

EXECUTIVE 10th February 2022

Report Title	Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Draft Budget 2022-23 and Medium-Term Financial Plan Proposals
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Lead Member	Councillor Lloyd Bunday, Executive Member for Finance and Transformation

Key Decision	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there public sector equality duty implications?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Applicable paragraph number for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1974	

List of Appendices

Appendix A – Draft Housing Revenue Account Budgets for 2022/23

Appendix B – Draft Housing Revenue Account – Medium Term Financial Plan

Appendix C – Summary of Reserves

Appendix D – Extract of Finance & Resources Scrutiny Minutes relating to the HRA

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is a separate ring-fenced account within the Council for the income and expenditure associated with its housing stock. The HRA does not directly impact on the Council's wider General Fund budget or on the level of council tax. Income to the HRA is primarily received through the rents and other charges paid by tenants and leaseholders.
- 1.2. Whilst North Northamptonshire Council must only operate one HRA it will, for a limited period of time, operate two separate Neighbourhood Accounts, these being:
 - the Corby Neighbourhood Account - responsible for the stock that was previously managed by Corby Borough Council and

- the Kettering Neighbourhood Account - responsible for the stock that was previously managed by Kettering Borough Council.
- 1.3. A future decision will be required around the timeframe for which two Neighbourhood Accounts continue – typically these interim arrangements would cover a two to three-year period.
 - 1.4. Work is underway on preparing a Housing Strategy for North Northamptonshire. This will consider the challenges faced by the Council across the local housing market and will set out measures to enhance housing options for local residents. This document will form a key element of the overarching strategy for North Northamptonshire which will be reported to Members during 2022/23.
 - 1.5. This report seeks approval for the proposed draft budget for the HRA for 2022/23 and the key principles on which it is based together with the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) that covers the following four years (2023/24 – 2026/27).
 - 1.6. This report also sets out the proposals regarding rent increases for 2022/23. As required by the Housing Act 1985. The following table summarises the average rent levels for 2021/22 and the proposed rent increase of 4.1% in rent levels for 2022/23.

Neighbourhood Account	22/22 Average Rent Levels £	Increase in Average Rent Levels £	22/23 Average Rent Levels £
Corby	77.88	3.19	81.07
Kettering	82.17	3.37	85.54

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The draft HRA Budget has been discussed and debated as part of the Finance and Scrutiny sessions and with tenants representing each of the Neighbourhood Accounts. The final budgets reflect a rental increase of 4.1% which accords with the Government's Rent Setting Policy and has been clarified by the Rent Regulator. The draft Budget proposals and Medium-Term Financial Plan are set out in **Appendix A** and **Appendix B**.
- 2.2 The overriding approach as part of the transition to the Unitary council for North Northamptonshire was to ensure that the arrangements were 'safe and legal'. It was determined that for the HRA this would, in the first instance, be best achieved through operating two Neighbourhood Accounts to be combined under a single HRA for North Northamptonshire. Work is planned to be undertaken during the course of 2022/23 to start to move to a single HRA and this includes developing a new 30-year Business Plan.
- 2.3 To help maintain and protect levels of service provision and to continue investment into the housing stock the proposed average rent increase is 4.1% for each of the Neighbourhood Accounts. This is in accordance with the

Government's Rent Setting Policy. Taking into account this increase, the draft Neighbourhood Accounts show a balanced position for 2022/23. A final budget report for the HRA taking into account the outcome of the consultation will be presented to Council on 24th February 2022.

