

Housing Services – Appendix A Service Area Plan **Performance 2018/19**

1. Background

Corporate/Strategic

Housing Services is responsible for managing the Housing Revenue Account within the context of the corporate Fit For the Future Strategy. This includes maintaining the Services' Medium Term Financial Strategy, budget setting and monitoring expenditure/income against the budget.

Customers

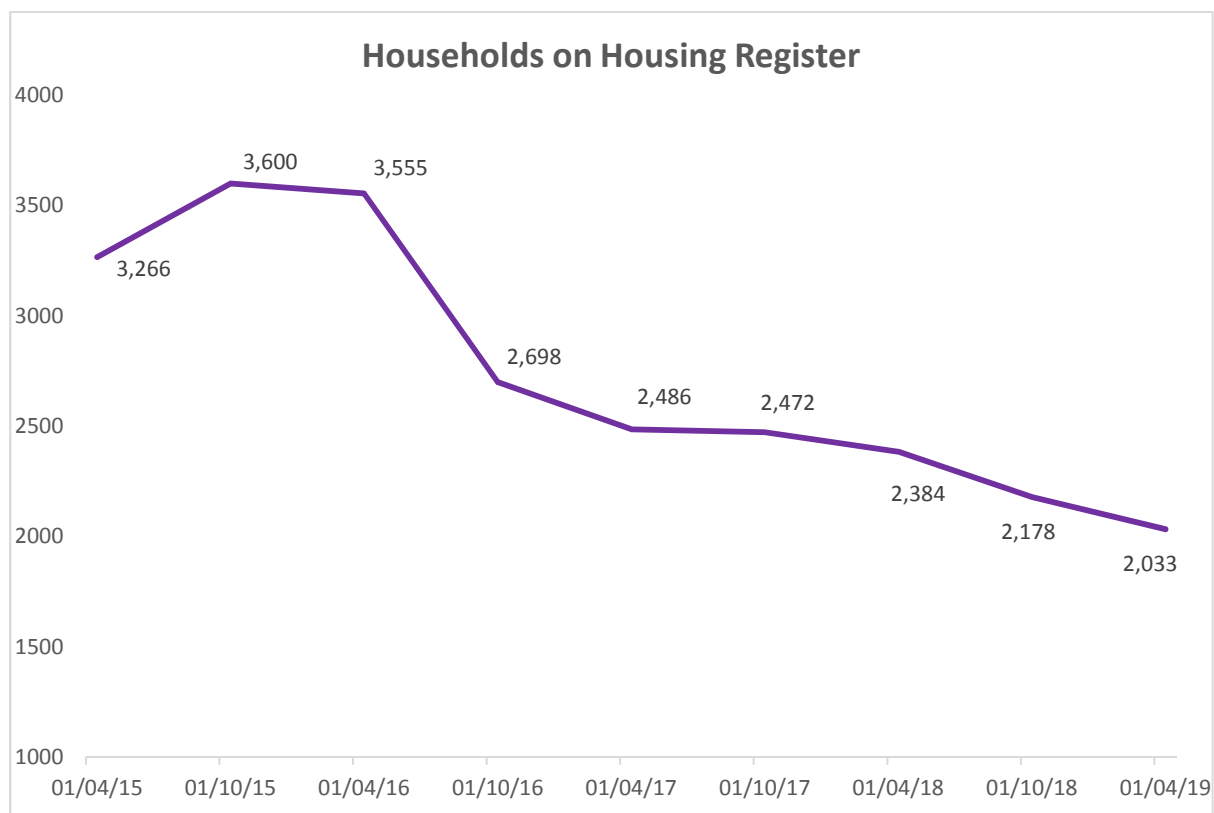
The customers of Housing Services include all those responsible for the payment of current rent and service charges. There are approximately 5284 tenants and 606 leaseholders (as at June 2019). The Housing Advice Team administers the Housing Register (HomeChoice) which includes over 1926 applicant households.

In addition, Housing Services works with partner organisations including other local authorities and housing associations, other agencies such as the Home Office, Immigration and National Directorate as well as other UK government departments.

2. Performance

Housing Advice and Allocations

In the 10 months since revisions were implemented to the Council’s Allocations Policy (August 2018), the number of households waiting for a home on the housing register has decreased by approximately 250.



