

SWT Tenants Strategic Group

Monday, 22nd March, 2021,
6.00 pm

**Somerset West
and Taunton**

[SWT VIRTUAL MEETING WEBCAST
LINK](#)

Members: Alex Akhigbemen (Chair), Jessie Bunn, Paul Cram,
Dennis Galpin, Kevin Hellier, Ivor Hussey, Corrine McMylor,
Livi Mongare, Mark Lithgow, Janet Lloyd and Francesca Smith

Agenda

- | | |
|---|-----------------|
| 1. Apologies | |
| 2. Notes from previous meeting | (Pages 3 - 6) |
| 3. Directorate Report | (Pages 7 - 14) |
| 4. Q3 HRA Finance Report | (Pages 15 - 22) |
| 5. Laxton Road update - Powerpoint presentation | (Pages 23 - 30) |
| 6. Election Results | (Pages 31 - 32) |
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| 8. STAR summary of final results | (Pages 39 - 40) |



**JAMES HASSETT
CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

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Following Government guidance on measures to reduce the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19), we will be live webcasting our committee meetings and you are welcome to view and listen to the discussion. The link to each webcast will be available on the meeting webpage, but you can also access them on the [Somerset West and Taunton webcasting](#) website.

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Any requests need to be received by 4pm on the day that provides 2 clear working days before the meeting (excluding the day of the meeting itself). For example, if the meeting is due to take place on a Tuesday, requests need to be received by 4pm on the Thursday prior to the meeting.

The Governance and Democracy Case Manager will take the details of your question or speech and will distribute them to the Committee prior to the meeting. The Chair will then invite you to speak at the beginning of the meeting under the agenda item Public Question Time, but speaking is limited to three minutes per person in an overall period of 15 minutes and you can only speak to the Committee once. If there are a group of people attending to speak about a particular item then a representative should be chosen to speak on behalf of the group.

Please see below for Temporary Measures during Coronavirus Pandemic and the changes we are making to public participation:-

Due to the Government guidance on measures to reduce the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19), we will holding meetings in a virtual manner which will be live webcast on our website. Members of the public will still be able to register to speak and ask questions, which will then be read out by the Governance and Democracy Case Manager during Public Question Time and will be answered by the Portfolio Holder or followed up with a written response.

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SWT Tenants Strategic Group - 25 January 2021 held via Zoom Video Conference

Present: Councillor Alex Akhigbemen (Chair)

Councillors Paul Cram, Kevin Hellier, Corrine McMyllor, Livi Mongare, Mark Lithgow, Janet Lloyd and Francesca Smith

Officers: James Barrah, Stephen Boland, Chris Brown, Ian Candlish, Shari Hallett (Housing Performance Manager), Sharon Yarde (Housing), Simon Lewis, Kerry Prisco and Tracey Meadows (Democracy and Governance)

Also Present: Councillors

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm)

24. **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Jessie Bunn

25. **Notes from previous meeting**

The notes of the meeting held on the 23 November 2020 were approved.

26. **Directorate Report**

Housing Directorate Report to Housing Tenants Strategic Board

The Group considered a comprehensive report presented by James Barrah (Director of Housing and Communities), Chris Brown (Assistant Director – Development and Regeneration), Ian Candlish (Assistant Director, Housing Property), Simon Lewis (Assistant Director, Housing and Community Development), Shari Hallett (Housing Performance Manager)

Comments from group members included;

- Happy that the new 8 properties at Laxton Road were now let and were good sustainable properties;
- The tenants that are under occupying their properties, are we encouraging or mandating them to downsize? *We encourage and are not mandating at all. We are looking at our policies to see how we can encourage our tenants to downsize;*
- How do we manage ASB's; *we always try to manage this before it gets to the Ombudsman;*

27. **Property Safety Compliance Update Report**

Landlord Health and Safety Property Compliance Update Report

The group were asked to consider a detailed report regarding Property Compliance by Adam Evans, Compliance Manager - Housing Property

Comments by group members included;

- Concerns that the Legionella checks were not being undertaken as prescribed; *the funds are set up between our general fund and our HRA properties. A specialist contractor has been brought in to organise these checks;*
- Why are you doing re-inspecting areas for asbestos? *communal areas were being re-inspected to check for no damage since the last inspection;*

28. **Budget and rent setting**

HRA Revenue and Capital Budget Setting 2021/22 including Dwelling Rent Setting 21/22 and 30- Year Business Plan Review

The group were asked to consider a detailed report regarding the Capital Budget setting for 2121/22.

Comments from the group included;

- Has the ITC programme been factored into this budget? *The ITC programme has been paid for in an ongoing budget. New projects will need further funding;*
- With an aging population would we need to put more money aside for aids and adaptations? *We need to maximise our budget by getting our lettings right for new properties rather than making permanent adaptations to properties. This will be kept under review;*
- Is there a reserve fund for repairs to leaseholder's flats? *Our blocks where we have leaseholders are of traditional construction so we do not have a cladding issue. The external envelope of the building would be our responsibility to maintain and then a recharge process pro rate through a service charge for works relating to the properties. There will be a review of Service Charges in the coming year;*

29. **A New Deal for Social Housing - White Paper Summary**

Summary of Social Housing White Paper – “The Charter for Social Housing Residents”

The committee considered the brief presentation on the new Social Housing white Paper.

Comments from the group included;

- Concerns with the wording on the report frequency stating adhoc. This was a bit vague; *the report was old due to Covid. This financial year we will do the Annual report and this will appear on our website and in the tenant's newsletter. If more information was needed on any of the items discussed the group can request that these items appear on the agendas, that way the group can direct us on the direction that they would like us to go in;*

30. **Complaints Self Assessment against Housing Ombudsman Code**

Self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Code

The group considered the information report that was in the agenda pack.