- 2.4 Beyond 2022/23, the Medium-term position (2023/24 to 2026/27) for the Corby Neighbourhood Account shows a deficit of £1.860m whilst the Kettering Neighbourhood Account shows a surplus of £3.921m. The main reason for the difference between the two Neighbourhood Accounts results from how the loans for self-financing were structured. The Corby Neighbourhood Account is increasing its contribution for the repayment of the loans whereas the Kettering Neighbourhood account is reducing its repayments.
- 2.5 The Medium-Term position assumes that rent increases of 2% are applied each year over the Medium-Term. Rent increases will be subject to an annual consultation with tenants and the rent levels will be dependent on the rent setting formula which is based on the CPI in September of the previous year plus 1%.
- 2.6 The scrutiny process for the Draft HRA Budget Proposals was undertaken by the Finance & Resources Committee at a meeting on the 6th January and 19th January. This was reported to the Finance & Resources Committee meeting on 1st February for ease of reference Appendix D provides a summary of comments made from the two scrutiny meetings (6th January and 19th January).
- 2.7 Representatives of the Kettering Tenants Forum and Corby Tenant Voice Members were consulted and agreed a 4.1% increase in rent levels for 2022/23.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That the Executive recommend for approval to Full Council the following:-
 - a. The draft 2022/23 Housing Revenue Account Budgets consisting of the Corby Neighbourhood Account and the Kettering Neighbourhood Account as set out in Appendix A.
 - b. an increase in dwelling rents for 2022/23 of 4.1% (based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for September 2021 3.1% + 1%) which is in line with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Policy statement on rents for social housing.
 - c. The draft Housing Revenue Account Medium Term Financial Plan consisting of the Corby Neighbourhood Account and the Kettering Neighbourhood Account, for 2023/24 to 2026/27 as set out in Appendix B.
- 3.2 Reason for Recommendations
 - a. To ensure that the Council complies with its Constitution in setting the budget for North Northamptonshire.

4. Report Background

Resources and Financial

- 4.1 Each year social landlords must set rent levels and budgets for the forthcoming financial year and provide each individual tenant with 28 days statutory notice of any proposed changes to their rent. This report sets out the proposals regarding the rents, as well as the expenditure plans for the 2022/23 rent year, together with a draft Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) covering the four- year period 2023/24 to 2026/27.
- 4.2 The Council housing stock in the Corby Neighbourhood Account comprises 4,621 tenanted and 631 leasehold properties (as at 1st April 2021) with a rent roll of £18.956m in 2021/22. The Kettering Neighbourhood Account comprises 3,603 tenanted and 253 leasehold properties (as at 1st April 2021), with a rent roll of around £15.066m. East Northants and Wellingborough Councils had no housing stock having made the decision several years ago to sell their stock. The composition of the Housing Stock for both the Corby and Kettering Neighbourhood Accounts is set out in Table 1 and Table 2.

Type of Property	Number of Bedrooms				Total
	One	Two	Three	Four +	
Flats-Low Rise	654	338	51	1	1,044
Flats-Medium Rise	131	187	113	16	447
Houses	1	671	1,683	245	2,600
Bungalows	309	179	42	0	530
Total	1,095	1,375	1,889	262	4,621

Type of Property	Number of Bedrooms				Total
	One	Two	Three	Four +	
Flats-Low Rise	720	455	3	0	1,178
Flats-Medium Rise	235	120	10	0	365
Houses	26	492	1,033	32	1,583
Bungalows	200	275	2	0	477
Total	1,181	1,342	1,048	32	3,603

- 4.3 The Council is required by law (Local Government and Housing Act 1989, Section 76) to avoid budgeting for a deficit on the HRA. This means the budget must not be based on total HRA revenue reserves falling below zero. In practice the Council is expected to maintain a reasonable balance of HRA reserves to cover contingencies.
- 4.4 The Executive Director (Chief Finance Officer) reviews the level of balances required to support the Housing Revenue Account spend annually as part of their risk assessment of the budget. The Executive Director – Finance has assessed that the minimum level of balances, taking all known risks into account, should remain unchanged at £800k for the Corby Neighbourhood Account and that the Kettering Neighbourhood Account be increased from £300k to £650k. This aligns the two Neighbourhood Accounts, so the minimum balances are around 4% of the total budget. Details of Reserves together with any estimated movements are set out in **Appendix C**.
- 4.5 It was not feasible to merge the two neighbourhood accounts into one when the legacy councils merged and create the operational changes that were required to ensure a safe and legal service. It is also necessary to develop a 30 Year Business Plan for a single HRA. The Council's Corporate Strategy was approved at the Executive on 18th November 2021, and this sets out its priorities, the objectives to achieve these, key actions, and measures of success. The services delivered within the HRA will support this strategy and will be developed over the forthcoming financial year.
- 4.6 The approach to the HRA budget setting has focused on three key areas for 2022/23 and the following sections of the report take items (i) and (ii) in turn. However, it should be noted that item (iii) will be covered in a separate report to this meeting which covers both the General Fund and HRA Capital Programmes.
- (i) Revenue income and rent and service charge levels;
 - (ii) Revenue expenditure plans that reflect service delivery patterns;
 - (iii) Capital expenditure plans that will deliver essential works to the stock as well as ensuring the Decent Homes Standard is maintained and support the new build programme.

