

# Housing Management Asset Strategy: 10 Challenges

Having an Asset Management strategy, with the right approaches and actions in place to make sure the homes we provide are safe, well maintained, of good quality, and meet the needs of current and future residents is so important.

A good Asset Strategy should be reviewed and updated, so Ipswich Borough Council is creating a new Asset Management Strategy for the period 2024 to 2030.

The Council has identified ten challenges to focus on, and the Council is seeking your views on whether you agree with these and which you feel are the top priorities.

The 10 challenges identified are:

## 1. Ensuring our homes are safe and secure

We will ensure that we take a rigorous approach to meeting all building safety, legal and regulatory compliance requirements so the homes we provide are safe, secure, and free from hazards and items of disrepair. This includes the following:

### a. SAFE HOMES THAT ARE FREE FROM DAMP AND DISREPAIR

Our approach must take account of the requirements and expectations of the Regulator for Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman

### b. COMPLIANCE ACTIVITIES

Compliance activities cover the range of statutory requirements such as servicing, testing and checks that we carry out on appliances, systems, and mechanical installations to ensure they remain safe and serviceable. The “Big 6” compliance matters are gas servicing, electrical testing, fire safety systems, asbestos management, water hygiene and lift servicing.

### c. THE BUILDING SAFETY ACT 2022 AND THE NEW FIRE SAFETY REGULATIONS

The Building Safety Act 2022 has introduced a range of additional requirements for our ‘higher risk’ buildings, including around fire safety.

## 2. Delivering effective and efficient repairs and maintenance

We are committed to providing a good quality, reliable repairs and maintenance service and to improve our performance where service enhancements are needed. This includes:

### a. RESPONSIVE MAINTENANCE

Responsive maintenance covers the day-to-day repair requests. We have identified some specific areas in which we need to focus. These are:

- To improve the process and experience of reporting a repair by reducing call waiting times, supported by the introduction of online repairs reporting.
- To improve in the quality and maintenance of our homes so we can contain the number of responsive repairs.

- To increase the percentage of repairs completed on time.

**b. PREPARING HOMES FOR RELETTING (VOIDS)**

Our focus over the next five years will be to try and manage and contain expenditure on preparing voids, supported by preventative approaches to tenancy management. This means making sure our Void Standard provides for properties to meet minimum standards of acceptable fixtures, fittings, decoration, and flooring.

**c. PLANNED MAINTENANCE**

We aim to carry planned maintenance when components reach the end of their useful life and replacing them when needed. To achieve this, the Council will undertake more regular stock condition surveys to assess the condition of each component.

**d. OUR COMMITMENT TO OUR IN-HOUSE DELIVERY ARRANGEMENTS**

We will invest sufficient resources in staffing and managing the DLO by carrying out more work in house to deliver better quality work whilst achieving good value for money.

### 3. Improving the quality of our homes and neighbourhoods

The Council will work to ensure all our homes meet the government's Decent Homes Standard (DHS), which includes a range of housing fitness, housing health & safety, quality of facilities and thermal insulation requirements. The Government are currently consulting on a new set of standards, so our strategy must reflect the new standards when they are rolled out.

To help raise the quality of our neighbourhoods we will put in place an Ipswich Neighbourhood Management Plan that will drive our work to improve the management and maintenance of the overall environment including better maintenance of the street scene, and better management of grassed areas and open space.

### 4. Ensuring intelligent, data-led asset management

It is important that we use accurate data on the condition of our housing assets and use this to base our decisions when planning improvements. Undertaking more frequent stock condition surveys will give us a better understanding of the current condition of our homes and planning future investment needs.

Intelligent, data-led asset management goes beyond just collecting stock condition information, it also included collecting energy data through Energy Performance Certificates (EPC's) and cataloguing all compliance records so we have a "Golden Thread" of information so sound investment decisions can be made. The "Golden Thread" of information is part of the Council's new regulatory obligations in crucial

areas of compliance such as fire safety, gas safety, damp and mould and other hazards.

