



Housing Revenue Account 2022-23 Provisional Year End Position

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Lead Member/Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Sarah Cox – Portfolio Holder for Corporate Finance, Property and Resources Councillor Pip Allnatt - Leader of the Council, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Landlord Services
Corporate Priority:	Providing high quality council homes and landlord services. Ensuring the right conditions to support delivery (inward)
Relevant Ward Member(s):	All
Date of consultation with Ward Member(s):	N/A
Exempt Information:	No
Key Decision:	No
Subject to call-in:	No Not key decision

1 Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out the provisional year end position for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), subject to external audit approval, for 2022-23 and provides information on the Council's HRA balances and reserves.

- 1.2 The provisional revenue outturn shows an overspend against the approved budget, with £76,310 also being requested to be carried forward into 2023-24. A projected overspend has been reported during the year. The overspend represents (6%) of the overall annual expenditure budget and comprises cost pressures and income recovery challenges. These factors are described in more detail below and in the appendix.
- 1.3 The majority of planned and programmed activity and spend has been completed within the capital programme, representing 83% of the budget (excluding purchase of affordable homes). Much of the outstanding activity within the programme has already been or is due to be completed in the first quarter of 2023/24. The planned purchase of 8 affordable homes in Great Dalby has not yet completed and represented the most significant underspend in the programme. The final position is still subject to external audit approval for 2022-23.
- 1.4 The HRA Business Plan and HRA Asset Management Plan that were approved in 2022 highlighted that there are significant and unprecedented challenges in the social housing sector. These include regulatory changes, high levels of inflation and greater scrutiny from the Housing Regulator and the Ombudsman alongside restrictions on rent increases below inflation. These factors have all had an in-year impact on the HRA budgets including contract price increases and additional health and safety work. There has also been a focus on bringing long term void properties back into use with positive improvements being achieved

2 Recommendation(s)

That Cabinet:

- 2.1 **Notes the provisional year end position, variations to the 2022-23 approved year end position, and the resultant effect on the Council's HRA balances and reserves as set out below and in the attached papers, for both revenue and capital.**

3 Reason for Recommendations

- 3.1 It is important that Cabinet are aware of the financial position of the HRA in order to ensure they can make informed decisions that are affordable and financially sustainable for the HRA.

4 Background

- 4.1 The HRA is a large and complex budget; as such it is monitored on a monthly basis as a key service. The operation of the HRA is governed by the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and one of the key requirements is that the Council will produce and publish an annual budget for the HRA which avoids a deficit; and that the Council has a duty to review, and if necessary, revise that budget from time to time. If it appears that the HRA is heading for a deficit, then all reasonable and practicable steps must be taken to avoid a deficit at the year end.

5 Main Considerations

- 5.1 **Revenue Provisional Year End Position**

5.1.1 The figures shown in Appendix 1, and summarised in the table below, compare the provisional year end position for 2022-23 to the original estimate set in February 2022 and the approved estimate (the approved estimate being the original estimate as adjusted by supplementary estimates, virements and budget reductions authorised during the financial year). The approved estimate is the authorised budget for spending purposes. The report also shows the resultant effect on the contribution from reserves (Appendix 1 line 45) and reasons for major budget variations. It should be recognised, however, that the figures are still subject to external audit certification.

5.1.2 A summary of Appendix 1 is shown below:

	2022-23		
	Approved Budget	Estimated Year End Position	Variance
	£	£	£
Expenditure	7,211,180	7,607,632	396,452
Income	-8,043,500	-7,752,981	290,519
Net Interest Charges	1,092,960	913,590	-179,370
Revenue Contribution to Capital	262,670	185,758	-76,912
Total Net Expenditure	523,310	953,999	430,689
Contribution to/from(-) Reserves	-523,310	-953,999	-430,689
In Year Surplus(-)/Deficit	0	0	0

5.1.3 The provisional year end position shows an actual deficit of income over expenditure of £953,999 at “Total Expenditure” level, being an overspend of £430,689 against the approved budget deficit of £523,310. The Total Expenditure is the Net Operating Expenditure at line 43 on Appendix 1 plus the Revenue contribution to Capital amount at line 44. There are a number of budget variances that make up this overspend and as part of the budget monitoring and review process all budget holders have been requested to provide reasons for significant variations against their latest approved budget on individual service accounts. The details for which are outlined in Appendix 1 attached and for any variances in excess of £10k further comments have been included in line with financial protocols. However, the main ones to note are:

5.1.4 General Management £12k underspend:

Whilst we rebuild and strengthen the service some of our vacancies and roles have been challenging to fill. The later delivery of the (Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) modules for which a carry forward of £26,310 has been approved under delegation for 2023-24 has also contributed toward this underspend. Offset by higher and longer voids incurring Council Tax and the new insurance contract. Internal re-charges were re-apportioned in-year to ensure that the Intensive Housing Management Service was charged their share.

