



# Borough of Telford and Wrekin

## Cabinet

Tuesday 13 July 2023

### Better Homes for All Update

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<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Cllr Richard Overton - Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member: Homes and Enforcement
<b>Lead Director:</b>	Katherine Kynaston - Director: Housing, Employment & Infrastructure
<b>Service Area:</b>	Housing, Employment & Infrastructure
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<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All Wards
<b>Key Decision:</b>	Not Key Decision
<b>Forward Plan:</b>	Not Applicable
<b>Report considered by:</b>	SMT – 13 June 2023 Business Briefing – 22 June 2023 Cabinet – 13 July 2023

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#### 1.0 Recommendations for decision/noting:

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 1.1 Note the continued progress of the Better Homes for All Programme.

#### 2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To provide an update against delivery of The Better Homes for All programme introduced in 2018 to set a new focus on improving conditions in the growing private rented sector and tackling rogue landlords in the Borough.

2.2 This was further underpinned in the Better Homes for All Cabinet Report 2020, with the development of the Council Programme to 'Protect, Care and Invest to Create a Better Borough' and again in the May 2022 update report.

2.3 The Council's Housing Strategy includes as a key objective to 'make BEST use of our existing homes'.

### 3.0 Background

#### National Context

3.1 In the last decade the private rented sector (PRS) has doubled in size, home ownership is now unaffordable for many, and declining social housing means the PRS is filling an essential gap in the market.

3.2 Census 2021 data, according to the ONS, showed a 20.5% **rented** their accommodation **privately** in 2021, an **increase** from 16.8% in 2011<sup>1</sup> in the UK. In comparison there was a **decrease** in the proportion of households that **owned** their accommodation, to 62.3% in 2021 (from 64.1% in 2011) and 17.1% were in the **social** rented sector, this is a **decrease** from 2011 (17.7%).

3.3 The PRS is now the only housing option for increasing numbers of young families and vulnerable individuals. For most single individuals in the sector, living in shared housing such as Houses in Multiple Occupation is their only housing choice.

3.4 With an ageing stock profile, conditions in the PRS are a major focus for all. Cases such as the recent death of a young child in Rochdale due to damp and mouldy conditions in the property that he lived in have cast further spotlight on this housing sector.

#### Local Context

##### Telford and Wrekin

3.5 In line with national trends, we have seen a **reduction** in the proportion of **owner occupier** households in the Borough. 60.7% of households were owner occupied in March 2021 compared with 64.1% in 2011. The proportion of social rented households has also **reduced**. 18.0% of households were **social renters** in March 2021 compared with 19.7% in 2011.

3.6 There was an **increase** in the proportion of households **privately renting** compared with 2011. In March 2021, 21.3% of households (16,279) were privately renting compared with 16.2% (10,793) in 2011.

3.7 **Woodside** (40.2%, 1,115 households), **Brookside** (32.1%, 884 households), **Sutton Hill** (31.3%, 750 households) and **Hollinswood & Randlay** (30.5% 1,149) had the **greatest** proportion of **households renting privately** in March 2021.

- 3.8 At a more granular level; in March 2021, three Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA) (1 each in Hollinswood & Randlay, Brookside and Sutton Hill) had more than **50%** of households privately renting in March. The LSOA in Hollinswood & Randlay had the greatest proportion at **55.9%**.

### **Private Sector Housing Service**

- 3.9 A statutory service, the Council works with tenants, landlords, external partners such as the police, fire service, NHS, social housing partners and landlord organisations such as Wrekin Landlord Association to improve conditions in the sector.
- 3.10 Acknowledging that the majority of landlords operate legally and ensure their properties meet the correct standards, our enforcement policy works to **Educate** and **Encourage** before we move to **Enforcement**.
- 3.11 However, where education and encouragement do not work, through the **Better Homes for All** programme we are committed to ensuring that we use the full force of the law on non-compliant and **unscrupulous landlords** who provide unsafe, unhealthy and sometimes dangerous conditions exploiting often vulnerable tenants who, for a number of reasons, do not have a voice of their own.

