

Report for: HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

Date of Meeting:	10 September 2024
Subject:	MID DEVON HOUSING (MDH) SERVICE DELIVERY REPORT FOR Q1 2024-25
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Simon Clist, Cabinet Member for Housing and Property
Responsible Officer:	Simon Newcombe, Head of Housing and Health
Exempt:	None
Wards Affected:	All wards
Enclosures:	Annex A: Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) – performance data for 2024-25: Quarter 1 Annex B: Tenancy Enforcement Activities – performance data for 2024-25: Quarter 1 Annex C: Rent Recovery – performance data for 2024-25: Quarter 1 Annex D: Building Repairs and Maintenance – performance data for 2024-24: Quarter 1

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendation(s)

This report has been presented in support of an ongoing commitment to provide a quarterly update to Members on activity undertaken by Mid Devon Housing (MDH), including some relating to enforcement.

It also contains relevant information relating to performance as measured in line with the guidance relating to the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs). The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) requires registered providers of social housing (RPs) to provide a report on a set of TSMs which includes perception and performance data on a rolling annual basis. This data was provided on a first full-year basis earlier this year for 2023-24. Management data for relevant TSMs is provided for the first quarter of this year however the first TSM perception surveys will not be completed until the second

quarter and results provided in due course. Overall, three perception surveys will be undertaken in 2024-25 and the results aggregated in accordance with RSH methodology to provide the next annual TSM perception survey data in April 2025 alongside the full TSM management data for quarters 1-4.

Recommendation(s):

That the PDG notes the outturn performance for Quarter 1 2024/25 as provided in Annexes A, B, C and D

Section 2 – Report

1 Introduction

- 1.1 MDH has approximately 3,000 homes in its management located across the District.
- 1.2 This report provides a summary of activity and performance for the first quarter of 2024-25 (Q1) ending 30 June 2024.
- 1.3 In accordance with this, data for Q1 provided on the following Annexes:
 - Annex A: Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs)
 - Annex B: Tenancy Enforcement Activities
 - Annex C: Rent recovery
 - Annex D: Building Repairs & Maintenance

2 Assurance requirements and reporting

- 2.1 RPs are now required by the RSH to provide effective assurance to Members and this should include relevant, updated performance data relating to service delivery.
- 2.2 The RSH takes a co-regulatory approach which means that Councillors are responsible for ensuring that MDH is meeting their standards. There are currently five consumer standards, although following the implementation of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act these are about to be changed, once a review has been concluded. Currently, RPs such as MDH are expected to have due regard to the required outcomes and specific expectations as set out in these standards, which are:
 - The Safety and Quality Standard
 - The Tenancy Standard
 - The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard
 - The Neighbourhood & Community Standard
- 2.3 The Rent Standard, an economic standard, also applies and MDH is required to have regard to this.

- 2.4 Councillors also have a responsibility to ensure that MDH is being open and accountable with regard to how the organisation meets its objectives. In line with the principles of co-regulation, RPs are also required to support tenants so that they can shape and scrutinise service delivery and hold Councillors to account.
- 2.5 Performance data recorded in support of the TSMs is shown in the report. The aim is to ensure that Members can be reassured that data is being collected. As set out in the introduction, some of the data in this report will be included in the data submission which will be made to the RSH during the first part of 2025-26.
- 2.6 Perception data to inform our return to the RSH, in line with the new regulatory requirement, will be collected throughout the year during three specific survey periods in a change of approach away from a single winter survey as completed for the TSM return for 2023-24. The first of this year's surveys went live on 19 August for a two-week period and will therefore be reported in the second quarter data for this year. 80% of surveys will be completed via telephone and 20% online. Going forward, it is intended complete such surveys every quarter/4 times annually.
- 2.7 During the survey, tenants were given an opportunity to provide limited feedback in response to some questions and were able to do this anonymously. Many tenants chose to give their name and address and officers will follow-up on any service requests or complaints received.
- 2.8 This work was procured by a partnership involving MDH and two other local authority providers with retained housing stock. As a result, there will be opportunities for local benchmarking alongside national benchmarking once all RSH have collected all relevant data and it has been published, provided that all partners wish to participate in this.
- 2.9 At the end of January, MDH commissioned an external review of compliance against the regulatory framework. The findings of this have been used, together with the analysis of the data collected during the perception survey, to inform an understanding of necessary service improvement. This insight has informed the development of a MDH Impact Improvement plan which contains a number of actions. This plan takes into account resourcing, legislative and regulatory requirements and good practice and this plan has been shared with MDH managers ahead of being disseminated more widely for consultation with staff and other stakeholders.
- 2.10 The work of different MDH teams is shown in the annexes as set out below. Information is provided on key areas of work. It is important for Members to be reassured that the homes in our management are safe and secure and to understand how teams are performing in relation to certain

indicators relating to tenancy and estate management. There are legislative and regulatory requirements which RPs must adhere to. However, it is also important that service delivery also takes account of MDH's own policies and good practice.