Comments from group members included;

- Is it correct that the Ombudsman expect a response to a complaint within 5 working day? *Currently we do it within 2 working days and stage 2 requires a response within 20 working days;*

31. **Tenants' Strategic Group election update**

Tenant's Strategic Group Election Update

Reported that everything was running on track. 10 or less applications will result in this not going to election;

Comments from the group included

- How many nominations had been received? *We have now received 3 nominations.*

(The Meeting ended at 7.27 pm)

Housing Directorate Report to Housing Tenants' Strategic Group

22nd March 2021

Director of Housing and Communities Introduction

Fortunately since the last report in January, the community position regarding COVID-19 has started to improve, with case numbers reducing dramatically and vaccinations progressing rapidly. Our focus in the next few weeks will be about a return to full service delivery, and some of these issues are set out in this report. We will continue to closely monitor issues.

I have previously reported on the plans for changes to our local government structures with the implementation of a unitary model of Council delivery. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) is currently inviting residents, businesses and service providers to have their say on what model of local Government will work best for the county through an online questionnaire.

The District Councils in Somerset are proposing that the five Councils in Somerset are replaced by two Unitary Councils – one in the West and one in the East of Somerset. Somerset County Council is proposing one Unitary Council for Somerset.

The Local Government Secretary will consider both the districts' Stronger Somerset proposal and the alternative single unitary proposal following the consultation before making a decision about which option, if any, to implement. This would be subject to Parliamentary approval.

The consultation period will run for 8 weeks until Monday 19 April. This is a significant decision that will impact on the provision of Council services to all residents in Somerset.

A decision by government is likely to be reached in June 2021. Full details about this are included in the next Housing Newsletter which is due to be issued shortly.

Lastly, in February Council approved our budgets for 21/22 and this included the proposed rent increase which was set out at the last meeting of the Tenants Strategic Group, and so the rent increase will be 1.5%. All tenants have now received written confirmation of this and the rent they will pay for the year to come.

Housing Development and Regeneration Team

The team are working hard to deliver new affordable homes directly by the Council or through partnerships. The team have also been progressing opportunities to support the most vulnerable. In particular we have been working with the

directorates' homeless service to develop the Single Homeless Accommodation Strategy and the contribution that Canonsgrove should provide. Work promoting community led housing in Exmoor is progressing well and the new development at Laxton Road is now complete and fully let.

Housing Strategy

- Single Homeless Accommodation Strategy - The service has produced a draft strategy to respond to the Council's and Government aspiration to maintain accommodation support to reduce or end rough sleeping by 2027. The strategy will help inform the Council's partnership and investment decisions. The Executive are being asked to consider the draft strategy at its March meeting.
- Housing Demand Study – The housing strategy team will shortly conclude its study on housing demand including general need, special need and homelessness. This will be shared for discussion and then inform a supply delivery strategy.

HRA New Homes

- Zero Carbon Pilot – The procurement of a volumetric modular contractor was not successful. The Development Team are progressing zero carbon through a more traditional approach and have appointed architects to progress the five sites through planning. Although some time has been lost, the specification and approach to be adopted is established and the lessons learned have already been adopted on this and other projects. Lessons are also being shared with other local authorities, community led housing and registered provider partners.
- Seaward Way, Minehead – The community has been consulted on this scheme of 54 units, through social media and other formats. The scheme has been submitted to planning and the procurement of a contractor commenced in March. This scheme will be zero carbon and delivered by Autumn 2023. Here are some images of how the site will look:





Seaward Way, Minehead

- North Taunton Woolaway Project – The final designs for phase A are complete and contract costs are being finalised through the Pre Construction Services Agreement (PCSA). Members supported the scheme at Full Council in December and a cross party working group is being formed to ensure the Council’s new build housing programme has the focus and support which its scale merits.

An approach is being adopted initially for phase A to achieve 80% zero carbon at first letting and 100% zero carbon when the grid decarbonises (subject to cost negotiations as mentioned above). This approach means a moderate investment in fabric and a larger investment in technology will reduce by nine times the carbon produced by the new homes compared to a standard (part L) new build homes; and by twelve times compared to a Woolaway home. Fuel savings to the customers are calculated to be 70%-80% of current costs and the project is seeking to work with customers to record current costs to provide better analysis against future costs. A report has been placed in the member library on the approach and assumptions.

- Laxton Road – as mentioned above, the properties have now all been successfully let.

Housing Property Team

At the previous meeting in January we advised that following the government’s lockdown/Tier 5 announcements and in particular, the high number of positive COVID cases in Taunton and Wellington at the time, we had reduced service levels to only provide those deemed essential to our customers.

In the light of a reduction in the level of positive COVID cases in the local area, we are now working to move back to a full service delivery. In order to ensure the ongoing safety of our staff and residents when these works are undertaken, we are

reviewing our Risk Assessments and Method Statements (RAMS) and prioritising responsive repairs previously placed on hold.

Responsive Repairs and Void Repairs

- The hold placed on non-emergency internal responsive repairs has led to a backlog of these works. We continued to log all requests for these repairs during the COVID service restrictions period, and will be making contact with residents to arrange appointments when available. Plans for tackling the backlog are being implemented, including additional resources for the in-house trade team, and investigating whether external contractors can assist.
- Void repairs continued during the service reduction period, albeit with revised working practices to ensure staff were kept safe. We are implementing plans to improve void repair turnaround times and are reviewing Risk Assessments in line with this objective.

