

# **EDDC Housing Strategy 2020 – 2024**

**A better home for all residents of East  
Devon**

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# Context

## The Housing Situation

East Devon District Council has a role within the local housing market as

- a landlord of over 4200 properties
- a regulator of standards within the private rented and owner occupier sectors
- the planning authority with a duty to bring forward more homes including more affordable homes
- the provider of a housing options service to help those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness

Key conditions within the housing market influence standards and provision.

- A high average house price in the district is £277,000 - the second highest in Devon. The Devon average is £250,000.
- A low average gross annual wage for those living in the district of £27,597, one of the lowest in England.
- A high affordability ratio of 10.04. This is one of the highest in Devon, above both the national average of 8.00 and the south west average of 8.76.
- A high proportion of owner occupied properties at 74.9% with only 9.3% of properties available for social rent. This compares to national proportions of 63.6% and 17.6% respectively
- High private rent levels compared to the rest of Devon (average monthly private sector rents almost £700)

## Housing Need

Figures from Devon Home Choice<sup>1</sup> show:

- 2556 households classed as being in housing need<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Data as at 21<sup>st</sup> Jan 2021

<sup>2</sup> 4568 households in total on Devon Home Choice

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- Highest demand is for 1 bed properties (1482) with 516 seeking 2 bedroom accommodation
  - The number of households in housing need has increased by 27% in two years

In the last financial year 2020-21, 352 homes were let through Devon Home Choice, with 171 of these being EDDC Council homes.

We also have 387 empty homes across the district (2018 figures).

Since the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act in 2018 the number of approaches to our homelessness service has increased substantially:

2017-18 – 261 Approaches

2018-19 – 871 approaches

2019-20 – 1126 approaches

All of these figures, when seen in tandem with the overall housing stats for East Devon

## **Challenges:**

The challenges faced by the Housing Service have historically been similar and ongoing; a lack of suitable housing, tackling rough sleeping and homelessness, how to help and support the poorest and most vulnerable in our society. We have risen to these challenges in previous years, although they remain stubbornly present. However, two massive global issues cast an additional shadow over us at this time. These are the coronavirus pandemic, which has placed enormous pressure on the service in 2020, and Climate Change, where too little action on a local, national and global scale now means that significant investment and work is required to address this emergency situation.

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## **Coronavirus management and recovery**

The upheaval caused by the 2020 coronavirus pandemic has required the whole Council to make significant changes to their operations. The main headquarters at Honiton and Exmouth Town Hall remain closed to the public, and can now only offer “covid-secure” office space to a small number of staff. However, the Housing Service have been able to continue essential services albeit with social distancing and additional PPE and through increased home working and relying on email and telephone for contact with customers and tenants in most cases.

Over the year, further spikes in the disease have led to more periods of stringent restrictions. The Housing Service has had an effective plan in place to pull back from and reintroduce services in line with the ebb and flow of the virus.

The recovery from Covid-19 also provides opportunities to learn lessons. The community efforts to maintain contact with and support our more vulnerable residents were inspirational. We will seek to keep that sense of community through the recovery.

### *Homes at the Heart campaign*

The pandemic forced all of us to spend more time in our homes. In July 2020, The National Housing Federation (NHF), in partnership with the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH), Crisis and others, called for the home to be at the centre of our national recovery from the Coronavirus. The campaign highlighted the poor quality and lack of space in many homes across the country. For those people living in substandard or crowded homes, the negative mental and physical health impact caused by multiple lockdowns and restrictions are even starker as a result of the poor conditions they have been forced to live under. The NHF led partnership has called for greater investment in social housing as part of the recovery from the pandemic providing both economic and social recovery.

In addition to this the NHF has identified 5 key areas in housing that should be prioritised as part of the recovery:

1. No return to rough sleeping
2. A new generation of affordable homes
3. Helping people to thrive at home
4. A new drive to decarbonise social housing
5. Change for communities across the country

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These are national priorities, but it is clear that they align closely with ambitions that EDDC hold. We will work with our social housing partners across the district towards these common aims, strengthening existing relationships and forging new ones to improve the future for all East Devon residents.

