

## SWT Tenants Strategic Group

Monday, 19th July, 2021,  
6.00 pm

**Somerset West  
and Taunton**

### [SWT MEETING WEBCAST LINK](#)

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**Members:** Alex Akhigbemen (Chair), Jessie Bunn, Paul Cram, Colin England, Kevin Hellier, Ivor Hussey, Luke Manning, Corrine McMyler, Samantha Rickward, Smith, Mark Lithgow, Janet Lloyd and Francesca Smith

### Agenda

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|--|-----------------|
| 1. Apologies   |                 |
| 2. Minutes from the previous meeting                   | (Pages 3 - 8)   |
| Minutes from the previous meeting on the 24 May 2021   |                 |
| 3. Directorate Report                                  | (Pages 9 - 18)  |
| 4. Finance Outturn Report                              | (Pages 19 - 28) |
| 5. 2020-21 HRA Scorecard                               | (Pages 29 - 34) |
| 6. Development update Report (New Build Council Homes) | (Pages 35 - 46) |



**JAMES HASSETT**  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

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## SWT Tenants Strategic Group - 24 May 2021 held via Zoom Video Conference

Present: Councillor Alex Akhigbemen (Chair)

Paul Cram, Colin England, Luke Manning, Corrine McMylor, Livi Mongare and Samantha Rickward

Officers: James Barrah (Director of Housing and Communities, Chris Brown (Assistant Director Development and Regeneration) , Ian Candlish (Assistant Director - Housing Property), Shari Hallett (Housing Performance Manager), Sharon Yarde (Housing), Simon Lewis (Assistant Director - Housing and Communities), Adam Evans (Compliance Manager), Suzie Rea (People Business Partner) and Tracey Meadows (Democracy and Governance)

Also Present: Councillors Lithgow, Lloyd, Smith and Weston

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm)

### 1. **Notes from previous meeting**

The minutes from the previous meeting on the 22 March 2021 were agreed.

Proposed by the Chair, Alek Akhigbemen and seconded by Livi Mongare.

### 2. **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Jessie Bunn, Kelvin Hellier, Ivor Hussey and Stephen Smith.

### 3. **Directorate Report**

The Group considered a comprehensive report from the circulated agenda. 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) and Adam Evans (Compliance Manager).

James Barrah welcomed the new members to the group. He stated that the Group had a busy year ahead with plenty of matters being brought to them for their consideration.

**Comments/ questions by the group included** (responses in italic);

- Were there any delays to any of the building projects that the Council would be commencing due to the delayed supply of building materials?  
*This was a challenging time but we were pleased that the Seaward Way*

*project has a fixed price so that gave us a bit of comfort regarding an increase of the prices of materials. North Taunton had been a challenge due to the risks being costed into the proposal.*

- The Internet Audit came out as reasonable. Were we going to increase the work being done to good or great? *The internal Audit was based on compliance, governance, and reporting processes. All our systems and data were looked at and how we were progressing and reporting our programmes to make sure that they were safe;*
- On the Capital Programme report, it stated that there was a charge for Water main replacement works was this the responsibility of the Council to replace? *If the water main was on our land it be our area of responsibility unless it is of the shared element;*
- Concerns that the delays to responsive repair works meant that we could possibly spend more money to fix these repairs. *During the Covid Lockdown period we were keeping a log of what works being requested. This was being monitored by the team to make sure that there was nothing that could cause an issue and if that was the case it would have been inspected. This was being reviewed regularly to get the back log or repairs down;*
- With regards to mutual exchanges and void properties. Lettings were now dealing more in line with the OT's. Would this mean that void properties would now be allocated to the correct tenants, i.e. disabled tenants being moved into properties that already had adaptations to meet their needs? *The Aids and Adaptions Policy was being looked at to get this approved as a policy. A bit part of that was that we properly advertised our properties particularly those with adaptations to ensure that the correct tenants were housed. The Home finder System now included notes from Doctors or Health Care providers with the latest information;*
- With regards to the Firepool development, did we as a Council have a stake in the accommodation property development? *As a council we did but the site was owned by the General Fund as opposed to being Housing land. The new approach was for the Council to take a master plan with the developer. This had been divided up into differing sections. More discussions would need to be had with regards to Affordable Housing when this comes forward in the scheme;*

**Resolved that** – the group noted the report.

#### 4. **Impact of Covid on Housing Staff**

The group considered a report from Suzie Rea (People Business Partner) on the impact of Covid on staff in the Housing and Communities Directorate.