## **4.0 Summary of main proposals/achievements**

- 4.1 The following sections provide an update on delivery since our last report 12 months ago:

- Dealt with **489** requests for service from tenants living in poor housing conditions; a **30%** increase from previous years.
- Carried out **300** inspections identifying **511** hazards, including falls, damp and mould and fire.
- Carried out an additional **50** proactive property inspections linked with the Safer Streets Programme identifying **20** category 1 hazards, this totals our Safer Streets inspection programme to **500**.
- We have issued **18** HMO licences following full inspections and audits of these properties and management standards.
- Participated in **10** Multi Agency Targeted Enforcement Strategy (MATES) operations
- Served **140** enforcement notices
- We have issued **12 Civil Penalty Notices** as an alternative to prosecution.
- We have carried out **3 Prosecutions** against landlords for serious failures of housing health and safety laws.
- We have issued **1** formal caution against a landlord
- We have brought **137** long term empty properties back into use against our 5 year target of 375
- We have been awarded approximately **£4m** to date of capital grant funding for energy efficiency measures to domestic properties in the Borough.

## 4.2 Damp and Mould

In 2020, the tragic death of two year old Awaab Ishak in Rochdale due to a respiratory condition caused by the **damp and mould growth** in the property he lived in lead to a national focus on this issue. This has been across both the social housing sector, where Awaab Ishak lived and the private rented sector.

Locally following the coroner's findings in late 2022, we immediately responded by sending out comms to all our residents warning of the dangers of living in damp and mouldy conditions and asked residents to contact us if they had concerns about their housing conditions.

We set up a duty desk to deal with the increase in calls and requests for service. We have since dealt with **123** requests for service for damp and mould growth alone.

Using our strong relationships with local social housing providers we were able to quickly engage with all our providers to ensure they were also responding to this issue and providing support to their tenants.

Against the backdrop of a cost of living crisis, when tenants may not be able to afford to heat their properties adequately, we have had to engage with landlords and tenants carefully. We have provided advice and guidance and only taken formal action where absolutely necessary. The following case study shows one such case:



An example of many properties we were called out to. After the landlord had been given ample opportunity to rectify this situation, we served an Improvement Notice on them and they have since complied with the notice.

We are working closely with external partners such as Marches Energy Agency to provide advice, support and funding to vulnerable households.

We are also setting up a taskforce specifically for housing concerns for children and young people suffering from asthma. This will include colleagues from the NHS who can refer their concerns to the Council when presented with children living in poor housing conditions. We will also work closely to provide training on how to reduce damp and mould in properties.



Improving Air quality for Children with Asthma



### 4.3 Safer Streets / Stronger

As part of the Safer, Stronger Communities programme we are taking targeted action to address housing standards and ensure vulnerable tenants are protected.

Following work in Brookside and Sutton Hill we saw a significant reduction in crime and ASB illustrating the impact of the partnership programme in supporting our communities. Work is continuing to maintain the impact of our interventions with a programme of re-inspections in Sutton Hill and Brookside to commence in the summer to spot check properties we have previously visited.

We have also done a large amount of work in **College** ward to identify private rented properties that may be linked to serious organised crime. A number of inspections have taken place and this programme of work continues.

Following a fatality in a flat in **Hollinswood** we have set up a multi agency taskforce to inspect all flats in Hollinswood. We have engaged with all freeholders of the blocks and identified fire safety issues in the communal areas. We are working with the Fire Service to improve these issues informally, however, we are also working on an enforcement plan for where compliance is not forthcoming informally. We are also working with our Anti Social Behaviour team due to rough sleeping and other ASB in and around the blocks. A mapping of similar blocks is informing further interventions.

## Better Homes for All Update



Examples of fire safety hazards found in the common parts. These have now been cleared. We are working on systems to prevent recurrence of such issues.

### 4.4 Empty Properties

Of the 137 properties brought back into use:

- **2 properties** had been empty for longer than **20 years**,
- **6 properties** had been empty longer than **10 years**,
- **8 properties** longer than 5 years and
- **42 properties** had been empty longer than 2 years.

