

Housing Services – Appendix A

Service Area Plan Performance 2017/18

1. Background

Corporate/Strategic

Housing Services is responsible for managing the Housing Revenue Account. This includes maintaining the services' Medium Term Financial Strategy, Budget setting and monitoring expenditure/income against the budget.

Customers

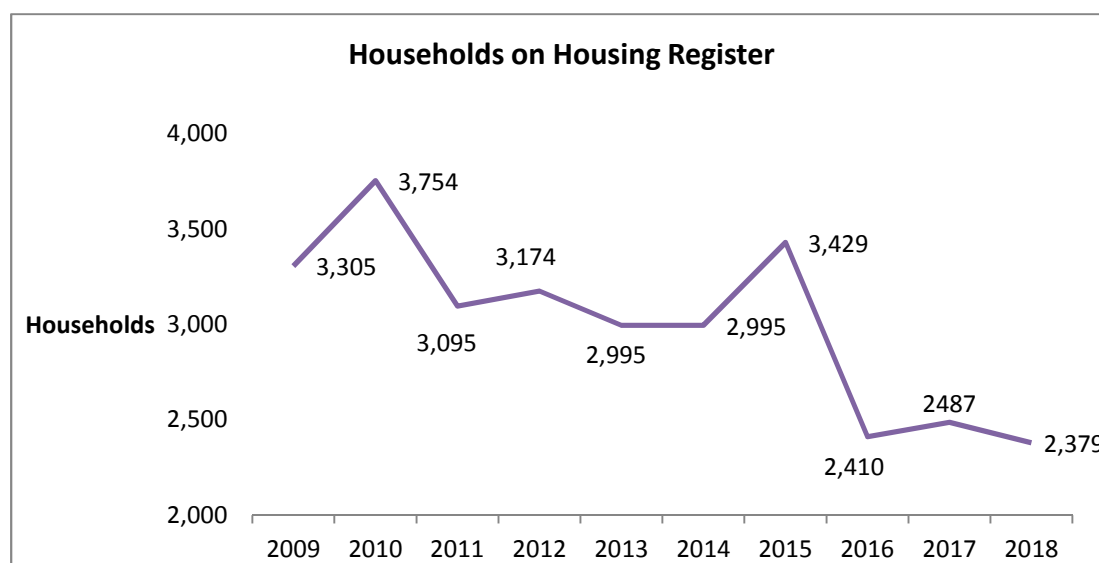
The customers of Housing Services include all those responsible for the payment of current rent and service charges for leaseholders. There are approximately 5,600 tenants and 600 leaseholders (as at June 2018). The Housing Advice team administers the Housing Waiting List (HomeChoice) which features over 2,000 applicant households.

In addition, Housing Services work with partner organisations including other Local Authorities and Housing Associations and with other agencies the Home Office, Immigration and National Directorate and other UK government departments.

2. Performance

Housing Advice and Allocations

During the first complete year of the Council's new Allocations Policy, the number of households waiting for a home on the housing register has reduced to 2,379 (March 2018). This is the lowest number of applicants on the waiting list at year-end since 2005.