Property Safety Compliance

- We continued to progress with property safety compliance checks and works during the COVID service reduction period, including gas safety checks (LGSR's), water risk assessments and remedial works, electrical inspections (EICR's), asbestos surveys and re-inspections, fire risk assessment and remedial works & fire safety checks, and lift and stair-lift checks and remedial works. These works are continuing.

Capital Programmes

- All internal capital programme works were placed on hold during the COVID service reduction period. We are working with the relevant contractors to recommence these programmes as soon as possible and are reviewing their risk assessments to ensure the works can be undertaken safely.
- It should be noted that not all capital works programmes planned to be undertaken during 2020/21 will have been completed. We are reviewing the contractual and financial impact of the situation, and developing plans to increase the level of capital programmes to be delivered in 2021/22. Delivering this volume of works will be very challenging, and additional support is likely to be required to achieve this.

Asset Management

- Stock Condition Surveys and Energy Assessments were placed on hold during the COVID service reduction period. These surveys are due to be restarted following a review of the relevant RAMS, and additional external resources will be utilised to accelerate the programmes to improve data in these areas.

Housing and Communities Teams

Extra Care Housing

- SWT continue to work with Way Ahead Care (commissioned by Somerset County Council) in our Extra Care Housing sites. Many of the tenants have now received their 1st vaccinations and the schemes are encouraging only essential visits from family and friends, to minimise Covid-19 risks.
- Lettings are still being undertaken. SWT staff continue to complete the weekly on-site Health and Safety checks and some gardening work has still been able to take place.

Sheltered Housing

- The Sheltered Housing team have continued to make welfare calls to tenants, offering support and advice and updating tenants' personal and health information.
- Staff have been undertaking home visits where necessary; for example, for tenants who have partial hearing, learning disabilities or where using the phone presents an additional challenge. Aids and adaptations assessments, tenancy sign ups, installation of Lifelines and responding to neighbour disputes is all taking place, to maintain business as usual.
- The most recent lockdown has proved challenging for many sheltered tenants, as the weather and limited hours of light have reduced people's opportunities to get out and about and have safe social contact with each other.
- During all visits, staff wear personal protective equipment (PPE) and are required to follow the relevant risk assessment guidance, which has been regularly updated and reviewed.
- A member of the Sheltered Housing team is available each day to follow up on concerns arising from calls made to sheltered tenants by Deane Helpline. This has enabled staff to check a tenant's welfare, provide support, make referrals and provide help for tenants' families during hospital admissions, and when the tenant has sadly died.
- Gardening works have been able to continue to take place and emergency repairs have also been completed.
- We have been unable to have the planned partial reopening of the meeting halls within the sheltered schemes. However, we are hopeful that this will be possible in the next few months.

Lettings

- Property advertising, shortlisting and verification processes are being carried out in line with the "lean" process. Viewings are still more of a challenge due to the COVID

restrictions and concerns around viewing properties that are still tenanted or are “void” but being worked on by SWT staff.

- The Lettings team are still working to COVID-19 risk assessments and procedures, ensuring they are in line with the SWT safe working practices. “ Virtual” Viewings have taken place and have received positive feedback from tenants.
- As you are aware, the Home Moves Plus Officer (HMP) started in November. The Officer is currently working with thirty households who are either overcrowding or under occupying. So far, we have successfully helped seven tenants to downsize. This ensures that we are making the best use of our stock and that the tenants are adequately housed. An example of the feedback received:

“Just wanted to take a minute to properly thank you for all the hard work and time you put in for mum and dad to get the bungalow. We started moving them in over the weekend and they couldn't be any happier. Knowing they will live the last years of their lives in such a lovely home and in a lovely safe area means the world to us all as a family. It's the perfect location for them, busy enough but not too busy. Thank you again we are more than grateful and appreciate everything you have done”.

- Laxton Road Flats: The new properties are now all fully occupied. Positive feedback has been received from the new tenants in relation to the standard of the accommodation. 7 out of the 8 new tenants have been contacted all of whom marked their satisfaction at 8 or above out of 10 giving a satisfaction of around 85%. One tenant commented on how she “Loved” her flat.
- Work continues on the Lettable standard.

Income

- The Rent Recovery team have achieved fantastic results in reducing the rent arrears over this last year. The arrears figure as of 03/03/21 is £542k against a yearly target of £566k. The team continue to follow the Lean Process for rent collection and will continue to offer support to our tenants; both those affected by COVID and those who continue to struggle with their finances.
- We are currently in the process of reviewing our Garage rent recovery process with a view to “Lean” the current process. We plan to follow the same template we used for the tenant rent arrears and strive to make positive change within this service.
- Our Debt and Benefit service continues to help and support our tenants with claiming all the benefits they are entitled to. We are preparing to face an increase with support needed around the updating of UC claims which will be needed at the start of the new financial year to reflect the rent increase.

Anti-Social Behaviour

- The ASB team are keeping busy with at least 45 open cases. Two of these cases have been served with a Notice of Seeking Possession but currently we have

chosen not to proceed into court as the notice has helped to contain the nuisance. The team are closely monitoring the situation in both cases.

- Along with the heavy case work, the team are working hard on pulling together procedures and processes which will be linked to the ASB Policy. In preparation for completing the work over the next two to three months; both Case Managers will be attending external training events to ensure that they are keeping updated on how others are tackling ASB and to gain an insight into good practice in the sector.
- We are working closely with SHAPE solicitors to ensure that there is a good understanding from both sides should a case need to go to court.
- The team are currently exploring the use of a Community Protection Notice (CPN) on a noise nuisance case which has been on-going for some considerable time.
- A CPN can be served if satisfied on reasonable grounds that :
 - (i) the conduct of the individual or body is having a detrimental effect, of a persistent or continuing nature, on the quality of life of those in the locality; and
 - (ii) the conduct is unreasonable.
- The formal steps for this approach is to first serve a Community Protection Warning. If the nuisance continues then this is followed by the CPN and may then lead to SW&T taking court action.
- Feedback nationally from other social housing providers is that they have found that just serving a Community Protection Warning is proving extremely effective in its own right, with very few leading to issue of the formal Community Protection Notice.