2.11 This service delivery report sets out the following specific data:

- 12 performance data TSMs (not data available yet for the 10 perception survey TSMs)
- Tenancy enforcement data
- Rent collection and debt data
- Full repairs data including Decent Homes
- Voids data (metrics determined by updated Voids Management Policy)

2.12 The TSMs include three measures designed to demonstrate how RPs are performing with regard to service delivery in connection with complaints. If a tenant remains dissatisfied following the conclusion of their complaint, they can escalate that complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS). In the new regulatory framework, recently introduced, the role of the HOS has been expanded. Every year, RPs must undertake a review of compliance against the Complaints Handling Code, issued by the HOS. This has recently been reviewed by the HOS and there is now a requirement to submit an annual complaints performance and service improvement report to the PDG, in support of this. This report was completed and reviewed for 2023-24 at the previous PDG meeting.

2.13 In addition, it should be noted that there is a Memorandum of Understanding between the HOS and the RSH which allows the transfer of information with the aim of ensuring that any regulatory failings associated with service delivery as performed by RPs are identified and dealt with in the most appropriate way.

3 Performance and context

3.1 Annexes A to D contain comments and narrative on performance provided against specific metrics and there is further context provided below.

3.2 In the absence of TSM benchmark data, which will be available once all RPs have submitted relevant information nationally, the results of the satisfaction survey obtained as part of the pilot exercise undertaken during late 2022 has been published alongside some indicators for comparative purposes. When the national data is published, a further report will come to this PDG showing how MDH compares with other organisations nationally.

3.3 In the meantime, MDH will focus on any TSM results where the score was 60% or less. The actions required to address any issues arising from this review of the data will be fed into the wider MDH Impact Improvement Plan.

- 3.4 MDH team leaders meet with senior managers on a monthly basis to discuss performance against a range of indicators across the business. This delivers a greater understanding and insight and ensures that performance is routinely monitored which in turn delivers an understanding of any pressures. This informs the allocation of resources, as appropriate.

4 Building Services

- 4.1 Performance relating to this area of work is dependent upon having a full complement of operatives who have the necessary skills to manage the workload. Unfortunately, there continue to be challenges with regard to recruitment due to prevailing market conditions with service staffing levels in front-line roles at its lowest point for around 10-years. This, combined with issues long term sickness, can have an impact on the ability of the team to manage the priorities. For these reasons, priority continues to be given to completing the most urgent works to ensure that they are completed on time, as well as to those routine repairs having the most impact upon tenants. Similar issues also affected the administrative team responsible for processing repairs requests. Taking these resourcing issues into account, managers are satisfied with the level of performance, especially as targets have been met, although, there is, of course, always room for improvement to ensure that 100% of repairs are completed on time.
- 4.2 Overall, our service priority is, and always has been, on keeping people safe, which we have been able to do by appropriately triaging and completing the most urgent repairs. Encouragingly all repairs were completed within target for the first quarter even if a 100% of repairs could not be completed on time or at first visit and performance is upper quartile in comparison with the social housing sector average.
- 4.3 The service has taken steps through role re-evaluation and regrading to address some of the recruitment and retention issues and is also currently recruiting new building services trade apprentices into housing. The positive benefits of this should be seen as this year moves forward.
- 4.4 Customer satisfaction with planned maintenance remains strong despite some challenging performance issues associated with a very limited number of contractors.
- 4.5 Members will note from previous reports that we have an internal target to achieve 100% of all our properties holding a full management survey for asbestos which includes material sampling, alongside an additional requirement to have 100% of our properties holding a full electrical safety check ahead of potential regulatory changes. This does not mean our properties are not presently safe or properly assessed within the requirements of current safety legislation and the RSH. More information is given below.