The Allocations Policy and its subsequent revisions have 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 2018/19, 210 existing Council tenants transferred through HomeChoice, thereby freeing up their existing property for another Housing Register applicant.

During 2018/19 the Head of Housing Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, has approved two minor amendments to the housing allocations scheme. These were as follows:

Policy	Amendment	Reason
In band three there is the “children above first floor” category. The policy states that:	Use time on waiting list for prioritisation of all band three applicants including “children above first floor”.	The policy was not practical because of the various band three categories.

<p>“If two or more applicants in this category say they are interested in a property; we will give priority to the applicant on the highest floor”.</p>		<p>As an example, suppose 10 band three applicants bid for a property but only the first and tenth bidders have children above first floor while the applicants who came second down to ninth are all in band three for other reasons.</p> <p>If the applicant who came tenth lives on a higher floor than the applicant who came first they would leapfrog the whole list and be offered the property whereas if the applicant that came first did not bid for it then the applicant who came tenth would remain well down the list in ninth place.</p>
<p>The “Children above first floor” category within the transfer policy and in band 3.3 only applies to children above the first floor in flats, not maisonettes.</p>	<p>Allow applicants in above first floor maisonettes to be awarded the “children above first floor” categories.</p>	<p>There is some ambiguity over the definition of a “maisonette”. Many maisonettes with the main entrance above the first floor suffer the same issues as flats on the same level, namely difficult access up communal stairways, and lack of defensible or overlooked space to allow children to play out safely.</p>

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

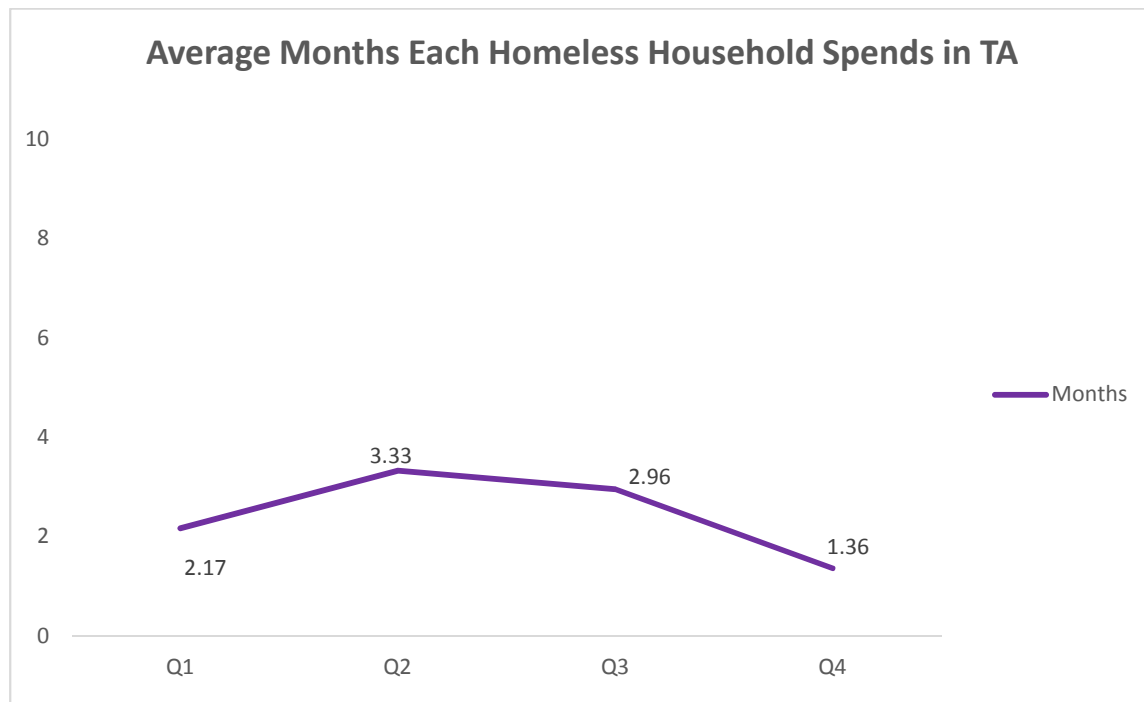
Housing Advice and Homelessness

During 2018/19, there were significant changes to homelessness legislation, with the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act. The team have had

to manage new responsibilities, with earlier interventions, the new prevention and relief duties and the introduction of Personal Housing Plans. The team have managed this change extremely well and have adopted a very proactive approach to helping those approaching us to prevent their homelessness or to help them find new accommodation.