Tenancy/Estate Team

- We are currently working on our first tenancy and estate management policy. This will help us to understand the gaps in our service area and ensure that processes are then put in place to provide transparency and consistency from the Case Managers.
- The team are actively working on block and estates inspections. From this, a number of the Case Managers are pulling together project plans for holding skip days on their estate. This will coincide with the Spring Clean Campaign that the organisation is leading on.
- The process we have adopted for notifying tenants about estate inspections initially prompted some comments from our tenants. We reacted quickly to our tenants' feedback by contacting the concerned tenants to explain and embedded some changes as a result. We have since received compliments on how we handled the situation. We continually look at how we can improve our processes to make things better for our tenants.

Housing Performance Team

Since our last report in January we have completed the following key pieces of work:

- The STAR survey is a comprehensive satisfaction survey completed every two years by an independent company (Acuity). The survey was concluded at the time of the last report but since then our Managers have been briefed on the survey results and a tenant friendly summary of our STAR survey has been posted to the website. Work has begun on analysing comments in detail and responding to the points raised.
- We have commenced a self-assessment against the consumer standards.
- We have concluded the elections to the Tenants' Strategic Group.
- £12,000 in grant funding has been issued by our Tenants' Action Group towards initiatives helping young people in housing communities (despite severe disruption to their meeting schedule due to COVID, Tenants' Action Group were supported to hold a special meeting to ensure grants could be awarded).
- Internally we have ensured that regular governance meetings are held to oversee and manage the activities of the housing directorate e.g. programme management meetings, finance and performance and risk meetings.
- Produced internal newsletters for staff allowing us to share housing news.

During the next two months we will:

- Formally complete an induction for Tenants' Strategic Group candidates.
- Create a response and action plan for the results of the STAR survey.
- Continue to support online meetings of our tenants' groups.
- Continue to develop webpages and electronic contact forms.
- Continue to consult on our housing policy documents.
- Continue to strengthen our internal governance through our meetings and reporting.
- Continue self-assessment against the government white paper.

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Tenants Strategic Group – 22 March 2021

2020/21 Financial Monitoring as at Quarter 3 (31 December 2020)

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Henley, Corporate Resources

Report Author: Kerry Prisco (Management Accounting & Reporting Lead)

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the projected outturn financial position of the HRA for the financial year 2020/21 (as at 31 December 2020).
- 1.2 The **revenue account** is currently forecasting an over spend of £247k as their year end outturn position for 2020/21. This outturn position is the best estimate based on information currently available. There are a number of risks and uncertainties inherent with this reactive, demand led service impacted by uncontrollable variables such as COVID.
- 1.3 The approved **capital programme** for 2020/21 is £113.80m. This consists of £15.9m of new schemes approved for 2020/21 plus £15.8m of slippage from prior years and £82.1m of approved supplementary budgets. The Capital Programme relates to schemes which will be completed over the next five years.
- 1.4 The **earmarked reserves** balance at the beginning of the year is £1.648m. The Social Housing Development Fund c£1.2m will be used as required to fund social housing development feasibility studies and usage approved through the Housing Programme Board. The remainder of the earmarked reserves have been specifically committed to be spent within the next three financial years.
- 1.5 The **general balances** at the beginning of the year is £2.701m. This is £901k above the minimum recommended reserve level of £1.800m, providing a comfortable level of resilience in light of the significant contractual risk in relation to North Taunton.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 None

3 Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

- 3.1 The HRA is a ring-fenced, self-financing, account used to manage the Council's housing stock of some 5,700 properties, with the Council acting as the Landlord.

- 3.2 The Council retains all rental income to meet the costs of managing and maintaining the housing stock, as well as meeting the interest payments and repayment of capital debt.
- 3.3 The current year end forecast outturn position for the Housing Revenue Account for 2020/21 is on budget a net underspend of £247k.

Table 1: HRA Outturn Summary

	Current Budget £'000	Forecast Outturn for the Year £'000	Forecast Variance COVID £'000	Forecast Variance non COVID £'000	Total Forecast Variance	
					£'000	%
Gross Income	-26,773	-26,921	0	-148	-148	-0.55%
Service Expenditure	15,026	14,756	0	-270	-270	1.80%
Other Expenditure	11,746	11,917	0	171	171	-1.46%
Total	0	-247	0	-247	-247	-0.92%

- 3.4 The table below provides more detail on the significant variances forecast for the year:

Table 2 - Summary of non-COVID Related Forecast Variances for the Year

Budget heading	Variance £'000	Comments
Income	-148	The outturn forecast is an over recovery of income of £148k. This relates in part to dwelling rents where more income is estimated to be recovered than predicted when setting the budget and providing an allowance for voids. This also relates to leaseholder service charges where the budget is set prior to the associated costs being incurred and then billed in arrears.
Salaries	-421	The estimated total under spend of £421k on staffing costs relates to the new structure for 2020/21 which has taken time to recruit suitable candidates. Therefore some vacancy savings have materialised across the service, specifically in the performance and development team. This has been offset in part by the increase in costs associated with the pay award at 2.75% compared to the estimated 2% pay award that was budget and approved by Full Council in February 2020, meaning an increase in costs to the HRA of £59k.
Housing Partnership	13	The estimated over spend on SWPSHP is due to an incorrect budget split between GF and HRA during 2020/21 budget setting process.
Landlord Property Compliance	211	A review of all compliance areas against every property for which Somerset West and Taunton Council has landlord property compliance responsibility is being undertaken. The review has so far identified that approximately £211k of additional costs will need to be incurred this financial year over and above existing budgets.
Transfer Removal Grants	-22	This relates to a freeze in transfer removal grants in lettings due to COVID19. This has now recommenced but is progressing slowly due to the current climate.