**Comments from the group included;** (responses in *Italic*)

- Concerns with the high level of sickness in the ASB team; *There were only two members of staff in the ASB team so when one member of the team went off sick this would have an impact on the team. We would continue to measure sickness absence levels;*

- The Chair conveyed the groups appreciation and gratitude to the entire Housing Team for their hard work and dedication;

**Resolved that** the group noted the report

## 5. **Fire Remedial Work Programme**

The group considered a Fire Remedial Work Programme Report from the circulated agenda from Adam Evans (Compliance Manager)

**Comments from the group included;** (responses in *Italic*)

- Did fire regulations differ for each property type, was there an overall standard for each property or were the requirement different ?. *All SWT properties were treated by a high standard and identified by a risk assessment;*
- Were specialist required to procure the Fire Doors? *These needed to be an accreditation for the manufacturing for the fitting of the Fire Doors which took 12 months to achieve;*
- What would happen if the Lease Holders tenant refused to update their Fire Doors? *We were embarking on a programme shortly to replace the existing Fire Doors, so we needed to ensure that all doors, including Lease Holders were being replaced;*
- If a flat has been bought by a private tenant, would this cost of the replacement fire door be at the cost of the taxpayer, not the private tenant? *On the cost of expediting fire safety as a priority over the time it would take to negotiate, take legal action in many cases and having to liaise with the lease holder on things around choice, colour ect if they were paying for the upgrade. To protect the tenants, we had taken these steps to progress the programme;*

**Resolved that** the group noted the report.

## 6. **Housing Website Report**

The Housing Performance Manager, Shari Hallett presented the Housing and Communities Website progress report

**Comments from the group included;** (responses in *Italic*)

- Concerns around;
  - tenants that were not technical enough to access all this information and how this would be implemented with the impending merger;
  - Customer Services not being trained properly due to their lack of knowledge on members of staff and the department that they

worked in. You are then waiting on the telephone for 45 minutes while they find out this information;

*The housing officer form that we have developed was important for tenants that not only have access to the website but tenants that call in. This information would be what our Customer Service staff use to find the correct department to pass the call onto. Going forward these calls would be routed correctly;*

*Unitary would not change how we provided our services. We have purchased a software system and portal to enable tenants to access this in the future;*

- Concerns that the website process was a waste of time and money. When you rung for a repair, they booked you in there and then. If you book online it took a week and then staff still have to call you to book in the repair. How were you getting on with the survey to see how many tenants were computer literate and were happy to use this service? *We are happy for customers to use whichever process suits them either via the website or phone. This work on the survey had not yet stated. It was a part of a bigger part of work that needed undertaking;*
- Would the money spent on developing this new website be required again in 12 month's, 2 years' time due the impending Unitary decision? *The changes that we were making to the website was using existing staff. The programme to replace the computer software would need to be implement as it would no longer be supported. The cost for this would be minimal;*

**Resolved that** – the group noted the report.

## 7. **STAR Action Plan Report**

The group considered a Star Survey/Action Plan update report from Sharon Yarde (Housing Customer Experience Lead)

**Comments from the Group included;** (responses in *Italic*)

- Concerns with the way that Customer Service staff were not trained enough in the way that they spoke to the elderly, disabled clients and learning difficulties on the phone and face to face; *training would be provided to the Housing Directorate. The Customer Services team who picked up the phones for the whole of the Council were not part of the Housing Directorate team. Customer Services that deal with Housing queries would be included in the course;*
- The recent block inspection letters had only the generic SWT phone number and no Officer contact details which was frustrating when you needed to speak to them direct; *This comment was also mentioned by the Tenants Action Group. It has recently been agreed with the Tenant Manager that going forward there would be a name and a photo added to*