## **5. Decarbonising our homes**

One of the biggest challenges we face is to improve the energy efficiency, by installing new heating systems that use renewable energy and improving thermal insulation and ventilation in our homes to meet the targets set by government for carbon emissions and energy usage.

Extensive programmes of work will be needed to our properties to meet the target of having all our homes meet Energy Performance Band C by 2030 and being 'net zero carbon' by 2050.

Collecting relevant data for all housing stock will help inform what our starting position is. However, we will need to undertake a pilot "retrofit" programme to 50 homes, from which a new Carbon Reduction Strategy will be developed to help us to tackle the remainder of the Council's housing stock.

## **6. Modernising our sheltered housing accommodation**

We are committed to delivering a significant programme of investment across our sheltered housing schemes to improve their quality and attractiveness.

A review of the sheltered housing stock is already underway. The vision for that review is to provide good quality, modern accommodation that supports independent living and offers a positive lifestyle choice, supported by services that are flexible, adaptable, and tailored to meet the need of older people, wherever they choose to live. Therefore, the Council's aim over the life of this strategy, is to implement the recommendations that come from that review.

## **7. Regenerating, developing and evolving our portfolio of homes**

When developing new homes and acquiring homes through a "buy-back" programme, the Council must make sure the right standards are being achieved so these new properties meet the long-term needs of customers from the start.

For our existing homes, when considering what improvements are needed, the Council may find that a small number of homes may be too challenging or costly to make the changes needed. This is most likely to apply when the Council starts the decarbonisation programme. Where this might be the case, the Council needs consider other options beyond just continuing to invest and upgrade the existing properties. Having robust and intelligent data is essential to help make viability decisions.

## 8. Embracing technology and digital approaches

The Council needs to consider how to make our homes smarter using new technologies, not just to keep it in good repair but to keep it up to date and truly fit for purpose for modern living.

The decarbonisation programme is one way of achieving this, by using the latest renewable energy and technologies to heat and insulate our homes to make them brighter, warmer, healthier, and less susceptible to damp and mould, as well as smart controls on heating systems to help reduce bills.

Other initiatives include upgrading our emergency alarms in sheltered accommodation so we can better communicate with tenants, undertake welfare checks, order repairs, enable tenants to access their information on rent and council tax as well as other benefits such as linking to the NHS telemedicine to avoid admissions or help with discharges from hospital.

## 9. Delivering an excellent customer experience

The Council wants to deliver high levels of satisfaction by constantly seeking to improve the customer experience. We want to do this by ensuring a strong customer focus around how we go about repairing and maintaining our homes. We want to actively work with residents, engaging with them and involving them in the design and delivery of our repair services and planned programmes of work.

To ensure a resident focus in our work we will:

- Review the Ipswich Standard in partnership with involved tenants to ensure it reflects their latest views on modern standards of quality that are affordable and sustainable.
- In line with the key recommendations laid out in an independent “Better Social Housing Review” undertaken at a national level in 2022, proactively work with involved tenants and leaseholders in a review of the repairs process, with the aim of co-designing what a good Ipswich BC repairs service needs to look like, and how they want to measure and monitor our performance.
- The Council also will work in partnership with our leaseholders to give them an opportunity to help shape the services we deliver to them.

## 10. Having the right resources and governance in place to deliver our work and account for our performance

We need to have in place the right resources and arrangements to deliver all our repairs and planned maintenance work and use them to best effect. This includes having a skilled and knowledgeable staff team, external contractors, and suppliers, along with the financial capacity to deliver the range of repair and investment works.

The Council's services and performance is monitored by the Regulator for Social Housing, who expect landlords to constantly raise standards. This means the Council needs to have the right systems in place, which are tested as part of a new range of Tenant Satisfaction Measures. This means we are regularly monitoring and benchmarking performance.

When reviewing the programmes of works needed over the life of this strategy, the Council needs to put in place an affordable financial plan that supports all investment needs in its long-term business plan.