The Council have already committed to a green recovery plan, and the Housing Service will focus on opportunities to adopt a greener approach to our work as we move forwards.

### **Climate Change**

In 2019, EDDC became a full signatory of the Devon Climate Declaration. We are seeking to reduce our carbon footprint across the council in order to meet the ambitious target of being a carbon neutral authority by 2040. Housing is a big part of the Council's energy consumption, and the Housing Service will need to assess the impact of our stock on the environment and seek to reduce that impact. A corporate Climate Change Strategy has been produced, and a number of actions have been developed for the Housing Service from that.

We intend to carry out a Stock Condition Survey over the next year to 18 months. This will provide the information to enable us to develop and carry out a far reaching and comprehensive programme of improvement works focused on improving the energy efficiency of our stock. The Housing service will also need to adjust its ways of working, reflecting on the impact of its activities on the environment (including travel, meetings and stationary usage) and adjusting its practices accordingly. We will also seek to train staff and educate tenants

### **Lack of suitable housing**

EDDC have been undertaking a longitudinal study of tenants and housing register applicants. This study, "Your Home: Your wellbeing", has been produced in partnership with LiveWest and Birmingham University and is already confirming the wider benefits that living in affordable, secure accommodation brings in relation to money matters, mental health and general wellbeing.

In East Devon, we have a combination of high house prices, high private rents and a low proportion of social and affordable rent properties across the district. There is currently a waiting list of over 4500 on Devon Home Choice. This environment is the backdrop for a number of challenges that EDDC face, but it also underlines the value of the service we can offer.

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## **Increase in homelessness**

The introduction of new legislation and duties on local authorities in 2018 has opened up homelessness prevention services to more people. Whilst this impacted on the level of work required by our Housing Options team to assist those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless it also means that we are helping more people in need.

Due to a reduction in the amount of supported accommodation in the district there has been an increase in approaches from people with more complex needs (including mental and physical health issues).

Further pressure on the system was added with the arrival of the Coronavirus pandemic early in 2020. The need for people to self-isolate, the “everybody in” strategy to house all rough sleepers and the additional influx of people who had been sofa-surfing led to a big increase in the number of people in temporary accommodation. Although this has now subsided, It is anticipated that there will be another rise in homelessness applications when restrictions ease and the moratorium on evictions ends.

## **Financial Stability**

The reduction in central government funding for local services and the unexpected financial implications of Coronavirus is likely to cause significant budgetary pressures over the coming years.

Although a lot of the funding for our housing services are covered through the Housing Revenue Account, it is incumbent on all council departments to seek out opportunities and activities that can generate income. This will enable the Council to continue to deliver outstanding services to all residents of East Devon.

## **Welfare Reform and the Poverty Agenda**

Tackling poverty in East Devon is a high priority for EDDC. A report to the council’s Overview committee in November 2019 provided a stark picture of the struggles that many families across our district face. Close to 11,000 households are living below the poverty line, with 22% of children in the district classed as being in poverty. Changes in the welfare system have exacerbated the situation. Looking at our tenants alone, the impact of Universal credit on rent arrears is marked. As at January 2021, we had 865 tenants in receipt of UC (21% of our tenant population). 41% of these were in arrears at this time. Taking the rent

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arrears total across our stock, the 21% of tenants on UC were responsible for 34% of total rent arrears.

### **Social Housing White Paper**

Published in November 2020, the Government's social housing white paper introduces a new charter for social housing residents which sets out what every social housing resident should be able to expect:

1. To be safe in your home
2. To know how your landlord is performing
3. To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly
4. To be treated with respect
5. To have your voice heard by your landlord
6. To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in
7. To be supported to take your first step to ownership

It is our desire to be the gold standard as a social landlord and many of the priorities identified within the white paper reflect our own ambitions.

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## Strategic Context

This housing strategy is informed and influenced by a number of key local strategies.

