

# Supplementary Agenda



<b>Meeting name</b>	<b>Meeting of the Cabinet</b>
<b>Date</b>	<b>Wednesday, 6 March 2024</b>
<b>Start time</b>	<b>4.30 pm</b>
<b>Venue</b>	<b>Parkside, Station Approach, Burton Street, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire. LE13 1GH</b>
<b>Other information</b>	<b>This meeting is open to the public</b>

<b>Meeting enquiries</b>	Democratic Services
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<b>No.</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Page No.</b>
8.	<p><b>INTENSIVE HOUSING MANAGEMENT SERVICE (HOUSING SUPPORT) REVIEW</b></p> <p>A report setting out the outcome from the Housing Support Review and recommendations for future housing support arrangements, within an independent living framework.</p>	1 - 36

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### Intensive Housing Management Service (Housing Support) Review Update

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<b>Chief Officer Responsible:</b>	<p><b>Michelle Howard</b> (Director for Housing and Communities, Deputy Chief Executive)  <a href="mailto:mhoward@melton.gov.uk">mhoward@melton.gov.uk</a></p>
<b>Lead Member/Relevant Portfolio Holder</b>	<p><b>Cllr Allnatt, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Landlord Services (Leader of the Council)</b></p>

<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	High Quality Homes and Landlord Services
<b>Relevant Ward Member(s):</b>	All
<b>Date of consultation with Ward Member(s):</b>	N/A
<b>Exempt Information:</b>	No
<b>Key Decision:</b>	Yes
<b>Subject to call-in:</b>	Yes

#### 1 Summary

1.1 In October 2023, Cabinet considered a report relating to a review of the Council’s Intensive Housing Management Service. The review has now concluded. This report provides an update on the outcome of the review and recommendations for future housing support arrangements, within an Independent Living Framework.

## 2 Recommendations

- 2.1 **Note the outcome from the Intensive Housing Management (Housing Support) Review.**
- 2.2 **Approve the establishment of an Independent Living Framework, at Appendix A, to provide clarity on the Council's housing support arrangements and associated costs.**
- 2.3 **Delegate Authority to the Director for Housing and Communities, in consultation with Portfolio Holder for Housing and Landlord Services, to make minor amendments to the framework and to publish the final version on the Council's website and provide to tenants.**
- 2.4 **Approve that the Council's Intensive Housing Management Service will cease, and be replaced by the arrangements set out in recommendations 2.5 and 2.6**
- 2.5 **Approve the implementation of an Independent Living Support Service, applied to properties designated as 'Sheltered Housing' as specified at section 5.15 of the report, and;**
  - 2.5.1 **Approve that the cost of delivering the Independent Living Support Service is met by an appropriate service charge as set out at section 5.26;**
  - 2.5.2 **Approve that a 20% discount is implemented in 2024/25 as a contribution to elements of the service that are ineligible for housing benefit.**
  - 2.5.3 **Approve that a 10% discount is implemented in 2025/26 as a contribution to elements of the service that are ineligible for housing benefit.**
  - 2.5.4 **Approve that the full Independent Living Service Charge will be implemented from 2026/27.**
  - 2.5.5 **Approve the commencement of a four-week period of consultation on the proposed Independent Living Support Service for those tenants living within the specified properties.**
  - 2.5.6 **Delegate Authority to the Director for Housing and Communities, in consultation with the Director for Corporate Services, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Landlord Services and Portfolio Holder for Corporate Property, Finance and Resources, to consider feedback from the consultation, finalise and implement an Independent Living Support Service Charge and report back to Cabinet if required.**
  - 2.5.7 **Delegate Authority to the Director for Housing and Communities, in consultation with the Director for Corporate Services and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Landlord Services, to create a one-off budget of up to £50,000 to enable improvements to communal areas of the sheltered housing schemes in 2024/25, funded from the HRA Regeneration and Development reserve.**

- 2.6 Approve the personalised exit and transitional plan, as set out in section 5.33 of the report for the remaining ‘dispersed’ council properties that have historically been subject to an Intensive Housing Management charge, the outcome of which will be that each tenant will be directly supported to access alternative support and lifeline services relevant to their individual needs and preferences, and;**
- 2.6.1 Approve the commencement of a four-week period of consultation on the proposed personalised exit and transitional plan arrangements for tenants in dispersed properties;**
- 2.6.2 Delegate Authority to the Director for Housing and Communities, in consultation with the Director for Corporate Services and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Landlord Services, authority to consider feedback from the consultation, finalise and implement the exit and transitional plan arrangements and to report back to Cabinet if required.**

### **3 Reason for Recommendations**

- 3.1 The Council has taken action to review current practices and future service delivery options in relation to the provision of support to tenants through a review of the Intensive Housing Management Service. The review has now concluded and the recommendations within this report provide clarity on the proposed arrangements arising from this review.
- 3.2 The review has involved extensive work to fully understand the history, scope and delivery of the Intensive Housing Management Service and to consider future options that can best support tenants to retain their independence, respond to feedback about the service and to ensure that the Council can confidently deliver any future support arrangements.
- 3.3 Consultation and engagement has taken place with tenants as part of the review. Feedback has been taken into consideration and has enabled a greater understanding of the views of tenants, types of support required and how this can best be delivered and in doing so, to ensure clarity of expectations and accountability in service delivery.
- 3.4 The review has identified a lack of clarity on the Council’s support offer and associated charging arrangements. The Independent Living Framework will help to address this by providing accurate and consistent information for tenants, prospective tenants, their families and for staff, stakeholders and elected members.
- 3.5 It is recommended that the Independent Living Support Service is only applied to specific ‘in scope’ properties. The rationale for the in-scope properties is set out in the report and includes traditionally sheltered housing properties and some bungalows adjacent to one of the sheltered housing schemes. The proposed service offer responds to feedback, aligns with expectations for what sheltered housing is, and will have sufficient staffing resources to deliver an effective and high-quality service.
- 3.6 It is appropriate and necessary to charge for the proposed Independent Living Support Service and to apply it to all in-scope properties. However, a period of consultation on the specific proposals is required and feedback considered, before any new charges and service delivery arrangements can be finalised and implemented.

- 3.7 The Council has considered feedback in relation to the need to reduce cost pressures to tenants where possible. Based on the feedback received, it is proposed that the Independent Living Support Service charges will be phased over a two-year period, with discounts on elements of the charge that are not eligible for housing benefit (ineligible charges) being offered in 2024/25 and 2025/26. The full charge would apply in 2026/27. Additionally, the report confirms that each tenant subject to the Independent Living Support Service Charge would be supported directly with regards to benefit maximisation, to help tenants access financial support to which they are entitled.
- 3.8 The Council will need to ensure an upgrade of the lifeline system within the properties and communal areas to ensure it is digitally enabled and achieves value for money.
- 3.9 Feedback from tenants across the wider Intensive Housing Management Service (designated dispersed properties) was varied. Many tenants did not wish to have a chargeable support service at all, some only wanted to have access to a lifeline service, and some expressed a wish to have access to support. There has been considerable tenant frustration about the lack of clarity relating to the Intensive Housing Management Service. Tenants have been given the option to opt out of the service. A model based on visiting support service was developed but was not considered affordable to tenants. Through a managed exit plan, it is considered that the Council can better support tenants on a case-by-case basis to access the support / services relevant to their specific needs and preferences. Managing the exit arrangements will be resource intensive but is considered important and necessary. As part of the exit planning arrangements, the report confirms that tenants would be supported directly with regards to benefit maximisation, to help tenants access financial support to which they are entitled.
- 3.10 By no longer providing an Intensive Housing Management Service, the Council will also need to go through a process of 'de-designating' dispersed properties meaning that they form part of the council's general needs accommodation rather than restricted accommodation. There is scope, through a review of the Housing Allocations Policy and / or the use of a Local Lettings Policy (LLP), to restrict the allocation of some properties to applicants with defined characteristics, for example, those over a certain age or with health needs or disabilities. The Council will need to balance the requirement to support sustainable and balanced communities across the borough with tenant expectations and the council's statutory obligations to assist and house those in greatest need via its housing register.
- 3.11 There is an existing delegation in place to enable the development of a Local Lettings Plan alongside this review. The Scrutiny Committee are also due to consider the allocations policy as part of their committee work programme, and it is suggested that this makes reference to any required amendments to the policy arising from this review.
- 3.12 The conclusion of the review and implementation of revised arrangements through an Independent Living Framework also responds to recommendations arising from an audit of the Intensive Housing Management Service.

