensure residents can evacuate safely from their homes in the event of a fire. In many cases, fire spread is prevented and damage to the home or adjoining properties is limited.</p> <p>We aim to upgrade the current minimum standard which exists within our existing housing stock in line with new build properties' latest requirements of BS 5839-6:19</p>
<p>Installed Carbon Monoxide detectors in all properties which have a combustion appliance installed.</p>	<p>Safeguard residents</p> <p>Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.</p> <p>Put our customers first</p>	<p>Gravesham Borough Council has a duty of care to its tenants to ensure that their health and safety is not put at risk through the use of its gas appliances and installations. The installation programme was completed before the recent amendments were made to The Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (England) Regulations 2015, which required local authorities (LA's) to comply with the regulations for social housing. The programme was funded by utilising budget savings achieved through the introduction of MOT-style gas servicing.</p>
<p>Commenced a five-year programme to upgrade flat entrance fire doors to 2,000 properties.</p>	<p>Safeguard residents</p> <p>Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.</p> <p>Put our customers first</p>	<p>Gravesham Borough Council has a duty to safeguard its tenants in case of fire and to ensure its premises are equipped with appropriate fire safety equipment such as flat entrance fire doors.</p> <p>Following recommendations and guidance from MHCLG (now DLUCH) in response to the Grenfell Tower fire tragedy. Flat entrance fire doors leading to a shared or communal area are required to provide fire and smoke protection as part of a layered approach to the fire strategy for residential buildings. Replacement flat entrance doors will have test evidence demonstrating that they meet the current performance requirement of Building Regulations for fire resistance and smoke control.</p>
<p>Installation of Fire Suppression systems to all our high-rise residential blocks</p>	<p>Safeguard residents</p> <p>Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.</p> <p>Put our customers first</p>	<p>Gravesham Borough Council has a duty to safeguard its tenants in case of fire and to ensure its premises are equipped with appropriate fire safety equipment such as fire sprinklers within flats.</p> <p>New build requirements for residential blocks state sprinkler systems are fitted to all blocks with a top storey of more than 11m above ground level.</p> <p>Fire sprinklers have been installed within all our existing high-rise blocks over 11m as per the requirement above. These include Carl Ekman House, The Hive, Chantry Court, Gravesham Court and Homemead.</p>
<p>Creation of health and safety literature for residents covering Gas Safety, Electrical Safety, Fire Safety, Asbestos, Water Hygiene and Mobility Lifts</p>	<p>Safeguard residents</p> <p>Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.</p> <p>Put our customers first</p>	<p>Gravesham Borough Council recognises its duty of care and is committed to creating a safe and healthy environment for its residents and visitors within its housing stock.</p> <p>The leaflets provide residents with key information on how to keep safe within their homes, which are also available electronically on the GBC website.</p>
<p>Green space improvements on the estates</p>	<p>Create clean, welcoming neighbourhoods and</p>	<p>New play parks have been installed at Medhurst Gardens, St Patricks Gardens, Park Place, Fountain Walk, Constable Road, Warwick Place and Carl Ekman House. Improvements have also been made with tree planting and enhanced planting schemes on some of the estates.</p>

	parks and an attractive town centre.	
Formation of Rosherville Repairs and Maintenance Ltd on 1 April 2022	Carbon Neutral Borough A financially innovative Council	Rosherville Repairs & Maintenance Ltd (RMM) brings a unique offering to the market which isn't readily available in the marketplace. RRML can advise and influence landlords and residents in the Borough on important matters such as building safety and energy efficiency.
<b>Housing Development &amp; Enabling – Assistant Director (Housing Development &amp; Enabling)</b>		
<b>Change / Improvement</b>	<b>Link to Corporate Plan</b>	<b>Benefits</b>
Creation of an Investment Partnership to help accelerate affordable house building	Deliver an ambitious and diverse programme of building – increase the supply of high-quality market and affordable housing.	The creation of the Gravesham Community Investment Partnership (GCIP) will help to accelerate the building of new council homes within the Borough, addressing the needs of those on the housing register waiting to be housed. GCIP will also enable to Council to generate an income from the housebuilding programme agreed, which could be used to fund other activities such as retrofitting council houses with carbon reduction measures.
