

# Landlord Strategy 2025-2030

Housing Department

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Version	Author	Date	Changes made
01	Paul Thomas	01/06/2025	2 <sup>nd</sup> Draft EMT amended – split of document into strategy and context statement.

## Foreword

I am proud to introduce this new Housing Landlord Strategy on behalf of New Forest District Council (NFDC) and its tenant. This strategy builds on our achievements of investing and improving our council homes and services for tenants and leaseholders over many years and sets out our ambitions for the future.

We identify 2018 as the start of our real ambition to build more new council homes to better meet the “affordable” housing need in the district, and to transform the housing landlord service. The financial challenge is getting the right balance between providing new homes, improving our existing homes, and enhancing our landlord service offer to tenants and leaseholders.

I believe we have been very successful in achieving our ambitions given the significant rise in service expectations since the introduction of the Social Housing Regulation Act (2023) and the new Consumer Standards. We are rising to the challenge of meeting the standards using them as a guide to improve service outcomes for our tenants and leaseholders.

We are proud that almost all our homes now meet the decent homes standard, and for the homes where this standard cannot be reached, we know the reasons why. Less than 100 properties out of our stock of 5,200 remain in this category mainly due to the non-traditional construction type of the homes. We are also alive to the prospect of a new enhanced decent homes standard which we will build into our future investment plans from early 2026.

Our overarching priority remains to increase financial investment in housing repairs, on-going maintenance, and the decarbonisation of our homes over the long term. This includes improving the energy efficiency rating of all our homes to minimum of EPC C standard by 2030. We understand that this is an ambitious target in addition to the large investments already made to make sure all our homes are decent, warm, and safe.

These priorities sit alongside our on-going plans to deliver and build better and more “affordable” homes to help meet the district’s housing needs including for our older tenants and particularly those with disabilities or vulnerabilities.

Our ambition combined with the council's tradition of strong financial management means that our Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is robust enough to fund the range of home improvements outlined over the longer term.

We have also made some excellent progress with a newly formed, and enhanced, Tenant Engagement team, delivering a new engagement strategy and involving our tenants more in council decision making structures. However, all this activity is taking place during a further period of uncertainty for our tenants and staff due to the government's recent Devolution White Paper and Local Government Reorganisation Plans (LGR), adding to the general uncertainty for our tenants, leaseholders, staff, and elected members alike.

Whilst we do not know yet what our new unitary council will look like or exact timescales, we will work pro-actively with all our neighbouring councils and the government to deliver the best possible longer-term outcomes for all our residents. Our aim is for our social housing ambitions, culture, and successful landlord operating model to be carried forward into the new unitary council.

I am pleased that this housing landlord strategy aims to keep our focus on continuing to provide secure, safe, warm, and affordable homes for our tenants, whilst delivering and building new affordable homes that will benefit our future communities, tenants, leaseholders, our economy, and environment.

Councillor Steve Davies

Portfolio Holder for Housing Services

## **Foreword by The Tenant Involvement Group (TIG)**

The TIG support the intentions of this Landlord Strategy and look forward to supporting all tenants to help deliver on the priorities and enable council action on improving our Housing Services.

We trust the Portfolio Holder and the staff at NFDC to help us make the promised housing landlord improvements happen, and hope that our co-operative way of working will continue with any new landlord under LGR when it happens.

We, as tenants, and the staff of the housing landlord service should in partnership be setting our own standards. We should set the highest standards to achieve and be raising the bar, aiming high, with a continued focus on tenant satisfaction.

We say: - “tenant voice” rightly underpins this strategy, alongside needed reflection of the regulatory landscape. Housing landlord priorities should be created in partnership with tenants and shaped by our “tenant voice” and our aspirations”

We know the staff and elected members listen to tenants, but this strategy must be more than a document that satisfies the regulator and the council’s corporate priorities – it must evolve into a plan and actions that mean something to us tenants and our communities.

We know that increasing our representation and engagement is key in this, and this strategy needs to be communicated to tenants at a level that we can all buy into, accounting for our diverse communities and tenant population.

## Introduction

The council is the largest provider of social housing within the district managing a stock of around 5,200 socially rented homes including a small but increasing number of shared-ownership properties. It has unique boundaries surrounding the New Forest National Park area. The New Forest District area including the National Park has high house price to income ratio of around 13 to 1 indicating significant disparities between the cost of housing and the financial means of many of its residents.

To help address the district's high level of housing need the council decided from 2018 to build and deliver new council homes of high quality itself, whilst enabling housing associations and private developers (through their Section 106 planning agreements) to deliver more "affordable" homes of all types in the district. This partnership approach to "affordable" housing supply has been successful with 776 new "affordable" homes built in the district since 2018.

To date, the council has directly delivered 375 new "affordable" homes and housing associations have delivered 324 homes. The remaining 77 have been delivered by the private sector via the planning system. In effect, NFDC has effectively delivered 48% of all "affordable homes" in the district since 2018 and has 174 new affordable" homes currently under construction or in contract for delivery over the next three years.

The high-cost of housing in the district has generated increased demand for shared-ownership properties to enable local working households and key workers get a foot on the property ladder. These have been delivered in the district in more recent years including some in the final stages of development in the National Park at Brockenhurst to address specific "affordable" housing needs and demand.

In short, we have a significant population who need subsidised housing in some form to live, work, and remain in the district and the council promotes "affordable housing delivery" in all forms. Providing the shared ownership housing option for local people supports our wider Place Making agenda whilst reducing pressure on the highly constrained private rented sector.

Our existing homes and those we develop ourselves are mostly provided at social rents with some newly built homes set at “affordable rent” levels. Social rents are restricted by policy and regulations to a government set rent formula for council owned homes.

“Affordable” rents are higher rents that can be set up to 80 per cent of the market rent to cover the costs of building new-high standard homes, including long-term borrowing by the council. Though these higher rents can be offset for tenants by the reduced running costs of our newly built warm and energy efficient homes.

At the same time, we consistently have over 2,000 households on our housing register, which demonstrates our urgent and on-going need for more “affordable” housing of all types in the district. Whilst our housing register looks static at around 2,000 households, the number does not take account of the circa 400 council homes our teams re-let each year across both our general needs and temporary accommodation properties.

This turnover demonstrates both a high turn-over in our housing stock and our business efficiency in managing our empty properties through our voids (empty homes) process and the high levels of performance by our repairs and maintenance teams.

Our social landlord responsibilities also include addressing the significant carbon emissions arising from social housing use and we have commissioned substantial capital programmes of works to meet our net-zero targets. These include retrofitting new products such as fabric insulation, triple-glazing, air source heat pumps, and solar panels to our existing homes.

Our aim is to bring all our homes up to a minimum standard (EPC C) that addresses both the energy efficiency targets and to help tenants with their energy bills and wider cost of living pressures. This approach is supported by our **Greener Housing Strategy 2022-2032** which runs over a longer period than our other strategies and is linked to our 30 Year HRA Business Plan investment priorities.

The training of our maintenance staff in the fitting and servicing of new technologies to ‘future-proof’ our housing stock and service delivery is also accounted for in our strategic long term investment plans.

We are also very aware the council's landlord function has significant responsibilities to ensure that our homes, estates, and surrounding areas including public open spaces are safe, well maintained, and contribute to better health and environmental outcomes including making biodiversity gains wherever possible.

Whilst we are rightly focussed on the safety and 'bricks and mortar' aspects of our service delivery, we intend to increasingly put our tenants at "the heart" of service delivery accepting that may mean a shift in approach and investment priorities for what matters most to them rather than the business in how we deliver our landlord services.

Overall, we are confident we can deliver on our tenant promises as our staff are mostly caring and committed to give the best service they can to our tenants, leaseholders, and customers giving us a positive and responsive service culture in our landlord service.

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## Scope of Landlord Strategy

The scope of this strategy is wide ranging and brings together and informs several housing related strategies and policies that focus on delivering services that meet tenants' needs and aspirations. It draws on our achievements to date and sets out the future aims of the service. The strategy aims to direct medium-term investment to provide secure, safe, warm, and affordable homes for our tenants, whilst delivering and building the new "affordable" homes that will benefit our communities, tenants, leaseholders, the economy, and our environment.

It also describes our approach to health and safety, governance, decarbonising our homes, and amplifying the "tenants voice" in our ambitions and promises for future action. This strategy is both a context statement and single reference document for our service promise and improvement journey as a social landlord.

The strategy also outlines how we plan to deliver best outcomes for our tenants and leaseholders at a time of fundamental political and structural change within local government and the increased demands of legislation and regulation of our landlord service throughout the lifetime of this strategy. It also provides an analysis of the external drivers and risks that the social housing sector is currently facing. This includes the potential local impacts that will influence its delivery now and in the future.

The strategy will be structured around four strategic priorities, underscoring the Council's commitment to:

- **Quality Homes and Neighbourhoods:** Focusing on delivering well-maintained, safe, affordable homes and neighbourhoods that support resident health and wellbeing.
- **Tenant Voice and Opportunity:** Centring decisions and actions around tenant perspectives and involvement in every aspect of service provision
- **Accountability and Transparency:** Striving for good governance, financial resilience, operational efficiency, responsible investment, and social purpose.
- **Culture and Operational Excellence:** Placing emphasis on delivering services that meet tenant needs and aspirations, prioritising safety, and compliance.

An updated [Tenancy Policy](#) will capture this change of approach and sits alongside this strategy as a companion document. The Tenancy Policy sets out the council's legal and operational approach to applications and tenancy related matters and is probably of more immediate interest to applicants, tenants, and leaseholders.

The Tenancy Policy offers detailed guidance regarding: -

- Obtaining a Council home and referencing our allocations policies
- Our approach to tenure including issuing Secure Tenancies, Licenses and Occupation Agreements etc.
- Reviews and appeals of landlord tenancy decisions.
- Tenancy Sustainment Support
- Advice and information
- Processes for Ending Tenancies including Succession.
- Repairs and Adaptations to properties referencing DFG policies
- Careline services
- Right to Buy (RTB) and home ownership opportunities
- Tenancy Fraud
- Performance Monitoring
- Review of policies

This is not an exhaustive list, and the detail of such policy matters is being updated in a revised Tenancy Policy at the time of writing.

The Council does also have wider housing duties including meeting the needs of homeless households and maintaining a housing register. These functions and activities are contained within NFDC's wider housing strategies and policies and are outside the scope of this strategy, though again there are cross-over and links that this strategy refers to accordingly as our landlord functions are set in the context of the wider Housing Department's overall objectives and accountabilities as a council stock owning landlord and provider of general housing services including homelessness provisions.

In presenting this strategy, we have analysed the defining issues shaping our current operating environment and the structural changes that LGR will bring, alongside social housing regulation. We also acknowledge the increased influence the Housing Ombudsman service has on improving service outcomes for tenants as we go forward on our journey of learning and continuous improvement.

## National Context

It is well documented that the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023 (The Act) was introduced by government following high profile failures in the social housing sector, namely the Grenfell Tower Fire in June 2017. This led to fundamental changes in housing regulation to improve the condition of social housing and increase tenant safety.

The Act also places greater emphasis on the rights of tenants, and for their voices to be heard. The absence of which was seen as a major failing in the build-up to Grenfell and in other previous cases of fire, deaths, and serious incidents in social housing.

## Increased Expectations of Social Housing Regulation

The service expectations placed upon the council as a Registered Provider of Housing and social landlord have also changed significantly since the introduction of the Act in 2023, which brought about inspection of council landlords for the first time in over 20 yrs.

The Consumer Standards form the basis of the RSH's new Inspection regime, which commenced in April 2024 on a four-year rolling cycle of inspections. The RSH has not published an inspection timetable as it works primarily on a risk-based approach with landlords known to be failing, those who have self-referred, and others that have had reports of serious failings in handling complaints from tenants and leaseholders published by the Housing Ombudsman Service.

The RSH also has the stated intention to balance out the inspection timetable more pro-actively with other landlords who are not seen as requiring immediate intervention. Whilst NFDC has not been inspected to date, an inspection could happen any time before April 2028 at six weeks-notice.

Whilst housing associations have been regulated for many years by the RSH in its various forms. It is acknowledged that after the first year of published inspection results that most councils inspected, including our prospective LGR partner councils, have some way to go in achieving compliant consumer gradings compared to our housing association partners.