- the letters. It had also been suggested that when Estates Officers were on a walk about that they wear SWT tabards to identify who they were;*
- Information was also needed on the Estate walk about with where to find the Officers would be helpful; *this would be fed back to the Estates Officers;*
  - Information was needed on the website to state which Housing Officer covered which area as at present this was unclear. You need to make them human by putting a bit of a bio about them. This would help communications as the Estate Officers change so often; *the website had been updated and the form for 'contact my housing officer' now stated the name of your Estate Officer;*
  - Concerns that the Estates Officers do not always respond to calls made to them. The structure also needed looking at as staff were constantly being moved around so could not build a rapport with tenants making them feel insecure; *since May 2020 we now have our own established Housing Directorate so this should be pretty stable going forward;*
  - Training for Estates Officers to deal with complex cases was needed to assist the officers in their role; *A training programme would be rolling out soon to all our front line housing staff on domestic abuse as there was new legislation around this and we wanted to make sure that everybody knows what to look out for and everybody knows how to address concerns raised to them. Training would also be undertaken on First Aid and Mental Health issues; As a landlord, why has this training taken so long to happen? Everyone was required to undertake online training which consisted of a core of set modules. Our policies have now been updated to make sure that they were current as legislation changed all the time. As a result of this, more front facing training would be given;*
  - More face to face training was required; *face to face training would still be given;*

The Director of Housing and Communities, James Barrahan stated that he would give the group access to the training packages so that they could see and experience what training our staff undertook in modules like Safeguarding so that you were better informed.

An action would also be taken to Customer Services to accelerate work at the front end where calls come through to work with the team that worked on our housing calls and to ask for some better reporting back.

**Resolved that** - the group noted the report.

## 8. Forward Plan

Forward Plan noted.

(The Meeting ended at 8.06 pm)

## TSG Directorate Report – 19 July 2021

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### Director of Housing and Communities Introduction

As can be seen from the contents of this report, the service has a huge amount of work to deliver in the current year to achieve the outcomes we expect for tenants and to get the service to where we want it to be. Our operating environment is certainly fast paced and constantly changing, which creates additional challenges. The volume of case work from customers is at a very high level, much of which is complex. I constantly review resource capacity with the senior team and we have recently taken steps to agree additional posts to help with key pressures and projects. However, we are also finding recruitment difficult in some areas for example, filling some of our tradesperson roles at the current time.

We are also looking to address the quality of what we do, as we are still experiencing a high number of complaints. We are supporting the team with training and process reviews to constantly try to improve our decision making and to actively try to learn from when we don't get things right - and when we do! As we continue to work mostly in a remote way, staying connected as a team and remaining co-ordinated as a service is something we have to work hard at, so I am pleased we are now able to take some small steps back to more face-to-face working practices, which I am sure will help us in many ways.

Lastly, I am massively proud of the team for the hard work that they continue to undertake and how they continue to strive to deliver the best service they can for tenants.

### Housing Development and Regeneration Team

The team continues to deliver new affordable homes directly by the Council or through partnerships. The team through its direct delivery, enabling and strategic work have been identifying and progressing opportunities to support the most vulnerable in the district, in relation to their housing and support needs.

### **Housing Strategy**

Somerset Homeless Reduction Board (HRB)

- A successful first meeting of this County wide strategic partnership was held in April, with a subsequent meeting in June. This partnership will meet regularly to identify how best to bring about better futures for some of the County's most

vulnerable customers. This will include opportunities to introduce new commissioning arrangements for support services.

- The HRB has agreed to deliver a pilot project looking at improving support services for the residents of Canonsgrove (and other rough sleeper settings within the County). The results of this work will then be used to inform a work programme that seeks to deliver integrated commissioning between health, care and housing services.

#### Single Homeless and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Strategy

- The Executive supported a draft strategy in March, and a final version for approval will be going through Scrutiny (July), Executive (August) and Full Council (Sept).
- The strategy included the following vision: *'Rough sleeping in Somerset West and Taunton will end by 2027. An active programme of Early Help and prevention will be established to proactively reduce the chance of homelessness and escalating need. For those requiring support, all single homeless people shall have access to a client centred service that will provide excellent coordinated support within a range of appropriate self-contained accommodation options that can flex according to changing demand'*.
- The Strategy is accompanied by a detailed delivery plan. The Housing Regeneration and Development function and the Housing Options service are working closely with partners to deliver the accommodation to support the strategy and delivery plan.