5.1.5 Special Services £19k underspend:

Due to budgeting for the full establishment whilst vacancies were being filled for key roles and a continued reduced requirement for food supplies following the pandemic, as lunch clubs for non-residents slowly recover, as well as the continuing high voids at Gretton Court for the resident’s lunches.

The contract works and asbestos budgets were also underspent and the budgets will be better informed as part of the continuous re-assessment of the asset management plan. Boiler and stair lift contracts are not currently in place, however any required maintenance is being completed so these budgets can also be re-assessed in future.

5.1.6 Repairs & Maintenance £356k overspend:

As the Council rebuilds and strengthens the service any underspends arising from vacant posts early in the year have been more than offset by agency costs.

Asbestos surveying was below the levels budgeted and a carry forward approved under delegation of £50k for 2023-24.

At the beginning of 2022-23 there was a significant number of long-term void properties (void over six months). There was an aim to clear the backlog of historic voids in the year. This meant that more major void work was completed, there was a higher turnover of completed void properties, contractors requested cost up-lifts and inflation levels were high. During 2022-23 there were also issues with the void contract that meant that the principal contractor could not complete void work. As a result, it was necessary to utilise other contractors whilst addressing contractor performance, resulting in a higher level of spend. The void contractor is now taking on 100% of new void properties and contract performance is high. However, this has all contributed to the voids overspend.

With regard to the overspend on the schedule of rates works, contributing factors include inflation that was higher than originally budgeted for which led to higher contractor cost uplifts. As the uplift was backdated to the contract renewal date there was a back-log of payable invoices for the previous financial year.

The increased focus nationally of damp and mould cases led to a significant rise in reports from tenants. Stock condition surveys and repair logging ensured that we had an accurate picture of damp and mould in our stock at the time that the surveys were completed. However, mould can develop in properties for a number of reasons that could not have been predicted at the stock condition survey stage. This can include changes in weather, occupancy levels, leaks and other factors that could not have been foreseen. The increased national focus resulted in a 300% increase in cases this winter. A robust reactive response was already in place and enhanced this winter. This includes proactively following up on cases after the repairs have been completed. A proactive approach continued to be developed to remedy damp and mould, including additional preventative steps that were taken. This included the installation of additional ventilation for any cases where damp and mould was present, alongside other measures, leading to a much higher spend on repairs in this area.

In November 2021 a new regulatory requirement was introduced to install CO and smoke detection in all properties within a specified timescale. This was after the budget had been set for 2022-23 which led to an increased spend in this area that had not been accounted for at the beginning of the financial year.

The 2022 HRA Asset Management Plan included a reassessment of these budgets to reflect some of these additional pressures. This includes an increased day to day repairs and void property budget.

A significant amount of work has been completed to address historic disrepair claims. This has resulted in higher spend against the annual budget in year. We continue to

receive disrepair claims but have found that the more recent cases are easier to defend due to better record keeping and a proactive approach to repairs.

5.1.7 Income shortfall of £291k:

Of this shortfall, the write-offs completed, the increase in arrears balances and the ages of these balances has meant an increase in the provision for non-payment of arrears resulting in an overspend of £210k on this line.

Voids performance though is improving, and we are continuing to actively relet properties including significant improvement at Gretton Court to reduce future rent loss. For example, in January 2022 we had 15 properties void at Gretton Court, now it has been reduced to 5, a further 4 properties had been held back for remodelling which are now being prepared to relet, and an acquired property, after undergoing extensive works, has recently been let.

5.1.8 Income recovery has been a key focus for the service and remains a risk. Since the appointment of an Income and Tenancy Sustainment Officer, positive action has been taken to improve recovery of rent arrears, and by March 2023 the arrears figure had reduced by £36k In addition to improvements to income collection processes and actions. End of year rent collection performance is 94.22% against a target of 95%. A range of improvements have been implemented to improve performance in this area, for example we are looking to increase the dates available for direct debts – currently we only offer one day per month for this. We will also be developing the arrears letters with tenants via the Your Choice meetings.