Directly developing (or currently in planning) 200 council homes across the Borough	Deliver an ambitious and diverse programme of building – increase the supply of high-quality market and affordable housing.	At any one time, there are around 1,000 households on the Housing Register awaiting a council home. Directly developing council housing allows the Council to address the needs of those on the Register and give households a place to call home, and that is truly affordable.
Increased working with various Housing Associations (HAs) to enable them to develop 528 affordable units in the Borough.	Deliver an ambitious and diverse programme of building – increase the supply of high-quality market and affordable housing.	As with direct development, affordable housing delivered by Housing Associations (HAs) is equally as important as the social housing provided by the local authority, as they can offer a much more diverse tenure, including affordable rents and shared ownership, again meeting the housing needs of those in our Borough.
Introduction of Local Lettings Plans for new developments	Deliver an ambitious and diverse programme of building – increase the supply of high-quality market and affordable housing.	To recognise the inconvenience experienced by existing tenants when development is being delivered within their neighbourhood, to create opportunities for existing tenants to move to more suitable accommodation and ultimately, to create sustainable and thriving communities, LLPs have been introduced which has been well received by tenants.
Formed a consortium with Elizabeth Huggins Almshouses in order to access	Deliver an ambitious and diverse programme of building – increase the supply	With aspirations to make better use of the land available to them that would see more affordable housing for ex-military personnel being developed, Elizabeth Huggins sought the advice of the development team who assisted the charity in developing their regeneration plans and successfully securing £500,000 grant funding from Homes



£500,000 of Homes England funding	of high-quality market and affordable housing.	England for phase 1. In the first phase, which is currently under construction, 4 homes were demolished, to make way for 14 new affordable homes.
<b>Housing Options – Vicky May</b>		
Change / Achievement	Link to Corporate Plan	Benefits
Allocations Policy & introduction of Allocations Panel	Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.  Put our customers first.	The introduction of the revised Housing Allocation Scheme and the subsequent reviews allow customers' needs to be addressed and support access to social housing for those most in need. The Scheme enables the service to provide customers with a fair and transparent assessment to identify housing needs.  The introduction of the Allocation Panel enables customers who have requested a review to have an independent panel to review all evidence and conclude a final decision in line with the Housing Allocation Scheme.
Consulted on and implemented a new staffing structure	Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.  Put our customers first.	The revised structure now reflects service demands and officers now have more ownership and responsibility of their team and feel empowered with their roles. The Housing Options Service review considered the demands of each service area and can now deliver an effective service to our customers.
Wrotham Road Rough Sleeping Provision / Next Steps Funding	Safeguard residents  Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.  Put our customers first	The bid for 'Next Steps Funding' has delivered a full wrap-around service in a ten-bedroom supported accommodation at Wrotham Road for those rough sleeping within the borough. This scheme also offers four emergency bed spaces and opened on 1 November 2021. To date, it has housed 13 residents, and in the emergency bed space rooms, helping customers to avoid 956 nights on the street.
Rough Sleeping Initiative Funding (RSI4 2021/22)	Safeguard residents  Put our customers first	In 2021, the Rough Sleeping Service was evaluated, and a new multi-agency partnership was formed to ensure all needs of the vulnerable people could be addressed. A three-year bid to the value of £999,631 was successful and necessary to deliver meaningful robust services for the most vulnerable over the next 3 years. To date, the service has assisted 89 customers.