4.6 Asbestos Safety Checks

A management survey can, but does not always require a sample of a suspected asbestos containing material (ACM) to be taken; however the only way to 100% determine if a material contains asbestos is to take a sample and have this analysed. MDH want to be able to provide more accurate information so are only reporting on the number of properties where we have a management survey that has included samples.

Overall, we still hold a current asbestos register for all properties in our stock which adopts a no-risk approach and makes conservative assumptions on the presence of ACM based on property design and age in specific areas of each building which may subsequently be confirmed or otherwise through sampling where the register will then be updated. This enables our tenants, staff and contractors to stay safe at all times and approach any works with the appropriate level of caution and risk management.

Where MDH do not have samples of an ACM that we want to work on then the suspected material is sampled and analysed. To avoid any doubling up on surveys, for a number of years we have been asking for management surveys with samples or sampling where required due to a more detailed refurbishment and demolition survey, which is only used for intrusive works, such as new kitchens and bathrooms.

As we modernise properties and/or undertake works during property void periods this will therefore result in ACM being removed from properties even where there is no specific safety reason for doing so (i.e. the ACM is safe and in good condition) and the register is updated accordingly.

Overall, this is a proactive risk-reduction approach where we can remove some properties completely from the register or reduce the scope of the register entry where some material is removed or it is confirmed as not being ACM.

The reason for the drop in the number of surveys for August and September relates to some cross checking of information relating to the refurbishment and demolition surveys.

4.7 Electrical Safety Checks

Historically MDH carried out a Visual Inspection Report (VIR) every 5 years and an Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR) every 10 years which is in line with current regulations as Social Housing is currently exempt from The Electrical Safety Standards in the Private Rented Sector (England) Regulations 2020, and we reported compliance on these figures.

But we are expecting that Social Rent properties will be brought in line with these regulations soon with a minimum five-year transition period. 'Housemark' nationally have changed the way we report with them already and are only recording EICRs.

As an EICR needs to be carried out every 5 years it would not be sensible to do lots at once we need to spread them out over a 5 year period which will equate to around 600 a year going forward, so in reality at the end of this year we will need to be around 50 % and then 60% next year and so on. This will ensure we are fully compliant at the end of the transition period.

5 Building Services – Voids Specific

- 5.1 The team which manages this work has been busy this year managing a large number of voids in both the housing revenue account and on behalf of the general fund strategic housing functions. The condition of the properties being returned has, on occasions, continued to be poor, and it remains a combination of these factors which has impacted the ability of the team to achieve set targets. Standard and major voids have been prioritised in order to ensure that the supply of available homes is maintained. However, some work, including that relating to decarbonisation, has taken longer than hoped due to external resourcing issues and therefore the target relating to the turnaround time for these properties was missed.
- 5.2 Notwithstanding the above, there has been between a 20-45% improvement (reduced turnaround times) in key void categories as set out in Annex D compared to the outturn for 2023-24.

6 Tenancy and Estate Management

- 6.1 The Neighbourhood team works in partnership with other agencies to manage tenancy-related issues and those on the MDH estates, including anti-social behaviour (ASB). Following period of holding a vacancy in the team, a new Officer has been recruited commenced work at the beginning of May 2024. This brings the team back up to full current strength and Annex B shows performance with regard to some of the tools available to the team. Many of these can be used to support the management of reports of nuisance and in particular, following training, the team are now equipped to deploy a wider range of ASB tool including formal Community Protection Warnings and Notices.
- 6.2 In line with good practice, our officers will endeavour to resolve any issues reported at an early stage. This can involve a range of options, including partnership working, informal mediation undertaken by team members and referrals for formal mediation. Therefore, the statistics in the Annex do not always reflect the extent of the work which is required when managing nuisance and anti-social behaviour.
- 6.3 With regard to fraud, tackling this is also continues to be a priority with two new cases opened in the first quarter. Tenancy fraud can encompass many issues, but if someone is living in a home where they do not have a right to be, that has an impact on the availability of that property for a household in greater housing need. For this reason, officers will be proactive about investigating any

concerns and making the necessary referrals for further investigation and action.

7 Income Collection

7.1 It is encouraging that the Neighbourhood team has continued its strong work managing the level of debt attributed to current dwelling tenants whilst still sustaining tenancies. At the end of quarter one, the debt stood at 2.22%, comparable with the overturn for 2023-24 and better than quarter one performance last year. This is also well within target. Just three convictions have come forward on the basis of rent arrears during quarter one.