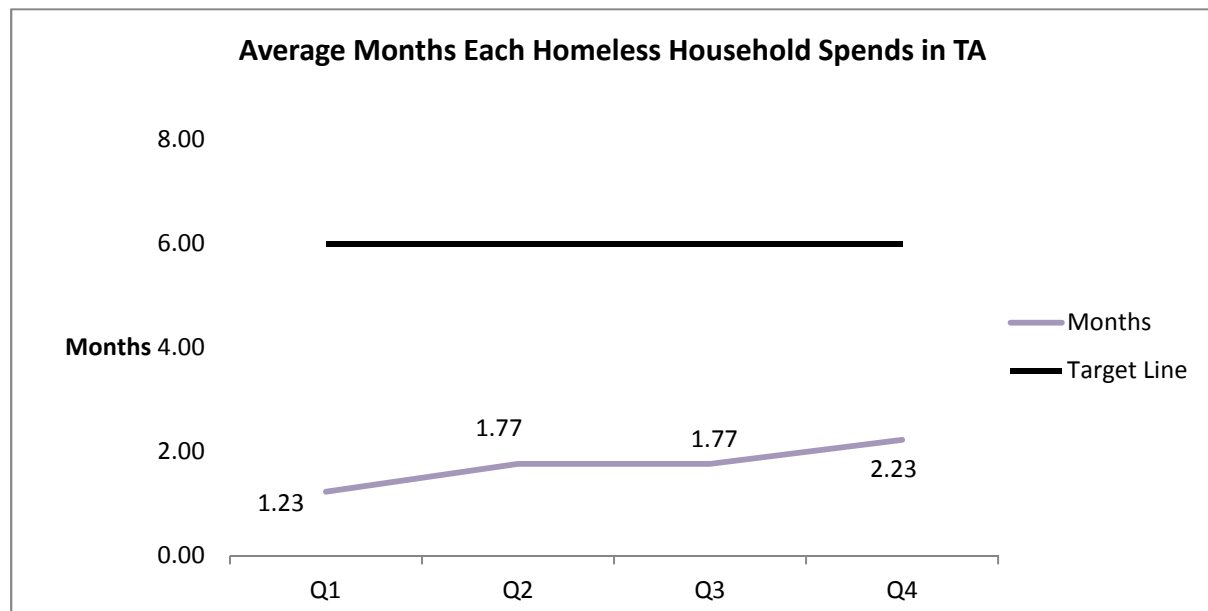
The new Allocations Policy has placed greater emphasis on providing opportunity for current tenants to transfer which in turn assists the Council to make the best use of its stock. During the year 2017/18, 185 existing Council Tenants transferred through HomeChoice, thereby freeing up their existing property for another waiting list applicant.

The Housing Advice and Allocations team received a 'substantial level of assurance' rating from the lettings and void control audit.

Housing Advice and Homelessness

Following consultations with voluntary and community services, other partners and with elected members, a new Housing & Homelessness Strategy for Warwick District Council was approved at Full Council and went live from 1st April 2017. This important document will help to shape the work of the Council and its partners over the coming three years with an aim of tackling homelessness across the district.

Considerable savings have been achieved through the significant reduction in the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless families. The use of accommodation at Willes Road - alongside existing units at Tachbrook Road and Tachbrook Street - has provided more suitable temporary accommodation for homeless families. During the year 2017/18, the Housing Advice team were comfortably within their target of the average length of time each homeless household spends in temporary accommodation.



Housing Strategy and Development

In 2017/18 financial year saw the completion of 305 affordable homes. With our partners, we continue to deliver affordable homes. Through our joint venture with W2, we are now onsite at Station Approach in Leamington that will deliver 160 affordable homes and at Theatre Street, Warwick for a further 40 properties.

The proposal to regenerate the Lillington area and build 600 new homes has been put on hold following the Inspector's decision not to approve Red House Farm being taken out of the green belt.

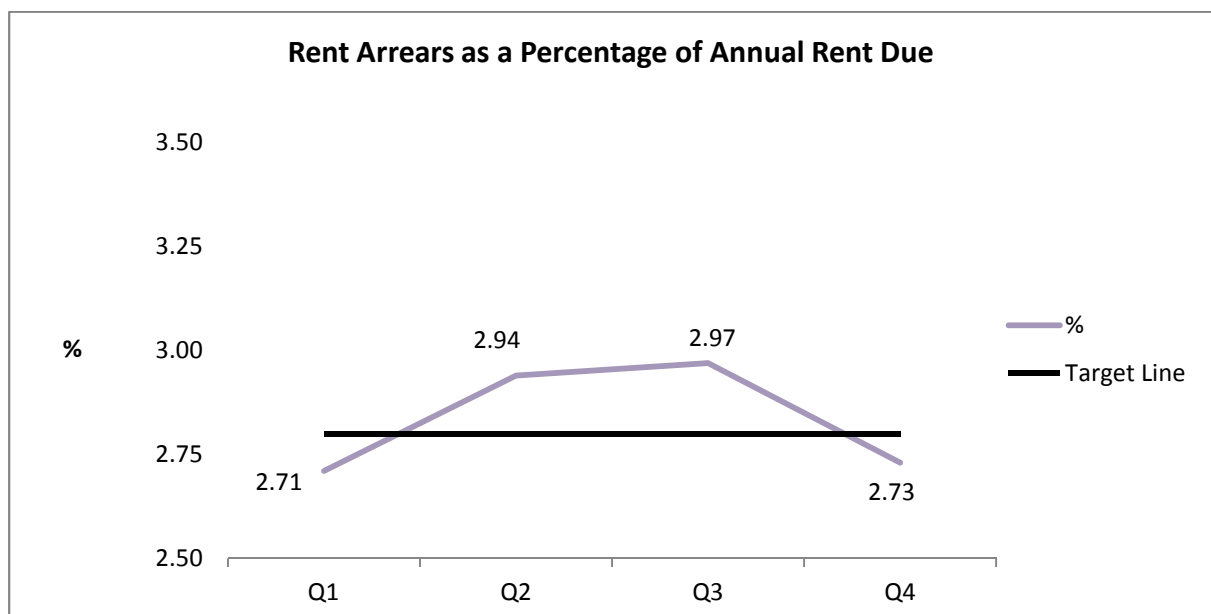
Over the summer of 2017, we submitted a bid to the Local Government Association for assistance with the development of the Student Housing Strategy. We were successful in obtaining £14,000 worth of free-to-WDC consultancy support, to help with better gathering and analysis that will provide a firm basis for the development of the final strategy document.