Budget heading	Variance £'000	Comments
Letting Expenditure	-10	This relates to a reduction in lettings expenditure with regards to paying for adverts related to house moves which have been restricted due to COVID19.
Meeting Halls	-25	There has been a significant reduction in activity seen in meetings halls due to their closure during COVID19 lockdowns.
Policy & Management	40	This relates to a range of variances in this cost centre for example additional costs incurred to increase communication to our tenants through the year which incurred additional printing and postage costs. We have also engaged independent financial modelling consultant to scenario plan and health check our business plan which supports our ambitious 10 year development programme.
Tenant Empowerment (TSG)	-17	Tenant empowerment work has been reduced this year due to Covid restrictions. Meetings are now taking place online and newsletters to our tenants have restarted but we will underspend on this budget this year by c£17k.
Tenants Action Group	-39	The Tenants Action Group have restarted their meetings online since September 2020 following Covid19 putting a stop to face to face meeting. The group are still hoping to issue youth initiative funding of £20k but other environmental improvements and training for the group has been halted due to Covid creating an underspend of c£39k. Of which a c/f request of £20k for the Youth Initiative grant as this may not be awarded in time for year end due to COVID19.
Depreciation	348	Following the closedown of the 2019/20 accounts a variance on the depreciation charge, which is transferred to the Major Repairs Reserve (MRR) to fund the capital programme and/or repay capital debt. Due to this being calculated at the end of the financial year the 2020/21 budgets were not adjusted for this and therefore there will be an over spend of c£348k. The budget for 2021/22 will be updated to reflect the latest estimates for this.
Interest Payable	-177	The current forecast estimate is an under spend of £177k. The authority have recently taken out an additional £10m loan at 1.64% reducing the amount and cost of internal borrowing. The final outturn position will depend on the final capital funding requirement funded from internal borrowings and the rate applied.
TOTAL Over / (-) Underspend	-247	

3.5 **HRA - Risk and Uncertainty**

3.6 Budgets and forecasts are based on known information and the best estimates of the Council's future income and expenditure activity. Income and expenditure over the financial year is estimated by budget holders and then reported through the budget monitoring process. During this process any risks and uncertainties are identified which could impact financial projections, but for which the likelihood and/or amount are uncertain.

- 3.7 There are also a number of areas where the financial impact is not known until the end of the financial year such as depreciation charges and change in provision for bad debt.
- 3.8 The current areas of risk and uncertainty being reported include:
- 3.8.1 **Repairs & Maintenance:** Overall this is a very demand led and reactive service based on the needs of the tenants. There are also a number of uncontrollable variables associated with this service such as the weather (e.g. cold winters causing burst pipes, roof leaks, etc), condition of properties when returned (e.g. void refurbishments), consumer demand on minor internal / external repairs (e.g. broken door or fence) and the type of repair work required.
- 3.8.2 **RTB Receipts:** The RTB scheme is a government scheme that enables tenants to purchase their homes at a discount, subject to meeting qualifying criteria. The receipts allowed to be retained by the Council can fund up to 30% of new social housing costs and must be used within three years of receipt. To date, the Council has successfully spent all of their retained 1-4-1 receipts resulting in no returns being made to the Treasury/MHCLG.
- 3.8.3 On the 31 Dec 202 the government issued a temporary relaxation of the rules in response to the COVID situation, to give authorities until 31 December 2020 to catch up with their spending plans. This has now been extended until the 31st March 2021.
- 3.8.4 Whilst projected spend and additional purchases are being sought by the service there is a risk that the quarter 4 spend requirements will not be met and may result in funds being return to MHCLD / Treasury. This is a direct result of COVID delaying progress on new build and purchasing houses on the open market.

4 HRA Capital Programme

- 4.1 The HRA approved Capital Programme is £113.8m. This consists of £15.9m of new schemes approved for 2020/21 plus £15.8m of slippage from prior years and £82.1m of approved supplementary budgets. The Capital Programme relates to schemes which will be completed over the next five years.
- 4.2 The Council is supporting this investment through the use of the Major Repairs Reserve, Capital Receipts, Revenue Funding and Borrowing.
- 4.3 The capital programme can be split into three distinct areas:
- 4.4.1 **Major Works:** The approved budget of £9.5m is funded by the Major Repairs Reserve and relates to spend on major works on existing dwellings such as kitchens, bathrooms, heating systems, roofs, doors and windows. New schemes approved for 2020/21 total £6m with slippage from the prior year of £3.5m. It is likely that the impact of COVID will result in an under spend in this area within the year.
- 4.4.2 **Improvements:** The approved budget of £3.2m is funded by the Major Repairs Reserve and relates to spend on improvements such as disabled facilities adaptations, asbestos

removal and environmental improvements. New schemes approved for 2020/21 total £2.9m with slippage from the prior year of £0.3m.

- 4.4.3 **Social Housing Development Programme:** The approved budget of £18.9m is for the provision of new housing through schemes such as Phases A-E for North Taunton Regeneration, Laxton Road and other buybacks to increase the Council's housing stock. Funding allocated for new schemes totals £6.9m with slippage from the prior year of £12m mainly being North Taunton and Laxton Road. Supplementary budgets of £82.1m have since been approved for a variety of new build affordable home schemes. In the current year £1.1m has been spent in buy backs.