Revenue Income

- 4.7 The HRA receives income primarily from rents paid by tenants and from service charges levied. The draft budgets for 2022/23 have been compiled based on a rent increase of 4.1% - which is in accordance with the nationally recommended increase for 2022/23. When considering the rental increase it is important to recognise the long-term impact as income foregone is compounded over future years.
- 4.8 The MHCLG policy statement on rents published in February 2019 announced that rents would increase by CPI + 1% from April 2020 and this would be for a period of five years (2020/21 to 2025/26). Members are reminded of the announcement that was made in July 2015 budget statement where all social

rents would decrease by 1% each year over the four-year period 2016/17 – 2019/20 during which the cumulative loss of rental income was around £70m for the Corby Neighbourhood Account and around £60m for the Kettering Neighbourhood Account. This will continue to have a significant cumulative impact on the level of income that will be available to the HRA over the course of the 30-year business plan.

- 4.9 The number of Right to Buy (RTB) sales assumed during 2022/23 and the medium term for the Corby Neighbourhood Account is 50 and for the Kettering Neighbourhood Account is 30 – these assumptions will be kept under review. The part year income associated from these sales has been deducted from the 2022/23 income budget.
- 4.10 For 2022/23 it is assumed that 0.9% of the Corby Neighbourhood housing stock will be void at any one time and it is assumed that 1.90% of the Kettering neighbourhood housing stock will be void at any one time and therefore rent cannot be charged. This is consistent with the approach taken in previous years and reduces the total income expected to be achieved by c£170,000 for the Corby Neighbourhood Account and c£290,000 for the Kettering Neighbourhood Account.
- 4.11 Acquisition and new build programmes increase the number of housing stock for the HRA. The Corby Neighbourhood Account will reflect the additional income in 2022/23 from the delivery of 3 new homes during 2021/22 at Stanion Close and will also reflect an increase in income from the delivery of 5 homes at Cannock Road.
- 4.12 The Kettering Neighbourhood Account will reflect the additional income from the delivery of 28 homes across the Scott Road (22 homes) and Albert Street (6 homes) sites. These sites were delivered in 2021/22 and a total of 28 homes have been added to the 2022/23 rental yield.
- 4.13 It is anticipated that a further 18 homes will be delivered at Cheltenham Road that will be available for rent in March 2023, this has been reflected into the revenue account for 2023/24. Further schemes will be reflected in the Medium-Term Financial Plan when there is more certainty around the timed delivery of future housing schemes.
- 4.14 In April 2012, the Government “reinvigorated” its Right to Buy (RTB) policy by reducing the eligibility period for RTB sales and increasing the maximum levels of discount. At the same time, the Government introduced a new mechanism that allowed local authorities to retain 100% of the RTB receipts (after some deductions) from the sale of Council Houses above a specified number of RTB sales set by Government each year for each council (the “RTB threshold”). These are referred to as 1- 4-1 Receipts.
- 4.15 There were two core principles for using 1-4-1 Receipts:
 - 1) That 1-4-1 Receipts can only be used to fund no more than 30% of eligible expenditure for the provision of new homes; and

- 2) That 1-4-1 Receipts must be utilised within 3 years of them occurring. In order for the Government to enforce the time period in which expenditure must be accounted for, the standard agreement signed by Councils requires any 1-4-1 Receipts not utilised within the 3-year timeframe to be paid over to the Government, plus interest charged at 4% above base rate compounded every 3 months.
- 4.16 The previous sovereign Councils (Corby Borough Council and Kettering Borough Council) opted into the 1 4 1 agreement. However, COVID-19 meant that a number of planned new build schemes nationally were delayed as contractors and companies rescheduled their projects and the need to maintain social distancing would see a reduction in staff on site which could result in a delay in delivery. In response to this the Government temporarily lifted the time period for which 1-4-1 receipts need to be utilised by granting a six-month extension in 2020/21, this extension was then increased to nine months.
- 4.17 The Government announced a number of changes on how 1-4-1 receipts could be used. These changes came into effect from 1st April 2021 and included;
- Increasing the time limit for the use of the receipts from three to five years – this covers not just future receipts but existing ones (i.e., back to 2017-18).
 - That the use of 1-4-1 Receipts to fund eligible expenditure for the provision of new homes be increased from 30% to 40%.
 - Introduction of a cap on the use of Right to Buy receipts on acquisitions to help drive new supply with the phased introduction, with the cap limiting acquisitions to 50% of delivery from 1st April 2022, then reducing to 40% from 1 April 2023, and to 30% from 1st April 2024 onwards. The first 20 units of delivery in each year will be excluded.