Income Recovery and Financial Inclusion

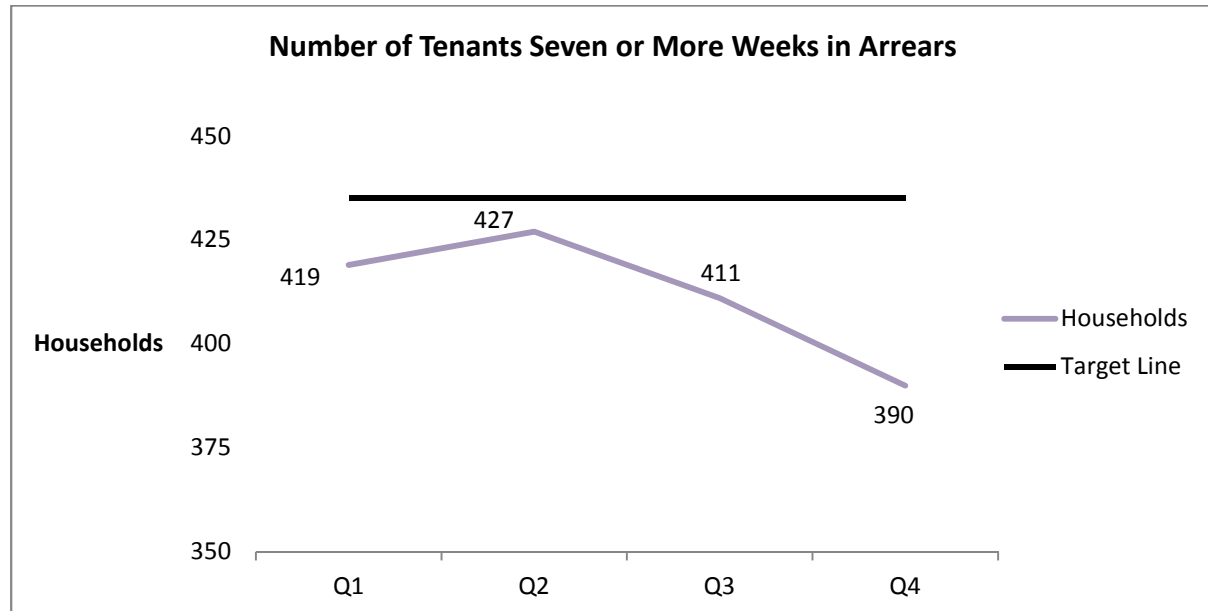
Councillors and officers have been working together to review the work around financial inclusion. This has led to the formulation of a Financial Inclusion Action Plan. The plan sets out actions around six themes: Access to Money Advice; responding to welfare benefit changes; Promoting affordable credit; Reducing fuel poverty, tackling worklessness, working with partners.

Our Money Advice caseworkers have generated income in the form of benefit entitlements or savings from prevention of evictions of an estimated £300,000.

In November 2016, the Executive approved a new Rent Arrears Policy. We have set a performance target for rent arrears to be no greater than 2.8% of total rent due. The target was met for 2017-year end and 2018-year end, having risen above the target line during the middle part of the year.



In addition to this, the target performance figure for the number of tenants in seven or more weeks in arrears (435) was met for all four quarters of the year 17/18.