5 HRA Earmarked Reserves

- 5.1 The HRA Earmarked Reserves (EMR) at the beginning of 2020/21 were £1.648m (see Table 3 below). The Social Housing Development Fund will be used as required to fund social housing development feasibility studies and usage approved through the Housing Programme Board. The remainder of the earmarked reserves have been specifically committed to be spent within the next three financial years.

Table 3: Balance of Earmarked Reserves held at 1 April 2020

Description	Balance b/f (£'000)
HRA Employment and Skills Dev	102
HRA Asbestos Surveys	102
HRA One Teams	37
Social Housing Development Fund	1,232
HRA Contribution to Change	175
HRA Total	1,648

6 HRA General Reserves

- 6.1 The HRA reserves at the start of the year were £2.7m. This is £901k above the minimum recommended reserve level of £1.8m.
- 6.2 **Forecast Outturn** - The current outturn position is forecast to be a net underspend of £247k. If this is the position at year end then this will be returned to general balances, increasing them to £2.948m.

Table 4: HRA Reserve Balance

	£k
Balance Brought Forward 1 April 2020	2,701
Forecast Outturn 2020/21 (as at 31 Dec 2020)	247
Forecast Balance Carried Forward 31 March 2020	2,948
Minimum Balance Per Business Plan	2,000

Democratic Path:

- Scrutiny – 3 March 2021
- Executive – 17 March 2021
- Tenants Strategic Board – 22 March
- Full Council – no

Reporting Frequency: Quarterly

List of Appendices

Appendix A	Capital Programme
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Appendix A: Capital Programme

	Total 2020/21 Capex Budget	Total Forecast Capital Outturn 2020/21	Forecast Capital Outturn 2021/22	Forecast Capital Outturn 2022/23	Forecast Capital Outturn 2023/24	Forecast Capital Outturn 2024/25	Forecast Capital Outturn 2025/26 Onwards	Variance Minus = Favourable
Majors and Improvements	12,785,300	3,316,953	9,468,347	0	0	0	0	0
Social Housing Development Schemes	100,988,490	4,944,995	22,763,000	27,276,000	11,280,000	9,038,000	25,686,495	0
HRA Total	113,773,790	8,261,947	32,231,347	27,276,000	11,280,000	9,038,000	25,686,495	0

Laxton Road Housing Project Kingston Black Court - Flats 1-8

Michelle Hall - Case Manager - Project
Manager

Chris Brown - Assistant Director Housing
& Regeneration

What is the scheme?

The Kingston Black Court housing scheme was approved for planning in 2017 and granted permission for the Council owned garage blocks to be demolished and redeveloped into 8 one bed flats. This was the site as it was pre -demolition. It often attracted anti-social behaviour.

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Somerset West
and Taunton

Autumn / Winter 2019

Following a formal procurement process, Classic Builders were appointed as our main contractor for the project and started on site in November 2019. The original completion was planned for Autumn of 2020, however, as we all know, COVID-19 came along and set the programme back a little. Below are some images of the site in the early days. As you can see from the photos, starting a build in winter doesn't come without its challenges, one of which being mud!

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Spring 2020

As things began to dry out a little on site, we began to progress much quicker and the blocks seem to take shape. You can see below, the 8 flats are split across two blocks. The first block has flats 1-5 and the second flats 6-8. The design allowed 4 out of the eight flats to have their own private entrance. Then two flats in each block share a communal area.

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January 2021

The flats are traditionally built, from brick and block and are rendered to give a high quality finish. Internally they are extremely well insulated, triple glazed and exceed building regulation standards and sound proofing requirements. These properties received an EPC rating of B. Our tenants will not only have the benefit of a high quality, comfortable new build, but should hopefully benefit from reduced energy bills too.

Here are some pictures of the internals, which are of an equally high finish.

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**Somerset West
and Taunton**

Move in Day!

I'm really pleased to say that we took handover of these properties on Friday 15th January 2021 and six out of the eight flats will be occupied from Monday 18th January 2021, with the remaining two in the process of being let.

This is a fantastic way to start 2021 and the tenants moving into these flats are incredibly happy to be moving into brand new, fit for purpose, energy efficient homes.

We managed to catch a couple of our tenants on sign up day and they kindly spoke to us about their experience and how they were feeling about moving into their new homes. One of our tenants said "I'm really happy with the property and the quality of work" another tenant was "trilled to be downsizing after many years on Homefinder".

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Somerset West
and Taunton

A Virtual Tour

As we're all aware the Covid-19 restrictions have made it quite tricky at times and we've had to find new ways of working. We'd have loved to show visitors around our new build pre-occupation, but this wasn't possible under the current rules. However, I did manage to do a quick tour of one of our ground floor flats, so you can really get a feel for the space and the layout. Enjoy!

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Somerset West
and Taunton

Questions?

If you have any questions about the scheme or would like more information about anything, please feel free to email me or call me.

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Michelle Hall - Housing Project Manager

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Tenant’s Strategic Group Meeting – 22nd March 2021

Tenant’s Strategic Group Election Update –*Please note for information purposes only*

Report Author: Sharon Yarde, Housing Customer Experience Lead

Background

The Terms of Reference for the Tenant’s Strategic Group state that elections should be held every 3 years. Therefore, an election is due so that newly elected members can start on 1st April 2021.