Service Charges

- 4.18 The Council can set its own charges for items that attract service charges but must review annually the costs that drive these charges as well as how that money can be utilised.
- 4.19 Leasehold service charges cover costs that are recharged to leaseholders in year to reflect either the cost of maintaining the fabric of the building or the cost of maintaining the communal areas. These charges must reflect the full cost that is incurred by the HRA, no profit should be achieved through the levelling of these charges. Given this, the income budgets proposed reflect only an indicative level and actual charges will be reconciled the following year against actual costs incurred. Within both the Corby Neighbourhood Account and the Kettering Neighbourhood Account leasehold charges for each building will be estimated and leaseholders will be notified of the charges to be applied for 2022/23. This process is in line with that undertaken in previous years.

Revenue Expenditure

- 4.20 The HRA manages expenditure that covers delivery of the general housing management function as well as overheads and capital financing charges. The expenditure costs are categorised into the following six headings, further details are set out in paragraphs 4.21 – 4.33 which follow.
- Repairs & Maintenance
 - General Management
 - Special Services
 - Self- Financing Payments
 - Revenue Contribution to Capital Expenditure
 - Other
- 4.21 The **Repairs and Maintenance** budget includes the general cost of maintaining the Council's housing stock on a day-to-day basis. It includes, repairs requested by tenants, gas repairs and servicing and costs associated with void property repairs and cleaning.
- 4.22 **General Management** costs include the cost of managing the housing service. They include the cost of running the landlord service efficiently and effectively including rent collection and allocating and managing tenancies.
- 4.23 **Special Services** represents the cost of running the Council's sheltered housing schemes for vulnerable residents. It includes all costs of maintaining sheltered housing and the services provided to residents. There are 558 properties across ten sheltered housing schemes in the Corby Neighbourhood Account and 406 properties across nine sheltered housing schemes in the Kettering Neighbourhood Account.
- 4.24 Fundamental changes to the HRA were implemented in April 2012 – this was referred to as '**Self-Financing**'. The Self-Financing settlement abolished the subsidy system and redistributed debt between authorities based on a government assessment of their ability to service the debt. This had the effect of increasing the debt held by most authorities, but in return they no longer had to pay into the national subsidy pot. Nationally there were 136 authorities who were making subsidy payments and these authorities were required to make a payment to the government that amounted to around £13bn. Conversely 35 authorities received a payment of £6bn from Government as they would no longer be receiving a subsidy payment. The self-financing determinations resulted in Corby Borough Council taking on debt of £70.6m and Kettering Borough Council taking on debt of £72.9m.
- 4.25 The self- financing system allows authorities to better plan over the longer term as they no longer face the uncertainty of annual subsidy determinations which were typically announced around December each year notifying authorities of what they will have to pay or receive in subsidy. This means that all authorities now get to keep all the rent they receive from tenants and are fully responsible for managing their own income and expenditure.