We have used the full range of powers available to us to work with owners of these very long term empties to bring them back into occupation.

**Two properties empty for longer than 10 years**



**Before**



Water ingress and other serious disrepair



An internal inspection showed the poor condition of the properties with failed ceilings damp and rotten windows



Complete refurbishment was required for both with an estimated timescales of 9mths + to complete



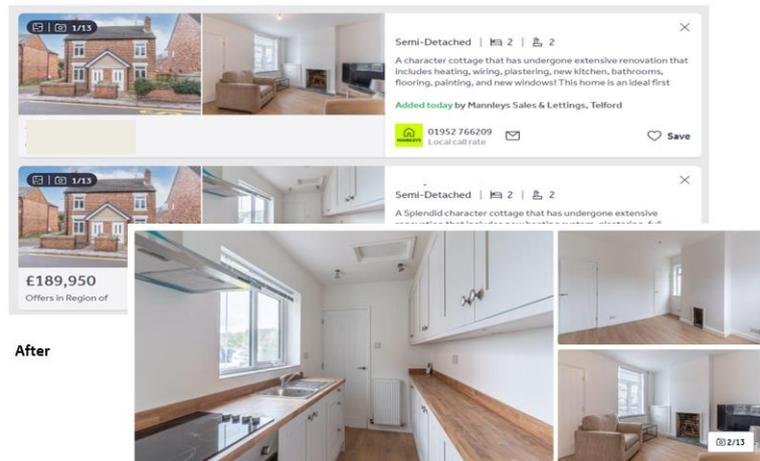
Two semi detached properties which had been empty for more than 10 years. The condition of the properties was affecting the amenity of the area. Water ingress had severely affected the internal aspect of the properties.

## Better Homes for All Update



Our officer conducted inspections to assess conditions within the properties.

The officer worked on this case for 2+ years to engage with owners, monitor progress and support them into bringing the properties back into reoccupation.



### 4.5 Civil Penalties

Local Authorities have civil powers to issue penalties on landlords as an alternative to prosecution. These cases are usually reserved for first time offences, where the offence was so severe that action must be taken, but the landlord has worked with us to resolve matters.

#### Case Study

We received a complaint about a property being used as a House in Multiple Occupation. An unannounced inspection found that not only was the property indeed a HMO but also had management breaches relating to missing smoke detectors, fire doors and a compromised means of escape.

A civil penalty notice was issued to the landlord as an alternative to prosecution on this occasion.

### 4.6 Prosecution

We prosecuted a large portfolio landlord who breached an Improvement Notice and was given several opportunities to rectify conditions in the property:

### **Maybach Lettings fined for failing to address essential property work**

A local property management company with a portfolio of over 130 properties in the Telford area has been fined £5100 for failing to complete essential works at a privately rented home in the borough.



Maybach Lettings Ltd failed to obtain a damp survey report at the property managed by them as part of work needed to address excess cold and also ignored a number of requests to do so by Telford & Wrekin Council's Private Sector Housing Officers.

This also sends out a clear message to any other landlords who may deliberately provide inadequate conditions to their tenants that the Council will not hold back on taking action.

#### **4.7 Nuplace**

Nuplace, the council's wholly owned housing company, now own and manage 486 homes, with a further 245 planned or in delivery, making them the largest private landlord in the Borough. Nuplace provide high quality homes on a private rent or affordable rent basis, to over 1,200 residents. Properties are located across the borough, from Newport to Madeley, and include a range of 1, 2, 3 and 4 bedroom homes to meet a number of different requirements, including adaptable and accessible accommodation for people over the age of 55 or with a demonstrable need. Through Telford & Wrekin Homes, Nuplace are also investing in and breathing life into old dwellings to improve property standards and in doing so are safeguarding our existing housing stock and bringing empty properties back into productive use. To date Nuplace have acquired a number of empty properties and are keen to engage with both owners of empty stock and landlords wanting to sell to ensure that this existing supply is not lost from the market.