Tenancy Management

The work of the Tenancy Officers during the year 2017/18 has been dominated by fire safety following the Grenfell Tower tragedy, which generated a high level of enquiries from the media, councillors and residents.

The Housing Management team swiftly responded to the fallout from the Grenfell Tower disaster. A plan of works has been set out and the Assets team have undertaken significant effort in respect of the seven 7+ storey blocks and the two 6 storey blocks that fall within the Warwickshire Fire & Rescue service (WFRS) definition of a high-rise block.

Joint inspections of the communal area of each block were undertaken with the WFRS and a programme of initial repair work and additional safety measures implemented and completed, including the fitting of 'drench'.

The Sustaining Tenancy Team have continued to also complete tenancy update visits every three years. They have completed visits to each of the 400 "very high-rise" residents and have ensured that entry was gained to every property to check that there were no fire safety issues and to reiterate in person the fire safety advice in high-rise. New leaflets and new signage have been supplied to our blocks.

The Sustaining Tenancies team have continued to effectively respond to instances and claims of Anti-Social behaviour. The team were able to close 126 'cases' during the year 2017/18, of which 81.75% were resolved within 6 months.

The sustaining tenancy team have had the building cleaning service contract and the lifeline service audited and achieved substantial assurance status.

Private Sector Housing

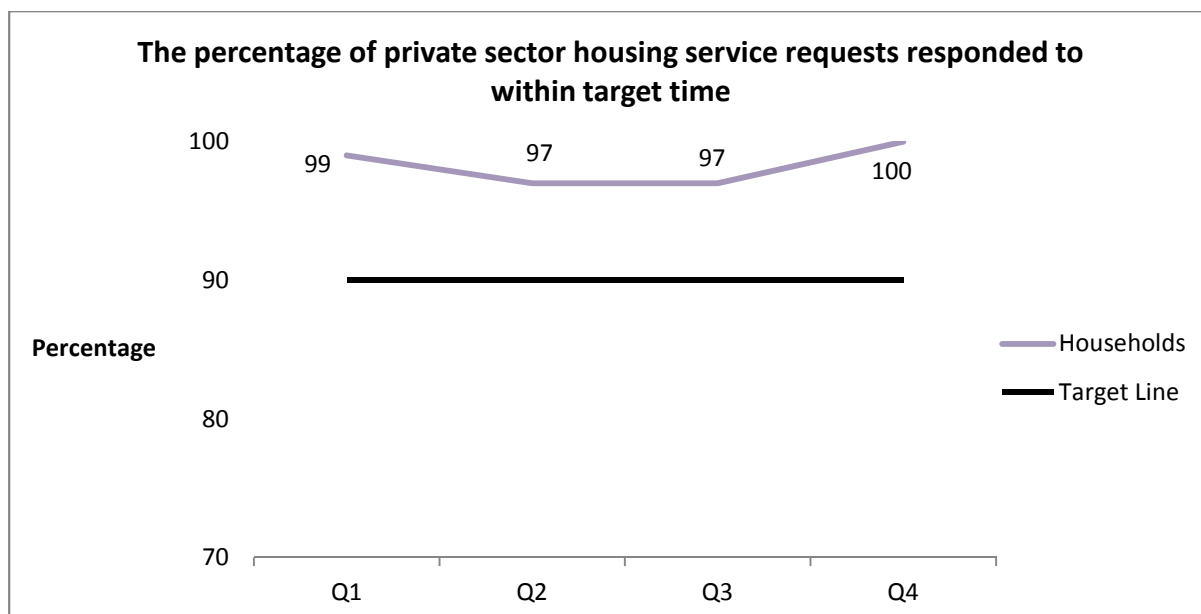
The introduction of the countywide Home environment assessment and response Team service (HEART) went live 1st April 2017. This service, involved the five Warwickshire District and Borough councils and the County Council provides specialist support and the delivery of adaptations and related services.

The service is designed to speed up and improve the quality of services offered to people who need home adaptations. The HEART service delivers a range of interventions, in addition to Disabled Facilities Grants, to enable customers to remain independent in their homes. A common Housing financial Assistance policy has been adopted across the county to enable applicants to be assessed in the same way. At the end of September 2017, the time taken to of their adaptation work dropped to 117 days for Warwick District Tenants and Residents.

In collaboration with Stratford-on-Avon District council, we have held two landlord forums in the last 12 months, bringing together 50 to 60 different stakeholders including private sector landlord, letting and property management agencies, and the National Association. These events enable the sharing of information and ideas and a place that landlords can find out about work elsewhere in the sector.