- 4.26 The Government on 29th October 2018 revoked the debt limits that were introduced for HRAs in December 2010 by the Localism Bill under self-financing determinations, by lifting the HRA borrowing cap. This means the Corby and Kettering Neighbourhood Accounts will not be subject to a limit on borrowing.
- 4.27 All borrowing must conform to the Prudential Code which requires that borrowing be affordable and prudent. The 2021/22 budget for the Corby Neighbourhood Account provides for the repayment of a loan of £10.646m, for which monies have been set aside annually for loan repayments in the HRA Debt Management Reserve. The outstanding debt on 31st March 2022 is estimated to be £60m. The 2022/23 budget provides for £1.972m to be set aside which will be transferred to the HRA Debt Management Reserve which will be used to part fund the repayment of the next loan of £15m which matures in 2031/32.
- 4.28 The Kettering Neighbourhood Account is forecast to have debt of £45.724m as of 31st March 2022. This is a combination of debt from self-financing which amounts to £42.903m and new loans amounting to £2.821m to fund new build schemes. The 2022/23 budget provides for the repayment of a loan of £3m, which will reduce the self-financing debt that is outstanding on 31st March 2023 to £39.903m.
- 4.29 Business cases that set out how and when the HRA will borrow will be developed and submitted for approval when Business Cases arise, this will be in accordance with the Council's Capital Strategy Approval Process.
- 4.30 Under the self-financing regime the HRA holds a depreciation charge that recognises the cost of managing and maintaining the Council stock at the current level. This funding represents a revenue cost to the HRA that is then used to support the capital programme to deliver the required enhancements to the stock to keep it fit for purpose. The **revenue contribution to capital expenditure** as a minimum must equal the depreciation charge, the draft budget for the two Neighbourhood accounts reflects this.
- 4.31 One of the main areas of risk for the HRA going forward is rent arrears and the management of debt within the rent account. There is a specific risk around the ability to collect this debt as a result of COVID-19 and also as national welfare reform changes are rolled out. The spare room subsidy changes have now been in place for several years and work to manage under occupation is now business as usual.
- 4.32 The Kettering Neighbourhood Account includes a provision of £173,000 for Bad Debts and the Corby Neighbourhood Account includes a provision of £104,000 for 2022/23 and the Medium-Term Plan includes provision for a further £46,000 in 2023/24 for the Corby Neighbourhood Account. The contribution to Bad Debts is shown under the 'other' expenditure heading which also includes Contingencies, Rents, Rates, Taxes and Other Charges and interest payable.
- 4.33 The 2021/22 budget included a 0.75% increase to cover the 2.75% 2020/21 pay award, only 2% was included in the 2020/21 base budget. In addition, both Neighbourhood Accounts incorporated a pay contingency for 2021/22 of 2.50%. The 2022/23 budget includes a pay contingency of 3% which is aligned to the increase in costs of living. To date the pay award is still to be agreed for both

2021/22 and 2022/23 a 1% change amounts to around £63k for the Corby Neighbourhood Account and around £40k for the Kettering Neighbourhood Account. Both Neighbourhood Accounts provide for an increase in employers National Insurance Contributions which will increase from April 2022 from 13.8% to 15.05%. The Government, as part of the Autumn Budget, announced that authorities would receive additional funding. However, it appears that this has been rolled into the £1.5bn that will be distributed nationally which dilutes the funding that is available by around a third to meet new costs. For the purpose of the HRA it has been assumed that this will be cost neutral as the support costs will be reduced to reflect the increase in cost as the funding will be received into the General Fund

Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)

- 4.34 The MTFP for both the Corby Neighbourhood Account and the Kettering Neighbourhood Account are detailed at Appendix B. The MTFP's contain several assumptions, the main ones are set out in Table 3 below – these assumptions will continue to be reviewed and updated but enable an initial medium-term position to be determined for both Neighbourhood Accounts.

Table 3 - MTFP Assumptions (2023/24 – 2026/27)		
Assumption	Corby Neighbourhood Account	Kettering Neighbourhood Account
Income		
Rent Levels	Assumes a 2% increase each year (CPI 1% + 1%)	
RTB Sales	50	30
Void Levels	0.90%	1.50%
Expenditure		
Pay Contingency	2.00%	2.00%

- 4.35 The Medium-Term position for the HRA has more certainty than that of the General Fund – largely in part to the self-financing system. Medium Term Financial Planning is more difficult for the General Fund owing to the annual local government finance settlement being announced very late in the budget process and typically only covering a one-year period in recent years.

5. Issues and Choices

- 5.1 Housing Rents are set by the Housing Rent Regulator – the expectation of the Rent Regulator is that rents are set in line with Government Policy, which is for rents to be increased by CPI based on the rate in September of the previous year – rents for 2022/23 would be based on the CPI of 3.1% in September 2021 plus 1%.
- 5.2 The Housing Rent Regulatory expect all providers to adhere to the rules, should an organisation implement a rise in excess of this amount, it would be necessary to gain approval from the Secretary of State and the authority would need to

provide a clear business case as to why an increase above guidelines are required.