The RSH's stated aim is to drive long term improvements in the social housing sector, and judgements are made on the landlords' abilities to demonstrate compliance with the four consumer standards:

- **Safety & Quality**
- **Neighbourhood & Community standard**
- **Tenancy (plus Rent Standard)**
- **Transparency, Influence & Accountability**

There is a fifth standard of **Competence and Conduct** that relates to the qualifications and behaviours of senior staff. This standard has not fully been entered in to statute to date, however we are not waiting for this as we believe in having the best trained staff we can secure, so we have entered a contract with the Chartered Institute of Housing to ensure that all our senior staff are qualified to CIH Levels 4 and 5 as per the required standards for each level of seniority, which will trickle down to relevant front-facing staff over the lifetime of this strategy.

## **Additional Legislation and Policy Changes**

### **Fire Safety Act 2021**

This Act is very significant for housing services as it clarifies that the landlord's fire safety duty extends to the building's structure, external walls (including cladding, balconies, and flat entrance doors) and particularly relates to multi-occupied residential building such as our extra-care schemes.

### **Building Safety Act 2022**

This Act was also enacted in response to the Grenfell Tower fire with key reforms including a new building safety regulator and a focus on construction product safety. Landlords now have a responsibility to advise and report on compliance particularly on their high-rise and/or high-risk buildings.

At present there are no buildings in our council stock that are 18 metres (7 storey) or 11 metres (5 Storey) or above which are classified as high-risk.

### **People at the Heart of Care white paper 2021 and the Health and Social Care Act 2022**

Both set out the Government proposals for health and reform of Adult Social Care, highlighting prevention and positioned digital connectivity as vital to better care. The government's key policy priority remains to support people to remain at home, rather than in care homes or hospital settings, for as long as possible and enhance partnership working across the health and social care economy.

Overall, there is broad agreement across housing, health, and social care providers that holistic people agendas that keep people well and able to live at home for as long as possible only happen with the support of the social housing sector.

### **Our Future Homes: Housing that promotes wellbeing and community for an ageing population (2024)**

The government's vision for spreading opportunity more equally across the UK, announcing the conclusions of an Older People's Housing Taskforce to better understand the housing market for our ageing population. T

The importance of housing was set out in the publication which promotes four key messages which have resonance with all social landlords:

- Think Housing
- Address ageing
- Promote wellbeing
- Create inclusive communities

These messages flow through NFDC as most of our residents and tenants are older people with increasing care needs, highlighting the priority of focussing on health and wellbeing alongside the built environment and adapted housing for the future.

### **Domestic Abuse Act 2021**

Transforming the response to domestic abuse, helping to prevent offending, protect victims and ensure they have the support they need including housing solutions.

The Council has recently produced a **Domestic Abuse Strategy** as part of its overall approach to tackling Domestic Abuse, and a specific **Policy** outlining our approach to supporting tenants suffering domestic violence.

In summary, our landlord services are now subject to increased oversight and scrutiny from the Regulator of Social Housing, the Housing Ombudsman, and the Local Government Ombudsman. All which have been given powers to issue unlimited fines and intervene in the business of social landlords where serious failures of compliance or service are identified.

### **Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code 2024**

This Code sets out good practice that will allow landlords to respond to complaints raised by their residents quickly and to use the data and learn from complaints to drive service improvements. NFDC has adopted this code in setting-up both its corporate and landlord complaints procedure and processes, including adopting the recommended governance structure.

Therefore, overall responsibility and scrutiny for complaints handling and outcomes is held at Portfolio Holder level by two Members Responsible for Complaints (MRCs) for both the Housing Ombudsman (HO), and the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSO) for all customers who are not tenants including applicants, those on the housing register, or receiving homeless support etc.

The Housing Portfolio Holder (PH) is also Deputy Leader of the Council and outcomes and learning from housing complaints are regularly reported at monthly PH Briefings, our Housing Panel and Cabinet.

We promote a positive complaint handling culture amongst our staff and tenants. The housing service is committed to working with complainants to resolve their issues and recognise where we got things wrong, plus responding to complaints on time which is a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for us.

### **Social Housing Decent Homes Standard Review 2024**

A review of the standards for condition of social homes – national consultation is underway which is widely expected to result in higher standards to be introduced as a new 'Decent Homes' Standard.

We expect this will include:

- Changes to what repairs are needed for a home to be considered 'decent'
- An updated list of what facilities all homes need to have
- Updates to how the condition of a property is assessed and measured
- A new minimum energy efficiency standard for social housing
- Changes to the way landlords need to assess potential hazards in homes

### **Proposed Future Homes Standard 2025**

Once implemented changes to Building Regulations will ensure that newly built homes result in significantly less carbon emissions compared with recent construction standards. NFDC is already building new homes to the anticipated standard which will result in more affordable heating costs as well as about reducing the carbon-emissions in the construction and long-term running cost by up to 80% of traditionally built homes. The consultation on the exact standards has not concluded at the time of writing but expected to do so by the end of 2025.

Whilst there is increasing legislation, regulation and prescribed practices already in place or developing, it should be recognised that the council still has some freedoms in determining how it prioritises and delivers its landlord services within the constitution of the council, having democratically elected members, and the aspirations of our tenants taking account of our financial resources and financial rules of managing the HRA.

## Local Context

We are currently measuring ourselves against all the consumer standards and making any identified improvements and tenant outcomes prior to inspection by the RSH. Striving for excellence in our service offer to our tenants is a key objective for us.

### HRA Investment Summary

For the 2025 -26 financial year our proposed budget includes a total of £22.11m to be spent on maintaining tenants' properties including fire safety, statutory compliance, and our accelerated decarbonisation programme, respectively.

During the preceding three financial year period 2022 -25 we invested £52.13m on maintaining tenants' properties including £6.2m on identified fire safety improvements, £2.7m on major refurbishment to bring empty properties suffering structural disrepair back into use, £21.07m on capital planned maintenance programmes, £3.16m on decarbonisation and £18.98m on statutory compliance and general repairs and maintenance.

The scale of this investment shows our commitment to make sure our homes are well-maintained, energy efficient, and affordable and will make a real difference to our tenants, not just by improving their homes but also helping with energy costs and ensuring they feel secure where they live.

NFDC has a proven track record in prudently and effectively using the HRA to fund our landlord priorities, activities, and meeting the district's housing need, whilst listening to and supporting the interests of our tenants and leaseholders across the range of council services that impact their lives more broadly.

## Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

The council recognises that it needs new IT systems to help provide better service outcomes for all our residents, tenants, and leaseholders. Our existing CRM system and repairs system portfolio need urgent replacement to allow our tenants and leaseholders to digitally self-serve across a range of council services if they chose to do so.

These new IT systems are being implemented under our Transformation Strategy.



## Achievements to date

All Registered Providers of landlord services like NFDC face the on-going challenges of ensuring they get the basics right whilst contributing to the wellbeing of their tenants and communities.

The Council has made significant strides forward over the last few years and has taken further proactive steps to prepare for the new regulatory regime. It has approved a Corporate Plan 2024 to 2028 with People Priorities that have been informed by housing need and has specific expected outcomes for council homes and tenants 'baked in' and has a clear commitment to continuous improvement and enhancing partnership working.

As part of their evidence base, landlords have also been required to submit Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) to the regulator annually. These provide a focus for identifying gaps in compliance and/or underperformance which should help inform our action plan.

NFDC is scored in the upper quartile (top 25% of all landlords and top 10% of local authority landlords) with tenants rating our services highly. Our current satisfaction score is 84% as reported to the RSH in June 2025.

## Our Vision for Council-Owned Housing

Our vision for council-owned social housing is laid-out in various sections of our **Corporate Plan 2024–2028**, though fundamentally;

*"We believe that no-one should live in a poor quality or damp home or be disadvantaged by poor quality neighbourhoods with unmaintained homes or have to live with anti-social behaviour on their estates or their streets"*

This Landlord Strategy establishes our vision for Council-owned social housing within the district and acknowledges the contribution that it will make towards the ambitions of our Corporate Plan 2024-2028 and our other linked strategies and policies.

The **Corporate Plan 2024–2028** has two significant People priorities that relate directly to the Landlord service: -

- Priority 1: Helping those in our community with the greatest need.

- Priority 3: Meeting housing needs.

It further states as one of its aims is to:

*“Work with our housing tenants to understand their needs and provide high quality service standards in line with the government's new Social Housing Charter and regulatory regime.”*

This statement effectively commits the whole council, not just the housing department, to deliver our landlord priorities and comply with all regulatory standards in partnership with our tenants and listen to the tenant voice in how we provide increasingly better landlord services for all our tenants and leaseholders throughout the lifetime of this strategy.

The Council has made substantial progress on several of its Corporate Plan priorities, including the housing ones through ensuring that our homes are safe, secure, and are at least maintained to the current decent home standard. For example, whilst ninety-eight per cent of our homes already meet the current decent homes standard, we are not complacent and continue to make long-term investment plans to further modernise and future-proof all our council homes.

We believe our estates and areas are generally secure, well maintained, healthy and safe for our tenants and leaseholders assisted by excellent in-house CCTV coverage of the district and a community safety service based at our headquarters in Lyndhurst.

At the same time, the aim of our Transformation Strategy is to modernise and innovative services by proactively using data and insight to inform our decision-making and report performance through a robust performance management framework and culture. The Transformation piece advocates maximising the use of new technology, automating manual processes and keep our software up to date with new technology releases, and should put us in a good position for LGR and the future transfer of our housing functions to a new council.

The Housing Department is in the process of commissioning a new repairs and maintenance IT system to better interface with our bespoke designed housing management system and replace three other obsolete or outdated IT asset data bases, which will then support a wider Asset Management Database for the council, including for our estates team.

Overall, we are preparing well to meet the regulator's new consumer standards through self-assessment, restructuring our teams to improve capacity where needed, and by introducing an enhanced performance management framework linked to both our Corporate Plan and Housing KPIs.

The aim is to improve and monitor our landlord service offer to tenants and leaseholders, especially around better meeting the needs of our older and vulnerable tenants.

### **Customer Strategy 2024-2028**

The aim of this strategy is to raise the profile of the customer throughout the organisation and ensure that our plans, decisions, actions, and culture, are customer focused' which again points to our need and ambition to modernise our communication channels for all tenants and leaseholders, but particularly those with additional vulnerabilities and support needs.

This is where a new corporate CRM system will allow our applicants, tenants, and leaseholders to self-serve in important services to them including reporting repairs, rent accounts, and general enquiries for adaptations, estate management, grounds maintenance, and all other housing enquiries rather than emailing or calling our housing hub contact centre as they must do currently. Thus, allowing our call-centre staff to spend more time with more complex case-handling needs and requests for services.

In short, the provision of a self-serve system is seen as essential to allowing our tenants, leaseholders, and residents to choose how they engage with us to receive services either through a digital platform, by telephone, or by face-to-face meetings.

The council aims to go beyond the minimum statutory and regulatory requirements placed on all local authority landlords, where the tenant's voice is heard and acted upon.

### **Tenant Engagement**

Our **Tenant Engagement Strategy (2024-2028)** best captures our overall vision for providing homes and landlord services to our tenants and has four strategic priorities: -

Strategy priority 1 - Listening to our tenants.

Strategy priority 2 – Putting tenants first.

Strategy priority 3 – Knowing our tenants and supporting engagement.

Strategy priority 4 – How we communicate with tenants.

## **Our Tenants**

We recognise that knowing our tenants and leaseholders is a critical part of delivering our housing landlord services. A Housing Performance and Tenant Engagement Team has been established to ensure the Strategy is delivered measured by Tenant Satisfaction Measures.

NFDC has done some innovative and creative work in this space already such as creating a Mental Health Practitioner role to work with vulnerable residents and employing a qualified mental health nurse in partnership with the NHS to support our tenants and staff to prevent hospital admissions and promote wellbeing.

However, we also recognise that we need to know more to truly tailor our services to meet our tenants needs and, where appropriate, provide a personalised service to those with specific complex needs (such as long term physical or mental health condition).

## **Tenant Profile**

Our current tenant profile tells us that 67% of our tenants are aged 50 or over, whilst 45% of our tenants are aged 60 plus, with the majority living in our four most densely populated areas of the district: New Milton; Totton; Hythe; Pennington & Lymington.