5.1.9 It is important to ensure income is maximised, whilst also providing guidance and support to tenants who are experiencing financial hardship, particularly in the context of the cost-of-living crisis.

5.1.10 A revised Income Management Policy has been implemented alongside a range of operational and process improvements. Scrutiny Committee undertook a recent review of income collection performance and the report from April 2023 including details of actions and improvements underway can be found here: [Committee \(melton.gov.uk\)](https://www.melton.gov.uk/committees/scrutiny-committee-reports). Key actions completed are shown below:

5.2 **Actions Completed:**

- The new created Income & Tenancy Sustainment Officer role started in October 2022, and is responsible for the end-to-end process, to enable greater focus and grip on income management.
- An Income Management Policy has been developed and approved.
- Initiated and implemented the use of Possession Claims Online (PCOL). This is an HM Courts & Tribunals Service function which will allow us to make possession claims for rent arrears more effectively

5.3 **Actions In Progress:**

- Improved data collection on arrears to highlight trends and issues for early intervention.

- Review of processes and development of clear guidance and processes for staff and customers.
 - Procedure complete and process mapping underway, providing clear guidance and ways to highlight our vulnerable customer(s) and how we can support our customers with getting on top of their debts.
- Produce an up-to-date suite of letters for the stages of rent arrears collections in consultation with tenants and leaseholders.
- Provide appropriate training to all staff who might have a part in the process to collect income and support our customers, including ongoing specialist training for key staff.
- Collate a list of cases where a debt relief order has been put in place and take appropriate steps / action as required.
- Implement a one-off hardship fund for council tenants.
- Update the ICT systems to replicate and automated process where possible.
- Review ongoing resourcing requirements to enable effective and resilient income management arrangements.
- Move from monthly data collection to weekly to improve performance monitoring and analysis.

5.4 **Summary**

- 5.4.1 The actual contribution from reserves against the budgeted contribution reflects the over and underspends noted above and, as approved in February 2022 the HRA working balance remains at £750k. This has resulted in an increased need to draw on the reserves by £431k in line with the overspend. When the £76k of carry forwards is taken into account this results in an increased draw on the reserves of £507k.
- 5.4.2 There have been no significant changes to the accounting requirements of the HRA accounts in 2022-23.

5.5 **Capital Provisional Year End Position**

- 5.5.1 In relation to the HRA capital programme against the budget of £5,895k, the provisional outturn is £3,448 resulting in an underspend of £2,447k, of which £2,312k to be carried forward into 2023-24.
- 5.5.2 £1,720k of the underspend relates to the 8 affordable houses at Great Dalby. Excluding this, the underspend is £727k of a £4,175k budget, or 17%. In the previous financial year the underspend was 66% of the budget.
- 5.5.3 One of the key reasons for the underspend this financial year is that the majority of the contracts were procured after the financial year started. This meant that there was less time to deliver the programme and resulted in some small carry forwards.
- 5.5.4 In some cases, the project was delivered under budget due to cost savings created through value engineering. As an example, the roofing project was completed as planned, providing a new roof with improved insulation levels. During the project the contractor proposed an alternative solution that delivered the same end result at a lower cost, which resulted in this budget being underspent.
- 5.5.5 Appendix 2 provides an overview of the main variances, those with carry-forward requirements are included in the table below:

Project	Budget £'000	Underspend £'000	Amount To Carry Forward To 23-24	Reason
Lifeline - Analogue To Digital	25	-18	18	This budget is required to fund a larger lifeline project for the purchase of digital Lifeline units to replace analogue units due to a national digital switchover in 2025. We are not yet in a position to purchase the units and are awaiting prices from two potential providers. We will need to carry this budget forward into the next financial year.
Aids & Adaptations	250	-87	70	The committed work has been completed. Identified delays worth 70k to be carried forward, the rest is a saving, as it was not allocated
Replacement Kitchens & Bathrooms	454	-41	25	The majority of the programme of kitchens and bathrooms will be complete. There will be around four kitchens that may not be 100% complete due to access issues. Work will be completed in 23/24. The saving is due to a difference between estimated individual kitchen cost and actual cost.
Install Central Heating	195	-45	45	Works were expected to be completed in year, but delays have resulted in the need for the carry forward.
Fire Safety & Fire Risk Assessment	1,022	363	360	Works were expected to be completed in year, but delays have resulted in the need for the carry forward.
Affordable Housing (Use Of	1,720	1,719	1,718	We are due to purchase 8 new build houses and planning issues meant