- 5.3 The Council could consider a lower rent increase. A 1% reduction in rental levels would amount to a reduction in the rental yield of around £196k for the Corby Neighbourhood Account and £157k for the Kettering Neighbourhood Account and the effect over the 30-year business plan would be around £6m for the Corby Neighbourhood Account and £5m for the Kettering Neighbourhood Account. The two Neighbourhood Accounts assume a rental increase in line with the Government Rent Setting Formula (4.1%) and the draft budgets for 2022/23 are in a balanced position. Any changes to the rental levels would require reductions in expenditure.

6. Implications (including financial implications)

6.1 Resources and Financial

- 6.1.1 The Resources and Financial implications are set out within this Report.

6.2 Legal and Governance

- 6.2.1 The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is a separate account within the Council that ring-fences the income and expenditure associated with the Council's housing stock and the 2022/23 Draft Budgets and MTFP adhere to this – the HRA can buy support services from the General Fund such as Finance, IT, HR etc and the draft 2022/23 budgets and MTFP reflect this.
- 6.2.2 The Council is required by law (Local Government and Housing Act 1989, Section 76) to avoid budgeting for a deficit on the HRA. This means the budget must not be based on total HRA revenue reserves falling below zero. The draft budgets show a balanced budget for both the Corby and Kettering Neighbourhood Accounts with no reliance on reserves.
- 6.2.3 Under the self-financing regime the HRA holds a depreciation charge that recognises the cost of managing and maintaining the Council stock at the current level. This funding represents a revenue cost to the HRA that is then used to support the capital programme to deliver the required enhancements to the stock to keep it fit for purpose. The revenue contribution as a minimum must equal the depreciation charge – the draft 2022/23 Budget reflects this for both Neighbourhood Accounts and the MTFP reflects assumptions around future property values– although this will be subject to change when future valuations are known.
- 6.2.4 Borrowing must conform to the Prudential Code which requires that borrowing be affordable and prudent. The draft 2022/23 budgets for both Neighbourhood Accounts comply with this. Business cases will be compiled for any future borrowing that clearly sets out the revenue implications – these will be modelled in the MTFP to ensure affordability and will be the subject of future reports to the Executive.

- 6.2.5 Whilst there is no statutory requirement to consult on rent levels specifically, there is a statutory requirement to consult on "housing management matters". Historically, Kettering and Corby have engaged and consulted with tenants on the annual HRA budget and rent levels. The consultation with local residents regarding the HRA and proposed rent levels for 2022/23 was undertaken with representatives of both the Kettering Tenants Forum Panel and Corby Tenants Voice Scrutiny Panel.
- 6.2.6 Council housing landlords are required to give 28 days' notice to all tenants of changes to the rental and charges for the new financial year. This will be achieved should all the recommendations be accepted by Council at the meeting on the 24th February 2022.

6.3 Risk

- 6.3.1 The self-financing valuation and settlement were based on the Council continuing to implement the Government's Rent Restructuring formula and deviation from this could potentially undermine the financial viability of the two Neighbourhood Accounts. The compound impact from rent increases will be fundamental to the sustainability of the two Neighbourhood accounts – the impact of a 1% reduction in rental levels is set out at Section 5.3.
- 6.3.2 The ability to aggregate housing service functions and strategies to ensure consistency across North Northamptonshire remains a challenge going forward.
- 6.3.3 The investment in the existing stock will be based on updated Stock Condition Survey reports – there is a risk that the investment need is greater than resources – if this were the case a further review of the capital programme would be undertaken.
- 6.3.4 In future years there will be a need to harmonise rents as the new authority migrates from the two neighbourhood accounts into a single account. This must recognise the resource requirements needed to deliver a consistent level of housing services.
- 6.3.5 MHCLG as part of the 2021/22 budget process confirmed that the operation of two neighbourhood accounts was a local decision for the council, however, for formal accounting purposes the Council will be required to have one HRA and as such the accounts will be aggregated at the end of the year.
- 6.3.6 COVID-19 has had less of an impact on the HRA compared to the General Fund – however it is recognised that it may impact on rent arrears for the two Neighbourhood Accounts.
- 6.3.7 The Welfare Reform Act changes have affected the payments being made to the HRA and further changes associated with the roll out of Universal Credit (UC) could affect levels of tenant income and further increase rent arrears within the HRA.

6.3.8 Compliance with regulatory standards and changes to health and safety legislation particularly regarding fire safety will provide additional challenges over the next few years and could lead to increased costs.