Our joint tenancies have an even mix of male and female tenants and 71% of our sole tenancies are held by female tenants. We are doing more to identify and recognise the protected characteristics of our tenants and residents and recently have published a **Reasonable adjustments policy**. This approach linked to the 'new tools' provided by our planned replacement IT system with enhanced staff training should help us improve the personalisation of our services wherever possible.

We know that we need to do more to know our tenants, their needs, and the needs of their household. To this end, NFDC are currently undertaking a commissioned tenant data survey asking all tenants to help us understand how we can shape our services to better meet their needs. This will be complemented with on-going efforts to improve our data integrity and collection by all our housing resident service teams.

### **Supporting our Tenants**

We have created a new Tenancy Sustainment Team and a separate ASB and Neighbourhood Team to continue to provide support for our tenant population, and we are proud to work in partnership with tenants and their communities to ensure the needs of our tenants are met.

We also provide a Careline service (lifeline pendant service) for which uses a two-way speech system linked to our team in the emergency control room based in Lyndhurst, where trained staff answer calls quickly, professionally and efficiently, to ensure that any help needed by our older and more tenants and residents is provided.

The Council currently supports five community hubs, geographically dispersed around our district, providing advice and support for our communities, including access to Housing Services, Citizens Advice Bureaux, alongside FoodShare larders and fund other community projects with Town and Parish Councils and the voluntary sector.

We continue to involve and consult tenants on housing services that mean a lot to them, and we provide a wide and accessible range of methods for tenants to be involved, through digital, face to face and personal contact at times and methods convenient to our tenants.

We recognise the need to strengthen our governance arrangements between our tenants and elected members on an on-going basis developing broader representation opportunities to attract better representation and numbers of engaged tenants even if this is based on time-limited topics and issues to be discussed on a digital platform in the future.

## **Corporate Priorities**

The overall strategic vision for the Council in the Corporate Plan 2024-28 is delivered by a caring and ambitious partnership of departments working together:

“To secure a better future by supporting opportunities for the people and communities we serve, protecting our unique and special place, and securing a vibrant and prosperous New Forest.”

To deliver this vision we have 3 key priorities.

- Helping people in the greatest need and creating balanced, resilient, and healthy communities who feel safe and supported with easy access to services
- Delivering growth, opportunity and services that shape our place now and for future generations, within a unique environmental context, to ensure we remain a special place to live, work and visit.
- Promoting a strong local economy that delivers its inclusive aspirations through effective partnerships, attracting investment, and increasing skills and employment opportunities.

There are a range of other strategic related housing objectives included in the Corporate Plan including ambitious targets for affordable housing delivery including developing new council homes. However, as the regulatory focus is on existing council homes and tenants, there remains is an identified need to accelerate the replacement of our customer service platform to realise the opportunities of enhanced customer interaction.

It is well recognised that this currently limits our ambition to improve customer interactions and business efficiencies in many areas of the council, and not just in landlord services. We know our tenants and leaseholders will be receiving several other council services at the same time including council tax, benefits, bin collections, and often a wider range of council services in many cases.

How we inform, engage, and interact with our residents is fundamental to how we design and deliver services that are responsive to their needs. We are committed to building a positive culture built around transparency, influence and accountability that puts resident engagement at the heart of the organisation.

## **Housing Landlord Priorities**

The landlord priorities highlighted in this strategy are further summarised below into seven key themes:

### **1. Regulation, compliance, and standards**

- Standards: Ensuring we meet all necessary standards and tenants have a home which is safe, warm, and dry.

## **2. Tenant Experience**

- Tenant voice. Extending open communication, complaint handling, and tenant involvement.

## **3. Culture and Performance**

- Transparent performance monitoring and reporting. Positive organisational culture that drives high performance and continuous improvement.

## **4. Scrutiny Governance and Controls**

- Accountability and Governance. Transparent decision-making and responsible leadership through robust governance structures.

## **5. Strategy and development**

- Improve the quality and safety of council housing. Long-term growth and innovation through strategic planning and purposeful development.

## **6. Carbon reduction**

- Sustainability. Reducing carbon emissions and improving energy efficiency.

## **7. Share learning and best practice**

- Promoting continuous improvement. Share knowledge, insights, and proven approaches across teams.

# **Monitoring and governance**

## **Monitoring**

The measurement of success for all aspects of this strategy will be open to scrutiny. This will take place by different stakeholders.

- Tenants – Tenant Involvement Group (TIG), Tenant Approved Panel, online surveys, and community days.
- Monthly Portfolio Holder Briefings.
- Quarterly Housing & Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panels.
- Cabinet and Council meetings as matters arise.

Oversight of the delivery of the Strategy will sit with the Portfolio Holder for Housing. This ensures our landlord services performance is reported and scrutinised at all governance levels through Portfolio Holder Briefings, Executive Management Team, the Housing & Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel, Cabinet, Full Council, and the RSH through periodic submission of the TSMs as required. An annual report is published each year to tenants with open and honest reporting of performance results.

We can therefore be assured that the percentage score for overall tenant satisfaction with the Council as a landlord determined in the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) is a key performance measure as stated and endorsed in the corporate plan.

The Strategic Director is the designated lead for Health and Safety under the Social Housing Regulation Act (2023) and monitors safety compliance for tenants and staff via a robust reporting regime whereby compliance and performance is monitored and addressed at or by:

- Regulator of Social Housing and Regulatory Standards – TSMs Annually
- Corporate Complaints and Housing Ombudsman outcomes – 6 months and Annually
- Housing Landlord Compliance report to EMT, Panel and Cabinet every 6 months
- Housing Statutory Compliance Board – every quarter
- Housing Consumer Standard Board – every month
- Building Safety Regulation – Annual Audits
- Housing Health & Safety Panel – every quarter
- Sector benchmarking - TSMs
- Annual Review of strategy - Annually
- Management meetings and one to ones – regularly

The Strategy will be revised to reflect any financial and operational impacts arising from any material changes to the assumptions made at the time of drafting this Strategy including government policy changes.



## Strategic Action Plan

The actions that will deliver our housing landlord priorities are detailed in our strategic action plan at Appendix 1.

# Appendix 1 - Action Plan

## Theme: Regulation, compliance, and standards

**Standards:** Ensuring we meet all necessary standards and tenants have a home which is safe, warm, and dry.

Priority	Action	Risk mitigated	Owner	Timescale
Achieve a compliant grading of C2 (min) from the Regulator of Social Housing	<b>Conduct a comprehensive gap analysis</b> to assess compliance with the Regulator of Social Housing's (RSH) Consumer Standards. <b>Progress:</b> Consumer Standards Board meets monthly to govern our compliance journey. Gap analysis conducted with the Housing Management Team.	Non-compliance	AD - Housing	June 2025-2028
	<b>Develop and implement detailed action plans</b> for each service area, addressing identified gaps and ensuring timely delivery of required improvements. <b>Progress:</b> Action plan developed to address identified gaps and includes action owners and priorities. Dashboard created to present summaries of assigned corrective action.	Lack of priority focus	AD- Housing	September 2025
	<b>Create evidence bank</b> to serve as a robust evidence base for regulatory review and ongoing compliance monitoring. <b>Progress:</b> Our evidence bank has been established and is actively being populated, with identified gaps addressed and necessary actions	Lack of evidence base and data sets for accurate grading by RSH.	PM - Housing	September 2025

Priority	Action	Risk mitigated	Owner	Timescale
	being completed to prepare a comprehensive submission for upcoming inspections.			
Produce a Landlord Strategy to give NFDC context and clarify priorities for the Housing Landlord Service	<b>Develop a Landlord Strategy</b> that outlines NFDC's vision for council-owned housing across the district for the Housing Landlord Service. <b>Progress:</b> First draft due to EMT 27 May 2025.	Services are disjointed and do not form a cohesive voice.	AD- Housing	May 2025
Established a corporate landlord asset-data inclusive of all our HRA and community-owned assets including office buildings, community centres, public open-spaces, toilets, and other amenities.	<b>Conduct a full audit of all HRA and community-owned assets</b> and integrate the data into a central data store. This will enable us to better manage and maintain HRA assets. <b>Progress:</b> Current arrangements are in place and effective although these form part of our new asset and maintenance system which will centralise our assets and introduce efficiencies.	No clear view of our assets which results in unclear strategic management and compliance across our portfolio.	SD - Housing	September 2025
Ensure we meet our obligations as laid out in legislation.	<b>Compliance to legislative commitments</b> as laid out in the Landlord Strategy. <b>Progress:</b> Corresponding action plans in place with the service designed to deliver.	We fail to meet statutory obligations.	SD – Housing	Ongoing
Updated data across 100% of	<b>Complete a rolling programme of stock condition surveys</b> that will ensure all data is	We have stock where the condition status is	AD – Housing	Ongoing

Priority	Action	Risk mitigated	Owner	Timescale
our housing stock which can continue to drive investment in our homes past the LGR April 2027 deadline and into any new Local Authority arrangements past that date.	validated and aligned with future investment planning beyond April 2027. <b>Progress:</b> We are making good progress in achieving 100% stock condition surveys across our estate. Opportunities such as voids are taken to undergo stock condition surveys as part of our rolling programme of work where surveys have not been completed for some time.	unknown and causes issues in managing and directing investment works.		

## Theme: Culture and performance

**Transparent performance monitoring and reporting.** Positive organisational culture that drives high performance and continuous improvement.

Priority	Action	Risk mitigated	Owner	Timescale
Staff have a clear understanding of their roles, how they contribute to the organisation, and how their work supports the delivery of our vision.	<b>Strengthen staff understanding of their role</b> in delivering organisational priorities by clearly linking the Corporate Plan to individual objectives. This will be achieved through regular development conversations and a refreshed approach to performance reviews and one-to-ones, aligned with the rollout of the new People Strategy. <b>Progress:</b> A service re-organisation has resulted in clarity of roles, supported by the Management Team.	Staff feel disjointed from the wider service and organisation. Silo-working which results in inconsistent performance and tenant experience.	Transformation SD – Housing	October 2025

Priority	Action	Risk mitigated	Owner	Timescale
	Staff have been actively engaged in shaping the Corporate Plan objectives, with follow-up dissemination activities ensuring these objectives are clearly understood across the organisation			
Tenant experience and perceptions continue to be prioritised, ensuring we deliver the highest possible standards.	<p><b>A focus on knowledge, skills, and behaviours</b>, leveraged by the new Consumer standards to strengthen our commitment to excellence.</p> <p><b>Progress:</b> The service has been actively involved in developing the new People Strategy. This includes the standards set out in the Competency and Conduct element of the Consumer Standards.</p>	Inconsistent practice resulting in tenants receiving differing levels of service.	Transformation SD – Housing	October 2025
Services are on a journey of continuous improvement, using data and insight to quickly learn and make refinements to practice.	<p><b>Service dashboards</b> provide a clear overview of current performance levels and identify areas requiring improvement. These dashboards are subject to regular scrutiny by the Management Team and service delivery teams to drive continuous improvement.</p> <p><b>Progress:</b> Dashboards are in place across many service areas and are integral to our routine service reviews. As services evolve, these dashboards will be enhanced with improved visualisations to better support analysis and decision-making.</p>	A lack of clarity around performance status and required improvements hinders effective progress	AD – Housing	Ongoing
Ensure there are links and transparency between service metrics and the Corporate Plan.	<p><b>Regular Performance monitoring</b> at a service and corporate level.</p> <p><b>Progress:</b> Housing service metrics are contained within the Corporate Plan set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).</p>	There is no visibility of Housing Performance at a corporate level. Housing is siloed from the wider organisation.	SD – Housing	Ongoing

Priority	Action	Risk mitigated	Owner	Timescale
	The KPIs are a standing agenda item at Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel.			