### EDDC Council Plan

The Council Plan provides the overarching corporate objectives that inform the focus of all council departments. As a consequence our Housing Strategy will strongly reflect those ambitions. This is highlighted within the Priorities section of the strategy.

A new Council Plan is currently in development, but a Statement of Intent published in late 2020 provides us with the overall vision and themes of the final Plan.

The vision is: to achieve a positive difference to residents' lives and our environment in East Devon. The four key themes underpinning this ambition are:

- 1 A Greener East Devon
- 2 Better Homes and Communities for all
- 3 A Resilient economy
- 4 Services that matter to all of us

### Housing Service Plan

Each council department produces their own Service Plan each year, setting out how their work will meet the aspirations of the broader EDDC Council Plan as well as highlighting future challenges for the services over the next 3 years.

The actions identified in the Housing Service Plan will reflect the objectives of our Housing Strategy. The service plan will also provide us with an opportunity to reaffirm our strategic approach to emerging issues on an annual basis, review our progress against our stated aims, and add further actions as we strive to achieve our longer term goals.

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## Links to other strategies

### Greater Exeter Strategic Plan (GESP)

This sub-regional strategic plan is currently in development, and aims to co-ordinate planning and spatial strategies across Exeter and the surrounding districts of Mid Devon, Teignbridge and East Devon.

In 2020, East Devon District Council made the decision to pull out of this strategic plan. It is anticipated however, that we will continue to work with our local authority neighbours to maintain links as part of a refreshed EDDC Local Plan.

### Devon Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2020-2025

The vision of this strategy is that the Health outcomes and health equality in Devon will be amongst the best in the world and will be achieved by Devon's communities, businesses and organisation working in partnership.

It has 4 priorities:

- Create opportunities for all (inclusive economic growth, education and social mobility)
- Healthy, Safe, strong and sustainable communities (creating conditions for good health and wellbeing where we live, work and learn)
- Focus on mental health (building good emotional health and wellbeing, happiness and resilience)
- Maintain good health for all (supporting people to stay as healthy as possible for as long as possible)

### EDDC Local Plan 2013 to 2031

Adopted in 2016, the local plan sets out planning policy for the whole of East Devon. It seeks to deliver a plan for the development of new jobs and homes whilst recognising and protecting our outstanding natural environment. Following the decision to step away from the GES in 2020, the document is now due to be refreshed.

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Our Housing Strategy will focus on the provision of more affordable and social homes; we will therefore seek to influence planning strategy to ensure that sufficient housing of all tenures for people on lower incomes is built. We will also seek to ensure that sufficient supported housing is available.

## **East Devon Public Health Strategic Plan 2019 - 2023**

Improving the health and wellbeing of our residents is a high priority for EDDC. The 2019-2023 plan seeks to help more people to be healthy and stay healthy, to enhance self-care and support community resilience, and to integrate and improve support for people in their homes.

Across the council we aim to achieve these aims by:

- tackling environmental and social conditions to promote good health
- encouraging healthier behaviour so fewer people become ill
- addressing loss of independence
- promote wellbeing and self-care

Our Housing strategy will support this work through improving the quality of homes across the district, including our own stock. We will also seek to expand our Home Safeguard service, providing equipment and support to vulnerable people across East Devon to enable them to live independently in their own homes for longer. Our Community Development team will continue to work with our tenants to promote good health and healthy lifestyles. They will also be working to improve and encourage community led support activities to improve community cohesion and reduce social isolation. We will seek to fulfil the actions identified within the Housing Mental Health Strategy to improve the mental wellbeing of residents (see more detail below).

## **EDDC Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-2023**

Our refreshed Homelessness Strategy focuses on 4 main areas:

1. Maximise prevention activities and outcomes
2. Increasing accommodation options
3. Minimising rough sleeping
4. Improving health and wellbeing

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An action plan, refreshed annually is in place to ensure that teams continue to work to the priorities outlined above. Resolving homelessness is a statutory requirement for EDDC. Our Homelessness Strategy effectively acts as part of our Housing Strategy, but sits as a document in its own right to reflect the importance of this work.