Project Timeline

Letter, Information pack & application form sent to tenants	11th January 2021
Completed application forms to be returned	8th February 2021 (1 month)
Housing Performance Team to check eligibility of applicants	11/01 until 08/02/2021
If 10 or less applications, the election will not go ahead	

Current update

- The online application form was removed from the website on 9th February 2021.
- 11 applications were received.
- All applications were checked against the eligibility criteria, 1 of the applications did not fulfil the eligibility criteria and was declined.
- This left 10 applications for 10 available spaces and therefore an election was not required.
- Civica were stood down.
- All successful applicants have agreed to join and comply with the Terms of Reference of the group.
- The new group will take effect from 1st April 2021
- The website will be amended to reflect the current members of the group as from 1st April 2021.
- An induction for the new Tenant’s Strategic Group has been arranged for 20th April at 4pm.
- A new Vice Chair will need to be elected
- 1st meeting for the group will be 24th May 2021.

Recommendations

To take this opportunity to thank Livi Mongare and Dennis Galpin for all of their hard work and for the support they have given the group over the years. They will both be greatly missed and we wish them well.

To note as from 1st April 2021, the members of the Tenants' Strategic Group are as follows:

Alex Akhigbemen
Paul Cram
Corrine McMylor
Jess Bunn
Kevin Hellier
Ivor Hussey
Samantha Rickward
Stephen Smith
Luke Manning
Colin England

Going Forward

Open for questions from the group during the meeting on 22nd March 2021

Democratic Path:

- **Scrutiny / Corporate Governance or Audit Committees – No**
- **Cabinet/Executive – No**
- **Full Council – No**

Reporting Frequency: Once only Ad-hoc Quarterly
 Twice-yearly Annually

Contact Officers

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Somerset West and Taunton Council

Tenants Strategic Group – 22 March 2021

2020/21 Housing Scorecard as at January 2021

This matter is the responsibility of Councillor Smith, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Report Author: Shari Hallett (Housing Performance Manager)

1 **Executive Summary**

1.1 This report provides an update on the housing scorecard as at January 2021.

2 **Recommendations**

2.1 To note content of the housing scorecard.

3 **Housing Scorecard**

3.1 The Housing Scorecard is a tool to measure our performance in key areas. Since the remodelling of the housing directorate the scorecard has been recreated. The scorecard is still maturing and it has some data issues e.g. repairs where data collection is still being verified. Where data is not reported or results are showing under performance against targets, improvement plans are being agreed or lean reviews have taken place.

3.2 Over the last 12 months Covid has had a significant impact on some areas of our performance, but hopefully we can now see a pathway to returning to full and normal service delivery. Due to the timings of the meeting it is not possible to report all February data, however we have referenced this in the commentary where it is available. Many indicators continue to improve through February.

3.3 This report covers a total of 17 measures. Customer 5, Rent Recovery 2, Supported Housing 1, Lettings and Voids 1, Housing Repairs 2, Tenancy Management 3, Compliance 2, Development 1.

3.4 Customer

Indicator	Target	Unit	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21
Customer					
% of complaints responded to in 10 working days	100%	%	57%	86%	89%

Improvement in complaints response times have been significant now that clearer routing and monitoring of complaints is in place. **Although February data is not yet published figures are currently showing 95%** (one complaint did not hit target as it as incorrectly assigned to the wrong area).

Indicator	Target	Unit	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21
Customer					
% of new tenants satisfied with the lettable standard of the property	85%	%			82%

In January we “let” 28 properties, we have had 23 responses to our satisfaction questions. Of the 23 responses, 20 rated us 9/10 or 10/10. We are almost at our target of 85% and are working to understand how we can improve satisfaction.

Indicator	Target	Unit	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21
Customer					
% of tenants satisfied with most recent repair	85%	%	N/a	82%	100%

Taking the data from our STAR satisfaction survey, 82% of those contacted reported were satisfied with the repair service. STAR upper quartile performance is 84% and the median is 78% our result is above the median and close to upper quartile scores.

Recently a trial system of sending electronic questionnaires to repair customers as soon as the repair is completed began. Results returned 100% satisfaction. Response sizes are still small however it is encouraging to note that those who choose to respond are responding positively.

Indicator	Target	Unit	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21
Customer					
Number of compliments received	6 per month	number	8	6	6

We have been receiving a steady number of compliments recorded formally since July 2020. Early indications for February indicate around 13. **There are 82 compliments recorded to date since July 2020.**

Indicator	Target	Unit	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21
Customer					
Overall tenant satisfaction (STAR results)	82%	%	N/a	83%	N/A

Our STAR survey during November/December 2020 recorded 83% tenancy satisfaction overall. This is an improvement on our satisfaction rating recorded in 2018 which was 81% and exceeds the target of 82%. Two years ago our target was to improve satisfaction and we have achieved that in our latest survey.

3.5 Rent Recovery

Indicator	Target	Unit	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21
Rent recovery					
Income collected as a % of rent owed excluding arrears brought forward	98.3	%	99%	98%	99%
Total number of evictions	less than 10	Number	1	0	0

Our recent Rent Recovery performance is exceeding target, current levels of rent arrears are £517,000 at 5th March 2021. Since September 2019 when we introduced our “Lean” approach, we have reduced the number of tenants in arrears by 461 and reduced the rent arrears by £275,000.

There have been a total of 2 evictions executed since April 2020. One in November 2020 and one in February 2021.

3.6 Supported Housing

Indicator	Target	Unit	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21
Supported Housing					
Sheltered housing - % of tenants receiving annual reviews of support plans	100%				90.70%

In January 90.7% of our sheltered tenants had received an annual review of their support plan, February’s data is showing that this is likely to have increased further to 93.6% and we are working towards 100%.

3.7 Lettings and Voids

Indicator	Target	Unit	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21
Lettings and Voids					
Average re-let time in calendar days (key to key)	23	cal days	58.4	51	58.5

A positive trend in performance in December 2020 has unfortunately declined during January 2021. This is primarily due to the effect of the most recent lockdown which has forced changes to the overall voids process (for example, fewer trades in a property at any one time when undertaking repairs to meet the Lettable Standard to enable social distancing to be maintained).