## Theme: Tenant experience

**Tenant voice.** Extending open communication, complaint handling, and tenant involvement.

Priority	Action	Risk mitigated	Owner	Timescale
Co-Produce a new Tenancy Policy to capture the relevant changes in our housing policies and procedure with tenants	<p><b>Work jointly with Tenants through the Tenant Involvement Group.</b> Complete a review of the existing policy, gather feedback through workshops and surveys, and draft a revised policy reflecting changes to housing practices and tenant/joint priorities.</p> <p><b>Progress:</b> The tenant involvement group has been in place for some time with changes planned to make this as inclusive as possible. The group will be given opportunities to help us shape the new Tenant Policy, so it reflects a jointly agreed, co-produced set of priorities.</p>	The tenancy policy lacks alignment with tenant perspectives and fails to address key concerns raised by them. Services are not built around the tenant.	SM - Housing	August 25
Establish a multi-channel engagement structure including digital and social media.	<p><b>Establish a multi-channel Communications Strategy</b> that includes a tenant portal, regular email newsletters, interactive social media campaigns, and virtual Q&amp;A sessions to increase accessibility and engagement.</p> <p><b>Progress:</b> We have good tenant sign-up to our Go Vocal online platform. This is used for digital participation. Service developments are raised via</p>	Low levels of tenant involvement limit our ability to capture a broad range of perspectives and insights.	Transformation AD – Housing	Ongoing

Priority	Action	Risk mitigated	Owner	Timescale
	Go Vocal to enable tenants to contribute and provide direction and feedback. We are working closely with our Transformation team to define and submit the requirements for a tenant portal that will enhance digital engagement and service accessibility.			
Increase tenant involvement in their topics of interest offering more opportunities to take part in scrutinising and improving our service.	<b>Tenant-led thematic exploration of the service</b> to encourage greater participation, honest learning, and service improvements. <b>Progress:</b> Regular participation to consider future developments is encouraged via our Go Vocal online platform and tenant involvement group. The tenant involvement group is offered genuine opportunities to raise concerns to be explored on the forward plan agenda.	Tenants can only comment on issues raised by NFDC and not take account of the issues they feel are important.	SM - Housing	Ongoing
Develop positive relationships with most of our tenants and leaseholders enabling us to better know our tenants and to plan services more effectively to meet their needs.	<b>Widen scope of Tenant Involvement</b> , harnessing the power of our existing networks and online tools to enable engagement that places services around our tenants. <b>Progress:</b> We are exploring engagement platforms to ensure tenants can work with us in a way that suits them. A member of the tenant involvement group now meets with our Portfolio Holder and attends the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel to represent the voice of tenants.	Tenant involvement does not effect change.	SM - Housing	Ongoing

Priority	Action	Risk mitigated	Owner	Timescale
Ensure better representation of the diversity of our tenants and scrutiny of our housing landlord activities through offering broader engagement opportunities and an enhanced visits approach.	<p><b>Expand the tenant engagement strategy</b> to include access channels for underrepresented groups. Explore options to offer translation and accessibility support. Conduct regular estate visits and listening sessions. <b>Progress:</b> Regular estate visits are made by our tenant engagement officer.</p>	Tenant involvement is not reflective of the tenants we serve	SM - Housing	Ongoing
Make performance data easy to access so that more tenants and leaseholders can take part in scrutinising and improving our services.	<p><b>Publish a public-facing dashboard on the housing website</b> that displays key performance indicators (KPIs), service standards, and tenant satisfaction measures. <b>Progress:</b> We have a dedicated tenant engagement page that invites tenants to get involved and includes minutes of tenant involvement group meetings. Annual Tenant Satisfaction Survey results are published. <a href="#">Tenant engagement and participation - New Forest District Council</a></p>	Tenants are not given clear indication of our performance. There is limited accountability to our tenants.	SM - Housing	Ongoing
Learning from complaints to ensure the	<b>Complaints lessons learned</b> so that we can implement the necessary service improvements highlighted through complaints.	We do not take effective actions arising from complaints.	SD – Housing	Ongoing



Priority	Action	Risk mitigated	Owner	Timescale
service can grow and that we do not repeat mistakes	<b>Progress:</b> all complaints are reviewed and associated actions are added to a lessons learned log.			

### Theme: Scrutiny, governance, and controls

**Accountability and Governance.** Transparent decision-making and responsible leadership through robust governance structures.

Priority	Action	Risk mitigated	Owner	Timescale
Design and deliver a robust member and senior officer development programme	<b>Form a development programme for elected members and senior officers</b> , including tailored training modules, leadership workshops, and mentoring opportunities. <b>Progress:</b> Approach to training as identified will be implemented.	Elected members and senior officers are not suitably positioned to hold services to account.	Democratic Services SD – Housing	Ongoing
	<b>Dedicated Executive Management Team (EMT) and Cabinet development sessions</b> building on existing coaching and training. <b>Progress:</b> Approach to training as identified will be implemented.	EMT and Cabinet have learning needs that are not addressed.	Kate Ryan	Ongoing
Consider ways to strengthen your Overview and Scrutiny function	<b>Review the Overview and Scrutiny function</b> , engaging members and working with Democratic services. <b>Progress:</b> Approach to training as identified will be implemented.	Scrutiny function lacks the power to effect change.	Democratic Services SD – Housing	January 2025
	<b>Identify strengths and gaps.</b> Use the findings to design and implement improvements. <b>Progress:</b> Underway	Scrutiny function lacks the power to effect change.	Service	March 2025

Priority	Action	Risk mitigated	Owner	Timescale
	<b>Specific topic briefings</b> to be held i.e. Housing Regulation, to develop member knowledge and support scrutiny role <b>Progress:</b> Delivered	Scrutiny function lacks the power to effect change.	AD – Housing	Ongoing
Governance structure supports reporting and discussion at directorate level with escalation to Transformation Board	<b>Governance, terms of reference and culture</b> at every level engenders a culture of open and honest exchange. This will support reporting, facilitate discussion, and allow issues to be addressed. <b>Progress:</b>	Lack of honest discussion inhibits a free and open exchange.	AD – Housing	March 2025

### Theme: Strategy and development

**Improve the quality and safety of council housing.** Long-term growth and innovation through strategic planning and purposeful development.

Priority	Action	Risk mitigated	Owner	Timescale
Deliver six hundred new social and affordable homes through the HRA and the council's development	<b>Programme of work to extend our stock</b> of social and affordable housing. <b>Progress:</b> Underway and reported back regularly.	Our housing stock cannot meet increasing demand.	SM - Housing	March 2026

Priority	Action	Risk mitigated	Owner	Timescale
and acquisitions programme.				
Revise business case considering LGR and ensure new focus is well communicated and anchored in governance reporting.	<b>Undertake preparedness activities for Local Government Reorganisation</b> to ensure the organisation is fully equipped to respond effectively to any resulting changes. <b>Progress:</b> A clear action plan is in place.	We are ill-prepared for necessary changes and cannot present a strong case for the district.	SD – Housing	June 2025
Consider and implement opportunities to improve EMT visible leadership of change initiatives	<b>Identify opportunities</b> to enhance visibility for EMT to lead change initiatives. Evaluate areas for increasing EMT presence and awareness of change initiatives so they can direct programmes of work <b>Progress:</b> A Transformation and Change Board is established for organisational transformation work. Service improvements will be integrated into the established Housing governance cycle for structured planning and oversight.	Our EMT is not able to effectively drive change	Transformation AD – Housing	September 2025

## Theme: Carbon reduction

**Sustainability.** Reducing carbon emissions and improving energy efficiency.

Priority	Action	Risk mitigated	Owner	Timescale
Demonstrate further commitment to	<b>Decarbonise the council's housing stock</b> and housing of all tenures in line with the Greener Housing Strategy.	Council housing stock does not meet the EPC	SM – Housing	May 2025

Priority	Action	Risk mitigated	Owner	Timescale
carbon reduction with a clear action plan	<p><b>Progress:</b> Secured Grant funding of £1492,595.56m to support overall annual budget of circa £2m for the next 3 years. Procurement tender will be launched to secure a long-term contractor partner to deliver work by Qtr. 2 25/26. 202 homes will be upgraded to EPC level 'C' in 2025/2026</p>	'C' or higher standard by 2030		
Form a better understanding of the scale and costs to decarbonise our homes after agreement with our tenants on how we prioritise our investment plans after this current round of accelerated investment up until April 2028.	<p><b>Ensure low carbon development</b> through alignment with the Planning for Climate Change SPD and wider Local Plan Review.</p> <p><b>Progress:</b> Underway.</p>	We are ill-prepared to meet our carbon reduction obligations	SM – Housing	Ongoing

## Theme: Share learning and best practice

**Promoting continuous improvement.** Share knowledge, insights, and proven approaches across teams.

Priority	Action	Risk mitigated	Owner	Timescale
Continue the good practice in housing and consider applying successful approaches to the wider organisation.	<b>Take case studies from Housing</b> , such as tenant engagement, performance monitoring, or service delivery models—and pilot their application in other council departments <b>Progress:</b> Commenced	Learning from within the Housing service is not applied across the organisation.	SD – Housing AD – Housing	October 2025
	<b>Knowledge transfer</b> opportunities with wider SLT <b>Progress:</b> Commenced	Inconsistent skills baseline across the organisation.	SD – Housing AD – Housing	October 2025
	<b>'Monthly Meet' staff engagement forum</b> as a learning opportunity to share examples of Housing best practice and improvement initiatives <b>Progress:</b> In process of being booked in for early September 2025.		AD - Housing	September 2025

# Appendix 2 - HRA Business Plan Commentary

## Introduction

This note has been prepared by Housing Finance Associates, using information supplied by officers at New Forest District Council about the authority's housing revenue account (HRA). It presents an updated baseline position, which has been prepared using working papers and assumptions agreed with the authority following its budget-setting process.

The projections summarise expenditure, investment, capital financing and borrowing in respect of council housing over a 30-year period, starting in 2024/25 and the authority's best available data and assumptions. They allow for inflationary pressures to impact on budgets and programmes from 2026/27 onwards. The projections also assume that National rent policy will permit maximum rent increases of CPI +1% until 2030/31, which is in line with a previous consultation by government.

We recommend that the authority reviews the risks facing its HRA regularly, with a view to identify the effects of emerging situations at an early stage, testing its response and taking appropriate action to eliminate or mitigate the risk.

## Baseline projections

### 1.1 Baseline assumptions

The baseline assumptions reflect the projected 2024/25 revenue outturn, 2025/26 budget and medium-term projections for capital and revenue prepared by the authority's finance team. These update the draft budgets that were reported to Cabinet in the annual budget-setting report from February 2025. Other information and assumptions we have used in preparing this baseline projection include:

Updated information on the authority's programme for developing and acquiring new dwellings over the medium term.

An expectation that growth in General Management budgets in 2025/26 to support the authority's transformation programme will be removed from 2027/28 onwards.

Data from the right to buy pooling returns that the authority submits to MHCLG

We have assumed that the authority sold 25 homes under the right to buy in 2024/25 and sells 40 homes in 2025/26, while it processes an influx of applications that followed publication in October 2024 of the government's plans to reform the Right to Buy and reduce discount levels. From 2026/27 onwards we have allowed for 10 to 11 sales per annum.

The authority aims to maintain a minimum HRA balance of £1.000m, adjusted for inflation

Any sums generated by the HRA that exceed the minimum balance are made available to finance the capital programme or to repay debt

Actual rents increase at the maximum rate currently permitted by the rent standard. The maximum rent increase for existing tenants in 2025/26 has been set at 2.7%. Under the policy statement issued by government for consultation in October 2024, an increase of CPI +1% is expected to apply until 2030/31. We have made the prudent assumption that rent increases will be limited to a CPI uplift from April 2031.

Formula rents increase at CPI +1% until 2030/31, in line with the government's policy statement consultation. From 2031/32 onwards we have assumed that formula rents increase in line with CPI.

In 2024/25 the authority re-let 5.5% of its social rent stock (282 units) at formula rent, with future relets in the same proportion. A small number of these dwellings (6 pa) are also re-let with an additional 5% rent flexibility charge, which is permitted under the rent standard.

Depreciation costs have been estimated in line with the authority's budget, uplifted for inflation at CPI.

Inflation assumptions have been updated to reflect the May 2025 Monetary Policy report from the Bank of England and applied as follows:

CPI at 3.25% in the final quarter of 2025 and 2.0% in the final quarters of 2026 and 2027. These rates have been used to reflect underlying inflation for 2026/27, 2027/28 and 2028/29, respectively. From 2028/29 onwards we have assumed CPI runs at 2% pa.

RPI tracks at CPI +1%

General management and special management costs increase by underlying CPI.

Building costs increase at RPI. This affects spending projections for day-to-day repairs and maintenance, major works to existing homes and the provision or acquisition of new homes.

Other costs in the capital programme have been inflated by CPI.

The baseline allows for the HRA to develop or acquire 445 new homes between 2024/25 and 2034/35.

Major works and component replacements are treated as 100% variable from 2027/28. These costs have an element that flexes to reflect increases and reductions in the housing stock.

At the start of the planning period HRA debt includes internal borrowing from the Council of £9.812m.