The use of bed and breakfast has been kept to a minimum by the careful management of our own temporary accommodation and the proactive work the team are doing to find solutions.

During the year the team have dealt with 732 approaches from those homeless or threatened with homelessness. The average length of time each homeless household spent in temporary accommodation was 2.38 months. It initially increased between the first and second quarters but reduced for the final two quarters.



Housing Strategy and Development

With our partners, we continue to deliver affordable homes. The 2018/19 financial year saw 471 reported completions of affordable homes. Through our joint venture with W2, we saw the first completions at Station Approach in Leamington, a scheme that will deliver 160 affordable homes in total. W2 also started on site to develop 39 properties at Theatre Street, Warwick.

In 2017/18 we made a successful bid to the Local Government Association (LGA) for grant assistance with the development of the Student Housing Strategy. The

LGA decided to invite a small number of authorities, who had made satisfactory progress with their projects, to apply for additional funding. We applied and as a result we obtained a further £14,000 for 2018/19 to spend on community consultation. This concluded in December 2018 and we are now taking forward the recommendations of that work.

We have put in place plans for building new Council housing at scale again and are in discussions and negotiations with a number of land owners now to acquire sites to achieve this ambition. We have also begun bidding again to acquire affordable homes being built under planning obligations as another way of replacing homes sold each year under the Right to Buy and increasing the housing stock.

During 2018/19 we began to take advantage of the Right to Buy “buyback” clauses that require more recent purchasers to offer properties back to the Council before selling on the open market. The Head of Housing Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, has purchased five former Council properties and allocated them at social rents to people on the Council’s housing register:

15 Kennedy Square, Royal Leamington Spa	Two-bedroom flat
22 Great Field Drive, Warwick	Two-bedroom house
19 Stonehouse Close, Cubbington	Three-bedroom house
24 Murcott Road West, Whitnash	Two-bedroom flat
109 Albion Street, Kenilworth	One-bedroom flat

Fire Safety

It is recommended that Members note the update of fire safety measures at Appendix C.