Right To Buy Monies)				that we could not exchange on them this year. The funds are required to be carried forward into the next financial year to ensure RTB receipts are spent on time.
Gretton Court	100	-21	8	Due to the nature of the tenants on site, progress with installs has been slower than expected so some will now take place in 23-24.
Scooter Pods	33	-33	33	Order placed and work originally planned for March 2023. Contractor advised that this has been delayed due to high levels of demand, so now being completed in April.
Fire Damage to Property – Drummond Walk	35	-35	35	This is a fire damaged property. Delays with work due to lack of power to the flat and major electrical upgrade work being required to supply power.

5.6 Balances

5.6.1 The updated actual and estimated reserves position following the final amount of carry forwards at the end of each financial year is noted below:

HRA Year End Balances:	2022-23 Provisional Actual £'000	2023-24 Estimate £'000	2024-25 Estimate £'000	2025-26 Estimate £'000	2026-27 Estimate £'000
HRA Working Balance	750	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
Major Repairs Reserve	3,319	3,305	3,167	1,054	185
Regeneration & Development Reserve	4,157	2,259	1,656	1,192	838
Capital Receipts Reserve	2,863	988	834	661	448
Total HRA Balances	11,089	7,552	6,657	3,907	2,471

5.7 In-year Movement on Balances

The table below shows how the overspend noted above directly affect the reserves in year compared to the originally budgeted balances and the estimates for 2023-24.

	Major Repairs Reserve	Regeneration & Development Reserve	Capital Receipts Reserve
	£'000	£'000	£'000
Budgeted Balance at 31.3.23	3,250	3,703	1,813
Carry Forward from 2021-22			
Capital	-52	-34	-731
Revenue	0	-150	0
Under/Over(-) spend			
Capital	121	1,069	1,184
Revenue	0	-431	0
Change in receipts	0	0	597
Provisional Balance at 31.3.23	3,319	4,157	2,863
Carry forward to 2023-24			
Capital	-70	-1,049	-1,163
Revenue	0	-76	0
Budgeted Movement 2023-24			
Capital	-1,712	0	-880
Revenue	1,768	-773	0
Other Receipts	0	0	168
Estimated Balance at 31.3.24	3,305	2,259	988

5.8 30 Year Business Plan

5.8.1 2022-23 was the first year of the updated 30 year HRA business plan. The balances noted above have been incorporated into the 30 Year plan with the following resulting indicators:

	2022-23 Provisional Actual	2023-24 Estimate	2024-25 Estimate	2025-26 Estimate	2026-27 Estimate
Interest Cover	-0.04	0.38	0.52	0.66	0.88
Margin	-0.44%	3.99%	6.57%	8.20%	9.35%

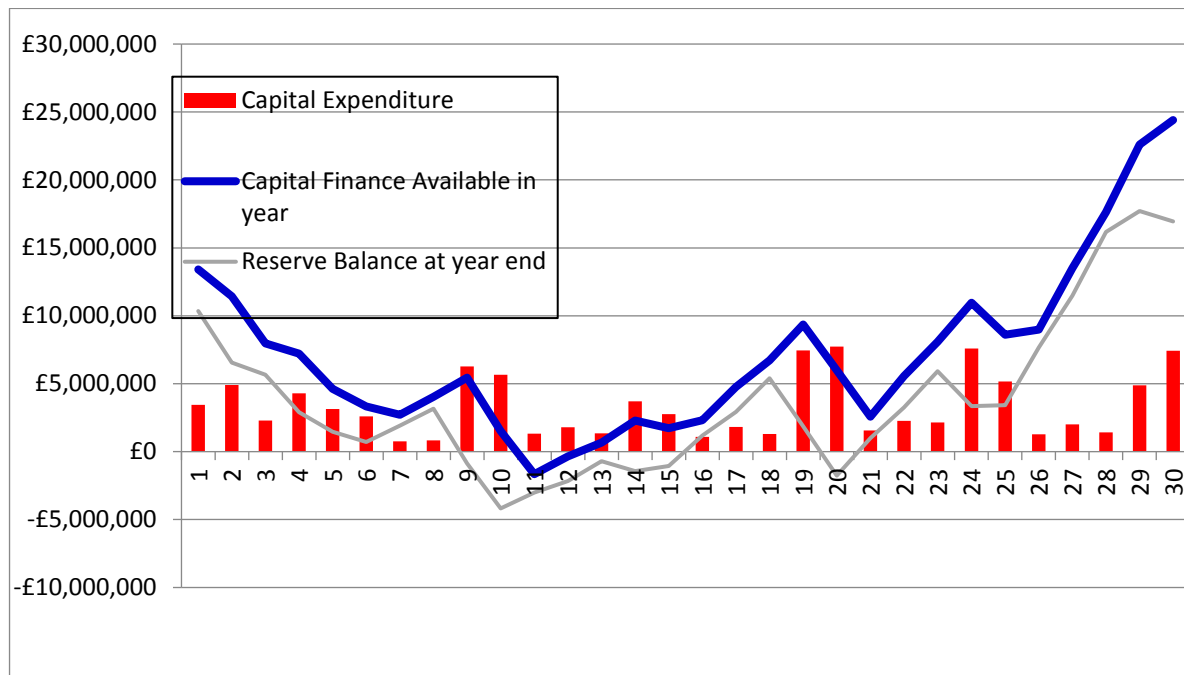
Interest cover as an indicator shows how many times in the year that the annual net interest payable on borrowing is covered by the Net cost of services total, the ideal cover nationally being 1.10–1.25. In 2022-23 the account was unable to service its debt from its annual resource and reserves were required to make this payment in full. If the council wishes to utilise borrowing to develop further housing then this indicator needs to improve.