The projections assume a pooled interest rate of 4.8% would apply to new loans in 2024/25 and 2025/25, reducing to 4.2% for 2026+/27 and 2027/28, then a rate of 3.8% from 2028/29 onwards.



In preparing this projection we have assumed that the HRA would attempt to repay any additional external borrowing that it undertakes as quickly as possible. Our reason for making this assumption is that it gives a clearer indication of how well the HRA can service and repay any borrowing that is required to deliver its long-term capital programme. Any actual borrowing undertaken by the authority would be subject to the prevailing market conditions and guidance received from the authority's treasury advisors.

## 1.2 Gaps in the data and potential risks

Note that there are gaps in the data available to the authority, which have required us to make assumptions about future expenditure in key areas. The two principal gaps we have identified relate to:

The cost of unforeseen works that may be required when investing in the authority's existing housing stock. We have included a contingency to allow for such works

Lack of certainty around future National policies impacting on the Right to Buy, decarbonisation of the housing stock and associated funding. We have made prudent assumptions to accommodate these risks.

The profile of component replacements required for the existing stock is generated from the authority's stock condition data. We recommend continuing to update the modelling assumptions to accommodate new information from the stock condition data as soon as it becomes available.

Other key risks include:

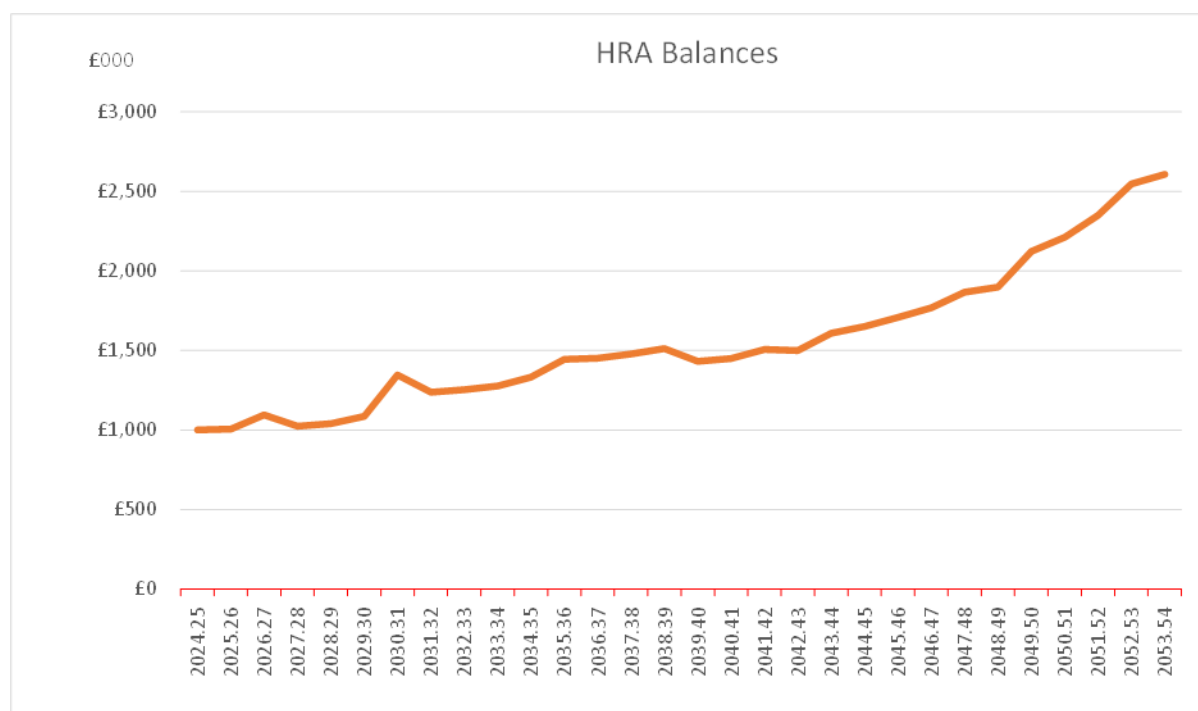
- fluctuations in the underlying rate of inflation, which can impact on both costs and income
- further constraint imposed on rent increases, whether by government or the authority itself
- increases in the costs of works and services that are not matched by increases in income
- changes to underlying interest rates

We recommend that the authority reviews the potential HRA impact of these risks regularly, as part of its early warning system. This will enable it to identify the effects of emerging situations at an early stage, test its response, and take appropriate action to eliminate or mitigate the risk.

The effects of the baseline assumptions are shown in the following sections.

### 1.3 Baseline – revenue position

The chart below shows the authority's ability to maintain a minimum level of balances during the 30-year period covered by the baseline projection:

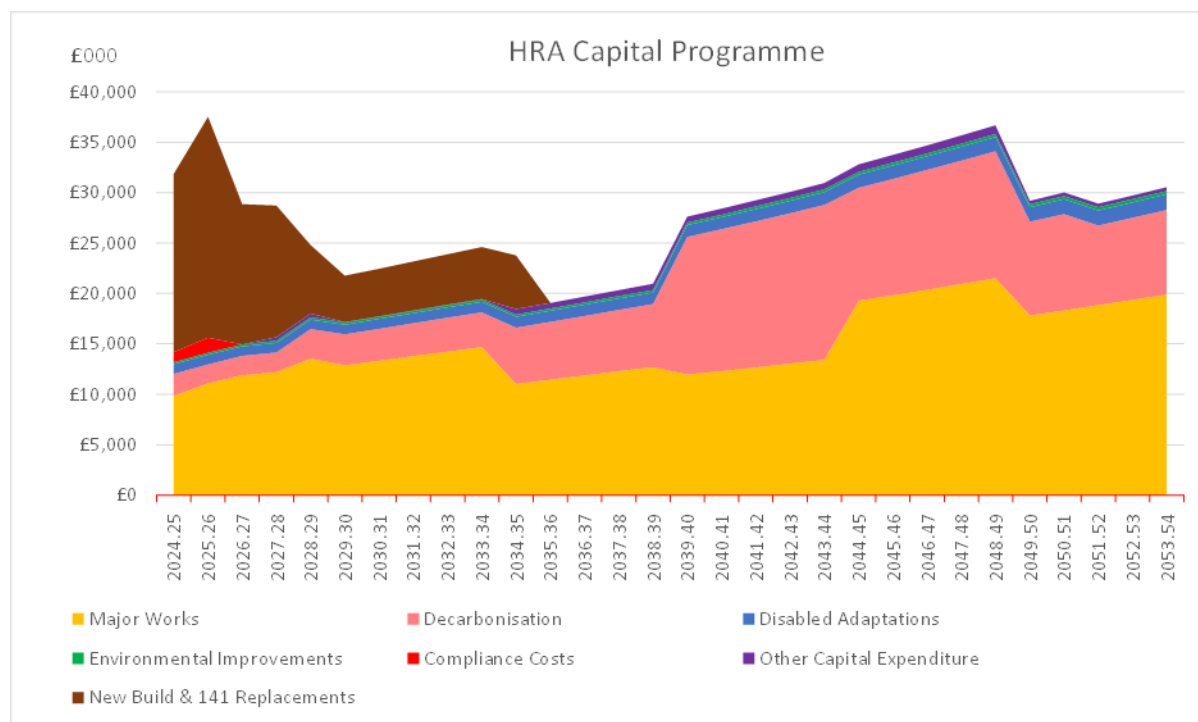


In this chart the orange line projects the cumulative HRA balance at the end of each year.

The authority maintains its minimum HRA balance of £1.000m (plus inflation) throughout the projections. During this period, any “spare” rents generated are used to pay for capital projects or to repay debt.

### 1.4 Baseline – capital programme

The next chart shows the scale and composition of the authority's projected capital programme:



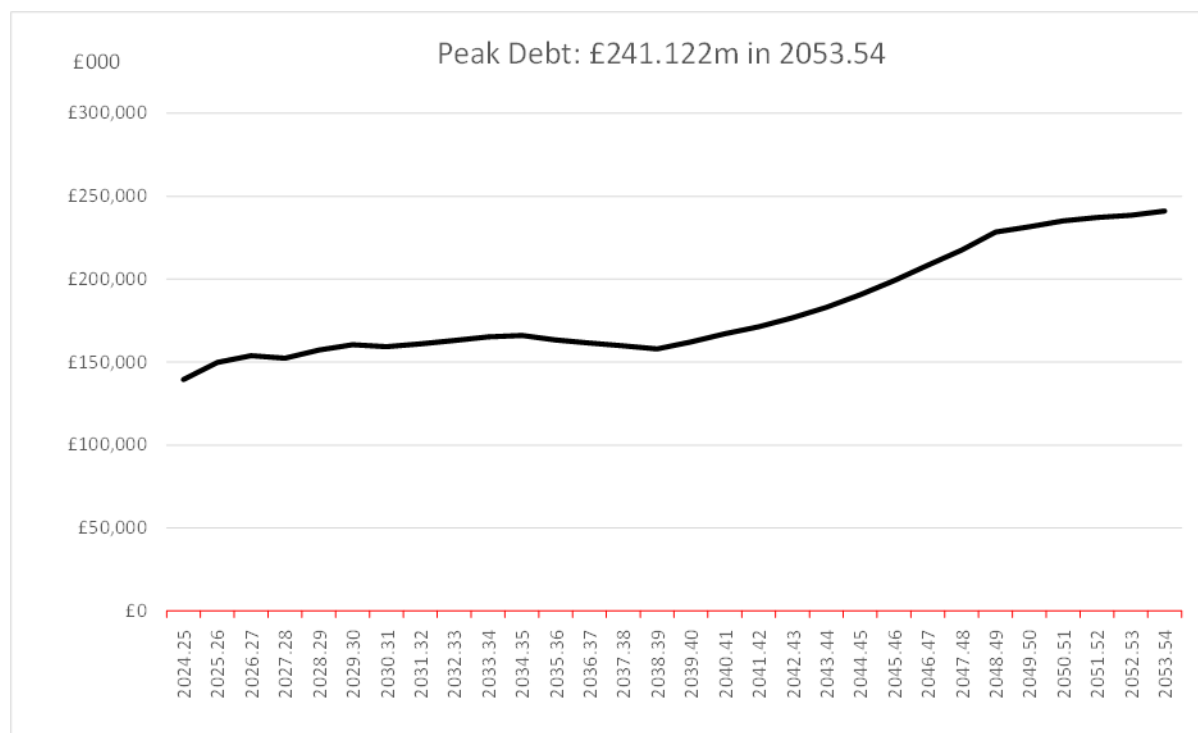
This projection includes a cautious 10-year programme for new build and stock purchase that produces 445 new properties between 2024/25 and 2034/35 (brown area). This represents the authority's commitment to increasing its housing stock, including a buyback programme, over the medium term.

The amber area allows for investment required on stock condition, based on the existing capital programme and stock condition data, with a contingency for (as yet) unidentified additional stock investment. The pink area shows an allowance for improving energy efficiency of existing homes to EPC level C standard by 2030, plus wider decarbonisation works. This allowance is based on the existing capital programme and stock condition data, with a contingency for additional decarbonisation works. The total amount of decarbonisation investment in the above chart is consistent with representative levels assumed by other local authorities.

The average cost of major works at current prices, £51,316 per dwelling (excluding decarbonisation works). The allowance for decarbonisation comes to £24,859 per dwelling at current prices over the same period. These allowances remain consistent with representative levels of investment in other authorities.