We will continue to vigorously pursue landlords who flagrantly breach housing regulations, whether related to HMO licensing, fire safety or overcrowding.

The Private Sector Housing team have continued to provide swift responses to the enquiries that they receive, comfortably surpassing the 90% target of 'Private Sector Housing service requests responded to within target time'.



In 2016/17 and 2017/17, the District has encountered a significant increase in the number of unauthorised encampments resulting in action through both the County and Magistrate’s courts. This has impacted on Local Authority, private landowners, the courts and the police in terms of resource time and cost. We have agreed a Countywide Gypsy and Travellers protocol aimed at ensuring that responses are, consistent, efficient and effective.

Lifeline and Supported Tenancies

Housing Support and Lifeline Services were subject to a full review in 2017 and a subsequent major restructure. Lifeline service operates on a more commercial footing, which has required some focus on marketing our Lifeline Services. We have undertaken a number of exciting publicity events to increase our marketing activity. Our electric vehicles are now clearly branded as Lifeline Services vehicles and we have been active on social media to target marketing at key audiences.

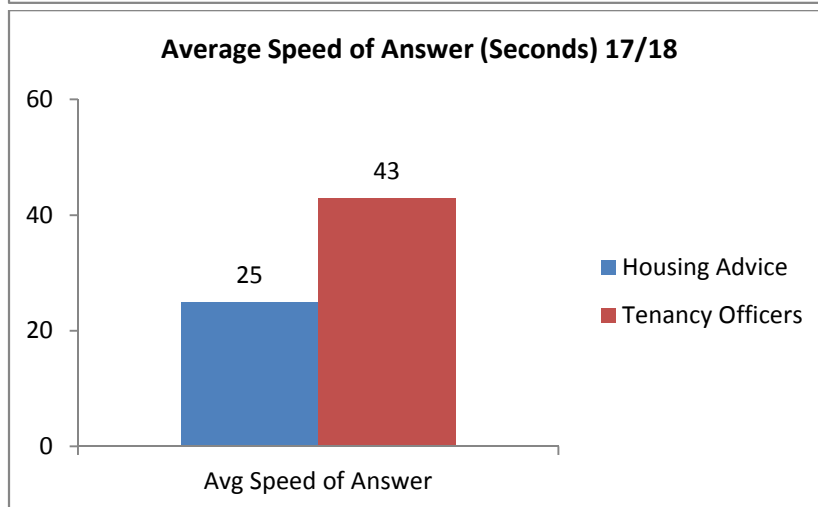
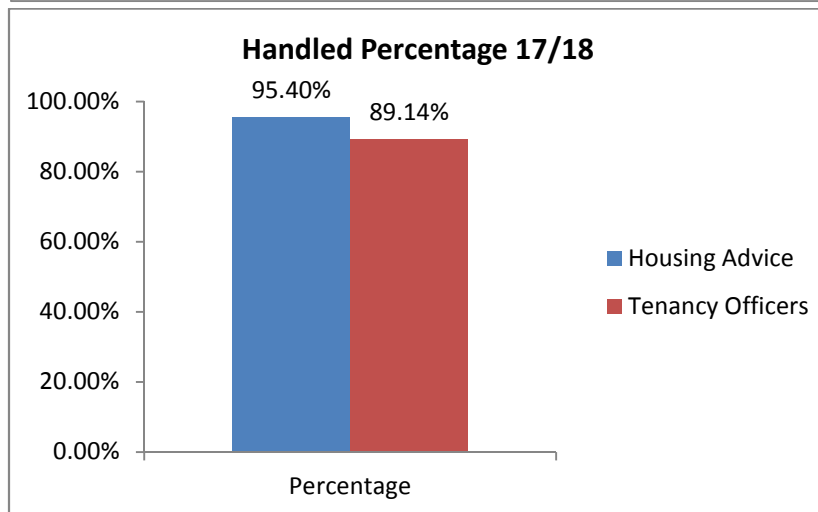
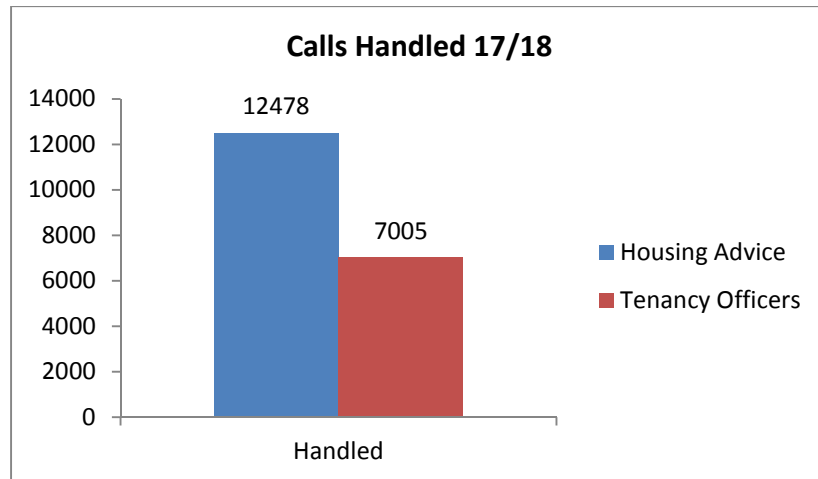
We have reopened William Wallsgrove House following the supported housing provider pulling out. Our staff has accepted the challenge this has presented and is now managing and providing support to 11 young people.