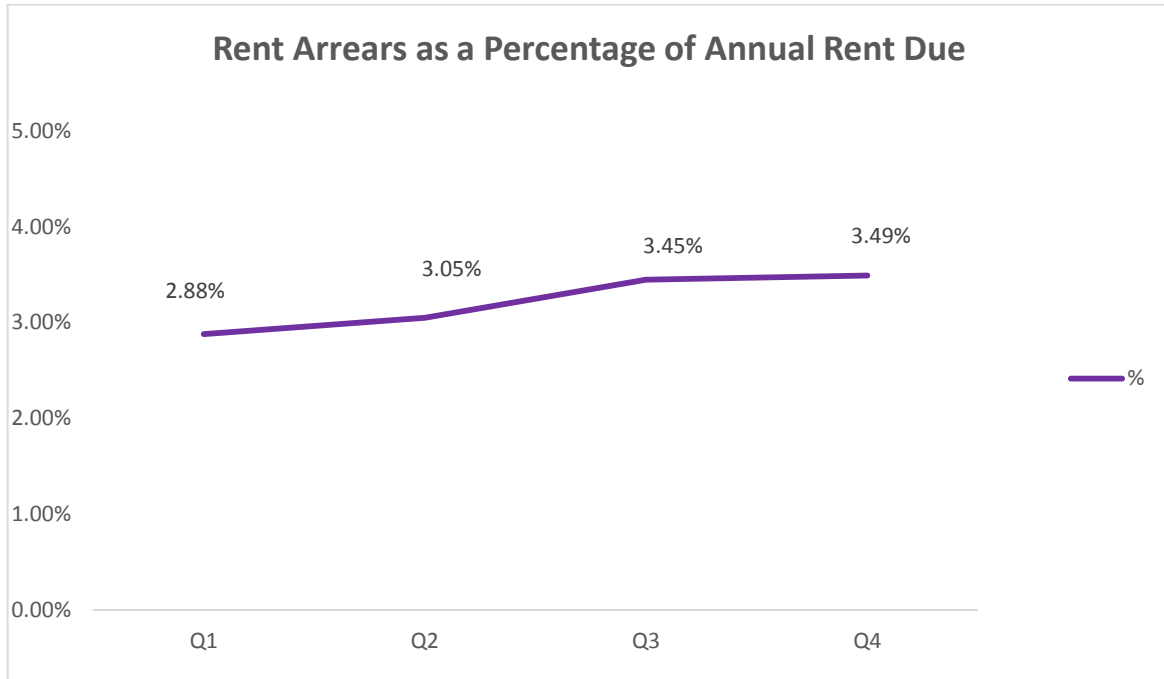
Income Recovery and Financial Inclusion

There has been a change in focus for the Income Recovery & Financial Inclusion Team who have been working closely with our tenants and customers to help them maximise their income and help make arrangements with them for them to stay in their home. This has resulted in a positive impact in that the number of evictions has reduced, and is helping families to stay in their home.

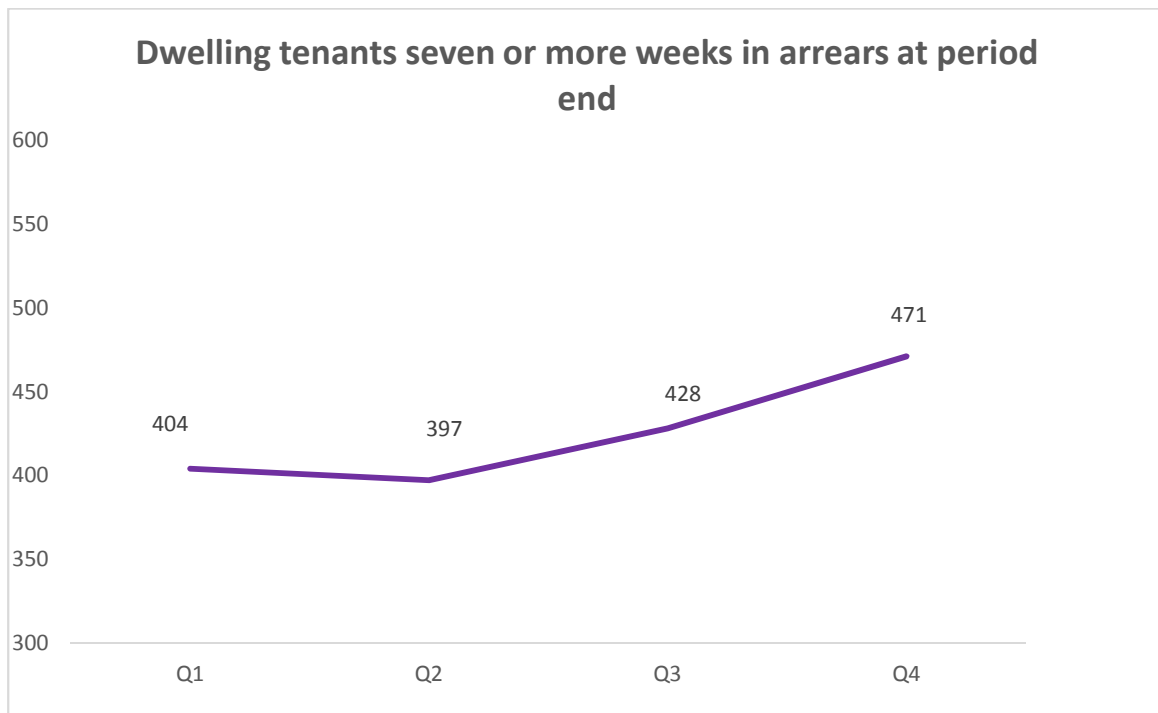
There has been a big increase in the number of tenants who are in receipt of Universal Credit (UC) which has had a negative impact on arrears. However, we have provided additional support for our tenants to help them with their claims and to help them manage paying their rent. This has seen an increase in managed payments from tenants on UC, which we have agreed with our tenants to ensure that their rent is paid.