## **4 Background**

- 4.1 In 2015, Leicestershire County Council withdrew financial support for Housing Related Support services due to changes to national funding arrangements. To continue to provide support to tenants, Melton Borough Council took the decision to implement a locally developed Intensive Housing Management Service (IHMS), largely funded through a

service charge to tenants, together with a financial contribution from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

4.2 The IHMS model included access to support and a lifeline in addition to tenancy related support and was applied to the council's extra care scheme, sheltered housing schemes and to specified units of dispersed accommodation (known as designated properties) across the Borough. A service charge was applied, based on the level of support available and was variable across the extra care, sheltered and designated dispersed properties. It has not been possible to locate a specification for the original IHMS service.

4.3 An audit of the Council's Intensive Housing Management Service was carried out by the Council's Internal Audit Team in 2019/2020, leading to a limited assurance opinion for the control environment and satisfactory assurance for compliance. The audit outlined the need for a clear service plan or specification setting out the services provided or expected outcomes, greater clarity for staff and customers and identified concerns regarding capacity and service resilience, and difficulty in demonstrating value for money.

4.4 A number of individual recommendations were made, and it was subsequently agreed that a more fundamental service review would be undertaken. This was delayed due to the need to focus on the Covid 19 response, the need to prioritise action to address health and safety risks across the council's housing stock and the complete change of housing leadership team in 2021.

4.5 Since 2019, the Council has begun to proactively transform and improve its landlord services. Significant improvements have been made with many areas, demonstrating notable progress and drawing upon best practice. A new housing and communities directorate was established, including the creation of housing officer posts in 2019, ensuring that housing officers had specific patch / area responsibility. All housing stock covered by the Intensive Housing Management Service has a named housing officer, each covering specific geographical areas / patches.

4.6 A light touch review of housing support arrangements undertaken in 2021 did not lead to the changes required. A full review has now been completed.

#### 4.7 **HRA Business Plan**

4.8 The HRA Business Plan includes a specific recommendation in relation to housing support and states that the council will 'progress a review of support available to tenants, including options regarding support and assistive technology to increase independence in the future'.

#### 4.9 **Extra Care**

4.10 A review of support arrangements at the Council's Extra Care scheme (Gretton Court) was carried out in 2022 and a new Wellbeing Service has been implemented. Gretton Court is therefore no longer part of the Intensive Housing Management Service and is not in scope of this report. Separately, a post implementation review of the revised support arrangements at Gretton Court is underway.

#### 4.11 **Progress update**

4.12 An interim update on the Intensive Housing Management (Housing Support) Review for Sheltered Housing and Designated Dispersed Accommodation was considered by Cabinet in October 2023. A summary of the progress is provided below.

- 4.12.1 Cabinet authorised the removal of the IHMS charge for tenants in dispersed accommodation who confirmed a wish to leave the service. Authority was also delegated to make the necessary arrangements to remove the charge. 107 dispersed housing IHMS tenants opted out of the service via this process and their IHMS service charges have been removed from their rent accounts.
- 4.12.2 The October report noted that initial modelling for a visiting support service across the Councils dispersed housing stock estimated an hourly cost of £37. The report noted that a possible outcome of the review was that it would not be possible or appropriate for the council to offer an IHMS service to tenants in dispersed accommodation in the future. It was noted that such an outcome would be detailed in a further Cabinet report with a proposed transition plan for each tenant. It is important that any future support arrangements are person centred – they must align to the needs of the tenant, rather than being a requirement of living in a particular dispersed property.
- 4.12.3 Feedback obtained as part of the review as well as a review of legal and procedural matters has continued, leading to the recommendations within this report. Tenants and ward members have continued to express concerns about cost-of-living pressures and the need for clarity on support arrangements.
- 4.12.4 Increased engagement with sheltered housing tenants has included the establishment of drop-in meetings at the sheltered schemes. Positive feedback has been received from tenants.
- 4.12.5 Cabinet previously delegated authority to the Director for Housing and Communities in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Landlord Services, to de-designate dispersed accommodation units where the IHMS charge is no longer being applied, and to develop a local lettings plan to provide clarity on future letting arrangements for de-designated properties across the borough, ensuring alignment with the council's housing allocations policy. This work has commenced and will be progressed as part of the implementation of the recommendations of the current report.

#### 4.13 **HRA Budget Setting 2024/25**

- 4.14 Further to a recommendation from Cabinet to Full Council in February 2024 and in recognition of feedback from tenants and the time taken to conclude the review, the Intensive Housing Management service charge has not been applied to rent accounts from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024, pending conclusion of this review. The report noted that:

4.14.1 *“A full review of the wider Intensive Housing Management Service (IHMS) has commenced and is underway, including consideration of consultation and engagement feedback from tenants. The review is progressing, however, the council is not yet ready to confirm the outcome or revised service offer and any associated charging arrangements. Recommendations relating to the future options for support to housing tenants and associated charging arrangements will be considered through a Scrutiny Committee workshop in February 2024 with Cabinet due to consider the wider review and recommendations in March 2024”.*

4.14.2 *“The postponement of the service charge from April 2024, pending the outcome of the review, does not impact on tenants’ current ability to continue accessing support via their named housing officer and Lifeline / alarm services will also continue to remain operational and accessible. The current arrangements will be maintained*



*until such time as Cabinet has considered the detailed review and tenants' have been advised of any new service offer".*

4.14.3 *"Once Cabinet have considered the review and a revised housing support offer is confirmed in March, tenants will be notified of the proposed approach and any revised charges would be applied to rent accounts, following appropriate notice and at the point they become operational. It is important to note that any new charges would not be backdated to April 2024 and would only take effect from the operational start of any revised housing support offer".*

4.14.4 *"Given this interim position, the proposed budget reflects a reduced income expectation whilst retaining a need for staffing resources to sustain the current provision and assist with transitioning to any new arrangements. Specific details relating to future staffing resources and specific financial implications will be considered by Cabinet as part of considering the wider review in March 2024".*

4.15 Letters were sent to all IHMS customers to confirm this position. Rent letters for 2024/25 are currently being produced and the charge has been removed.

## **5 Main Considerations**

5.1 The review has now concluded. This report provides an update on the outcome of the review and recommendations for future housing support arrangements, within an Independent Living Framework.

### **5.2 Summary of main findings from the review of the current service:**

- There is a lack of clarity on the current IHMS service, which is not meeting tenant needs or expectations and has resulted in some customer dissatisfaction and some requests for refunds.
- The initial survey with IHMS customers resulted in over 50% expressing a wish to opt out of the service or have access to a lifeline only.
- Affordability of any future service offer is a concern – the indicative costs of fully recovering the costs of a visiting support service across the borough were not considered affordable to IHMS tenants or deliverable by the council without significant changes to staffing arrangements and associated infrastructure, which would lead to increased charges to tenants.
- A desire remains for an affordable support offer and on-site presence (often described as a warden) in sheltered housing schemes, and which supports tenants to live independently remains.
- There are varied support needs, wishes and preferences across wider / dispersed tenant base.
- Concern and frustration have been expressed by some tenants that the current IHMS designation (and associated charge) is linked to their property, rather than the needs of those actually living there.
- Affordability is a key concern – for tenants and for the council.
- Tenants are not always clear who their housing officer is and how to contact them.
- Feedback was provided that letters and correspondence can sometimes be difficult to understand.

- Clarity of any future offer needed – clear specification, communication, charging arrangements and accountability.
- Any de-designation of properties will require careful future housing allocations arrangements.
- Digital switchover is a key consideration and interdependency. Customers want to be able to access digitally enabled lifeline technology / other assistive technology solutions.
- That communal lounges are important to facilitate a sense of community, but some are very dated and in need of modernisation.
- It has not always been clear to tenants which of the support related tasks are eligible for a housing benefit contribution.

### 5.3 **Proposals arising from the review:**

5.4 There are three key recommendations arising from the review. They form the basis of this report and the proposed future support arrangements:

5.5 Key Proposal 1: To establish an Independent Living Framework to provide clarity on the Council's housing support arrangements and associated costs.