#### Hinkley Point C

- We are currently working with the Development and Place Directorate to assess the impact of the workforce uplift on the local housing market. Peak construction workforce is expected to increase from 5,600 (previous assumption) to 8,500 (expected during 2022/23). Negotiations continue with EDF and Sedgemoor District Council concerning the nature of the impact, the geographical communities that will be impacted, and possible mitigation measures.

#### Housing Demand Study

- The Housing Strategy team will shortly conclude its study on housing demand across SWT, including general need, specialist need and homelessness. This will be shared for discussion and it will then inform a supply / delivery strategy.

#### **HRA New Homes**

- The contract for NTWP phase A has been signed and Engie will start on site in August after completing their site set up. The build period will be two years with some homes being ready to let within 12 months. The phase will see 47 new low carbon homes and a community facility built. The Service are progressing the details of the contract for the next phases which it is hoped will start April 2022. Work with the planning authority continues for Phases B and C.

- Community Working Groups continue to meet and the community were recently involved in a project with Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme aimed at encouraging engagement with our natural heritage. The project led to the decoration of some of the hoardings protecting sites and was funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.
- The Council's development of 54 zero carbon homes at Seaward Way Minehead, was recently approved by planning committee and contractors Classic Builders have been appointed. Classic Builders were the contractors who build eight council homes at Laxton Road which were completed in January. They also build the award winning zero carbon passivhaus apartments on Seaton seafront. Following a refinement of low carbon works the development is due to start on site this year.
- The zero carbon affordable housing schemes to be built on various sites in Taunton are being prepared for planning approval. The service has been working on a phosphate solution, which if approved by Natural England will support the planning applications. The service is also using the knowledge gained in designing and developing low carbon new homes to work with colleagues across the directorate on developing the Council homes retrofit strategy and delivering some early schemes.

### **Housing Property Team**

A summary of all areas of activity being undertaken within the Housing Property team is provided below, but it should be noted that we are generally still in the process of bringing back services to pre-COVID lockdown period levels. That said, a positive direction of travel is being maintained. Specific updates on each of these work areas are as follows:

#### **Responsive Repairs and Void Repairs**

- Both emergency and non-emergency responsive repairs continue to be undertaken, although the hold placed on non-emergency internal responsive repairs during the lockdown period continues to lead to a backlog of these works. All emergency jobs are being delivered within our defined timescale (24 hours from logging), and the ongoing non-emergency backlog is being resolved by recruitment of additional resources for the in-house trade team. We are also using an external contractor (MD Group). We are continuing to carefully monitor and manage progress in this area and keep residents informed in relation to their repair requests.
- Void repairs are also being undertaken, but the high level of properties being received in poor condition (leading to 'major' void repair works being required), is causing difficulty as is the recruitment of skilled tradespersons. Delays in licensed asbestos removals (due to specialist contractors furloughing their staff) is also presenting a challenge in returning the properties back to our Lettings team promptly. We are, however, continuing to take appropriate management

action on these issues and seek to continue the positive overall trend in performance.

## **Property Safety Compliance**

- All property safety compliance checks and works continue to be undertaken, 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. Positive progress is being made to all areas, and they are being carefully monitored with weekly review meetings in place.

## **Capital Programmes**

- All capital programme works previously placed on hold during the Covid lockdown periods are now being planned for delivery.
- Many of the capital works programmes planned to be undertaken during 2020/21 were not completed. The capital programmes to be delivered in 2021/22 will now seek to incorporate these, although it should be noted that delivering this volume of works will be very challenging. As an indication of this challenge, the 2021/22 capital programme, combined with slippage from the 2020/21 programme, will total over £14m. We are recruiting additional capital programme staff resource to assist with delivery of these programmes. Capital work programmes currently being mobilised include:
  - ASHP's
  - Heating improvements
  - External doors
  - Fascias and soffits
  - Windows
  - Fire safety works
  - Insulation
- A substantial procurement exercise is in progress for a range of new capital contracts, and an additional Interim Procurement Case Manager has been recruited specifically to assist in delivery of this work for the Housing Capital Programme.