In the coming year we will be reviewing the Financial Inclusion Plan and relaunching the Financial Inclusion Working Group.

Rent arrears as a percentage of rent due has progressively risen over the last year as the following graph shows:



The number of tenants who are in seven or more weeks' arrears decreased in the first quarter, however, the number of cases over the last three quarters has gradually increased.



Tenancy Management

The work of the Tenancy Officers during the year 2018/19 regarding fire safety continues. We have completed works at an age-designated tower block, with upgrades for fire safety improvements as well as environmental improvements. We also continue with the annual tenancy update visits at all of our high rise blocks.

The Sustaining Tenancies Team has continued to complete tenancy update visits every three years. They have completed visits to each of the 400 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. New leaflets and new signage have been supplied to our blocks.

We are jointly managing a post with WCC for a Family Support Worker, to assist families with complex needs, to help keep the family together and to keep them in their homes.

Lifeline and Supported Tenancies

Lifeline has been operating in its new structure for two years now. Whilst the redesign had some benefits there have been some downsides to how the roles operate. We have therefore reviewed the service and will be looking to make some minor changes to our structure to operate more efficiently as part of the wider housing review.

We have sourced new items including a GPS device that acts as a Lifeline when out and about and locates the person's position so help can be sent directly to

them wherever they are. We are also in the process of setting up a low level falls service to help people who have fallen but are uninjured to try and prevent some of the low level calls to the ambulance service.

Lifeline has assisted with decanting residents of William Wallsgrove House to Beauchamp House in Warwick and continues to provide the landlord function and support in partnership with Home Group. We have managed to get over 10 residents to move on and to sustain their own tenancy in the community.

Private Sector Housing

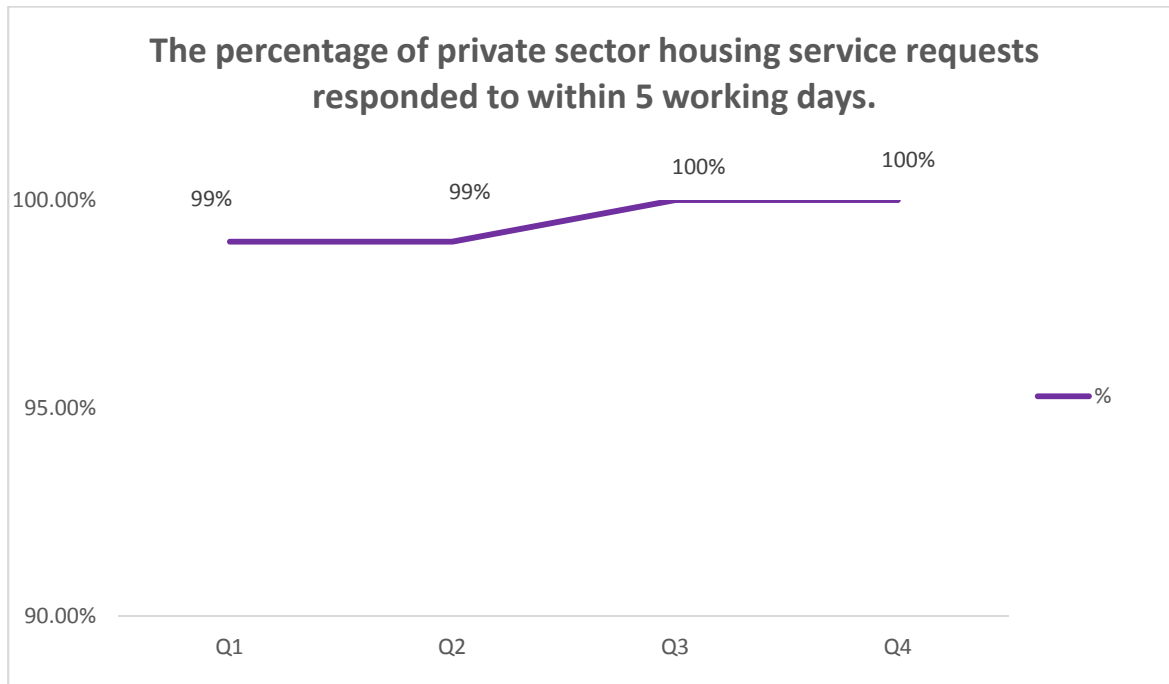
The major area of work for the team this year has been the extension of House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) licensing from 1 October 2018. Due to preparations the team made in advance of this we have been able to make excellent progress with 180 HMOs licensed for the first time by 31 March 2019.