5.6 Key Proposal 2: To implement an Independent Living Support Service for the following properties:

- Bradgate Flats (21 properties)
- Wilton Court (21 properties)
- Granby House (31 properties)
- Bradgate Lane Bungalows (10 properties)

5.7 Key Proposal 3: That the Council will no longer offer an Intensive Housing Management Service across its dispersed housing stock, which would all revert to general needs accommodation. To manage this through an exit and transitional plan through which each tenant will be directly supported to access alternative support and / or lifeline services relevant to their individual needs and preferences.

5.8 Each proposal is set out in more detail below:

### 5.9 **Key Proposal 1: Establishing an Independent Living Framework**

5.10 It was clear from the review that there is a lack of clarity regarding the support available to council tenants to help them to live independently.

5.11 The Independent Living Framework is a simple document intended to provide a summary which sets out the support provided by the council as a landlord for Extra Care Housing (Gretton Court, Wellbeing Service), Sheltered Housing (Independent Living Support Service) and General Needs Housing (generic housing officer support).

5.12 The draft Independent Living Framework is at Appendix A. It will be updated to reflect the outcome of the review, charges and service delivery arrangements further to the consultation period.

5.13 When finalised, the Independent Living Framework will be published to the Council's website. It will also be provided to tenants and will be included in sign up packs for new

tenants. Key teams such as the Customer Services and Housing Options teams will also be briefed on the Independent Living Framework.

5.14 The Independent Living Framework document will be kept under review and updated as required in future to provide any further information or clarity required.

5.15 **Key Proposal 2: Implementing an Independent Living Support Service**

5.16 The review identified a need for a clear and accountable support offer for more vulnerable tenants within traditionally sheltered housing schemes. 'Sheltered housing' is a type of housing with support; designed for individuals who want to live independently but who may require additional assistance and support, often through a designated officer, with access to 24-hour emergency assistance also provided. Typically, there will be access to communal areas and gardens maintained by the landlord, but unlike care homes, care services and meals are not provided.

5.17 To meet this expectation and to clarify the service offer, it is proposed that the Independent Living Support Service will apply to the following blocks of flats (Bradgate Flats, Wilton Court and Granby House), which were historically considered 'sheltered' schemes and attracted a higher IHMS charge. Each of the blocks has a communal lounge / kitchen and site office and officers have increased presence and contact compared to dispersed housing stock.

5.18 Additionally, due to their close proximity to Bradgate Flats and link with tenants, activities and facilities at Bradgate Flats, it is proposed to include the Bradgate Bungalows within scope of the Independent Living Support Service. This would also enable a different property type to be included within the enhanced support available. Historically, the Bradgate Bungalows have attracted an IHMS charge, though at a lower level to that of the other in-scope properties.

5.19 The aims of the Independent Living Support Service are:

- To ensure the voices and views of tenants are heard by the Council as a Landlord.
- To support and empower more vulnerable tenants to live independently.
- To support and connect tenants with information and support relevant to their needs.
- A clear, consistently delivered, transparent and accountable support service.
- Accurate record keeping and accountability.
- Sufficient and resilient staffing resources to provide the agreed service offer.
- To enable access to a digitally enabled lifeline system / assistive technology.
- To 'know our tenants' – a key regulatory requirement.
- To ensure a welcoming and supportive environment within communal areas to encourage engagement and participation.

5.20 The new Independent Living Support Service will be staffed by two Independent Living Officers (1.79FTE) and will be overseen by the Senior Housing Officer. Independent Living Officers will focus on supporting and empowering tenants to live independently and will ensure that tenant voice is heard clearly by the council as a landlord. The job roles and remits will be clear and unambiguous. Their typical working days will be Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm.

- 5.21 Independent Living Officers will work flexibly across the sheltered schemes and in-scope bungalows. They will have daily presence across the sites and will become well known to tenants as their key point of contact for support, advice and information. They will be expected to spend the majority of their time across the sites, making use of the office facilities as appropriate. Resilience will be enabled (for example, periods of holiday or sickness absence) through the support of the Senior Housing Officer, Housing Officer and other members of the team.
- 5.22 Independent Living Officers will be expected to make direct contact with each tenant once every two weeks, unless declined by the tenant. This will involve a knock at the door, or contact via telephone (or, via the lifeline system in some circumstances) to check in with each tenant to see how they are. A record of contact with tenants will be maintained on tenancy records. Should there be a period of no contact, the team will have escalation arrangements relevant to the circumstances.
- 5.23 Independent Living Officers will also be expected to host drop-in sessions in each block on a fortnightly basis (alternated with 'check in' visits). The scope of the sessions will vary, depending on what is needed or requested by tenants, and may involve other teams or partners as appropriate.
- 5.24 Independent Living Officers will also carry out visual checks on communal areas such as communal lounges, storage areas and laundry facilities. They will provide feedback to other teams as required, for example, if tenants need assistance to report repairs.
- 5.25 The Independent Living Support Service will include a lifeline system, providing 24-hour access to support in an emergency.
- 5.26 The Independent Living Support Service (including the Lifeline) is a chargeable service. Based on the model proposed (83 properties), this will lead to a 2024/25 service charge of £19.46 per tenant per week for the Independent Living Support Service (including the Lifeline). Service charges are applied to rent accounts and appear on rent statements.
- 5.27 Some of the elements are eligible for a Housing Benefit or Universal Credit contribution. The working assumption is that this is estimated to be approximately 45% of tasks, meaning that 55% will be ineligible for Housing Benefit.
- 5.28 To assist tenants with affordability, it is proposed that the Independent Living Support Service charges will be phased-in over a two-year period, with initial discounts on elements of the charge that are not eligible for housing benefit (ineligible charges) being offered in 2024/25 (20%) and in 2025/26 (10%). The full charge would then apply in 2026/27, i.e. from April 2026.
- 5.29 Each tenant subject to the Independent Living Support Service Charge will also be supported directly with regards to benefit maximisation, with direct assistance being provided to help people to find out about and to access financial support to which they are entitled (for example, Attendance Allowance, Carers Allowance, Single Person Council Tax Discount).
- 5.30 A transition to a digitally enabled lifeline system in advance of the digital switchover will be necessary and will be managed as a corporate project.
- 5.31 Before any charge can be finalised or implemented, a period of statutory consultation is required. A four-week consultation period is proposed, during which tenants will be encouraged to provide any further comments or feedback on the proposals. All feedback

will be considered before any new charges are finalised and implemented. After considering any feedback received, the council may finalise and implement charges and any specific implementation arrangements.

- 5.32 The Independent Living Support Service would need to be applied to all in scope properties. This means that when the charge is implemented, there will not be an option to 'opt out'. This is also necessary to ensure that the service is eligible for a Housing Benefit or Universal Credit contribution for eligible tenants (i.e, it is part of the tenancy arrangements demonstrating an enhanced level of support). It should be noted that for any current tenants who have previously expressed that they do not wish to receive support within a sheltered housing setting, or, where, during the consultation period, a tenant advises that the new service costs might be unaffordable, the Council will review specific concerns in relation to hardship on a case-by-case basis in accordance with normal council policies.
- 5.33 **Key Proposal 3: Implementing a Personalised Exit Plan for Dispersed Housing Tenants**
- 5.34 Based on the feedback received, it is clear that the previous Intensive Housing Management Service is not effectively meeting the expectations of some tenants across the council's dispersed housing stock and that there are varied support needs, wishes and preferences across tenants.
- 5.35 The initial survey of the 567 IHMS tenants in dispersed housing was responded to by 542 tenants. The outcome of this was that 265 tenants expressed a wish to opt out of the IHMS service (of which, over 100 have subsequently followed the steps required to opt out). 56 tenants confirmed they just wanted access to lifeline services, and 221 expressed a wish to have access to support.
- 5.36 The report to Cabinet in October 2023 noted that initial modelling for a visiting support service across the Council's dispersed housing stock estimated an hourly cost of £37. The report noted that it was possible that as an outcome of the review it would not be possible or appropriate for the council to continue offering an IHMS service to tenants in dispersed accommodation in the future and that in this case, a further Cabinet report would detail a proposed transition plan for each tenant. Whilst some tenants (approx. 220) have expressed a wish to have ongoing access to support, it has not been possible to design and directly deliver an affordable, sustainable or resilient model. It is therefore proposed that the Council can best meet tenants needs and preferences in a different way.
- 5.37 This will mean that the Council will no longer offer an Intensive Housing Management Service across its dispersed housing stock. Instead, the Council would consult upon a personalised exit planning process through which each tenant will be directly supported to access alternative support and or lifeline services relevant to their individual needs. This will enable tenants to make choices about the support and services they receive. Further to consideration of feedback from this consultation and any amendments required, an exit process will commence.
- 5.38 There are currently approximately 450 tenants across the Borough who live in 'designated' dispersed properties who will need to be supported through this exit planning process. A small officer project team (4-5 officers) has been established. The officers will carry out personalised exit planning home visits to each tenant affected by this change. Alternatively, and subject to individual tenant preference, it may be appropriate for discussions to take place via telephone or online. The visits will be carried out by trained and experienced staff,

from existing teams (housing team and community support hub team) who have knowledge of support services, housing options, and where to access information and guidance on a range of topics whilst also being able to discuss with tenants some of the other things that matter to them as a tenant such as any concerns or feedback about their home or their communities. As part of the exit planning meetings, tenants will also be supported with regards to benefit maximisation, with direct assistance being provided to help people to find out about and to access financial support to which they are entitled (for example, Attendance Allowance, Carers Allowance, Single Person Council Tax Discount).