## **Asset Management**

- Stock Condition Surveys and Energy Assessments are being undertaken, including use of additional external resources to accelerate these programmes to improve data in these areas. Capital work programme planning (for both this

financial year and forward plans) is being undertaken, together with development of our energy efficiency / affordable warmth programmes of work.

- The implementation of the Open Assets module of our Capita software system project is continuing. We are currently reviewing the configuration of the underlying tables, undertaking 'gap analysis' and populating new validated data, ongoing data cleansing, and undertaking User Acceptance Testing (UAT) to both the system functionality and reporting suite. We anticipate this module going live by August 2021.

## **Housing and Communities Team**

### **Extra Care Housing**

- Way Ahead Care (commissioned by Somerset County Council) staff and all SWT staff continue to work in COVID-safe ways, to minimise risks.
- All visitors are asked to follow government guidance and use PPE, as appropriate.
- The Outreach Clinic run by District Nursing has continued to run, which allows vulnerable patients access to health care support, without the need to enter the hospital.
- Way Ahead Care are running the 'assisted dining' for tenants, Mon – Fri (tenants are helped to the communal lounge for a meal they purchase). PPE is used and tenants sit on separate tables, to minimise risks.
- Monthly referrals meetings and lettings are still being undertaken, with Adult Social Care and other housing association partners.
- SWT staff continue to complete the weekly on-site Health and Safety checks.
- Gardening and maintenance work has continued to take place.
- SWT staff continue to meet tenants within the communal areas, or visit them in their home where essential, using PPE.

### **Sheltered Housing**

- The Sheltered Housing team continue to make welfare calls to tenants, updating the annual reviews.
- Staff have been undertaking home visits where necessary; for example, for tenants who have partial hearing, learning disabilities or where using the telephone presents an additional challenge.
- Aids and adaptations assessments, tenancy sign ups, installation of lifelines, manage tenancies ending and responding to neighbour disputes is all taking place, to maintain business as usual.
- Staff continue to complete regular estates checks, involving tenants and local Councillors.
- Many sheltered tenants have had their vaccinations. The changing date for 'Freedom Day' and the newer strains of the virus are concerning for some tenants, leaving them feeling anxious about getting back out and about. Staff are

supporting tenants to have phased returns to build their confidence, involving family and friends for support.

- 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.
- The Sheltered Housing team continue to run the Deane Helpline rota, to follow up on concerns arising from calls made to sheltered tenants by the helpline.
- Gardening works have been able to continue to take place and emergency repairs have also been completed.
- Plans for the meeting halls to begin to re-open in mid-June have been moved to September 2021, following recent changes in COVID transmissions and guidance. However, staff are continuing to prepare for the re-openings, including planning re-decoration of some venues and purchasing new furniture, where needed. Small groups of tenants are supporting this process and the decision making.
- A group of tenants at Taunfield Close are working with staff to create a planting area within the scheme, for growing some fruit and veg.
- Staff are attending a variety of Housing Qualities Network training, to develop their skills and knowledge regarding matters such as tenancy management, ASB, hoarding etc.
- Staff are meeting with EROSH to begin establishing plans to develop an accredited service and standard within our sheltered and extra care housing.

## Lettings

- The Home Move Plus project continues to develop well, with plenty of referrals for Housing Officers.
- Paul Hadley the Homeless Plus Officer is still on course to reach his target of 100 bedspaces by the project end date of May 2022.
- The recent housing newsletter article produced positive responses. An article in the next housing newsletter will focus on our more mature service users (the 60+ age group) to consider contacting the Homeless Plus officer.
- Work continues on “Open Housing” to replace the software system Academy. This and the new Home finder Somerset software “Locata” will impact the Lettings team in the transition to these new databases.
- The Lettings team are looking to work in a more normal pre-COVID way, taking a more non-pandemic approach to work. We have reinstated the weekly voids meetings where we work closely with the Voids team to plan works and reduce turnaround times. These are much more fruitful discussions resulting in better outcomes for all.
- Pre-void inspections have been reinstated, which in turn will help in the marketing and advertising of SWT properties on the Homefinder Somerset website.
- Since the last report in May, we have relet 83 properties in a six-week period. Of those tenants that have responded we are averaging a year-to-date average of 97.5% satisfaction rate of the standard of the property let to them.