Margin shows the percentage amount of income above revenue expenditure at Net cost of service total level. Nationally this averages around 22%. The margin in 2022-23 equates to an operating deficit per property of £20

5.8.2 These indicators demonstrate that borrowing to fund capital expenditure either for delivery of new housing or support maintenance of the existing housing stock is currently

unaffordable. Therefore, until there is an improvement in the net cost of service delivery through either increased income or reduced expenditure, the opportunity that borrowing provides is not possible.

5.8.3 Based on the current Asset Management Plan and on-going revenue requirements the 30 year plan does retain an average £553k annual headroom in reserves, however this is more evidently available in the later years of the plan as illustrated in the following table:



As previously described the HRA must avoid a deficit and therefore spending in years which show this possibility will require re-profiling to ensure that a surplus is maintained as required by The Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

5.9 Future action plan

5.9.1 Actions to address revenue expenditure levels:

5.9.2 Much of the revenue account overspend relates to increased pressure or new requirements that were not apparent at the point of budget setting.

5.9.3 The annual review of the HRA Asset Management Plan includes a review of all revenue budgets. This review looks at spend in previous years and considers any new requirements that had not been accounted for previously. By doing this, budgets can be set as accurately as possible at that point. The 30 year financial plan is also updated.

5.9.4 Key budgets for 2023-24 have already been increased to account for the higher spend we have seen in 2022-23.

5.9.5 It is anticipated that the focus on damp and mould will continue to have an impact on spend. As a result, the repairs budget for 2023-24 has been increased in line with spend for 2022-23.

5.9.6 The vast majority of long term voids have now been let, but there are still a small number of properties to be completed. These will be ready to let by June. The 2023-24 void budget has been increased to take account of this, it will then be reduced again in future years.

5.9.7 Inflation predictions have been updated in line with the current levels we are experiencing. This will mean that the budgets will be able to accommodate future contract price increases.

- 5.9.8 Actions to address capital underspends:
- 5.9.9 All capital contracts are now procured and in place. The key projects were all on site in April 2023 and a significant amount of work is complete already.
- 5.9.10 The HRA Asset Management Plan includes an action plan which highlights when contracts are due for renewal so that procurement can start in advance, allowing an earlier start on site.
- 5.9.11 Carry forwards have only been requested for work which has already been committed in 2023. The majority of that work is already complete and paid for.
- 5.9.12 Actions to address income levels:
- 5.9.13 The sharp focus on rental income and the dedicated resources and refined approach will continue to see the rent collection figure improving.
- 5.9.14 Likewise, the commitment to let more properties will also deliver income and reduce the costs related with void properties such as council tax and standing charges obligations.
- 5.9.15 Whilst the overall voids relet time average is high, this is because we have allocated properties which have been vacant for, in some cases years, and as we prioritise the letting of all properties, with a challenge to deliver back to back lettings, our overall performance will improve, and we will generate more revenue.

6 Options Considered

- 6.1.1 No other options considered as, if the report was not provided, Councillors would not be aware of on-going developments and therefore would not be able to represent their residents effectively.