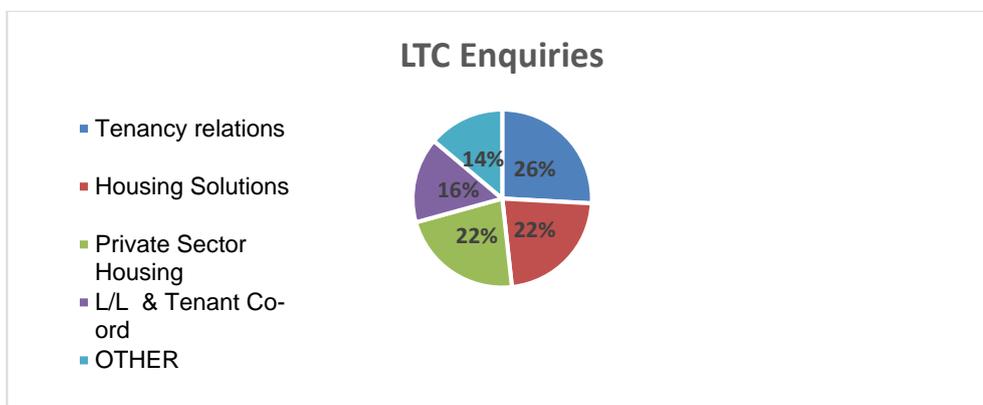
Nuplace's annual resident survey, last undertaken in 2022, confirmed that Nuplace are a landlord of choice with over 95% of respondents saying they would recommend Nuplace to friends and family with the high quality of the tenancy and property management services being highly praised.

### Examples of properties let by Nuplace

	<b>Carnival Close</b> <b>£550.00 pcm</b> **Please note to apply for this property you must have a strong connection to the area and meet the affordability criteria of a gross house hold income less than £26,000.00 per year and we would require evidence as proof** This must see 2 bed ground floor apartment is built with a through-hallway leading to a lovely kitchen/dining and living area, master bedroom complete with en-suite, second spacious bedroom and family bathroom.	Let agreed
	<b>Ercall View</b> <b>£750.00 pcm</b> A recently fully renovated three bedroom semi-detached home. The ground floor of the property benefits from a spacious family living room, large kitchen, Rear boot room and toilet. The kitchen comes equipped with a high quality Bosch oven, electric hob and extractor, with space for a washing machine and fridge/freezer. The first floor features three sizeable bedrooms and a new family bathroom. The lounge and bedrooms are carpeted in neutral tones, with wood effect vinyl flooring to the hall, kitchen and bathroom.	Let agreed
	<b>Hills Lane Drive</b> <b>£750.00 pcm</b> A recently fully renovated three bedroom semi-detached home. The ground floor of the property benefits from a spacious family living room and a large kitchen diner. The kitchen comes equipped with a high quality Bosch oven, electric hob and extractor, with space for a washing machine and fridge/freezer. The first floor features three sizeable bedrooms and a new family bathroom. The lounge and bedrooms are carpeted in neutral tones, with wood effect vinyl flooring to the hall, kitchen and bathroom.	Let agreed
	<b>Portley Road</b> <b>£750.00 pcm</b> A recently fully renovated three bedroom semi-detached home. The ground floor of the property benefits from a spacious family living room, large kitchen and toilet. The kitchen comes equipped with a high quality Bosch oven, gas hob and extractor, with space for a washing machine and fridge/freezer. The first floor features three sizeable bedrooms and a new family bathroom. The lounge and bedrooms are carpeted in neutral tones, with wood effect vinyl flooring to the hall, kitchen and bathrooms.	Let agreed

### 4.8 Landlord, Tenant Co-Ordinator (LTC)

We have introduced our free Landlord, Tenant Programme and dedicated Co-ordinator role to support both landlords and tenants in the last 12 months. The service seeks to assist landlords and tenants to resolve issues before other council services need to get involved and/or to coordinate where support is needed by a range of services. The following graph shows the types of enquiries we have received:



### 4.9 Homes for Ukraine

As part of the Homes for Ukraine programme, we have received 160 applications from householders in the Borough looking to offer a room(s) in their property to host Ukrainian Refugee(s). We have inspected 142 properties to date of which 130 have been approved. Our inspections check for adequate space to avoid overcrowding in the property, as well as suitable and adequate facilities ensuring properties have safe gas and electrical checks and identify any safeguarding issues.