## **Income**

- The Rent Recovery Team now have a new target for 21/22, this year's target is £461k, the arrears on 16/06/21 are £565,7270.87 with 1501 tenants in arrears. The team will continue to work in accordance with the "Lean Process" to reduce the arrears whilst continuing to support our tenants.
- We have recruited an agency member of staff who started in June, to cover a maternity leave position.
- The Open Housing Project has had an impact on the capacity of the team and will continue to do so. Therefore, it has been agreed that we can increase our team capacity with an agency member of staff for 6 months. This will relieve the pressure on the current members of staff that are involved with the project.
- We developed a backlog of garage lets during COVID and the lockdowns. We are now working through these to clear the backlog and let the vacant garages.
- The Debt and Benefit Officers continue to support all our tenants to maximize their income. They are currently exploring ways to help our new tenants, right at the start of the tenancy to stop them falling into arrears and falling behind on other bills such as Council Tax.

## **Tenancy/Estates and ASB Teams**

- The team have gone through significant pressure over the last two months with sickness and other absences. This has created real pressures for the team.
- As a department generally we are experiencing high demands for service from our customers. This is not unusual in the sector, as most housing providers have recently experienced similar high demands.
- It is pleasing that the team are now back to working at full strength; and are working hard to catch up on the backlog of work.
- We have successfully recruited some additional staff to help us through this period and to support the team during the Open Housing Project. The posts are as follows:
  - 1 x Senior Housing Case Manager – to help support both teams.
  - 1 x ASB Officer – for a four month period
  - 1 x Estates/Tenancy Case Managers – for a 4/6 months
  - 1 x Estates/Tenancy Case Manager – 12 months to support the team during Open Housing Project
- Once these staff are up and running we are hopeful that the team will get back up to speed and we can again focus on their process workflows in preparation for Open Housing. We are looking to ensure that for each task that we have that there is a workflow which will include guidance notes and processes, along with standardised letters. This will ensure that all our customers receive the same high standard of service across the whole area.

- We are also looking to roll out Service Standards for both teams and hope this will be able to deliver by late Summer, which we hope will help to reduce the number of complaints that are currently coming into the service.

## **ASB Team**

- We have currently just over 80 active open cases; with a small proportion of these being high level ASB. The team are currently preparing witness statements and are having ongoing discussions with our legal team.
- The temp ASB Officer has a Police background and will be supporting the team in getting these witness statements completed.
- The team are also recognising that several of the ASB Cases involve repeat offenders and we will be looking to take swift action to try to get these perpetrators to amend their behaviour. Working closely with them in the past as not had the outcome we would have wanted, so we will possibly be looking to serve them with a Notice of Seeking Possession as a deterrent for any future bad behaviour. A Notice of Seeking Possession is the first step towards taking legal action against a perpetrator; this notice is valid for 12 months; and at any point during this 12-month period SW&T could decide to take Court action if their behaviour continues to cause nuisance and annoyance to the community.
- The outcome we want is to not evict but is to ensure that we get a long-term change in their behaviour. However, if we must evict then we will take that position.
- The team have also now served their first Community Protection Warning (CPW) as we have delegated powers to do so. This notice has been served on a person living in one of our properties but is not the tenant. We are now closely monitoring whether this has been successful. We will be able to provide further feedback moving forward. If the CPW is breached then we will be serving a Community Protection Notice (CPN).

## **Estates/Tenancy Team**

- The team have now held six skip events across the borough which have been successful and well used. We are planning to hold a further event in the Halcon area as two of the largest skips were completely filled. We have included a couple of photographs of our successful skip days at the bottom of this section.
- We have also worked closely with Link Power (Volunteer group) and they have worked extremely hard and supported us in these events.
- As these events have been successful, we will be planning more.
- Block and estate inspections are also continuing and staff are stating that blocks are now looking good and most continuing to remain clear. We are now working closely with our Compliance team as legislation is now allowing for internal balconies to be checked to ensure that they are not cluttered and to not present as a fire hazard. Again, we will be able to report on this further as and when we establish a process for moving this forward.