Tenant Engagement

Engagement works has continued with a number of local environmental projects and have completed several tenant consultations. We have completed new seating, planting, patio landscaping and fencing as well as organising a skip day. The annual report to Tenants and a Leaseholder bulletin has been completed during the year. The STAR satisfaction survey has been completed and this independent survey found that 82% of tenants were satisfied with the service provided by Warwick District Council.

Call Centres

The Housing Advice and Tenancy Officer teams continue to use a CISCO developed telephony system to handle the enquires that come into to the teams. Between the two teams, nearly 20,000 calls were received during 2017/18 and 92% were answered.



3. Risks

The Housing Risk Register has continued to be reviewed throughout the year, and is due to be presented to Finance & Audit Scrutiny in 2018, alongside the Contract Register and review of Budget, this being the inaugural review of this nature by Finance and Audit Scrutiny Committee. There are no risks that score in the "red". Risks are regularly considered at Finance Management Team meetings.

4. Workforce planning

We will implement the new requirements brought about by the Homeless Reduction Act 2017, ensuring that our staff have the skills and support to make a smooth transition to the new arrangements and ensuring that our Homelessness Strategy is revised accordingly.

Our work on improving fire safety will continue with the Assets team.

Our review of the Allocations Scheme was brought back to the Executive Board Feb 2018.

The deliveries of affordable housing will continue to be a key priority.

We will continue to look opportunities to purchase small parcels of houses, and for development land within the District.

Implementation of Financial Inclusion includes actions to support residents on the transition to the full roll out for Universal credit.

Implementation of the Rental Exchange scheme.

Continuing our work to ensure that our Lifeline Services are developed, we will further rollout the Lifeline marketing plan.

Review the possible restructuring of Housing teams to deliver better management of teams and the management of ground maintenance and cleaning contracts.

5. Budget

The Housing budget for 2017/18 included the Council-wide 1% reduction to discretionary budgets. There was also an assumed £50,000 additional investment interest included from the use of alternative investment vehicles. In view of the continuing low investment interest returns, the 2016/17 Treasury Management Strategy included Equity Funds as a new investment instrument with the aim of getting an increased return on some of the Council's investment portfolio whilst protecting the Council's investment. Following an appointment, two fund managers were appointed in March 2017, with £3m paid into each fund in April. These investments need to be regarded as long-term investments since the returns may be somewhat erratic over a short term. A review of the performance on these funds is planned to Finance and Audit Scrutiny Committee.

6. Planned Changes, Major Work streams and Projects

Change/Project	Milestones
Housing & Property Services - split and redesign	New assets team New service area - "Housing Services"
New Head of Housing Services	Focus on people base services
Budget Review – increase engagement across all Services	Ongoing each month – improved reporting Comparison to Final Accounts
HomeChoice Allocations Policy Review	New allocation policy - reduced waiting list by over 1,000 since June 2016 implementation of current policy.
Homelessness Reduction Act implementation	New staff resource in place
Universal Credit – prepare for Oct 2018 rollout to new working age housing benefits claimants.	Rental exchange scheme
Housing Support and Lifeline Services	Full review completed