- 5.39 The staff facilitating the exit plan visits or calls can also facilitate referrals to partner agencies, and support tenants in initial discussions with other agencies as appropriate. This process will be overseen and coordinated by the Senior Housing Officer, and each visit will be supported by a proforma to guide discussions with customers. A record of each visit will be logged on tenancy records.
- 5.40 For customers who wish to have continued access to lifeline or assistive technology services, officers will advise on the options available from a range of providers, and the associated costs and subscription arrangements. The current arrangements will remain in place and will be unaffected until the individual exit plan discussions have taken place with each tenant. A date from which the current lifeline service will no longer be available will be agreed as part of the implementation arrangements.
- 5.41 It should be noted that Melton Borough Council offers a chargeable private lifeline service but is not the only service provider of lifeline services and it is important that tenants can make choices and be supported to access the right lifeline or assistive technology services for them.
- 5.42 Completing the personalised exit plan meetings will be resource intensive but is considered necessary to ensure that each tenant is aware of, and connected with any advice, guidance, support or services they may need.
- 5.43 Prior to implementation of the exit planning process, a consultation will be undertaken with affected tenants on the proposed exit plan arrangements. Feedback will be considered prior to finalisation and implementation of exit planning arrangements.
- 5.44 Following consideration of the consultation feedback, letters will be sent to all tenants confirming the next steps and visits will be offered to tenants to undertake the personalised exit plan visits. The use of clear language and messaging will be important within any correspondence sent to tenants.
- 5.45 It should be noted that tenants who do not wish to receive an exit visit and do not wish to receive to have any further advice, support or lifeline services can decline and will not be included in the exit plan visit arrangements.
- 5.46 It is proposed that the exit visits will be concluded within a three-month period (progress will be kept under review by the Senior Housing Officer). A phased programme of visits will be undertaken, based on ward areas and will be planned in advance. The plan (order of wards) will be set out in advance to all Members, and ahead of the visits taking place in a ward area, the relevant ward members will be notified to ensure they are aware in advance in the event of any tenant queries.
- 5.47 Feedback obtained as part of the review has identified that tenants are often unclear who their housing officer is, and how to contact them. Whilst the council has provided this

information, it is important to consider how best to ensure tenants can access this information when they need it in the future. Details are included within newsletters and letters, but feedback suggests that information in this format can get lost. A new tenants webpage has been developed and is due to launch, which includes useful and tenant focussed information (including details of each housing officer and their patches). Additionally, in response to feedback from the Scrutiny Committee, a fridge magnet with key contacts and information is being developed and will be provided to every council tenant in the future.

#### 5.48 **Pre-development involvement from the Council's Scrutiny Committee**

5.49 To support effective pre-policy development work, the outcome of the review and draft recommendations were considered at a workshop of the Scrutiny Committee in February 2024. Scrutiny consideration has been an important part of the review process, enabling proposals to be refined and improved and to ensure effective governance, oversight and challenge. Scrutiny Committee feedback will be formally provided to Cabinet by the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee, and the Portfolio Holder was in attendance for the workshop session.

5.50 The Portfolio Holder and Officers would like to express thanks to the Scrutiny Committee for the engagement, constructive feedback and advice which has added value and quality to the proposals made to Cabinet and have been discussed with Cabinet and in detail with the Portfolio Holder leading to some refinements to the finalised proposals and the recommendations set out within this report.

5.51 A copy of the Scrutiny Committee Workshop feedback can be found at Appendix B. The Committee were broadly supportive of the proposed approach but wanted to highlight a number of key themes. These are set out below, with detail of how the comments have been taken into consideration and incorporated into the above proposal:

5.52 **Clarity of offer and language that promotes support and independence:** this is an important consideration and will be embedded within the service design. The title 'Independent Living Support Service is also designed to promote independence.

5.53 **Costs to tenants to be kept as low as possible and potential to phase the implementation of charges:** the committee recognised the need to charge for support services but were concerned at the potential increase in costs from a tenant perspective, in the context of wider cost of living pressures. This feedback has been taken into consideration and based on the feedback received, it is proposed that the Independent Living Support Service charges will be phased over a two-year period, with discounts on elements of the charge that are not eligible for housing benefit (ineligible charges) being offered in 2024/25 (20% discount) and 2025/26 (10% discount). The full charge would apply in 2026/27. Additionally, the report confirms that each tenant subject to the Independent Living Support Service Charge would be supported directly with regards to benefit maximisation, to help tenants access financial support to which they are entitled.

5.54 Work is also continuing to ensure the design of the service enables eligible tenants to access a contribution to the Independent Living Support Service charge from Housing Benefit or Universal Credit. Continued internal work and refinements have identified that up to 45% tasks could be eligible for such a contribution for eligible individuals. Further work continues to establish whether any further elements would be in scope.

5.55 It should be noted that for any current tenants who have previously expressed that they do not wish to receive support within a sheltered housing setting, or, where, during the

consultation period, a tenant advises that the new service costs might be unaffordable, the Council will review specific concerns in relation to hardship on a case-by-case basis in accordance with normal council policies.

- 5.56 **Visibility of officers to tenants and on-site presence / contact with Independent Living Officers:** the committee identified that the wording of the proposals had not been clear that whilst working flexibly, staff would be present across the sheltered housing sites each day (Monday to Friday) in addition to the proposed drop-in sessions and check in visits. This led to queries about value for money. This clarity has been added to the service scope set out above.
- 5.57 **In scope properties for the new Independent Living Service:** Members considered it beneficial to include the Bradgate Bungalows into the Independent Living Service scope due to their proximity to the Bradgate Flats and access to the communal facilities within. This has been included within the proposal and consultation on the proposed Independent Living Support Service will enable those tenants to provide feedback.
- 5.58 **Communication and engagement:** the committee noted the importance of clear and effective communication with tenants and also with ward members, who are likely to receive resident enquiries.
- 5.59 **The importance of a person (rather than property) based approach for those living in dispersed accommodation:** Committee Members noted the importance of having services linked to people rather than properties, so that they can access the right service and not pay for things they do not want or need. Members agreed that the current priority should be to ensure that tenants are supported in a way that is relevant to their individual needs.
- 5.60 **Pace and delivery of the personalised exit planning process:** Concern was raised regarding managing the exit arrangements in a timely manner. Members suggested that all interviews should be done within three months, and to monitor progress. This is agreed and progress will be monitored via a project group. If additional resource is required to accelerate progress, this will be discussed separately. There is significant benefit from using existing staff to carry out this process, to enable referrals and links to local services relevant to tenants needs and preferences. Members also noted the need to ensure that 'softer' questions form part of the exit meetings such as how a resident feels living in their property and whether they feel safe. The exit meetings provide an important opportunity to engage directly with a large number of tenants. Members also noted that forms can be difficult complete, and that doing this through face to face discussions will be important.
- 5.61 **Customer dissatisfaction:** The committee recognised that the wider IHMS service has been a reactive service, and that there is a level of frustration from some customers. Any complaints or concerns regarding the previous service will be dealt with through normal policies and procedures.