7 Consultation

- 7.1 The Statement of Accounts (subject to audit) which includes the HRA revenue out-turn position was advertised as available for public inspection on the website and the auditors available to answer questions from 1 June to 12 July 2023.

A summary of the HRA final position can be included in the annual report to tenants.

8 Next Steps – Implementation and Communication

- 8.1 External audit will be undertaking their independent assessment of the Council's financial statement position and accounts production as part of their statutory duties.
- 8.2 The out-turn as part of the audited statement of accounts will be considered by the Audit and Standards Committee following completion of the audit work which has not yet been timetabled.

9 Financial Implications

- 9.1 The overspend has resulted in lower reserves than forecast. This coupled with the planned spend over the next four years leaves the level of revenue reserves above the working balance low at £838k by 2027. Further overspends at this level are therefore not sustainable.

It is recognised that the reserves start to increase briefly after 2029 but it is important that spend is brought into line with budgets set. The Senior Leadership Team will be working to identify actions that can be taken to ensure where there are unavoidable overspends on repairs and income shortfalls savings can be identified to offset these in year by reducing more discretionary spend.

Financial Implications reviewed by: Director for Corporate Services

10 Legal and Governance Implications

- 10.1 The HRA is framed by the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. The Act created the ring-fence and the structure within which the HRA operates and provides rules as to its operation.
- 10.2 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Legal Implications reviewed by: Natasha Taylor, Deputy Monitoring Officer 23.06.23

11 Equality and Safeguarding Implications

- 11.1 Equalities and safeguarding issues were addressed in setting the current year's budget. There are no further issues arising from this report.

12 Community Safety Implications

- 12.1 Community safety issues were addressed in setting the current year's budget. There are no further issues arising from this report.

13 Environmental and Climate Change Implications

- 13.1 No implications have been identified.

14 Other Implications (where significant)

- 14.1 No other implications have been identified.

15 Risk & Mitigation

The HRA is a high-risk service account that the Council has a duty under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 to ensure that it avoids being in a deficit situation. This requires that effective budget monitoring procedures are set in place to monitor HRA expenditure and income against the budget and careful consideration is given to determining the level of the working balance.

Risk No	Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Risk
1	Repairs continue to overspend against budget in future years, following low spend in previous years. It important to note here that we have no choice but to carry out statutory repairs, but as we increase the spend on planned maintenance, this will reduce over time	High	Critical	High Risk
2	Economic climate and welfare reform changes continue to cause hardship on tenants causing higher levels of rent arrears and reduced collection performance, coupled with the accessibility debt relief orders etc. which infringe our ability to collect revenue	High	Critical	High Risk
3	Increasing right to buy sales over those budgeted for cause reductions to rent income streams. This can be in part off set by the acquisition of new homes	High	Marginal	Medium Risk
4	Ability to fully cleanse historic repairs commitments from Northgate Housing System. These commitment records are no longer commitments as they were paid on another system and so misrepresent spend on financial reports.	Significant	Critical	Medium Risk

		Impact / Consequences			
		Negligible	Marginal	Critical	Catastrophic
Likelihood	Score/ definition	1	2	3	4
	6 Very High				
	5 High		3	1, 2	
	4 Significant			4	
	3 Low				
	2 Very Low				
	1 Almost impossible				

Risk No	Mitigation
1	The HRA Asset Management Plan aims to focus spend on planned investment in key areas of high spend on revenue repairs. For example, targeted and planned investment to address damp and mould in properties will reduce the strain on the revenue repair budgets.
2	A sharp focus on income recovery, and implementing the income strategy, plus dedicated resources will significantly improve performance. It is important to note that there was no dedicated resource managing income for over two years, and whilst good results can be achieved with relatively new debts, the high level of older debts which the HRA holds will prove challenging.
3	The commitment to reduce void times, and allocate properties which have been void for a considerable time, will increase revenue, and as we implement the new voids procedure, an overall reduction in the amount of time properties are void, and conversely rent lost, will reduce,
4	Significant progress has been made to reduce the historic commitments. This work will continue with the aim to remove all historic commitments by Q2 of 2023-24. The finance system will be integrated with the repairs system to eliminate the risk of double commitments.

16 Background Papers

None

17 Appendices

17.1 Appendix 1 – HRA Provisional Year End Position

17.2 Appendix 2 – HRA Capital Provisional Year End Position