6.4 Consultation

6.4.1 The HRA Budget Report to the Executive meeting on 23rd December 2021 commenced the consultation on the HRA draft budget proposals, the consultation concluded on 28th January 2022.

6.4.2 There are no changes to the budget proposals to those presented to the Executive at the meeting on 23rd December 2021.

6.4.3 The Corby and Kettering Neighbourhood Accounts budget consultation included the rent levels, the 2022/23 draft budget proposals, together with the draft Medium Term Financial Plan. Representatives of the Tenants Forum agreed with the recommended increase of 4.1% for 2022/23 which adheres to the Government Guidelines and have asked that the Council provides details of the forms of financial support that are available to tenants that so those that require financial support are able are eligible for support.

Consideration by Scrutiny

6.5.1 Scrutiny is a means for councillors not on the Executive to influence the development of Council policies and services and hold decision makers to account. Budget Scrutiny involves councillors reviewing significant proposals from across the draft budget and reporting their conclusions about the deliverability and service impact of these proposals to the Executive. In this way Budget Scrutiny contributes to the development of the final budget proposals and supports local democracy.

6.5.2 The scrutiny of the budget proposals took place following the presentation of the 2022/23 budget to Executive on 23rd December 2021 to 28th January 2022. In order to assist in the scrutiny process, separate scrutiny sessions took place across the main service areas of the Council and the scrutiny of the HRA was included within Adults, Communities and Wellbeing Services. The relevant senior Council Officers and Executive Member portfolio holders attended these scrutiny sessions to answer questions put forward by the Committee Members.

6.5.3 The Finance and Resources Scrutiny Committee has a critical role to play in scrutinising and reviewing the budget proposals, ensuring that they are subject to rigorous challenge, comments from the Finance and Resources Scrutiny Committee are set out in **Appendix D**.

6.5 Equality Implications

6.6.1 None directly from this report

6.6 Climate Impact

- 6.6.1 The ongoing maintenance of existing stock, such as heating replacement, insulation and low energy LED lighting in communal areas also help to increase the energy efficiency of the existing stock. Consideration will be given to new methods of building construction, recent developments of the Hampden Crescent Site resulted in air source heat pumps being used.
- 6.6.2 National and international good practice will be considered as technology is changing constantly in this fast-moving sector but, it is clear, that the HRA housing stock will embrace this issue within its programme going forward.

6.7 Community Impact

- 6.7.1 The draft 2022/23 HRA Budgets should not impact on front line service provision and should enable the Council to meet the needs of disabled and older residents to have aids and adaptations fitted to support their independence.
- 6.7.2 Tenants should be positively affected by the investment in dwelling insulation, energy efficiency and changes to heating and communal utility charges. Many have benefited from reduced personal heating charges and a lower split of communal utility costs between all residents benefiting from these services.
- 6.7.3 There is a clear correlation between effective housing and better health outcomes. Community development work undertaken seeks to minimise isolation, particularly with older residents, contributing to improved physical and mental health outcomes and more active communities. We will continue to work with community and voluntary groups, promoting their services and offering practical help where feasible.
- 6.7.4 There are many reasons why tenants may struggle to maintain their tenancies including substance misuse and mental health. We will seek to support tenants in their homes to ensure that they are able to maintain successful tenancies and to reduce the number of evictions and staff will provide support for tenants including financial advice.

6.8 Crime and Disorder Impact

- 6.8.1 None

7. Background Papers

- Suite of Budget reports to the Executive 23rd December 2021
<https://northnorthants.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s4607/Housing%20Revenue%20Account%20HRA%20Draft%20Budget%202022-23%20and%20Medium%20Term%20Financial%20Plan%20MTPF%20Proposals.pdf>

- Suite of Budget reports to North Northamptonshire Shadow Authority, 25th February 2021 (Budget Council):
<https://northnorthants.moderngov.co.uk/CeListDocuments.aspx?CommitteeId=138&MeetingId=109&DF=25%2f02%2f2021&Ver=2>
- Suite of Budget reports to North Northamptonshire Shadow Executive Committee 10th February 2021:
<https://northnorthants.moderngov.co.uk/CeListDocuments.aspx?CommitteeId=139&MeetingId=120&DF=10%2f02%2f2021&Ver=2>