## 6 Alternative Options Considered

- 6.1 Option 1 – Do Nothing: The IHMS service requires change and improvement. The lack of clarity and ability to evidence service quality exposes the Council to risk and challenge, and the Council cannot be confident that it is meeting the needs or expectations of customers. Doing nothing would also fail to respond to the audit recommendations and to tenant and Councillor feedback about the service. This option is not recommended.



- 6.2 Option 2 – Consult formally upon a chargeable visiting support service for the wider dispersed properties. The costs were considered prohibitive, and it is considered that tenants’ needs are better met through the recommended exit plan. Therefore, this option is not recommended.
- 6.3 Option 3 – Do not offer a discount to the Independent Living Support Service charge in 2024/25 and 2025/26. Given the importance of supporting tenants with their finances, this option is not recommended.

## **7 Consultation, Implementation and Communication**

- 7.1 The outcome of the review and recommendations were considered at a workshop of the Scrutiny Committee in February 2024. Scrutiny consideration has been an important additional step to refine the proposals and to ensure effective governance arrangements.
- 7.2 Engagement with tenants has taken place throughout the review. The proposals and recommendations reflect feedback received during the review.
- 7.3 Subject to formal cabinet approval, formal consultation will commence on the following basis:
- 7.3.1 A four-week consultation will commence with sheltered housing tenants (including Bradgate bungalows) on the proposed Independent Living Support Service and associated charges. Consideration of feedback in line with delegation and finalisation / implementation of the new service and associated charges.
- 7.3.2 A four-week consultation will commence with IHMS dispersed housing tenants on the proposed exit plan arrangements. Consideration of feedback in line with delegation and finalisation / implementation of the exit plan arrangements.
- 7.4 A rollout plan for the ordering of wards in which exit planning meetings will be agreed and shared with ward members.
- 7.5 Officers forming the project group will be deployed to coordinate and carry out the exit meetings.
- 7.6 Recruitment to the vacant role of Independent Living Officer will be undertaken.
- 7.7 A project to digitise the lifeline system within the sheltered housing schemes as part of the Independent Living Support Service will be undertaken.
- 7.8 An appropriate end date for the current lifeline system within dispersed housing properties will be agreed.

## **8 Financial Implications**

- 8.1 The annual cost of providing the proposed Independent Living Support Service (based on 1.79FTE plus overheads and lifeline costs) is £76,360. Based on the model proposed (83 properties), this will lead to a service charge in 2024/25 of £19.46 per tenant per week for the Independent Living Support Service (including the Lifeline). Service charges are applied to rent accounts and appear on rent statements.
- 8.2 It is appropriate and necessary to charge for the proposed Independent Living Support Service and to apply it to all in-scope properties. However, a period of statutory consultation on the specific proposals is required and feedback should be considered, before any new charges or service delivery arrangements can be implemented. A four-week consultation is

proposed. The proposed delegation at para 2.5.6 confirms that there is a clear mechanism to review and consider feedback arising from the consultation prior to finalisation / changes and implementation of charging arrangements.

8.3 The Council is keen to reduce and transition costs to tenants where possible. The report confirms that some of the Independent Living Support Service costs / tasks are eligible for a Housing Benefit or Universal Credit contribution. The working assumption is that approximately 45% will be eligible, leading to a cost reduction for eligible tenants. External advice is currently being undertaken which may adjust the maximum Housing Benefit / Universal Credit contribution. Housing benefit cannot be applied to lifeline services.

8.4 In making a commitment to reduce and transition these costs the Council is proposing a discount on the amount of the Independent Living Support Service charge which is not eligible for housing benefit for the financial years 2024-25 and 2025-26 (20% in 2024-25 and 10% in 2025-26).

8.4.1 This would be a total net cost to the HRA over these financial years of £11,549 as follows:

	39 weeks 2024-25 £	52 weeks 2025-26 £	52 weeks 2026-27 £
Weekly Charge	19.46	19.46	19.46
% Ineligible for Housing Benefit	55%	55%	55%
Ineligible Charge	10.70	10.70	10.70
20% Discount 2024-25	-2.14	0.00	0.00
10% Discount 2025-26	0.00	-1.07	0.00
Total Ineligible Charge	8.56	9.63	10.70
Annual Cost to HRA	6,929.12	4,619.41	0.00

8.4.2 Assumptions made:

- Inflation has not been included in the table and will affect both the service charge and cost amounts in future years.
- The working assumption and expectation that 45% of the charge will be eligible for housing benefit for those who are entitled to it, has been used.
- The charge will start from 1 July 2024.

8.5 It is also proposed that a one-off budget is created to enable improvements to the communal areas within the sheltered housing schemes during 24/25 in response to tenant feedback. A delegation is proposed to authorise the Director for Housing and Communities, in consultation with the Director for Corporate Services and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Landlord Services, to create a one-off budget of up to £50,000 to enable improvements to communal areas for properties in scope of the Independent Living Support Service in 2024/25, funded from the HRA Regeneration and Development reserve. Whilst this is affordable, it should be noted that this choice for investment will reduce the available funding within the reserve.

8.6 The Regeneration & Development reserve balance at 31 March 2025 would then be estimated to be £1.020m with overall HRA reserves at £4.408m. Reserves are expected to reduce and some reprofiling of expenditure is required within the first 10 years of the

business plan, as reported to Cabinet on 7 February 2024, but from year 11 balances do start to recover based on the current known profile of works.

### **Financial Implications reviewed by: Director for Corporate Services**

## **9 Legal and Governance Implications**

- 9.1 Further to the audit of the IHMS service, the need for a full review remains on the internal audit tracker. As a high priority and overdue recommendation, close attention is being given to progress on this work by the audit committee with updates being provided to the committee at every meeting. When the review has concluded with final recommendations considered by Cabinet and implemented, a final update will be provided to audit committee.
- 9.2 The Council's HRA Business Plan is clear on its commitment to progress a review of support available to tenants, including options regarding support and assistive technology to increase independence in the future. The Business Plan was approved by Council in July 2023 and the IHMS (Housing Support) review remains in line with this commitment.
- 9.3 Scrutiny Committee have considered the proposals and will provide feedback to Cabinet. Key themes are included within this report.
- 9.4 The IHMS service is assessed as a high risk on the Housing and Communities directorate risk register.
- 9.5 The IHMS review project is being managed as a corporate project as part of the Council's project management arrangements. This should continue, to ensure corporate oversight and accountability.
- 9.6 Formal consultation on the proposals must now take place and will form and engagement with tenants will form a key part of the decision-making process and implementation of charges and service changes.
- 9.7 Where agreement is reached with a tenant, a variation of tenancy agreement can be entered into to make the legal change to the tenancy.
- 9.8 The Housing Act 1985 also permits the terms of secure tenancy which is periodic to be varied by the landlord through a notice of variation. If this route is to be followed, before serving a notice of variation, the Council must inform the tenant of the intention to serve a notice of variation, specify the proposed variation and its effect, and invite the tenant to comment on the proposed variation within such time as the Council considers reasonable. The proposal of four weeks appears to be a reasonable time. The Council must consider any comments made by the tenant within the specific time.
- 9.9 Consideration will also need to be given to any contractual obligations the Council has with external contractors, such as the current lifeline call centre as part the exit planning process.

### **Legal Implications reviewed by: Deputy Monitoring Officer**

## **10 Equality and Safeguarding Implications**

- 10.1 The Equalities Act 2010 requires the Council as a public authority in carrying out its functions to have due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty to achieve the objectives set out under section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010:

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

- 10.2 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been undertaken. The EIA has been reviewed during its development by the internal check and challenge group and updated in response to feedback received. The EIA will be published to the Council's [website](#).
- 10.3 The review of the IHMS service does impact on some of our more vulnerable tenants, for example elderly tenants and those with disabilities. As part of the review, engage with tenants using a variety of methods including face to face meetings, surveys and individual correspondence.
- 10.4 Tenant feedback has shaped the proposals and for sheltered housing tenants enables a clear and enhanced level of support as part of the council's housing offer for more vulnerable tenants, through the provision of an Independent Living Support Service.
- 10.5 For dispersed housing tenants, a person focussed approach and personalised exit plan is an important way to ensure that individual needs and preferences are understood and that tenants are supported to access alternative support and lifeline services in line with these needs and preferences.
- 10.6 If at any point in interactions with tenants any safeguarding or welfare concerns are identified, onward referrals must be made to appropriate organisations.
- 10.7 Care must be taken to ensure that where properties are de-designated, there are clear and effective allocation arrangements. Removing the IHMS charge from each individual dispersed tenancy where the tenant has identified that they wish to leave the service will mean that those properties are effectively 'de-designated' and will form part of the council's general needs accommodation rather than restricted accommodation. The proposed Local Lettings Policy will be an important safeguard to ensure appropriate future allocation of properties, for example, to restrict the allocation of some properties to applicants with defined characteristics, for example those over a certain age or with health needs or disabilities. The Council will need to balance the requirement to ensure sustainable and balanced communities across the borough with tenant expectations and the council's statutory obligation to house those in the greatest need via its housing register.