### **Other Housing policies**

There is a suite of housing policies that provide greater detail on specific aspects of service delivery. These policies are regularly reviewed and can be found on our website. Hard copies are also available on request.

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## Your home: Your Wellbeing

EDDC have been working with LiveWest and Birmingham University to carry out a longitudinal study to establish and better understand the relationship between tenant wellbeing and their home. We have engaged with the same social housing and private sector tenants over the last three years, an approach which enabled us to measure the impact of policy changes and to map our tenants' journey. This in turn provided us with that deeper understanding of the positive impact that safe and secure housing can have on a person's mental and physical wellbeing.

The data coming out of this research strongly suggests that social housing has a positive impact on individual wellbeing relative to other tenure options, in particular around anxiety and life-satisfaction.

The research also showed the important role that a landlord can play in tenant wellbeing. The evidence suggests that respondents who were satisfied with their landlords are 25% less likely to say there is a problem with their home that negatively affects their wellbeing. Satisfaction with maintenance and repairs are both also associated with more happiness and less anxiety.

The findings of this important research have been used to support and inform the direction and priorities set out in this Strategy.

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# High level Priorities

## 1. Providing homes

- Tackling homelessness and rough sleeping
- Providing council housing for those who need it, reflecting their needs
- Work with the private sector and Housing Associations to increase availability of homes for low income households, prioritising social rented accommodation
- Take an overview of the total housing market in East Devon and maximise effort to match housing demand and provision

## 2. Improving homes

- Bring sub-standard housing (of all tenure) up to the required standards
- Improve the use and safety of housing
- Improve the sustainability and energy efficiency of housing and eliminate fuel poverty including our own housing stock
- Enable vulnerable people to live as independently as possible and where possible and practicable remain in their own homes if they so wish
- Maintain and manage the council owned housing stock to a high standard, actively involving tenants in all aspects of the service

## 3. Improving communities

- Support the improvement and regeneration of local communities by encouraging social inclusion, involving children and young people with housing issues, and enabling residents to actively participate in their communities
- Invest in improvement of communal areas and grounds, encouraging more nature and green sites across the district
- Improve the health and wellbeing of our tenants by ensuring regular communication and encouraging mutual support within our communities.

## 4. Improving Services

- Develop and expand internal systems to optimise service delivery
- Seek and respond to feedback from tenants to guide service improvements

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## Meeting our Priorities

Although the bulk of this strategy and the priorities that are set out within it are focused on the Housing Service, successful implementation of this strategy will require the support and commitment of wider council teams and external partners.

In relation to housing standards and energy efficiency, as a social landlord we can drive up the standard of our own housing stock. However it will require Housing Associations and Private sector landlords to also take their own steps to improve their properties. Some already are, and it will be through working in partnership with these groups, sharing good practice from other social landlords, and providing support and guidance to private sector landlords that we will have the greatest success. Proactive action, engaging with existing forums, inviting discussions and creating new groups will all contribute to this goal.

Our Private Sector Housing team is located within Environmental Health rather than the Housing Service which can present challenges. However, if there is a positive to be taken from the pandemic restrictions, it has been to prove that physical separation between teams does not have to be a barrier to joint working.

Over and above local conditions, there are national restrictions that can negatively affect us at district level. The policy of Right to Buy has for a long time impacted on our ability to maintain our housing stock levels, and without change this will only get worse, particularly as we seek to “level up” our housing stock to become carbon neutral by 2040.

The table below summarises our proposed actions to meet the priorities of our housing strategy. It also indicates how our actions align with the Council plan objectives for the next 4 years.