	Safeguard residents  Put our customers first	Throughout the lockdown period, the service worked hard to make placements and offer essential items for those affected by covid and Housing Options claimed back £81,600 to ensure we protected the most vulnerable residents' rough sleeping in Gravesham. By utilising this grant, it was possible to provide temporary accommodation, Tesco vouchers, increase the Covid vaccine uptake, counselling and assisted 19 customers
Relaunch of Gravesham's Landlord Forum	Provide a proactive, supportive and	The Landlord forum was relaunched in 2021. This was an essential platform to engage with the private sector and was supported by key partners and had a sponsor, stalls and Speakers from National Landlord Forum and

	<p>financially efficient housing service.</p> <p>Enforce a High Quality of Private Housing</p>	<p>Beckett &amp; Chamber Barristers. The Forum aims to bring together landlords and agents up to date on legislation that governs the private sector as well as share best practices by reputable speakers. This has also enabled the team to engage with the private rented sector locally.</p>
<p>Introduction of property inspections for Ukrainian visits</p>	<p>Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.</p> <p>Enforce a High Quality of Private Housing</p> <p>Put our customers first.</p>	<p>As Ukraine guests arrived in the UK there was a joint agreement with Kent County Council where both organisations agreed on certain aspects to safeguard and settle this cohort. This had to be established after the government's announcements. The Private Sector Housing Team have carried out 61 inspections on host homes to ensure they are suitable for those that have fled their country.</p>
<p>Management of Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF).</p>	<p>Put our customers first</p>	<p>Kent was successful with COMF fund and each local authority in Kent was allocated £175k which was to target households who had been affected by the lockdown (loss of jobs, illness-causing arrears). This was provided in November 2021 and the expectation was to spend this by July 2022. In total, 91 households were prevented from becoming homeless following assistance from this fund.</p>
<p>Rent Assurance</p>	<p>Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.</p> <p>Enforce a High Quality of Private Housing</p>	<p>Introduction to pilot a rent assurance package was essential to provide a prevention tool to landlords/agents. The aim was to remove some of the stereotypical barriers Gravesham customers face and to encourage local landlords to rent their properties to those who they may not have considered previously. This package covers landlords for arrears, damage etc.</p>
<p>Temporary Accommodation Policy &amp; Inspections</p>	<p>Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.</p> <p>Enforce a High Quality of Private Housing</p> <p>Put our customers first.</p> <p>Safeguard residents</p>	<p>The introduction of a Temporary Accommodation Policy ensures compliance with legislation and reflects relevant working practices such as condition and suitability of accommodation. The new policy sets out what is expected of staff and customers and details how officers determine the suitability of placements as well as confirming a reasonable charge for their temporary accommodation. Private Sector Housing has been inspecting temporary accommodation with over 80 carried out over the last 3 months.</p>
<p>Introducing HMO Licence applications</p>	<p>Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.</p>	<p>Historically, GOV.UK hosted an online HMO licence platform however this was to be discontinued. The implementation of a new DASH process enabled the external application to feed directly into the server Uniform workflow system, saving officer time. The exact cost/time saving is unknown as we were originally undercharging for the officer's time. The new system is now more accurately costed using the officer's time for each step of the licencing process. Officer's time has also been reduced since the automated certificate</p>

	<p>Enforce a High Quality of Private Housing</p> <p>Enforce High Regulatory Standards</p> <p>Put our customers first.</p>	<p>reminder system has been implemented. This provides a more effective way for landlords to apply for an HMO licence and gives a two-payment option which is in line with current guidance.</p>
Household Support Grant	<p>Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.</p> <p>Put our customers first.</p>	<p>Ensuring funding opportunities is key within housing when delivering services to those more vulnerable. The service secured £78,000 from the Household Support Fund to support the vulnerable people over the winter of 2021/22. This funded several positive interventions for vulnerable households including temporary accommodation for single people, arrears payments for singles who would lose their accommodation and funding the essential work of Gravesham sanctuary to deliver services to the vulnerable.</p>
Winter Shelter Provision / Longferry Court	<p>Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.</p> <p>Put our customers first.</p>	<p>The Rough Sleeping Partnership is probably more important now than ever given the economic climate. Housing staff work closely with partners to ensure there is a winter shelter provision and can directly refer verified rough sleepers to accommodation to ensure we can offer continued help and more settled housing solutions. Through the partnership, over the last 12 months, 22 customers have avoided sleeping on the streets. Our main partner, Gravesham Sanctuary was also gifted the use of an unused community building on one of the Council's Independent Living Schemes – brought back to life by social value secured by the council. Although this provision is no longer used for sleeping, it is very much used for outreach and rough sleepers attend the centre for food, showers and advice/support.</p>
Introduction of Financial penalties	<p>Enforce a High Quality of Private Housing</p> <p>Enforce High Regulatory Standards</p> <p>Put our customers first.</p>	<p>To ensure that the service pro-actively enforces the private sector, the introduction of financial penalties now means that the service can charge for the legal notices that it serves under the Housing Act. This will ensure officers support and act for our customers and ensure that landlords are aware that the Council will not tolerate poor housing in the private sector. Since the team has been fully resourced (Feb 2022) the first financial penalty has been served for £10,500 reduced to £6,825 (35%) applying our discretion following a relevant representation.</p>
Housing Enforcement Policy review	<p>Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.</p> <p>Enforce a High Quality of Private Housing</p> <p>Enforce High Regulatory Standards</p>	<p>Whilst there was a policy in place for Private Sector Housing Enforcement, it was out of date, and therefore the policy was updated to ensure it reflected legislation and reflected relevant working practices such as early intervention and enforcement options the local authority can and will use. The new policy sets out what is expected of landlords/agents.</p>

	Put our customers first.	