## 1.5 Baseline – debt

The next chart projects movements in the level of HRA debt during the planning period:



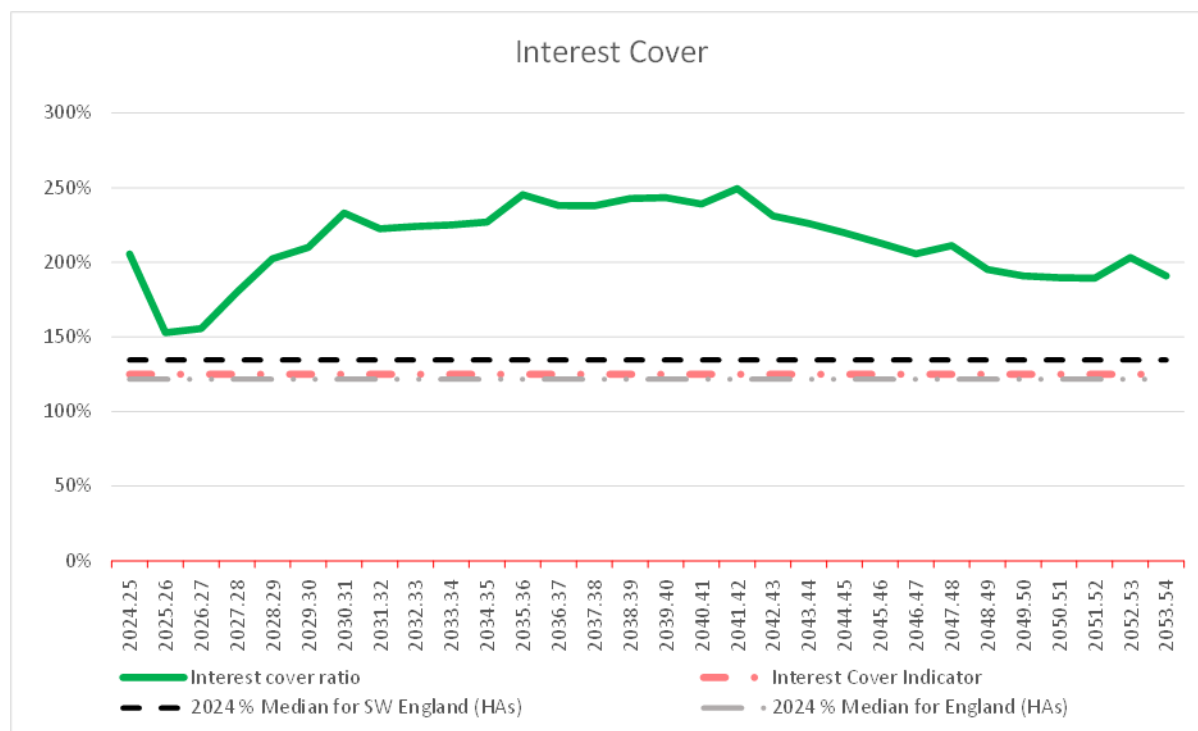
On these assumptions, the authority is unable to finance its capital programme entirely from its Major Repairs Reserve, revenue surpluses generated by the HRA and projected right to buy receipts. This causes the HRA to rely on borrowing to part-finance its HRA capital programme throughout the thirty-year period.

HRA-related debt is projected to rise in most years, reaching a peak of £241.122m in 2053/54 – the final year of the projections. It is noticeable that the authority can repay some debt between 2035/36 and 2038/39, which follows the end of the medium-term development programme and precedes an expected increase in decarbonisation investment. From 2039/40 onwards the HRA needs to borrow more to finance its capital programme than it can afford to repay from the available resources, causing debt to rise for the remainder of the period.

Debt is at its peak level in 2053/54 and continuing to rise. This means that the authority would be exposed to potential fluctuations in interest rates over the long term. It will therefore be important to continue reviewing the authority's options as the underlying economic circumstances evolve.

## 1.6 Baseline – affordability

Alongside our projection of the ability of the HRA to repay the debt required to finance the assumed capital programme, the chart below compares the level of operational surplus it generates with a standard indicator used by other landlords:



The green line in this chart shows the number of times the revenue HRA surplus can cover the assumed interest charges. When the green line goes down the authority's HRA is either making smaller surpluses or paying more in interest charges and the reverse is true when the green line goes up. The static dashed pink line suggests a minimum level of 125%, below which the authority would be at risk of being unable to cover its interest costs from its operating surplus.

This chart shows reasonable levels of interest cover throughout the projections, which implies that the authority would be able to afford the level of borrowing required under the baseline assumptions. It is noticeable that performance against this metric deteriorates in the latter half of the planning period. This reflects an expectation that some costs will rise at a faster rate than income over the long term, as well as increases in borrowing to deliver the 30-year capital investment requirement. If debt continues to rise at the projected rate, it would eventually reach a level that is unaffordable to the HRA.

Any further increase in costs or loss of income would cause the drop in performance under this metric to accelerate unless the authority is able to make cost savings or generate additional income to compensate. The types of additional cost that the authority could encounter might result from higher inflation, increases in interest charges, commitments to spend more on providing additional or improved services, or additional costs to secure compliance with regulatory requirements. Any constraint on rent levels (whether imposed by government, or by a local decision to set rents at a lower level) would have a similar negative impact on interest cover performance.

Note that the requirement for borrowing is very sensitive to assumptions relating to cost levels, income from rents and other sources, plus interest rates. Initial sensitivity testing of these assumptions indicates that the authority should continuously seek to minimise costs and maximise income as a way of keeping debt levels down and minimising the associated risks.

## Baseline – summary

The baseline assumptions produce a position that looks affordable but starts to weaken over the long term. The HRA can use borrowing to increase the number of council homes over the medium term, but to protect the long-term financial health of the HRA the authority needs to be cautious about future commitments. It will be important to continue to minimise costs, while maximising income and resources. Where possible, spending pressures should be contained within the levels of income growth the authority can achieve from rents and other charges.

## Appendix 3 - NFDC Draft Context Document

The content of this draft Context Document has been compiled using information gathered from what we are aware the regulator has previously requested from Council landlords. Until we get the request from the regulator, we are working incrementally to be “inspection ready.”

This is not a finalised document, some of the information is currently in a copy and pasted format from other strategic documents and audit reports. We may not be inspected for another 2 years, and the document will be professionally published and updated once the Landlord Strategy is adopted.

### Section 1- The Council’s provision of housing

The council is the largest provider of housing within the district, managing a stock of 5,200 socially rented homes including a small but increasing number of shared-ownership properties.

Specifically, our homes are broken down as follows:

<b>Property Type:</b>	<b>Tenancy Type:</b>	<b>Number of Bedrooms:</b>
Houses: 2,840	General Needs: 5,048	1 bed: 1,370
Bungalows: 876	Extra Care: 117 (made up of 3 schemes)	2 bed: 1,686
Flats: 1,402	Shared Ownership: 14	3 bed: 1,968
Maisonettes: 61		4 bed: 139
		5 bed: 13
		6 bed: 3

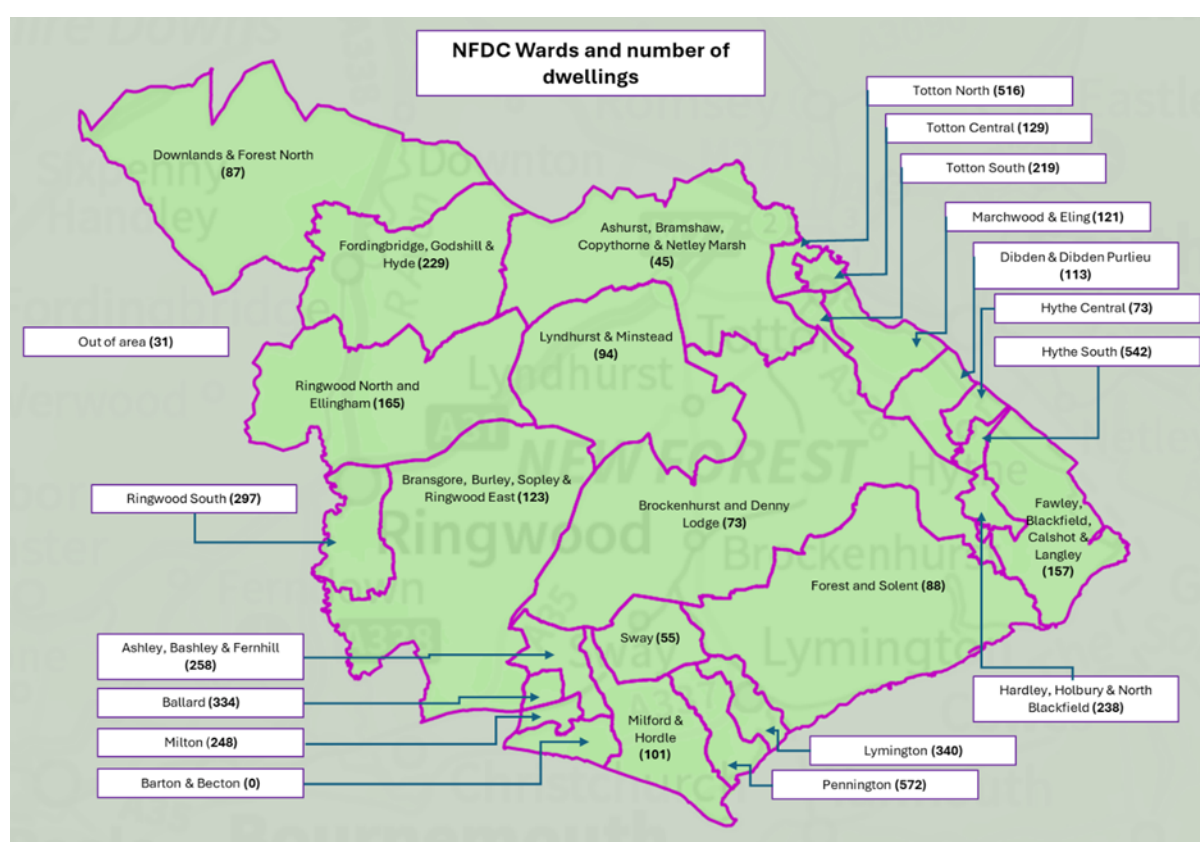
We also own and manage 196 temporary accommodation homes, consisting of 78 owned homes and 118 homes managed through our Private Sector Leasing scheme.

We are also the freeholder of 117 Leasehold properties within the district, the make-up of which is as follows:

<b>Property Type:</b>	<b>Number of Bedrooms:</b>
Flats: 105	1 bed: 45
Maisonettes: 6	2 bed: 71
Bedsit: 6	3 bed: 1

The New Forest area is predominately a rural area, though the district council's boundaries include urban and semi-rural Towns, villages, and settlements. The distribution of our housing stock across our wards is demonstrated below.

**Fig. 1 – NFDC Wards and Housing stock**



We also own and manage 1,759 garages across our district and are currently reviewing their use and occupation with a view to better use the sites and land for new homes development, commercial storage, and other uses as part of the asset base.

(The following images / information have been snipped from the Corporate Peer Challenge Local Government Association 2024 Position Statement to demonstrate the demographic or context information relevant to the LA area.)



Corporate peer challenge position statement - Introduction

## The New Forest

### At a glance

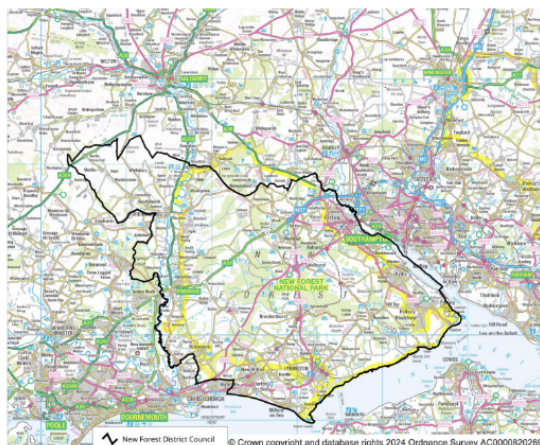
175,785 residents living within the district	51.9% of residents are female	96.8% of the population are White	Average age in New Forest is 51.8 years
Life expectancy is 83 years	48.1% of residents are male	1.3% of the population are Mixed Race	Average age in England is 40.
		1.2% of the population are Asian or Asian British	
		0.4% of the population are Black or Black British	
		0.3% of the population are other ethnic groups	
Median gross annual earnings are £34,647	The salary growth rate is 1.5% lower than England	51.8% of residents are employed	
		33.4% of residents are retired	
		18% have a disability which limits their day-to-day activities by a little or a lot	
Main language is English	0.2% of residents reported having poor English language skills		
We collect Council Tax from 83,380 properties	4th largest economy in Hampshire with £4.4 billion (GVA) generated in 2020 and circa 8,000 business enterprises		
Around 80% of all registered businesses are small businesses (fewer than 10 employees, less than £250,000 annual revenue)			

Data sourced from: NOMIS ONS 2021 census data, ONS Local statistics, 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation, New Forest Economic Profile 2022.

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Corporate peer challenge position statement - Introduction



### The place

The New Forest is located within the county of Hampshire on the south coast of England positioned between Bournemouth and Southampton. It is a vibrant and unique area known for its natural landscapes, ancient woodland, and 40 miles of stunning coastline.