<b>1) PROVIDING HOMES</b>		
<b>Key Service Objectives</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>Council Plan Objective</b>
Refresh the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan, incorporating a review of our approach to delivering affordable housing with the aspiration of building more Council housing, as well as delivering climate change actions and new building safety requirements.	Cross-department	2) Better Homes for all
Meet the increased demand from homeless households and secure suitable temporary and permanent accommodation, supporting households who present with physical and mental health needs, poverty and other issues, to ensure they are able to sustain their tenancies.	Housing Solutions	2) Better Homes for all
Continue to review and monitor outcomes from the Homelessness Strategy in order to reduce homelessness. Review service delivery and demand at Honiton and Exmouth offices to ensure our triage arrangements and resourcing is 'fit for purpose'.	Housing Solutions	2) Better Homes for all
Engage with owners of Empty homes to bring back houses into use	Private Sector Housing	3) A balanced economy
<b>2) IMPROVING HOMES</b>		
<b>Key Service Objectives</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>Council Plan Objective</b>

Carry out an updated Stock Condition Survey on our Council owned housing stock in order to collate up to date information, including energy performance, and use it to inform a new stock investment programme to decarbonise the Housing assets.	Property and Assets	1) A greener East Devon
Once the Stock Condition Survey has been completed we will use the data to update and inform the 30 year HRA Business Plan that includes detailed Asset Management considerations.	Property and Assets	1) A greener East Devon
Implement the actions contained in the Climate Change Action Plan relating to housing, specifically a phased replacement of heating systems reliant of burning fossil fuels and improved energy efficient homes for tenants.	Property and Assets	1) A greener East Devon
Addressing Fuel poverty and energy efficiency in owner occupied and rented homes.	Private Sector Housing	1) A greener East Devon
Refresh and clearly define our offer of sheltered accommodation ensuring clarity and a commitment to the levels of support that can be offered.	Housing Services	2) Better Homes for all
Improve void turnaround times and review the Void Standard for properties being relet as part of our Price Per Void contract, and ensure that a suitable lettable standard is achieved for new tenants achieving 'right first time'.	Property and Assets	2) Better Homes for all
Develop and consult tenants on an EDDC Home Standard that exceeds the Decent Homes Standard and that can be applied to all homes.	Cross-department	2) Better Homes for all
Publish a five year planned maintenance and cyclical decoration programme to provide tenants with visibility of planned works.	Property and Assets	2) Better Homes for all
Develop and expand on Year 2 of the Integrated Asset Management Contract to further increase customer satisfaction. Look to implement the first series of social value objectives, review the Handyperson offer and consider the inclusion of the planned works programme under the contract.	Property and Assets	2) Better Homes for all

Introduce a Programme of Property MOTs.	Property and Assets	2) Better Homes for all
Implement a robust process for dealing with Disrepair Claims, ensuring that this is embedded into all team processes. Prepare to meet the requirements of the Homes Fitness for Human Habitation Act.	Property and Assets	2) Better Homes for all
Identify areas of Housing land that are being used by residents without permission and ensure the appropriate signage is posted at all entrances and exits to prevent future claims of easements over our land.	Housing Services	2) Better Homes for all
PWS To review; risk assess; sample and enforce on private water supplies so that homes are fit for occupation and have a wholesome and safe water supply.	Private Sector Housing	2) Better Homes for all
To engage and work with residents in filthy and verminous properties.	Private Sector Housing	2) Better Homes for all
Increase the use of enforcement powers in the private rented sector to improve housing conditions and tenant safety.	Private Sector Housing	2) Better Homes for all
To deliver an increased in home improvements and adaptations using the Better Care Fund	Private Sector Housing	2) Better Homes for all
To license and inspect all houses in multiple occupation and residential caravan sites	Private Sector Housing	2) Better Homes for all
Work with landlords and managing agents to encourage standards to be raised and advise on regulatory issues	Private Sector Housing	2) Better Homes for all
Work towards a ratio of 70/30 spend on Planned to Responsive repair works.	Property and Assets	3) A balanced economy
Develop and introduce mobile/floating support service to assist vulnerable tenants, particularly those with mental health issues, sustain their tenancies.	Housing Services	4) Outstanding council and council services
Improve our approach to safeguarding by implementing the protocol developed for Registered Providers.	Cross-department	4) Outstanding council and council services