Housing Assistance Policy review	<p>Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.</p> <p>Safeguard residents</p> <p>Put our customers first.</p>	<p>There is an existing policy in place however the Service reviewed this to ensure that the eligibility criteria were widened to ensure we capture as many vulnerable households as possible to assist with different grants/thresholds for works on properties. The review highlighted several positive additions which could/would be implemented to assist residents in the borough. These additions include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Fasttrack Grant increased to £12,000</li> <li>2. Hospital Discharge increased to £5,000</li> <li>3. Minor Repairs (Cat 1) increase to £5,000</li> <li>4. The Heating Grant increased to £10,000</li> <li>5. Specialist Assistance Grant (Alzheimer's, end of Life adaptations, Motor Neurone etc) £30,000 limit, waiver of the means test</li> </ol> <p>The research carried out in line with the review identified areas in which the authority has discretionary powers, which can be exercised to assist customers with ease, often taking away the client's financial restrictions and requirement to put a levy on the property. The policy now reflects the flexibility of The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (RRO). The discretion element and thresholds will be reviewed if the future DFG budget reduces.</p>
Energy Hub Partnership	<p>Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.</p> <p>Put our customers first.</p>	<p>Gravesham has signed up as a partner to deliver the HUG 1 and LAD3 which target on-gas and off-gas and provides a shared cost with landlords to upgrade.</p> <p>HUG 2 targets household energy ratings D-F that are on low income and off the gas network. This area of work is important and in line with our climate change priorities.</p> <p>Sustainable Warmth as of 23<sup>rd</sup> Jan 2023:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. HUG 1 Leads: 13</li> <li>2. LAD3 Leads: 53</li> </ol> <p>GBC ranked 6/12 of the Kent authorities in relation to qualified leads.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Delivered 12</li> <li>2. Cavity Wall: 1</li> <li>3. Loft Insulation: 4</li> <li>4. Solar PV: 7</li> </ol> <p>GBC ranked 6/12 of the Kent authorities on scheme delivery</p>
Award Winning – Florentina Bela, Rough Sleeping Partnership Manager was highly commended for Excellent Housing Professional at the KHG Excellence Awards	<p>Provide a proactive, supportive and financially efficient housing service.</p> <p>Put our customers first.</p>	<p>Continued staff investment and focus through a praise and reward system.</p> <p>Raised profile of the housing team within the housing sector throughout Kent. Florentina was nominated to raise the profile of the housing team within the housing sector throughout Kent. Florentina was nominated as in the short amount of time she has been in post she has shown exceptional ability, adapted her approach and delivered a first-class service for rough sleepers in the borough whilst inheriting challenges that have not stopped the performance of the service. In addition, Florentina volunteered additional hours and went above and beyond to ensure that the new supported housing building was covered and the guests received the right support and ensured Christmas Day was a success by co-ordinating and spending the whole day with the cohort.</p>