Another challenging area for the team during the year has been responding to the high levels of unauthorised traveller encampments, particularly during the summer months. Over the year by working closely with the Police and WCC Legal Team we brought 19 encampments to an end within an average of five calendar days for each encampment.

In collaboration with Stratford-On-Avon District Council, we have held another Landlord Forum bringing together 50 to 60 different stakeholders including private sector landlords, letting and property management agencies, and the National Landlord Association. These events enable the sharing of information and ideas particularly in respect of new legislation and an opportunity for landlords to find out about good practice 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 and we have issued our first Civil Penalty to a landlord.

Over the course of the year virtually all service requests have been responded to within 5 days.



Tenant Engagement 2018-2019

During the past year the engagement team has focused on consultations on fire safety refurbishments to our High rise and medium rise blocks.

Fire Safety Communications included: -

- Newsletters
- Open days
- Satisfaction surveys
- A new fire safety leaflet
- New web pages on high rise living

New Tenant Surveys: - The feedback helps to find out whether any aspects of our Housing Services may need improvement.

Environmental Improvements have been carried out which have enhanced neighbourhoods.

We have continued to improve our services for leaseholders as follows;

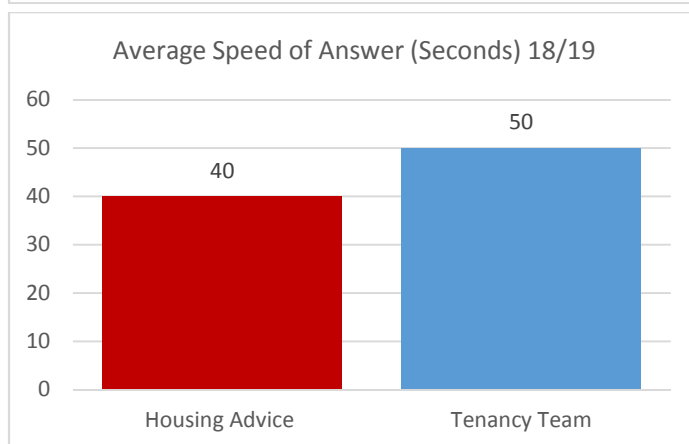
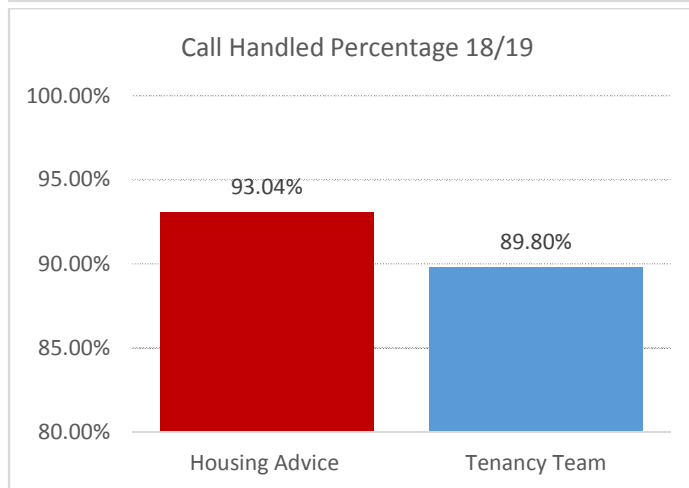
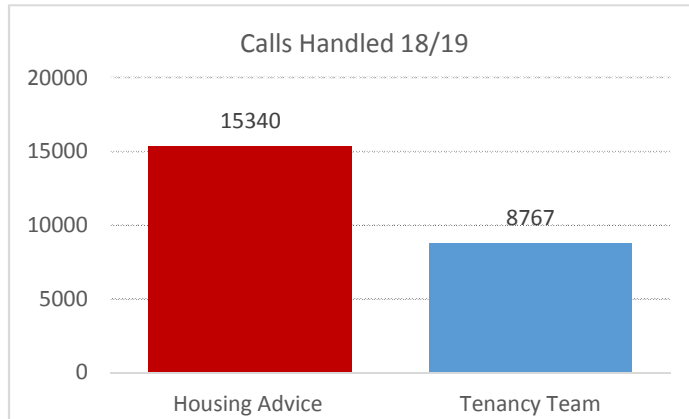
- when we carry out major works for tenants, we offer to carry out the same work to leaseholders at a cost
- consulting before we carry out major works to the blocks where they live. This process also enables us to recover some of the costs of the work through leaseholders' service charges.

