

Executive – 6 October 2016

Present: Councillor Williams (Chairman)
Councillors Beale, Edwards, Habgood and Mrs Warmington

Officers: Shirlene Adam (Director – Operations), Simon Lewis (Assistant Director – Housing and Community), Richard Sealy (Assistant Director – Corporate Services), Christian Trevelyan (Partnership Manager, Somerset West Private Sector Housing Partnership) and Richard Bryant (Democratic Services Manager)

Also present: Councillors Aldridge and Coles.

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm.)

48. Apologies

Councillors Mrs Herbert and Parrish.

49. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 8 September 2016, copies of which had been circulated, were taken as read and were signed.

50. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Beale declared personal interests as a Board Member and Director of Tone FM and as a Governor of the South West Ambulance NHS Trust. Councillor Edwards declared a personal interest as the Chairman of Governors of Queens College.

51. IT Update

The Assistant Director – Corporate Services, Richard Sealy, spoke about the recent issues some Members were having with the Council's e-mail system. Although there were several issues, the main one appeared to be Councillors not being able to access e-mails sent to them.

Mr Sealy reported however that Southwest One had identified the cause of the problem and that this was in the process of being remedied. This situation would continue to be monitored over the next few days.

The Chairman thanked Mr Sealy for his report.

52. Amendment to the Private Sector Renewal Policy – Disabled Facilities Grants and Repairs Assistance

Considered report previously circulated, which outlined a number of proposed amendments to the Somerset West Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy.

These included a new prevention grant and equipment provisions to assist applicants applying for disabled adaptations and to assist with essential modifications to housing or repairs for owner occupiers and tenants with repairing obligations in order to prevent accidents or ill-health.

The Council would essentially be offering vulnerable owner occupiers of properties with Category One hazards a grant of up to £4,000 to make their properties safe. Applicants would need to be in receipt of a means tested benefit and not be eligible for a loan from the Council's preferred loans provider Wessex Resolutions.

The Council would also be offering discretionary grants for people with housing conditions likely to lead to a health impact to assist with minor adaptations or modifications to their home. The grant was up to £1,000 and was non-means tested. A discretionary grant would also be available for applicants who had applied for a Disabled Facilities Grant and the cost of the works exceeded the mandatory grant limit of £30,000. Noted that access to the discretionary top up was subject to approval by the Strategic Housing Manager and Housing Portfolio Holder.

The above grants / loans were to be funded from the Better Care Fund from the Department of Health, which was distributed via Somerset County Council

All grants and loans would be a Land Charge on the property so that the funding could be reclaimed in the event of sale of the property within 20 years and the funds recycled.

The Somerset West Private Sector Housing Partnership (SWPSHP) was between Sedgemoor District Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council and had been established some years ago to deliver private sector housing services. The local authorities worked closely together to ensure consistency across the three Districts and to deliver financial and other benefits to those who lived and/or worked in the Somerset West area.

As in most parts of the country, Somerset faced the challenge posed by an expanding population, particularly at the older end of the age spectrum. There was also an increasing number of households with at least one family member having some form of disability, sometimes with complex medical and health needs particularly in children and young adults.

The Somerset Strategic Housing Framework recognised the importance of ensuring that accommodation was of sufficient quality and comfort to enable safe and healthy independent living. Priority 2 would make best use of the of sub-region's existing housing stock and Priority 3 was intended to meet the housing and accommodation related support needs of Somerset's most vulnerable and least resilient residents.

The numbers of non-decent homes in the private sector continued to increase and the reasons for this were set out in the report.

The aim of social care teams was to actively promote independence and choice.

The service helped people to live in their own homes for as long as possible, and when this was no longer possible, to choose a suitable care home. Disabled adaptations played a crucial part in assisting with independence.

Details of the current demands on provision of care and the anticipated future demands were set out in the report.

There was a strong correlation between unsatisfactory housing conditions and households in economic and social disadvantage. Elderly and vulnerable private sector households were over-represented in non-decent housing. There were limited resources available for private sector housing renewal but increasing dependency levels in the private rented sector and among vulnerable owner-occupiers who might be capital rich but revenue poor.

Further reported that the Somerset West Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy was the document which set out the types of financial assistance that the Council could offer owner occupiers and landlords to carry out essential repairs on their property and to bring empty properties back into use. The proposed amendments to the policy would need to be amended to enable the Council to offer the types of grants and assistance needed to assist the most vulnerable in society.

The funding for the grants and loans would come from an increased capital allocation through the Better Care Fund. The programme was over two years. Taunton Deane had been awarded £657,557 for each of the financial years 2016/2017 and 2017/2018. It was the intention that through the increased funding, Councils could maximise the services they could offer through low level interventions, which in turn reduced the prospect of a person being admitted to hospital and the costs, which this incurred.

Resolved that the proposed amendments to the Somerset West Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy be approved.

53. **Executive Forward Plan**

Submitted for information the Forward Plan of the Executive over the next few months.

Resolved that the Forward Plan be noted.

(The meeting ended at 6.44 p.m.)