7.2 When managing rent arrears, the team endeavours to work closely with the tenants involved. The aim is to offer an empathetic and supportive approach to encourage individuals to speak to the team about any financial issues they may be experiencing. Referrals for debt counselling and money advice are offered. The aim is to create a culture whereby all tenants are able to pay their rent; and, to this end, the team will offer realistic arrangements to facilitate the payment of rent arrears in instalments.

8 Recommendation

8.1 The following recommendation is made:

- That the PDG notes the outturn performance for Quarter 1 2024-25 as provided in the Annexes A, B, C and D.

Financial Implications

The activity of MDH is funded through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The HRA is ring fenced and subject to specific financial controls. The Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) charges a mandatory membership fee based on the number of homes in the management of the registered provider (RP) of social housing.

Legal Implications

The tenancy agreement defines MDH's relationship with tenants and sets out the rights and responsibilities of both parties. This takes account of legal and regulatory requirements. The Council is an RP and therefore is required to comply with the regulatory framework operated by the RSH. The regulatory framework has been reviewed. The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard contains provisions relating to the management of complaints. There is also a requirement for MDH to manage complaints in accordance with the Complaints Handling Code (the Code) which is issued by the HOS. Landlords are expected to self-assess against the Code. Landlords are required to use the learning from complaints to drive service improvement. Following publication of the Social Housing White Paper in late 2020,

the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023, has now been implemented and gone into statute.

Risk Assessment

The Council has approximately 3,000 homes in management and the performance of MDH impacts upon the lives of many thousands of tenants and their families. This represents a huge responsibility and investment, consequently a major area of risk. Not providing an effective housing management service has the potential to result in failure to meet legal and statutory obligations including those relating to health and safety issues, repairs obligations, tenancy fraud, and reputational issues which could result in our tenants feeling stigmatised. Failure to collect rental income could impact the ability to fund necessary management and maintenance activities.

Finally, a failure to provide adequate information on service performance for the purposes of governance and scrutiny is a specific area of non-compliance with the requirements of the RSH. This regulator has new powers to impose performance improvements and potentially fine registered providers where performance is poor and/or adequate assurance is not provided.

Impact on Climate Change

None directly arising from this report.

Equalities Impact Assessment

MDH has a collection of housing related policies. The use of these helps to ensure that service delivery is consistent and fair. These are currently being reviewed with the aim of aligning them more closely with the Regulatory Standards. There is a regulatory requirement for registered providers of social housing to tailor their services to meet the needs of tenants. MDH requests diversity data from tenants to enable compliance to be monitored. MDH is required to work with people from all sections of society and having an agreed policy ensures that all tenants and other stakeholders are treated in the same way with adjustments being made to meet their needs, as necessary. The Housing Ombudsman Service Complaints Handling Code which MDH adhere to also requires landlords to have an awareness of accessibility so residents are easily be able to access the complaints procedure via several routes.

Our “Getting to Know You” project has been designed to refresh our knowledge relating to the diversity of our tenants and over the next two years, we will be surveying them in an effort to better understand their needs.

Relationship to Corporate Plan

Homes are a priority for the Council and in the context of MDH service performance this includes supporting the delivery of several key objectives; investing in our homes, monitoring tenant satisfaction and ensuring our tenants feel safe, secure and happy in our homes.

Section 3 – Statutory Officer sign-off/mandatory checks

Statutory Officer: Andrew Jarrett
Agreed by or on behalf of the Section 151
Date: 30 August 2024

Statutory Officer: Maria de Leiburne
Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer
Date: 2 September 2024

Chief Officer: Simon Newcombe
Agreed by or on behalf of the Chief Executive/Corporate Director
Date: 19 August 2024

Performance and risk: Steve Carr
Agreed on behalf of the Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager
Date: 23 August 2024

Cabinet member notified: Yes

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Simon Newcombe, Head of Housing and Health
Email: snewcombe@middevon.gov.uk
Telephone: 01884 255255

Background papers:

Mid Devon Housing Strategies and Policies:
[Procedures, Policies and Strategies - MIDDEVON.GOV.UK](#)

The Regulatory Framework for Social Housing:
[Regulatory framework - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Tenant Satisfaction Measures:
[Tenant Satisfaction Measures Standard - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code:
[Complaint Handling Code | Housing Ombudsman Service \(housing-ombudsman.org.uk\)](#)