Nevertheless, we are reviewing our void processes to seek to improve performance and will update the group on progress at future meetings.

3.8 Housing Repairs

Data for this indicator is taken from Open Contractor software system (which is used to hold repair jobs against the core property database). This data is unfortunately temporarily not currently available for reporting purposes. A detailed validation process has established that there are a number of data and software issues which are still being verified and work to resolve these is ongoing. Working with our software providers we hope to be able to report this data as soon as possible. We are confident that this is a data reporting issue and that our service delivery of repairs in the context of Covid restrictions remains good.

It should, however, be noted that all housing emergency repairs have continued to be undertaken during the Covid lockdown periods and there are no backlog emergency repairs outstanding.

It should also be noted that internal housing non-emergency repairs were placed on hold during the latest Covid lockdown period and that a backlog of these jobs has therefore inevitably arisen. This will have negatively impacted the percentage of housing non-emergency repairs overall and this will take some while to resolve. We are currently developing plans to deal with this situation.

3.9 Tenancy Management

Indicator	Target	Unit	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21
Tenancy management					
Total new ASB cases in the month	(Ctrl) 10 per month		5	1	7
Total number of ASB cases that were closed in the month	N/a		0	1	5
Number safeguarding referrals	N/a		0	0	2

ASB - These figures represent “high level” ASB cases opened and closed in the month. We are happy with our performance in this area but ideally would like the numbers to be as low as possible. Work has commenced to start recording lower level nuisance/ASB cases so that these can be reported and provide a more detailed picture of nuisance/ASB on estates.

Safeguarding – We currently raise low numbers of safeguarding referrals to Somerset County Council. Where we do have concerns we will frequently help to address these through a multi-agency approach to provide the required support and interventions to the affected households. We have just refreshed our Safeguarding Policy and are re-launching awareness and training in the Council to ensure that all incidents are identified and managed within policy.

3.10 Compliance

Indicator	Target	Unit	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21
Compliance					
% of housing dwellings with a valid gas safety certificate (LGSR)	100%	%	99.96%	100.00%	100.00%
% of communal areas with a Fire Risk Assessment (FRA) in place and FRA Review complete (where applicable)	100%	%	33.16% (subject to recount)	45.38%	65.44%

There was a requirement to maintain gas safety inspections during lock down and we have successfully managed to maintain 100% gas safety inspections.

We are undertaking a new programme of FRA’s with two external specialist consultants, and expect to be 100% compliant by the end of March 2021, February data already shows 87.33%

3.11 Development

Indicator	Target	Unit	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21
Development					
Number of SWT HRA new home completions since April 2019	1000 by 2049		0	53	61

This indicator is used to measure progress against the HRA Business Plans ambition of 1000 units over 30 years, which equates to circa 33 units each year. The Housing service has built or acquired 61 new homes since April 2019. The majority of these homes have been acquisitions from the market either as individual buy backs, buying back previously council owned homes, or block acquisitions such as the 17 new homes purchased at Pyrlands Fields, Taunton. However, the Council completed the Laxton Road development building eight flats which were let in January this year. Moving forward virtually all new HRA homes will be new build homes through developments such as North Taunton Woolaway Project (NTWP) and Seaward Way. By developing our own homes the Council is better able to set standards relating to space, unit size and low carbon.

Democratic Path:

- Monthly to Housing Performance Meeting – 16th March 2021
- Tenants Strategic Board – 22 March 2021

Reporting Frequency: Quarterly

Contact Officers

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Somerset West and Taunton Council

Tenant's Strategic Group Meeting – 22nd March 2021

STAR Update –*Please note for information purposes only* to be read in conjunction with Tenant Friendly “Your views” report from Acuity.

Report Author: Sharon Yarde, Housing Customer Experience Lead

Background

The Star (survey of tenants and residents) is done every 2 years and it is a reputable way of gathering information on Customer satisfaction. We decided to complete STAR prior to Christmas 2020 in order to understand customer priorities and ensure that any unitary consultation can take place from January 2021 onwards without causing any consultation fatigue.

Current update

- In February a webinar from Acuity was delivered to all Housing Managers within the Housing Directorate. This informed them of the results in an easy to understand format so that they could share the findings with their teams.
- We received 42 “flags” from Acuity which were individual matters that needed to be looked into as a result of the survey.
- All 42 flags have been dealt with.
- Acuity collated over 1,000 comments from our tenants during the survey.
- The Housing Performance Team have worked their way through all of the comments and grouped them into topic area. These comments will feed into an action plan.
- At the end of February we received a “Tenant Friendly” version of the STAR survey. This version has been referred to in the Spring Edition of the Housing Newsletter and will be posted on our website for our tenants to view.
- Satisfaction has generally increased since the previous survey in 2018. In 2020 we received the highest ever satisfaction scores since the surveys began in 2013 in the following areas: Value for money, appearance of estate, grounds maintenance, repairs and maintenance and gas servicing
- All data (statistics, comments, flags) has indicated that both repairs and communication are areas where improvements can be made.
- The Housing Performance Team are currently putting together an action plan to address these topics.

Recommendations

To note that:

- the tenant friendly STAR survey report will be available on the website

- there will be an action plan of improvements that will be made as a result of the survey results and feedback.

Going Forward

Open for questions from the group during the meeting on 22nd March 2021

To present an action plan to the group in the next meeting.

Democratic Path: N/A for information only

- **Scrutiny / Corporate Governance or Audit Committees – No**
- **Cabinet/Executive – No**
- **Full Council – No**

Reporting Frequency: Once only Ad-hoc Quarterly
 Twice-yearly Annually

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