Embrace the changes anticipated in the Building Safety Act, including the appointment of building safety managers.	Property and Assets	4) Outstanding council and council services
Continue to develop and enhance the Open Housing System in order to continually improve efficiency and the customer's experience of contact with our service. Work alongside colleagues Corporately with the roll out of Firmstep in order to develop and release the tenant portal.	Housing Systems	4) Outstanding council and council services
<b>3) Improving Communities</b>		
<b>Key Service Objectives</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>Council Plan Objective</b>
Implement Phase 2 of the #inhoniton project by working with tenants in Honiton to identify areas we can manage differently and re-wild.	Housing Services	1) A greener East Devon
Identify Housing land for Nature Recovery Networks, re-wilding and wildlife improvement corridors and liaise with tenants to deliver blue heart areas.	Housing Services	1) A greener East Devon
SWITCH groups to make bug hotels with Countryside to encourage learning and appreciation of the natural world. The educational element links to our carbon reduction commitments.	Housing Services	1) A greener East Devon
Invest in the improvement of the communal areas on housing estates, including tree planting and encouraging a greater diversity of wildlife.	Housing Services	1) A greener East Devon
Encourage the Creative Cabin from the Thelma Hulbert Gallery visiting Housing estates.	Housing Services	1) A greener East Devon
Invest in the improvement of the communal areas on housing estates, including tree planting and encouraging a greater diversity of wildlife through re-wilding and nature recovery corridors.	Housing Services	1) A greener East Devon

Develop the re-use and recycling furniture programme to assist residents with setting up their home, recognising the increasing amount of people arriving in our homes with few possessions.	Housing Solutions	2) Better Homes for all
Develop our existing tenancy support and sustainability service who are tasked with pro-actively supporting tenants to maintain tenancies, to include Budgeting workshops, New tenant induction workshops, new tenancy "sign-up" briefings, Floating support for vulnerable tenants in sheltered and general needs housing, annual visits to all tenants who reside in council housing	Housing Services	2) Better Homes for all
Complete and publicise the final phase of the Your Home - Your Wellbeing Project.	Housing solutions	2) Better Homes for all
Develop the Axminster Fairshare project working with Tesco in Axminster and Nourish to collect food from the supermarket, cook and freeze it, and distribute to people with an identified need. Aim to do more for rural areas and link with other work e.g. new applicants for Universal Credit who have limited income for the first six weeks.	Housing Services	2) Better Homes for all
Deliver the priorities from the emerging poverty strategy and action plan.	Cross-department	3) A balanced economy
Provide and enable budgeting advice for tenants through our own staff and partner organisations (HomeMaker and CAB) to reduce the incidence of poverty.	Housing Services	3) A balanced economy
<b>3) Improving Services</b>		
<b>Key Service Objectives</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>Council Plan Objective</b>
Ensure that the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the Integrated Asset Management Contract are closely monitored and standards set are met or exceeded.	Property and Assets	2) Better Homes for all

Ensure that all of our major building components are loaded onto our asset database, and the database maintained as items get replaced and upgraded.	Property and Assets	2) Better Homes for all
Maintain up to date Fire Risk Assessments and publish documents and renewal dates.	Property and Assets	2) Better Homes for all
Create a comprehensive KPI dashboard of performance information to provide greater visibility of Service health and compliance assurance.	Housing Systems	3) A balanced economy
Review multi-agency and key stakeholder relationships to ensure understanding of processes and information sharing is effective and GDPR compliant.	Cross-department	4) Outstanding council and council services
Review the Service against the Social Housing Regulators Standards and ensure that we are fully compliant.	Cross-department	4) Outstanding council and council services
Review compliance procedures by an external body to drive continuous improvement.	Property and Assets	4) Outstanding council and council services
As part of pro-active succession planning, explore the creation of a housing apprentice post that can work across housing teams to support the housing sector as a career path.	Cross-department	4) Outstanding council and council services
Deliver Covid-19 Response & Recovery Plans to maintain housing services for tenants.	Cross-department	4) Outstanding council and council services