

## CABINET

<b>Date of Meeting</b>	Tuesday, 17 <sup>th</sup> December 2024
<b>Report Subject</b>	Housing Rent Income Service – Change in Reporting Portfolio
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities Cabinet Member for Corporate Services
<b>Report Author</b>	Chief Officer (Housing and Communities) Chief Officer (Governance)
<b>Type of Report</b>	Operational

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

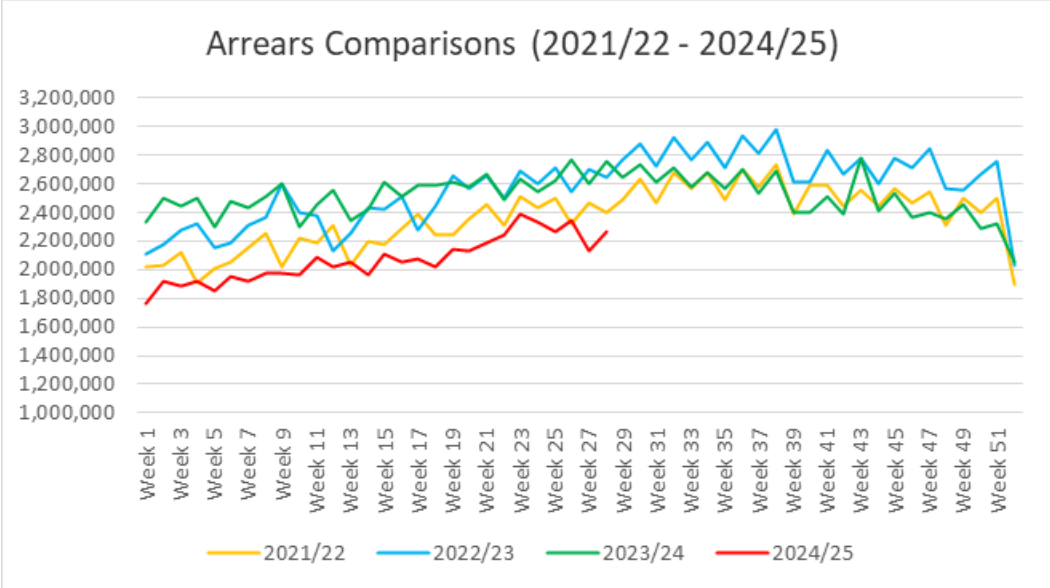
To adapt to evolving business needs and deliver on WG policy intentions of tenancy sustainment and “no evictions into homelessness”, Cabinet approval is sought to relocate the Housing Rent Income service from the Governance portfolio to the Housing & Communities portfolio.

This transfer will enhance the service delivery to housing tenants. It will also enable earlier interventions with contract holders and deliver a more joined up approach across the wider housing teams to address and respond to issues of non-payment of rent.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1	For Cabinet to transfer the Housing Rent Income service from the Governance portfolio to the Housing & Communities portfolio.
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## REPORT DETAILS

1.00	<b>EXPLAINING THE REASONS FOR THE SERVICE REALIGNMENT</b>
1.01	The Rent Income service has significantly improved collection rates over the past two years, despite the aftereffects of the global pandemic and subsequent cost-of-living crisis. This has resulted in a reduction of overall rent arrears.
1.02	The recent improvements in rent collections have played a significant part in reducing the number and value of write offs. Consequently, there is now a much lower budget provision set aside to fund the cost of write offs.
1.03	<p>The table below illustrates the latest position for 2024-25, along with full year comparisons for previous years. Rent arrears in week 28 are around £490k lower than at the same point in the previous year, and overall rent arrears are now aligned at levels last seen in 2017/18.</p>  <p>Arrears Comparisons (2021/22 - 2024/25)</p> <p>Legend: 2021/22 (Yellow), 2022/23 (Blue), 2023/24 (Green), 2024/25 (Red)</p>
1.04	<p>Over recent times the service has also:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modernised working practices.</li> <li>• Invested in Mobyssoft 'Rent Sense'.</li> <li>• Introduced text messaging technology.</li> <li>• Developed management reporting.</li> <li>• Placed more emphasis on early contact with contract holders by telephone and digital channels.</li> </ul>
1.05	<p>There is no room for complacency. To adapt to evolving business needs for those contract holders who find it difficult to pay and who want to engage, there is a growing need signpost and make referrals to specialist teams in the Housing and Communities portfolio.</p> <p>Early engagement with contract holders, and working collaboratively to discuss, support and resolve complex cases at housing panel meetings,</p>