## **11 Data Protection Implications (Mandatory)**

The Council holds personal and financial information about its tenants. This must be treated in line with data protection requirements at all times. Advice should be taken from the Council's Information Governance Lead as required.

## **12 Community Safety Implications**

- 12.1 None arising directly from this report.

## **13 Environmental and Climate Change Implications**

- 13.1 None arising directly from this report.

## 14 HR and Staffing Implications

- 14.1 Currently there is one IHMS officer in post working 4 days per week, (0.79FTE) with additional cover being provided across the wider housing team, including the deployment of the senior housing officer to provide direct support and oversight. The role will transition to that of Independent Living Officer. A further 1FTE post will be recruited to. The role and remit of the posts is set out in the report.
- 14.2 The establishment will be updated to reflect these changes through a separate decision notice.
- 14.3 Should any implications arise, employees and unions will be consulted on throughout the process and all usual HR policies and procedures will be followed.

## 15 Risk & Mitigation

- 15.1 The IHMS Service is assessed as high risk on the Housing and Communities Directorate Risk Register. The review seeks to address the risk and improve service clarity and delivery in the future.
- 15.2 The IHMS review is being managed as a corporate project. A risk log is maintained for all projects.

The risks outlined below are specific to the current report:

Risk Number	Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Risk Rating
1	The proposed arrangements do not meet the weaknesses in the current scheme as identified by the internal audit review	4	2	Medium
2	The costs of the Independent Living Support Service scheme are unaffordable to tenants either due to their ineligibility for Housing Benefit/Universal Credit or due to the level of the charge that is covered by benefit.	3	3	Medium
3	The consultation process following cabinet decision is not clear, robust or transparent.	3	3	Medium
4	Recommendations for future support arrangements are not	3	3	Medium

Risk Number	Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Risk Rating
	robust or evidence based			
5	Unable to transition effectively to digital lifeline arrangements in sheltered housing schemes as part of the Independent Living Support Service	4	4	High
6	The switch to digital lifeline increases costs in the future	3	3	Medium
7	De-designation of dispersed properties without alternative arrangements leads to lettings that do not support community cohesion or stability	3	4	Medium
8	Customer dissatisfaction results in complaints or additional costs	4	4	High
9	Not achieving project implementation milestones	3	4	Medium
10	Cost to apply discount to Independent Living Support Service in 2024/25 and 2025/26 leads to greater pressure on the HRA	3	2	Low
11	Housing benefit implications arising from changes to service charges	3	3	Medium
12	Dispersed housing customers dissatisfied at having to access alternative support and lifeline arrangements	3	3	Medium
13	De-designation of properties opens them up to the Right to Buy	4	4	High

		Impact / Consequences			
		Negligible	Marginal	Critical	Catastrophic
Likelihood	Score/ definition	1	2	3	4
	6 Very High				
	5 High				
	4 Significant		1		5,8, 13
	3 Low		10	2, 3, 4, 6, 11, 12	7, 9
	2 Very Low				
	1 Almost impossible				

Risk No	Mitigation
1	<p><b>The proposed scheme does not meet the weaknesses in the current scheme as identified by the internal audit review:</b></p> <p>The audit outlined the need for a clear service plan or specification setting out the services provided or expected outcomes, greater clarity for staff and customers and identified concerns regarding capacity and service resilience, and difficulty in demonstrating value for money.</p> <p>The proposed arrangements seek to address this requirement. For completeness, the report and associated background documents will be provided to Internal Audit colleagues for their review and comment. Any further requirements arising from that review will be actioned and evidence provide to Internal Audit. When Internal Audit are satisfied that the audit recommendation has been appropriately addressed, an update will be provided to the Audit and standards Committee by way of update to the audit tracker.</p>
2	<p><b>The costs of the Independent Living Support Service is unaffordable to tenants either due to their ineligibility for Housing Benefit/Universal Credit or due to the level of the charge that is covered by benefit:</b></p>

Risk No	Mitigation
	<p>Whilst it is appropriate to apply a service charge, work has been undertaken to consider ways in which to reduce and transition costs. The report confirms that some of the Independent Living Support Service costs / tasks are eligible for a Housing Benefit or Universal Credit contribution. The working assumption is that approximately 45% will be eligible, leading to a cost reduction for eligible tenants. External advice is currently being undertaken which may adjust the maximum Housing Benefit / Universal Credit contribution. Housing benefit cannot be applied to lifeline services.</p> <p>In making a commitment to reduce and transition these costs the Council is proposing a discount on the amount of the Independent Living Support Service charge which is not eligible for housing benefit for the financial years 2024-25 and 2025-26 (20% in 2024-25 and 10% in 2025-26).</p>
3	<p><b>The consultation process following cabinet decision is not clear, robust or transparent:</b></p> <p>The consultation process is set out in the report and also follows the steps required to implement or vary service charges. The report confirms that there is a meaningful mechanism through which consultation feedback will be considered. The recommendations at paragraphs 2.5.6 and 2.6.2 refer specifically to this point.</p>
4	<p><b>Recommendations for future support arrangements are not robust or evidence based:</b></p> <p>The review has involved extensive work to fully understand the history, scope and delivery of the Intensive Housing Management Service and to consider future options that can best support tenants to retain their independence, respond to feedback about the service and to ensure that the Council can confidently deliver any future support arrangements.</p> <p>Consultation and engagement has taken place with tenants as part of the review. Feedback has been taken into consideration and has enabled a greater understanding of the views of tenants, types of support required and how this can best be delivered and in doing so, to ensure clarity of expectations and accountability in service delivery.</p> <p>The consultation period will provide a further opportunity for feedback prior to finalisation and implementation of changes.</p>
5	<p><b>Unable to transition effectively to digital lifeline arrangements in sheltered housing schemes as part of the Independent Living Support Service:</b></p> <p>A transition to a digitally enabled lifeline system in advance of the digital switchover in 2025 will be necessary and will be managed as a corporate project. Digital switchover is already being monitored by the Helping People Board, and the need to accelerate the development and implementation of a plan to digitise the lifeline system as part of the Independent Living Support Service has been highlighted as part of the project governance arrangements.</p>
6	<p><b>The switch to digital lifeline increases costs in the future:</b></p> <p>Digital switchover is a requirement, as current analogue technology will become obsolete by December 2025. Depending on the solution that is implemented, there will be costs associated with this, for example, changes to equipment and monitoring arrangements. Value for money will be a key part of the associated project.</p>
7	<p><b>De-designation of dispersed properties without alternative arrangements leads to lettings that do not support community cohesion or stability:</b></p> <p>By no longer providing an Intensive Housing Management Service, the Council will also need to go through a process of 'de-designating' dispersed properties meaning that they form part of the council's general needs accommodation rather than restricted</p>