#### 4.10 **Asylum Dispersal**

Following the announcement that all local authority areas nationally have been declared as asylum dispersal areas, we are monitoring the situation closely in the Borough to ensure, so far as we can, that the placement of refugees, lead by the Home Office, is done so properly and safely for the refugee as well as the existing neighbourhoods.

#### 4.11 **Supported Accommodation**

We are seeing a growing number of supported accommodation providers in the Borough, attracting a premium Housing Benefit rate. This is currently a largely unregulated area but also an important source of accommodation. While Central Government plan to increase regulation of this area in the future we are seeking to ensure that standards both of the property and care are managed and we are investing in quality provision. A taskforce has been set up consisting of housing standards, homelessness, housing commissioning and housing benefits to ensure the right care, support and supervision is provided to our vulnerable residents. This includes calling all providers in for a panel meeting to explain what services they provide.

#### 4.12 **Hoarding**

We have a small number of households in the Borough who live in hoarded conditions. A taskforce has been set up consisting of officers from housing standards, planning, homelessness and adults safeguarding to deal with each case.

We look at what options are available to us including how we can support residents and ensure they are accessing services. We aim to work in a proactive way to support the householders to manage and reverse the decline of the property.



Case study of a hoarded private rented property where the tenant had caused a fire in the property. We have since moved the tenant out to more appropriate accommodation and are arranging additional support for them and are working with the landlord to bring this property up to standard.

## 4.13 Communication and Promotional Work

### Website

We have done an extensive piece of work on updating our website and providing user friendly information and advice for our tenants and landlords. We have included links to everything landlords and tenants may need, including tenancy agreements, advice on legal responsibilities and health and safety. We have provided template letters for tenants to send to their landlords requesting repairs to be done. We also offer an open invitation to contact our LTC for further support.

We recognise the challenges of changing regulation, the impact of mortgage interest rises and deadlines for changes to EPC requirements. We continue to update our advice for landlords and tenants to support and advise on these issues.

#### Tenant support

[Are you at risk of becoming homeless?](#)

[Are you looking for somewhere to rent?](#)

[Are you thinking of renting in Telford?](#)

[Damp and mould](#)

[Do you need advice about renting in Telford?](#)

[Empty properties](#)

[Houses in multiple occupancy \(HMO's\)](#)

[Landlord and tenant responsibilities](#)

[Pre-tenancy advice](#)

[Rogue landlords](#)

[Smoke and carbon monoxide alarms in rented properties](#)

[Tenancy relations](#)

[Unsatisfactory conditions and disrepair](#)

#### Damp and mould

Damp and mould growth is a common occurrence in properties caused by excess moisture, however exposure to a high concentration of damp and mould over a prolonged term in your property can cause detrimental effects.

Damp can cause the structure and safety of the property to be compromised and mould growth can increase the likelihood of harm to physical and mental health. Effects can include increased allergies and respiratory illnesses such as asthma as well as increased cases of depression and anxiety due to the living conditions of the property.

This page is provided in order to give information on the different types of damp and mould growth, signs for tenants and landlords to look out for, causes and steps to be taken to reduce and rectify the issues.

Tenants should report any concerns to their landlords as soon as possible to allow them to investigate and rectify if necessary.

[Types and causes of damp and mould](#)



[How to reduce condensation and mould growth](#)



[Treating black mould](#)



[Reporting damp and mould](#)



Last updated: 18/05/2023 12:18

### HMO Licensing Week

12 – 16<sup>th</sup> June 2023 was National Licensing Week. Seizing this opportunity, we were out in the Borough checking properties that are being used as HMOs to ensure they have the correct licence and ensuring that properties with a licence are being managed and maintained adequately and in line with their licence conditions. We will be building on this work with a rolling programme of visits and information sessions in local areas over the coming months.