We have also improved information for staff to be able to deal with leasehold issues.

The STAR satisfaction survey was completed in 2017 and this independent survey found that 82% of tenants were satisfied with the service provided by Warwick District Council.

Call Centres

The Housing Advice Team and Tenancy Team continue to use a CISCO developed telephony system to handle the enquires that come into the teams. Please see the tables below for performance information.



Risks

The Housing Risk Register has continued to be reviewed throughout the year, and is due to be presented to Finance & Audit Scrutiny Committee in 2019, alongside the Contract Register and budget review. There is one risk score in red which is Inadequate staffing resources. To address these risks, we are undertaking a review of staffing resources and identifying posts where we have had recruitment and retention issues. The Service Area Crisis Plan is being reviewed and risks are regularly considered at Housing Management Team meetings.

4. Budget

Annual budgets for Housing are agreed by Executive and budget reports are routinely considered by the Senior Management Team, with quarterly review reports issued to the Executive.

Budgets are agreed to enable Housing Services to deliver its core agreed services relating to housing provision within the district. The net cost of General Fund Housing Services budgeted for 2019/20 is £1.5m. Services include Housing Strategy, Homelessness, Housing Advice, Public Conveniences and Private Sector Housing. These are funded by Council Tax, Revenue Support Grant and charges for council services.

Housing Services also include the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), a statutory ring-fenced account identifying the net cost associated with the provision of housing for Council tenants. The main sources of income to the HRA are from rents and service charges from tenants, with income budgeted to be £26.4m in 2019/20. This takes into consideration a 1% rent reduction for 2019/20, the final year of a 4-year national policy.

Main areas of expenditure include repairing, maintaining and improving existing housing stock (budgeted to be £12.7m in 2019/20), and servicing the debt taken on when the Council made a one-off 'buy-out' payment to Government to purchase its housing stock in 2012 (£4.8m debt servicing 2019/20). Where a surplus is generated on the net cost of services (budgeted to be £3m in 2019/20), this money is ring-fenced to support future investment in major housing projects, including the construction and acquisition of housing stock, and currently ongoing investment in improvements to our existing high-rise housing stock, including fire safety improvements.

5. Planned Changes, Major Work streams and Projects

The following table shows the major work streams/projects to be taken for by Housing Services for 2019/20.

Change/Project	Milestones	Date
Fire Safety – including FRA Please see update on fire safety in Appendix D	Westbrook ongoing CLS determine requirements FRA programme developed	31/03/20
Review our approach to the types of tenancies we offer and the legal agreement with our tenants, as well as the way in which we use our stock and engage / interact with our tenants	De-designation Exec Report Draft Tenancy Strategy Await green paper	30/05/19 31/12/19 Summer '19
Improve the way we maintain, improve and repair our housing stock	Planned and Cyclical Programmes	Ongoing
Improvements to our Lifeline Service, increasing its 24/7 concierge role across the district	Analogue switch off Product identification	Spring '19 Autumn '19
Tackle homelessness, including developing strategic and local responses	Mid-term RSI strategy Hostel review Night Shelter redevelopment	Spring '19 Ongoing Ongoing
Ensure that our workforce is structured to be able to meet present & future challenges and are sufficiently skilled and equipped to undertake their roles	Housing Review Exec Report and consultation Identify system developments	31/12/19 Autumn '19
Ensure that our policies and practices are designed to produce optimal results and a good standard of customer care	Establish policies	Ongoing
Developing the role of the Council as a builder of new local homes		Ongoing
Complete the re-licensing of existing HMOs and the new licensing required by the revised regulations	Legislation Start work	Ongoing