It is a working forest that has prospered for nearly 1,000 years. Many local practices are unique and date from historic times.

This includes most significantly the depasturing of the iconic New Forest ponies, as well as cattle, pigs, and donkeys in the open forest

by authorised landowners known as Commoners. These agricultural commoning practices are administered by the Verderers.

The New Forest is the second most populated district authority in the southeast, with over 175,000 residents, although the population has decreased since the 2011 census. It is home to an increasingly aging population with 30% of residents over the age of 65 compared to 19% nationally.

The largest settlements are Fordingbridge, Hythe, Lymington, Marchwood, New Milton, Ringwood, and Totton. Approximately 72% of residents live in urban areas, while around 28% of residents live in rural areas.

On average, residents could expect to pay around 11.4 times their annual earnings on purchasing a home in the district (England, 8.26 times).

The average property price is just over £498,000 and around 74% of householders own their homes. Rental prices are high with the average monthly rent £125 higher than that for England.

Although the New Forest ranks highly against other authorities for low levels of income deprivation, 4 of our 114 neighbourhoods appear in the top 20% of most deprived neighbourhoods in England.

21.5% of children are eligible for free school meals (4th highest of Hampshire authorities) however there are known localities within the district where this percentage is significantly higher.

Just over half of our residents of employment age are in full time employment. 30.4% of working people now state they work from home full time and around 2.2% of employment age residents claim unemployment benefit, representing a rise from previous years.

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The economic inactivity rate of the district is 14.2% which is lower than the Hampshire average but is driven in part by higher levels of early retirees.

Around 30,100 people who live locally cross district boundaries to go to work with the main working areas being Southampton, Bournemouth, and Test Valley. Approximately 22,500 workers travel inwardly from where they live to their employment within the district.

Marine, hospitality and health and social care occupations make up some of the major industries. Administrative occupations are the most common job type at 13.6%, followed by corporate managers and directors at 12.0%, and customer service occupations make up 10.9%.

The area's largest employers include Exxon, Garmin, Paulsons Park (home of Peppa Pig World), as well as public sector bodies including the NHS and ourselves as the district council.

Data sourced from: 1) ONS statistics, 2011 and 2021 census data, 2) 2011 rural/urban classification using population figures from mid-2022, 3) New Forest District Council Local Plan 2016 – 36, 4) The New Forest Economic Profile (2022).



Corporate peer challenge position statement - Introduction



### The council

New Forest District Council was created on 1 April 1974, following the 1972 Local Government Act, and is celebrating its 50th year.

Our most recent district elections were held in May 2023, when an electoral review of the district was implemented. 48 councillors (a reduction of 12) were elected to 26 new wards, comprising of the following political groups:

- 26 Conservative
- 14 Liberal Democrat
- 4 Independent
- 3 Green
- 1 Labour and Co-operative

We operate a leader and cabinet form of governance under the majority administration of the Conservative Group. Councillor Jill Cleary is the council's leader.

The chairman, elected each year by all members, chairs full council meetings and is the civic head and the first citizen of the district.

The local government administrative area of New Forest District Council includes the National Park, which was designated in 2005. The New Forest National Park Authority (NFNPA) is the planning authority for its specific area, and we share responsibilities in other service areas as well as working in close collaboration.

Hampshire County Council (HCC) are responsible for upper tier services. There is 145 square miles of Crown land managed by Forestry England and 37 town and parish councils active within our boundaries.

## Devolution and local government reorganisation (LGR)

Hampshire County Council, Isle of Wight Council, Portsmouth City Council, and Southampton City Council have been accepted by Government (5 February 2025) to join the Devolution Priority Programme.

For our wider region, this will mean a new strategic regional Mayor for Southampton, Portsmouth, Hampshire, and the Isle of Wight.

As of May 2025, NFDC is continuing to work with other councils in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight to explore options for reorganisation.

Different options for changes are being looked at in detail to see which would work best.

NFDC has made it clear from the start that we do not support any model that will break up the New Forest district. This will form the basis of our proposal to government.

A proposal will be submitted to government by NFDC in September this year.

The Landlord Strategy ([link](#)) sets out how the Council will continue to deliver its landlord service at a local level over 2025 - 2030, accepting that in the latter two years this is likely to be in the form of working through a smooth transfer of assets, finances, and our landlord services within a newly formed council under LGR.

## Section 2- The operational management structure of the Council

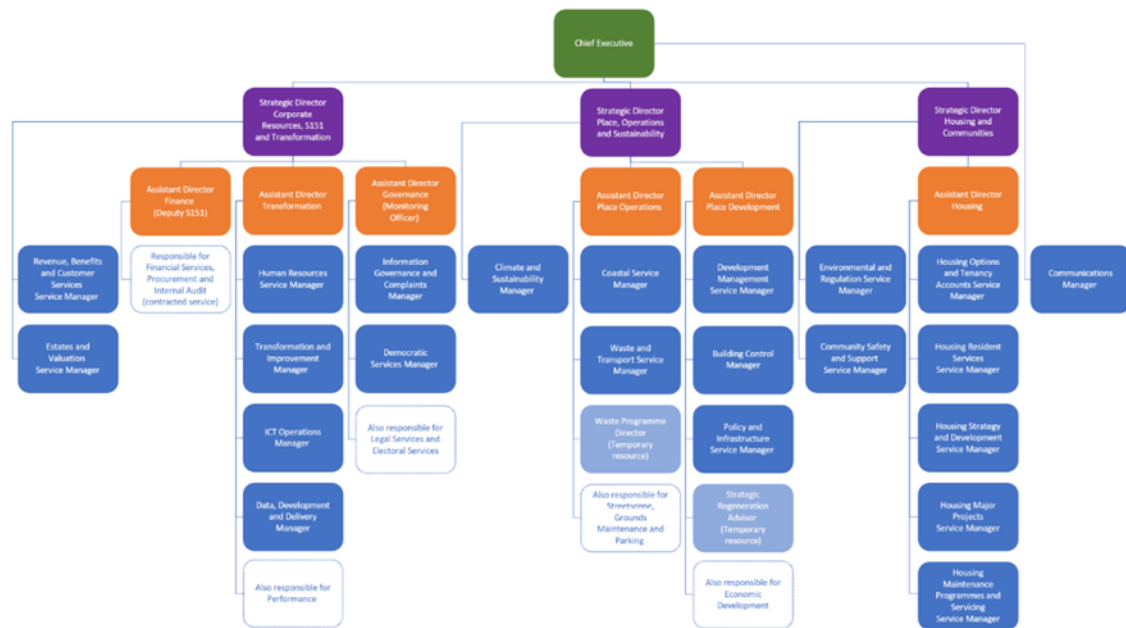
The Council's Chief Executive. (Details will be added here about the Chief executive when requested by the regulator) The Council employs approximately 830 full-time and part-time staff across three Directorates:

- Housing and Communities
- Place, Operations and Sustainability
- Resources, S151 and Transformation.

A new senior leadership team was established in 2021, moving from a 4 executive head model to 3 strategic director roles. This was designed to enable greater capacity and focus on strategic change, partnership working and experience in leading resident services. The team is known as the executive management team (EMT) and meets formally twice a month. The monitoring officer and democratic services manager also attend.

Each directorate benefits from assistant directors who oversee the delivery of key strategic areas of the organisation.

The Corporate Leadership Team structure is shown below:



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The Strategic Director for Housing and Communities (Details will be added here about the Strategic Director for Housing and Communities when requested by the regulator).

- The Housing and Communities directorate covers the following areas of Council service.
- Housing Estate Management and Support
- Housing Maintenance and Compliance
- Housing Options, Rents, Support and Private Sector Housing
- Housing Strategy and Development
- Environmental and Regulation (including licensing, health and wellbeing and Arts and Culture)
- Community Safety

The Strategic Director for Housing and Communities is also the designated lead for Health and Safety under the Social Housing Regulation Act (2023).

The Assistant Director Housing (*Details will be added here about the Assistant Director for Housing when requested by the regulator*). The Assistant Director Housing has responsibility for the Councils Landlord function including the Housing Management functions, Strategy Development, Estate Management, Compliance and Repairs for council provided housing alongside statutory Homelessness functions and rents.

(The Housing Senior Leadership Team structure will be added here when requested by the regulator.)

### **Service Manager responsible for Housing Major Projects**

Structural surveying, Fire Safety, Asbestos management.

### **Service Manager, Housing Maintenance Programmes and Servicing**

Reactive maintenance delivery and Repairs, including all trades. Warehouse, equipment, and cleaning coordination. Housing Decarbonisation. Gas and Electrical.

### **Service Manager Housing Strategy and Development**

Housing Initiatives and development programme.

### **Service Manager Housing Resident Services**

Private Sector Housing, Tenant Engagement, Neighbourhood lettings and Tenancy Sustainment, Anti-Social Behaviour. Resident Services also oversees the Housing Business Support and Customer Services, Workforce Planning and Business Development.

### **Service Manager Housing Options and Tenancy Accounts**

Tenancy Accounts, Housing Options and Homelessness.

### **Repairs and Maintenance Delivery**

To maintain control of our repairs, maintenance, and investment programmes the council has always employed its own staff to provide these services in the form of a Direct Labour Organisation (DLO).

This is supported by a range of robustly procured, contracted, and monitored contractors that assist and deliver a range of housing maintenance and planned works improvement programmes such as new windows, doors, and kitchens etc.



This hybrid approach enables us to have better management control to assure compliance with all the relevant health and safety standards including for gas, electric, legionella testing, and damp and mould that now apply to all social homes. It also provides assurance in retrofitting new green technologies such as insulation, solar panels, and air-source heat pumps etc.

The DLO service is one of our unique landlord service features at NFDC and forms an important part of our service offer to tenants who report high levels of satisfaction with our teams and day to day repairs. This approach is different to many council and housing association landlords in the region that have outsourced all their repairs and maintenance services to external contractors.

Whilst there is arguably no right or wrong way of providing these services, we believe our flexible arrangements led by our own DLO staff and contract managers can better meet the needs of our tenants and fulfil our statutory duties as a landlord. As outlined, the HRA pays for investment and maintenance of the council's own housing stock and related housing services provided solely for the benefit of council tenants and leaseholders.

## Section 3 – The Council's governance structure

### Governance and culture

#### Our governance

##### How decisions are made

The Council operates a Leader and Cabinet governance model, with portfolio holders having certain powers within the constitution to determine policy and approach to the way that services are delivered.

The constitution reflects the local demands and specific issues of the New Forest district and sets the delegated processes and the codes of conduct for councillors, along with the framework for officer decision-making within the council. The Council's 48 members are elected every 4 years, and cover 26 district wards.



## **Cabinet**

The Cabinet is a group of 6 Councillors, all from the majority political group (Conservative) represented on the Council. The Leader of the Council (*Leaders details to be added when requested*) chairs the Cabinet. She has appointed the other 5 members. The Cabinet is responsible for taking all decisions classed by the law as "Executive" decisions. Many of these decisions are taken at a meeting of the whole Cabinet. However, each Cabinet member has a "portfolio", that is, a list of the responsibilities assigned specifically to that member. Subject to certain conditions, individual Cabinet members can take decisions on matters within their portfolio.

## **Committees**

Committees are groups of Councillors appointed by the full Council. They are appointed "proportionally" - that is, they contain Councillors from more than one political group, in the same proportion as the political groups are represented on the Council.

## **Overview and Scrutiny Panels**

Overview and Scrutiny Panels, like Committees, are appointed "proportionally". There are 3 Panels. Cabinet members cannot serve on Overview and Scrutiny Panels. Each Panel is responsible for overview and scrutiny of several service areas. The Panels can undertake reviews of the Council's policies, either on their own initiative or at the request of the Council or the Cabinet, advise on policy development, and review executive decisions to make sure the Cabinet does not exceed its powers.

The Landlord functions of the Council are scrutinised by the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel. (Details of Chairperson, and Vice-Chairman to be added when requested).

(List specific items scrutinised by panel over the year prior to inspection)

The Council uses Modern.gov to manage its reporting arrangements and formal meetings are live streamed and available on You Tube.