## 4.14 Better Homes Loan

Working with our partners in Credit Union we are offering our residents on low income a loan package to help improve conditions in their properties. This includes

essential repairs and energy efficiency measures. The loan is also available to owners of empty properties to help bring their properties back into use.

### 4.15 Renters Reform Bill

The Renters Reform Bill was introduced to Parliament on 17 May 2023. This bill aims to reform the private rented sector, including banning 'no fault' evictions, giving tenants with pets more rights and a number of other provisions. While we support any reform that will help our most vulnerable residents, we are also mindful that increased Regulation of the sector may cause some of our good landlords to exit the market. We are therefore, working with our local landlord association to provide support to landlords as well as tenants.

## 5.0 Alternative Options

5.1 The alternative would be to do nothing or to take a less active approach, which would likely make us non-compliant with our statutory duties under the Housing Act 2004 and associated legislation and almost certainly lessen our ability to truly ensure Better Homes for All.

## 6.0 Key Risks

6.1 We are required to carefully review all our interventions to ensure that our enforcement action does not cause landlords to evict their tenants and cause homelessness. It is hoped the abolition of 'no fault evictions' under the new Renters Reform Bill will mitigate this risk.

## 7.0 Council Priorities

7.1 The Better Homes for All Programme supports the following Council priorities:

- Every child, young person, and adult lives well in their community
- All neighbourhoods are a great place to live
- A community-focussed, innovative council providing efficient, effective and quality services

## 8.0 Financial Implications

8.1 Capital allocations of £4.7m have been made, which include approximately £4m grant awarded through the Midlands Net Zero Hub, to support the energy efficiency measures contained in this report, of which £740k has been spent to 31 March 2023. Additionally, the Medium Term Financial Strategy includes £1.1m allocation to support the empty property strategy.

8.2 The revenue costs associated with supporting the Better Homes for All Programme is mainly officer time which is funded through a combination of base budget, grant funding, income and reserves. Income received from HMO Licensing, Civil Penalties and Prosecutions is invested back into the service.

## **9.0 Legal and HR Implications**

9.1 The Council has wide legal powers and statutory responsibilities pursuant to the Housing Act 2004 and associated legislation. Where new processes or policies are considered, Legal Services provide advice so that the Council continues to act lawfully.

## **10.0 Ward Implications**

10.1 The work of this programme affects all wards across the Borough.

## **11.0 Health, Social and Economic Implications**

11.1 The links between housing and health are well known. The case of the death of the child in Rochdale attributed directly to damp and mould growth in his property, has further confirmed the importance of this work.

While we do everything we can support compliant and responsible landlords, Central Government have given Local Authorities a clear mandate to penalise criminal landlords with a view to them leaving the housing market completely and thus not being able to profit from exploitation of vulnerable residents.

## **12.0 Equality and Diversity Implications**

12.1 The work of this programme aims to provide the best outcomes for all residents of the Borough.

## **13.0 Climate Change and Environmental Implications**

13.1 Our work to enforce the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards in rental properties along with the retrofit capital programmes we are currently running in the Borough are all contributing to the achieving of our zero carbon 2030 target.

## **14.0 Background Papers**

- 1 15 February 2018 – Cabinet, Better Homes for All
- 2 14 March 2019 – Cabinet, Better Homes for All Update
- 3 9 July 2020 – Cabinet, Better Homes for All
- 4 22 April 2021 – Cabinet, Draft Affordable Warmth Strategy
- 5 4 November 2021 – Cabinet, Long Term Empty Property Strategy
- 6 19 May 2022 – Cabinet, Better Homes for All
- 7 5 January 2023 – Cabinet, Affordable Warmth Strategy Update
- 8 16 February 2023 – Cabinet, Long Term Empty Property Strategy Update

## **15.0 Appendices**

None

**16.0 Report Sign Off**

<b>Signed off by</b>	<b>Date sent</b>	<b>Date signed off</b>	<b>Initials</b>
Finance	08/06/2023	08/06/2023	DR & MLB
Legal	05/07/2023	05/07/2023	RP
Director	08/06/2023	08/06/2023	KK