Risk No	Mitigation
	<p>accommodation. There is scope, through a review of the Housing Allocations Policy and / or the use of a Local Lettings Policy (LLP), to restrict the allocation of some properties to applicants with defined characteristics, for example, those over a certain age or with health needs or disabilities. The Council will need to balance the requirement to support sustainable and balanced communities across the borough with tenant expectations and the council's statutory obligations to assist and house those in greatest need via its housing register.</p> <p>There is an existing delegation in place to enable the development of a Local Lettings Plan alongside this review. The Scrutiny Committee are also due to consider the allocations policy as part of their committee work programme, and it is suggested that this makes reference to any required amendments to the policy arising from this review.</p>
8	<p><b>Customer dissatisfaction results in complaints or additional costs:</b></p> <p>There has been considerable tenant frustration about the lack of clarity relating to the Intensive Housing Management Service. Tenants have been given the option to opt out of the service and IHMS charges have not been applied to rent accounts from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024. Any individual concerns or complaints would be dealt with in line the customer feedback and complaints policy.</p> <p>The review of the service and associated recommendations respond directly to feedback received and seek to provide clarity on revised support arrangements, within an Independent Living framework.</p>
9	<p><b>Not achieving project implementation milestones:</b></p> <p>This will be managed as a corporate project and will be overseen by the Helping People Board, which will monitor progress against key milestones. The project documentation will be updated ahead of the next project board meeting to ensure milestones are aligned to the cabinet recommendations and final implementation arrangements. Any deviation from the project timeline would be discussed and challenged through this process.</p>
10	<p><b>Cost to apply discount to Independent Living Support Service in 2024/25 and 2025/26 leads to greater pressure on the HRA:</b></p> <p>The cost implications arising are set out in the report. In making a commitment to reduce and transition these costs the Council is proposing a discount on the amount of the Independent Living Support Service charge which is not eligible for housing benefit for the financial years 2024-25 and 2025-26 (20% in 2024-25 and 10% in 2025-26). This would be a total cost to the HRA over these financial years of £11,549. This is considered affordable to the HRA.</p>
11	<p><b>Housing benefit implications arising from changes to service charges:</b></p> <p>Operational processes agreed to ensure relevant changes made to rent accounts and housing benefit claims simultaneously, to reduce the risk of housing benefit overpayments. Consider as a project risk and mitigate through project implementation plan.</p>
12	<p><b>Dispersed housing customers dissatisfied at having to access alternative support and lifeline arrangements:</b></p> <p>The need to prepare for the digital switchover presents a timely change for customers in the context of the review. The Council operates a private lifeline service, and transitional arrangements have been agreed between teams for customers who wish to transition to this service. Officers recognise that customer choice is an important factor and will make tenants aware of alternative lifeline / assistive technology service providers and</p>

Risk No	Mitigation
	can support them to transition to these services on a case-by-case basis. Irrespective of provider, customers will need to pay for lifeline services.
13	<p><b>De-designation of properties opens them up to the Right to Buy:</b></p> <p>There is an exception to the Right to Buy for properties for the elderly if they meet the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The property is one of a group or a single dwelling house which according to its location, size, design and heating system and other features makes it suitable for occupation by elderly people and;</li> <li>b) Dwelling houses in group are let to people aged over 60 or physically disabled people and;</li> <li>c) There is either a warden on site, or a system for calling a non-resident warden and there is a communal room in close proximity.</li> </ul> <p>This means that even for non-sheltered properties within the current IHMS scheme, a RTB application may be allowed. It is considered that outside of the sheltered housing schemes the council would currently struggle to defend some RTB applications regardless of the IHMS review.</p> <p>A local letting plans is being developed to ensure the continued careful allocation of dispersed properties for older residents. However, without a lifeline and / or warden type arrangement as part of this, it is possible that there is an increase in RTB applications for properties that are not exempt (i.e, those outside of the Independent Living Support Service), the main issues being the absence of a lifeline service and / or close proximity to a communal room.</p> <p>The Council may also wish to consider extending the scope of the Independent Living Support Service in future.</p> <p>The current profile of right to buy sales has been approximately 10 per year. The Council has an Affordable Housing Development Policy, which sets out how the council will seek to acquire or develop new affordable homes. The Right to Buy is a tenants right, and should the council experience an increase in applications it will need to consider carefully how it offsets the reduction in housing stock through acquisition and development opportunities.</p>

## 16 Background Papers

- 16.1 Cabinet: [Microsoft Word - FINAL IHMS Service Review \(melton.gov.uk\)](https://www.melton.gov.uk)
- 16.2 Council: [HRA Revenue Budget Proposals 2024-25 \(Recommendations from Cabinet\)](#)
- 16.3 Scrutiny Briefing Presentation: Housing Support Review
- 16.4 Equality Impact Assessment
- 16.5 Letter to tenants: IHMS charges from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024

- 16.6 Choice Based Letting and Housing Allocations Policy
- 16.7 HRA 30 Year Business Plan
- 16.8 Internal Audit Report and Audit Tracker

## **17 Appendices**

- 17.1 Appendix A: Draft Independent Living Framework
- 17.2 Appendix B: Scrutiny Committee Workshop Feedback

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## Melton Borough Council – A Framework for Independent Living

DRAFT – PENDING FINALISATION AS PART OF HOUSING SUPPORT REVIEW



At Melton Borough Council, we want to support tenants to live and age well, and to live independently for as long as possible.

The Framework for Independent Living has been designed to provide a summary which sets out the support provided by the council as a landlord for:

- General Needs Housing: General Housing Officer Support
- Sheltered Housing: Independent Living Support Service
- Extra Care Housing at Gretton Court: Wellbeing Service

### **General Needs Housing**

The majority of our properties are classed as 'general needs'. There are no support charges applied to these properties. As a general needs tenant, you will have an allocated housing officer, and you will be provided with their name and contact details.

Our housing officers cover 'patches' and will have approximately 500 properties on their 'patch'.

If at any time you feel you need some extra support, for example, you are unable to pay your rent, need help to understand your rent statement, or are experiencing anti-social behaviour or any other issues affecting your tenancy, your housing officer will be able to advise you on the advice and support available from the council and from other organisations, based on your specific circumstances.

Your housing officer can also advise you on how to access other support and services, for example, advice and support on income and benefit maximisation, or lifeline and assistive technology services.

Housing officers work flexibly across their housing patches, Monday to Friday between the hours of 9am and 5pm. To arrange to speak with your housing officer, or another member of the housing team, please contact the Council via the switchboard on 01664 502502.

There are separate arrangements for accessing support in an emergency outside of these hours.

### **Sheltered Housing: Independent Living Support Service**

Sheltered housing is a type of housing with support; designed for individuals who want to live independently but may require additional assistance and support, often through a designated officer, with access to 24-hour emergency assistance also provided. Typically, there will be access to communal areas and gardens which are maintained by the Council as a landlord, but unlike care homes, care services and meals are not provided.

We operate an Independent Living Support Service across our Sheltered Housing Schemes. 83 of our priorities are classed as 'sheltered' housing. The majority of these are flats, but some are bungalows. The following properties fall into this category:

- Bradgate Flats (21 properties)
- Wilton Court (21 properties)
- Granby House (31 properties)
- Bradgate Lane Bungalows (10 properties)

The Independent Living Support Service is paid for by tenants through a weekly service charge of £19.46. This will appear on your rent statement as XXXX. The

weekly service charge pays for the provision of support and a lifeline. You may be eligible to receive help towards these costs from Housing Benefit or Universal Credit.

*Please note: The Independent Living Support Service charges will be phased-in over a two-year period, with a discounts on elements of the charge that are not eligible for housing benefit (ineligible charges) being offered in 2024/25 (20%) and 2025/26 (10%). The full charge would apply in 2026/27.*

The aims of the Independent Living Support Service are:

- To ensure the voices and views of tenants are heard by the Council as a Landlord.
- To support and empower more vulnerable tenants to live independently.
- To support and connect tenants with information and support relevant to their needs.
- A clear, consistently delivered, transparent and accountable service.
- Sufficient and resilient staffing arrangements to provide the agreed service offer.
- To enable access to a digitally enabled lifeline system.
- To ensure a welcoming and supportive environment within communal areas, to support and encourage engagement and participation.
- To 'know our tenants'

As a tenant sheltered housing tenant, you will be supported by our Independent Living Officers. There are 2 Independent Living Officers, who provide this support across the sheltered housing schemes. They are supported by a Senior Housing Officer, and they work closely with the Housing Officers and wider housing team.

Independent Living Officers help tenants to live independently and will ensure that your voice is heard clearly by the council as your landlord.

Independent Living Officers will work flexibly across the sheltered schemes and in-scope bungalows. Their typical working days will be Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm and they will have a daily presence across the sheltered housing sites. They can be contacted if you need support, advice or information.

Independent Living Officers will make direct contact with you once every two weeks, unless you tell us you would prefer them not to. This will involve a knock at the door, or a telephone call to check in with you and to see how you are.

As part of the Independent Living Support Service, there will also be drop-in sessions for tenants on a fortnightly basis (alternated with 'check in' visit weeks). The drop-in sessions are an opportunity for you to meet with council staff, tenants and other organisations, and you will be able to let your Independent Living Officers know if you have any ideas or suggestions for the drop-in sessions.