	helps to reduce the number of cases owing unpaid rent and reduce number of evictions.
1.06	Expenditure on homeless accommodation is a high-risk area for the Council. Costs have increased significantly in recent years as demand has grown and covid related hardship grants from Welsh Government (WG) have reduced.
1.07	The Revenues Rent Income service is currently part of the Governance portfolio. It does not work in a vacuum. It is acutely aware of the need to avoid evictions where possible because a greater number of evictions will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lead to increased homelessness;</li> <li>• greater budget pressures falling on the Council General Fund; and</li> <li>• increased numbers of void properties and potential repairs.</li> </ul>
1.08	There is now an opportunity to build on the successes, and to re-consider the way in which the service is delivered to meet future demands and ensure more cohesive working arrangements to meet WG policy intentions of 'no evictions into homelessness'.  The intention, therefore, is to transfer the service from the Governance portfolio to the Housing and Communities portfolio. This is supported by both chief officers.
1.09	The transfer will improve case coordination within the housing service and support early interventions to support contract holders.
1.10	Ultimately, this will provide an opportunity to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide better levels of service to contract holders,</li> <li>• enhance the working relationships and synergies between housing teams, and</li> <li>• improve collection rates even further.</li> </ul> <p>By re-aligning the Rent Income team to the Housing and Communities portfolio, the proposals will also improve service resilience across the housing service and address skills gaps and recruitment issues in the Rent Income team.</p>

<b>2.00</b>	<b>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS</b>
2.01	The existing Rent Income Team, fully funded by the HRA, and consisting of 9 FTE's will simply transfer from the Governance portfolio to the Housing and Communities portfolio. There will be no reductions in head count or changes to job roles and job descriptions.
2.02	The Rent Income service will be re-located from County Hall to County Offices, Flint, in quarter four, as part of the planned decommissioning of County Hall.

<b>3.00</b>	<b>IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT</b>
3.01	The existing Rent Income team, and their expertise, will simply transfer from the Governance portfolio to the Housing and Communities portfolio. Service continuity will therefore be maintained, as will the day-to-day managerial oversight.
3.02	The deployment of the Mobyssoft 'Rent Sense' software, fully funded by the HRA, will continue to be deployed in the Housing and Community portfolio to control rent arrears and to ensure resources are targeted effectively. Rent Sense enhances income collection operations. It eliminates the guesswork for housing and rent income officers, clearly indicating cases that require interventions to keep payment of rent on track.

<b>4.00</b>	<b>CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT</b>
4.01	<p>An informal consultation with the Rent Income Team has been undertaken and all team members are in support of the proposed transfer from the Governance portfolio to the Housing and Community portfolio.</p> <p>Officers in the Rent Income team, and service managers across both portfolios, recognise the importance and value of working closely with other colleagues in the Housing portfolio, particularly when coordinating recovery of rent and dealing with wider tenancy issues. Relocating the Rent Income service to County Offices, Flint will also assist in developing face-to-face working relationships with colleagues undertaking like-minded, and often cross cutting work, in the Housing and Communities portfolio.</p>

<b>5.00</b>	<b>APPENDICES</b>
5.01	None.

<b>6.00</b>	<b>LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS</b>
6.01	None.

<b>7.00</b>	<b>CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS</b>
7.01	<p><b>Contact Officers:</b> David Barnes, Revenues &amp; Procurement Manager Jen Griffiths, Service Manager, Housing Welfare and Communities</p> <p><b>Telephone:</b> 01352 704848, 01352 702929</p>

	<b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:david.barnes@flintshire.gov.uk">david.barnes@flintshire.gov.uk</a> <a href="mailto:Jen.griffiths@flintshire.gov.uk">Jen.griffiths@flintshire.gov.uk</a>
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<b>8.00</b>	<b>GLOSSARY OF TERMS</b>
	<p><b>Housing Revenue Account:</b> The Council is required to keep a HRA to record all income and expenditure relating to the provision of local authority housing. All rental income, including arrears, must be held with a ring fenced HRA account. This means that income can only be used for council housing purposes and not general expenditure. This also allows rental income to be invested locally to help improve and maintain council owned homes and build new council homes.</p>