## **Councillors and democracy - New Forest District Council**

**The Portfolio Holder - Housing and Homelessness** is (*details to be added when requested*).

He has oversight for

- Housing Strategy and Development
- Housing Maintenance and Compliance
- Housing Estates Management
- Housing Allocations and Options
- Housing Delivery and Performance
- Homelessness
- Private Sector Housing including HMO licensing
- Disabled Facilities Grants
- Tenant Engagement

The current The Portfolio Holder - Housing and Homelessness is also the member responsible for complaints.

Monthly Portfolio Holder Briefings are held between the portfolio holder, the Housing Senior Leadership Team, any other relevant members of the service to ensure the portfolio holder has regular updates on service delivery.

## Section 4 – The Council’s strategy or long-term plan for its housing stock.

Our Housing Department including the Landlord service has been on a journey of improvement since 2018, with a major focus on the home standard including carrying out a 100 per cent stock condition survey alongside making significant investments in the housing stock to ensure that all our homes are safe, warm, and free from hazards such as damp and mould.

We understand the importance of providing safe and warm homes for our tenants to live in and the positive impact on our communities, individual tenants, and leaseholders that our initiatives can bring including addressing the significant carbon emissions arising from our social housing use and development.

Our Corporate Plan amplifies that the housing landlord service has an ambitious decarbonisation agenda which aims to reduce carbon emissions of council owned homes to net zero by 2050, and to reduce carbon emissions of the housing operational services, respectively.



A more specific measure stated in the Corporate Plan is to improve the energy efficiency of over 3,200 council houses by 2030, and coherent spending plans for the decarbonisation of our housing stock have been incorporated into the long term HRA investment plan to deliver this objective.

This on-going commitment builds upon the significant capital investment made into our housing stock over recent years, and we fully understand the importance of providing safe and warm homes for our tenants and the positive impact on their households and communities that these initiatives bring. Our approach focuses on lowering tenants' energy bills and helping lift our most vulnerable households out of fuel poverty.

We understand improving the energy performance ratings (EPCs) of all our homes to band C by 2030 is only a stepping stone towards longer term decarbonisation, improving energy efficiency, reducing energy demand, and make it easier to transition to renewable technologies, once fossil fuel-based fuels are no longer viable.

This is a fundamental ambition as a social landlord given the significant responsibilities for decarbonisation of all our homes including retrofitting new green technologies such as fabric insulation, solar panels, and air-source heat pumps to achieve at least an EPC band C that now apply to social housing in general.

For the 24/25 year the council has been successful in obtaining £549,253 of additional grant funding through the Social Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF). This was match funded by the council. Following successful delivery of measures to 70 homes, introducing renewable technology with insulation improvements the Council was offered an additional amount of funding through the SHDF programme seeing a further 98 homes improved with £630,000 of matched funding.

This year, another successful bid under the Warm Homes Grant funding (WHGF) will see a further 174 properties improved with £1.493 million of grant funding.

Software and AI technology, staff qualifications and changes to the delivery of housing services has seen a further 474 homes improved to EPC band C through its capital works streams and day to day repairs at no additional cost to the council. A total of 642 homes have seen their energy performance increase since 2022.

This remains a fundamental service ambition as a social landlord given the significant responsibilities for decarbonisation of all our homes including retrofitting new green technologies such as fabric insulation, solar panels, and air-source heat pumps to meet the new standards and at least EPC C from 2030 that now apply to social housing in general.

This includes addressing the significant carbon emissions arising from our social housing use and new development.

### **Our Housing Strategy**

As written in 2018 states our ambitions for developing new homes and meeting local housing needs including: -

Future housing development - Accelerating and maximising future housing development to meet local need and deliver sustainable growth.

Council housing provision - Increasing the supply of high-quality affordable homes through an ambitious council house building and acquisitions programme.

Meeting our greatest needs - Improving housing options for those within our communities with greatest need

- Best use of existing stock - Enabling the best use of existing housing to meet local needs

The council has also made good progress to date against its 2018 -2026 target of directly delivering 600 new “affordable” council homes. We have delivered 373 to date and have a growing pipeline of new developments in place to meet this target. This is despite two or three years of slow-down in the construction industry during the pandemic when most housing development, both private and publicly funded, was put on hold nationally.

So, whilst we cannot fully guarantee that all the 600 new homes will be completed by April 2026, we will ensure that they are all legally contracted for delivery or purchased in 2026 having set aside £15.2m for this purpose in the 2025/26 annual budget. We are assuming similar levels of annual HRA investment for newly built homes throughout the lifetime of this strategy.

In addition, due to current uncertain market conditions and impending LGR we have shifted our strategic approach from Council commissioned 'land-led' opportunities to purchasing at a larger scale from private developers under existing Section 106 affordable housing agreements via the Planning system.

Whilst recently approved off-the-shelf homes will not meet future homes standards, they will nevertheless be quality homes built to acceptable and high energy efficiency ratings.

This approach also safeguards the overall delivery of affordable housing for the district given that housing associations have effectively withdrawn from purchasing "S106" homes from private developers as they concentrate on meeting their own new-build land-led targets. Without this intervention, the risk is that privately built "affordable" homes could be converted back to market housing, or removed from sites altogether, resulting in a loss of much needed social and affordable housing in the district.

S106 affordable homes can also be available to meet the needs of households on our social housing register more quickly whilst also reducing the risks associated with land-led developments not being fully built-out before the council is dissolved through LGR. The risk is sites may be consequently stopped or stalled if the new council's priorities do not align with our own at the point of transfer.

It is worth noting that we have decided not to refresh the housing strategy at the present time due to the LGR process and timescales. Going forward, we anticipate that most of the new affordable homes in the district will be delivered through the planning system and by our housing association partners at a larger scale due to the government's planning reforms and government's national 1.5 million new homes target. A forthcoming Affordable Housing Delivery Plan will capture this renewed political commitment.

Given that over 60% of our tenants and leaseholders rely on state benefits, our robust council housing development programme continues to make a significant contribution to meeting local housing needs particularly for those who need a lower social rent and a secure tenancy.

The Landlord Strategy establishes our vision for Council-owned social housing within the district and acknowledges the contribution that it will make towards the ambitions of our Corporate Plan 2024-2028 and our other linked strategies and policies.

## Section 5 – How tenants are involved in decision making about their homes.

The Council recognises it has significant responsibilities to ensure that tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in decisions affecting the services they receive and the quality of their homes.

Our priority remains to amplify the ‘voice’ of tenants and leaseholders making it visible in priority decisions such as rent increases, balance of spend between stock investment and housing development, and having robust input into new policies including Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), and in the overall delivery of landlord services.

This includes the commissioning of appropriate aids and adaptations to properties, especially minor works that will allow tenants to remain in their own homes for longer.

We are confident that our culture is generally one of trust and openness with our tenants and leaseholders, where our housing staff and elected members do their best to help households and provide additional support where necessary.

At the same time, many staff report increasing challenges in engaging with other agencies or in getting the wrap-around services many of our tenants' need in maintaining their tenancies, health, and wellbeing.

This is despite our excellent partnership and regional working contributions, across the health and social care domain, as evidenced by our recent Corporate Peer Challenge Review. We are committed to keep improving our service offer to older and vulnerable tenants including offering advocacy and support through the maze of existing health and care systems including representation to the regional Health and Wellbeing Boards at Council Leader and Chief Executive levels.

We understand that many social landlords have similar pressures and acknowledge the immense pressures our colleagues in health and social care are facing at the present time. However, our aim remains to give more “tailored” service responses especially around repairs and maintenance timescale responses, ASB, and offer support throughout the different housing services where tenant vulnerabilities are identified.

We remain on a journey of culture change to empowering our customer facing staff to make bespoke service decisions for residents, and particularly for tenants that need more specialist housing support. We place great emphasis on property condition, tenant experience and accountability.

Our new Tenant Engagement Strategy commits us to action by carrying out a full tenant data survey to generate a robust needs analysis and to inform service design. We will improve engagement outcomes for tenants and take opportunities to engage to where our tenants live, to give us a unique understanding of what it means to be a tenant or leaseholder, in the places they call home.

We are also very aware the council’s landlord function has significant responsibilities to ensure that our homes, estates, and surrounding areas including public open spaces are safe, well maintained, and contribute to better health and environmental outcomes including making biodiversity gains wherever possible.

### **Tenant Insight Data**

As stated, the housing service is committed to understand who our tenants are, what they need, their characteristics and vulnerabilities which mean we may need to design our services differently to maximise engagement, collaboration, and tenancy sustainment. To do this we have commissioned a tenants’ survey from a trusted provider to independently give us this data to help better shape our service offers in the future with our tenants and leaseholders.

We know there has been a significant rise in the expectation for council landlords to ensure that tenants and leaseholders are given a wider range of opportunities to influence and be involved in decisions affecting their quality of their homes, landlord services, and broader services provided by the council.

For example, our tenants and leaseholders have told us that the implementation of the council's Waste Strategy is very important to them. Whilst good progress has been made to date the actual service change of rolling-out wheelie bins for the first time, opening a new depot at Hardley to service the east of the District, and building new bin-stores in our flatted blocks, changing collection frequencies and new recycling rules is a current hot-topic for residents, tenants and leaseholders alike.

This is where our Tenant Engagement Team steps in to amplify the tenants voice in the corporate decision-making process and in the communication of changes which is championed by the Housing Portfolio Holder in the Cabinet decision making process.

The Tenant Engagement Group (TIG) also invites council managers and the Executive Team to their meetings to independently challenge and help co-produce areas of policy and change through their lived experience as both a tenant and resident of NFDC.

Equally, we recognise that tenant and leaseholder engagement is an on-going area of improvement for us, and we have already committed to invest significant resource and do more to engage tenants and leaseholders in the decision-making processes and better understand their needs and expectations.

The overall aim is to better tailor individual service responses particularly for older, disabled, or more vulnerable tenants and leaseholders taking account of any protected characteristics and housing demand factors, as necessary.

### **Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs)**

TSMs consist of a mixture of 10 management measures and 12 tenant perception measures.

Our perception measure results have enabled valuable insight for the council to ensure that tenants' views on services that are important to them can be measured and improved. With two years' worth of data now available, the Council can evidence notable increases in overall tenant satisfaction and particularly in the 'transparency, influence and accountability' measures, complaints outcomes, and in maintaining communal areas.

This improvement profile reflects the significant work all our teams have been putting in over the last several years towards continuous improvement, which has ramped up since the introduction of TSM data collection in April 2023.

**Table 1: Yearly Comparison of TSM perception measure results**

Measure	2023/24	2024/25	Change ↑↓↔
Overall satisfaction	81%	84%	↑ 3%
Overall repairs	82.8%	81%	↓ 1.8%
Time taken repairs	82.8%	82%	↑ 0.8%
Well maintained home	82.1%	78%	↓ 4.1%
Safe home	84.7%	85%	↔
Listens and acts	67.8%	71%	↑ 3.2%
Keeps you informed	78.9%	81%	↑ 2.1%
Fair and with respect	82.2%	86%	↑ 3.8%
Approach to complaints	29.1%	32%	↑ 2.9%
Communal areas	68.6%	72%	↑ 3.4%
Neighbourhood	72.1%	76%	↑ 3.9%
ASB handling	62%	64%	↑ 2%

**Table 2 Yearly Comparison of Management Measures**

Measure	2023/24	2024/25	Change ↑↓↔
RP01 Proportion of homes that do not meet the Decent Homes Standard	2.14 %	1.20%	↓ 0.94%
RP02 – Emergency repairs completed within target timescale	94.30%	93.40%	↓ 0.90%
RP02 – non-emergency repairs completed within target timescale	91.98%	93.69%	↑ 1.71%
BS01 Gas safety checks	98.21%	100%	↑ 1.79%
BS02 Fire safety checks	95.59%	100%	↑ 4.41%
BS03 Asbestos safety checks	98.27%	100%	↑ 1.73%
BS04 Water safety checks	75.50%	100%	↑ 24.5%
BS05 Lift safety checks	100%	100%	↔

CH01 Stage 1 complaints received per 1000 dwellings	7.9	12.9	↑ 5.00
CH01 Stage 2 complaints received per 1000 dwellings	1.5	5.1	↑ 3.60
CH02 Stage 1 complaints response handling in time	100%	95.59%	↓ 4.41%
CH02 Stage 2 complaints response handling in time	100%	100%	↔
NM01 Anti-social behaviour cases per 1000 dwellings	30.8	39.4	↑ 8.60
NM01 Anti-social behaviour cases that involve hate incidents per 1000 dwellings.	0.57	0.19	↓ 0.38