As part of the Independent Living Support Service, our officers will be able support you to check that you are accessing any financial assistance that you are entitled to, for example, Housing Benefit, Attendance Allowance, Carers Allowance, Single Person Council Tax Discount.

Independent Living Officers will also carry out visual checks on communal areas such as communal lounges, storage areas and laundry facilities. They will provide feedback to other teams as required, for example, if tenants need assistance to report repairs.

The Independent Living Support Service includes a lifeline system, providing 24-hour access to support in an emergency.

### **Extra Care Housing**

Gretton Court is an Extra Care scheme for residents who would benefit from additional support to live independently. To be eligible to access housing at Gretton Court, residents need to be assessed by adult social care as needing a minimum of 3 hours care per week and need to apply to Melton Borough Council to join the housing register.

There are 43 flats at Gretton Court, and each one is equipped with a lifeline to enable 24-hour access to emergency support. On-site care is provided to tenants by Diamond Home Care, and this is commissioned by Leicestershire County Council.

Melton Borough Council also provides a Wellbeing Service to tenants at Gretton Court, which is intended to support tenants to live independently, and to facilitate and help residents to get involved in a range of social activities and events at Gretton Court. There is an Independent Living Officer on site at Gretton Court who coordinates this and oversees the general running of Gretton Court.

There is a weekly charge for the Wellbeing Living Service of £XXXXXX. This charge is applied to all flats at Gretton Court. This will appear on your rent statement as XXXX. You may be eligible to get some help towards this cost from Housing Benefit.

On site there is a laundry room, communal lounge with large garden and seating area. A midday meal is provided on a daily basis in the communal dining area, for which there is an additional service charge.

The Independent Living Officer is available 37 hours per week and works flexibly across the whole week (including occasional weekends to coordinate the delivery of events and activities).

### **Out of Hours**

The Council has an out of hours service in place, to respond to emergency situations for example, serious incidents or emergency repairs. If your call is an emergency,



outside of our office hours, please call 01664 502 502 but select option 1 to speak to our emergency contact centre. If lines are busy there will be an option to leave a message, which will be followed up. There are arrangements in place for calls requiring escalation or urgent attention. Please note, this does not replace lifeline services which should be used if assistance from family members or blue light services are required.

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To: Cabinet

Date: 6 March 2024

Report/Comments of: Scrutiny Committee

Title: Scrutiny feedback to Cabinet – Housing Support Review

<b>SUMMARY OF WORKSHOP UNDERTAKEN</b>	
<b>Workshop Title:</b>	Housing Support Review
<b>Purpose/Description of Workshop:</b>	<p>To present to Members the proposals for the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An independent living support service for Sheltered Housing schemes;</li> <li>• Arrangements to facilitate alternative access to support and lifeline services for tenants of dispersed housing;</li> <li>• Developing a framework for independent living to provide clear information to tenants, prospective tenants and their families.</li> </ul>
<b>Key Decision:</b>	No
<b>Scrutiny Lead Member:</b>	Cllr M Brown, Scrutiny Committee Chairman
<b>Relevant Portfolio Holder:</b>	Cllr P Allnatt, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Landlord Services

## 1. Introduction and Overview

A Scrutiny Committee workshop was held on 14 February 2024 to consider a presentation on the Housing Support Review. During the workshop, Members considered and commented on proposals for the following:

- An independent living support service for Sheltered Housing schemes;
- Arrangements to facilitate alternative access to support and lifeline services for tenants of dispersed housing;
- Developing a framework for independent living to provide clear information to tenants, prospective tenants and their families.

It was noted that feedback from Scrutiny Members would help shape the proposals ahead of Cabinet consideration on 6 March 2024.

## 2. Summary of Feedback/Recommendations for Cabinet Consideration

**a) An Independent Living Service for Sheltered Housing schemes:**

- The comment was made that the wording/language of the proposal needs to be clear that is focussed on support and Independence. Members commented that it is crucial that tenants feel empowered and want them to feel that they are independent but are able to have access to support when required.
- The service needs to be clear and welcoming and outlined clearly to a tenant before they move into a sheltered housing property.
- Some committee members felt there should be opportunity to 'opt out' of the proposed Independent Living Service. It was explained in response that a service would need to apply to all 'in scope' properties to enable this to be eligible for a housing benefit contribution eligible tenants and to be clear about the sheltered housing 'offer'. Members felt that a pragmatic approach would be needed for tenants who are already living in sheltered housing.
- A Member commented that as a provider of the service there has to be universality about it, in order for it to be affordable to deliver, but that scope needed to be clear and focussed.
- It was noted that other costs include the charge Harborough levy in answering lifeline calls and the cost of cover when officers are on leave.
- In relation to staffing costs, the query was raised as to whether there is scope to have one Officer on band 5 instead of band 6, however Members were informed that the saving was negligible and that for resilience purposes, it was better to have two band 6 Officers. The proposed service had been designed based on a deliverable model.
- Members were concerned that the proposal does not provide value for money, as it reduces the amount of time that people are left without contact. Visibility and presence on site is important and could it be as simple as people knowing that someone will be in a building at a particular time for an hour. In response, reassurance was given that officers would have presence across the sheltered schemes each day, but not on a fixed basis.
- Members commented that it is important for tenants to have contact with officers. The arrangements for visits and tenants drop-in surgeries were noted.
- The comment was made that it would be helpful if an officer could attend to a tenant who needs medical attention. It was noted that lifeline does send out a paramedic if assistance is needed urgently. Members were reminded that the Council is a landlord who provides additional assistance and not a care provider.
- The comment was made that Officers should be aware of what other supported accommodation is available within the Borough, what are they offering and how are they managing the service and costs.
- It was noted that the costs could seem a lot for tenants – members noted that any way to reduce costs to tenants would be welcome.
- Transitional arrangements for the Independent Living Service were discussed, and a pragmatic approach was requested to avoid any risk

of 'forcing tenants out of their homes'. Members were reassured on this point. Members also noted that there may some instances where tenants may benefit from alternative accommodation, on a case by case basis.

- Members recognised that tenants in communal blocks are a part of a community and noted that that the Council should ensure that tenants can afford the service.
- Members considered it beneficial to include Bradgate Bungalows into the Independent Living Service scope.
- In regard to the proposals regarding housing support arrangements for sheltered housing, Members commented that it broadly feels right.
- It was recommended that Ward Members need to be fully engaged on the proposals to be able to manage resident enquiries.
- Members stated that the increased charges for sheltered schemes should be phased in.

**b) Arrangements to facilitate alternative access to support and lifeline services for tenants of dispersed housing:**

- Concern was raised that tenants do not know who their housing officer is. In response to update that information is in the tenant newsletter, members pointed out that newsletters don't often get read and that a wallet sized card or fridge magnet with the housing officer's details to give to residents might be better and have less chance of being lost.
- Members noted the importance of having services linked to people rather than properties, so that they can access the right service and not pay for things they do not want or need.
- Concern was raised regarding exit interviews and how to process them in a timely manner. Members suggested that all interviews should be done within three months because once the process has commenced then the information will become widely known and needs to progress in a timely way, even if this requires additional resource.
- Dealing with tenants who may not realise or agree that they need any support or guidance was raised, although Officers comments that there are safeguarding assessments and Officers can refer appropriately.
- Regarding the questionnaire, Members commented that it must also include consideration of softer aspects such as 'how a resident feels living here' or 'whether they feel safe' or whether there is anything else they need.
- Members cautioned that the council will need to be clear on what they are asking for information from tenants and how this will be used. Suggested that there needs to be somewhere to sign the form in order to make the tenant feel empowered and ideally to give the tenant a copy of the form.
- It was suggested that tenants should be informed of what other support is available.
- Members agreed that the current priority should be to ensure that existing residents are properly supported in a way that is relevant to their needs.

- Members commented that forms are often complicated for tenants to fill out.
- It was recognised that the service has been a reactive service, and that there is a level of frustration from some customers. It was noted that there had been some requests for refunds from customers and that there is analysis of this underway. Members noted this as a risk.

**c) Other comments:**

- A comment was made that the service officer at Gretton Court needs to be defined as part of the proposed Independent Living Framework, so tenants know what to expect.
- Members were pleased that Officers are constantly improving performance.
- Officers were thanked by Members for their hard work.

**Written by: Scrutiny Committee Chairman in consultation with Members of the Scrutiny Committee**