*Our very successful skip days*

## Housing Performance Team

Since our last report we have been progressing the following key pieces of work:

- We have started work on the STAR action plan, addressing the “communication” theme e.g. sourcing customer service refresher training and designing the mystery shopper programme for volunteers.
- Producing an annual report to tenants to be published over the summer.
- Working to implement the new housing software (Open Housing). This continues with many groups set up to implement the various modules.
- Held the first Tenants’ Strategic Group meeting (virtually) with the newly appointed group.
- Produced a training plan for the Tenants’ Strategic Group including access to TPAS training (TPAS are a tenant engagement organisation).
- Supported our managers to consult our Tenants’ Strategic Group on policy documents.
- Held our Tenants’ Action Group meeting to consider sub-groups and forward business.
- Supported the responses to complaints within the 10-working day deadline.
- Started to review how we can improve our complaints process. There is a corporate review being undertaken in the next few weeks.
- Continued our development of website forms and pages, which we will report upon during this meeting.
- Continue work on our in-depth assessment against the consumer standards part of the white paper.
- Produced summer newsletter content to tenants and leaseholders.
- Continued to publish a two weekly newsletter to staff to share information across the service.
- Internally we continue to ensure that regular governance meetings are held to oversee and manage the activities of the housing directorate e.g., programme management, finance, performance and risk meetings.

# Somerset West and Taunton Council

## Tenants Strategic Group – 19 July 2021

### Financial Monitoring – Outturn Position 2020/21

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Ross Henley, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources

Report Author: Kerry Prisco, Management Accounting and Reporting Lead

#### 1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report contains information related to Somerset West and Taunton Council's (SWT) financial performance for the 2020/21 financial year. The outturn figures included are provisional subject to the completion of the external audit of the statutory financial statements. The audit is due to be completed between July and September with the findings due to be reported to the Audit and Governance Committee on 27<sup>th</sup> September this year.
- 1.2 The COVID pandemic has significantly impacted upon the Council's services, costs and income during the past financial year. The situation has been extremely dynamic throughout the year both in terms of various announcement of additional funding arrangements from Government and the local impact on demand for and delivery of services. Measures were implemented early in the year by leadership to mitigate risk and uncertainty.
  - 1.2.1 The HRA is a ring-fenced, self-financing account used to manage the Council's Housing Landlord function, which is budgeted to break even (net of approved transfers to/from HRA Reserves). As the HRA Net Budget is net £nil with costs wholly offset by income and reserves, performance is reported against gross income for monitoring purposes.
  - 1.2.2 The **Housing Revenue Account (HRA) revenue outturn position** for the financial year 2020/21 is a net overspend of £15k (0.1% of gross income).
- 1.3 The **HRA capital outturn position** for 2020/21 is as follows:
  - 1.3.1 The actual spend on the HRA Capital Programme during 2020/21 was £9.1m with £231k budget underspend being returned as no longer required (Appendix A). The major areas of capital spend during the year related to the capital maintenance for the existing housing stock and the development and acquisition of new stock. Capital budget totalling £125.3m is planned to be spent over the MTFP, which includes housing development projects that will be delivered over several years (Appendix B).

#### 2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Tenants Strategic Group to note the recommendations being made to the Executive.

2.2 The Executive is recommended to:

2.2.1 Note the impact of COVID on the Council's cost and income during 2020/21 financial year.

2.2.2 Note the reported Housing Revenue Account Budget overspend of £15k in 2020/21 and the HRA General Reserves Balance of £2.8m as at 31 March 2021.

2.2.3 Note the Capital Outturn position.

2.2.4 Approve the proposed capital slippage of £125.3m for the HRA Capital Programme.

2.2.5 Note the Capital Programme schedule identifying the schemes and overview profile providing the basis for future performance monitoring (Appendix B).

### **3 Risk Assessment**

3.1 The Council has managed significant financial risks during the past financial year, notably due to the significant volatility in costs and income due to COVID, economic recovery, and a range of additional grant funding arrangements from Government that emerged throughout the year.

3.2 Whilst a significant focus was placed on COVID, the final outturn position demonstrates that it has been difficult in some areas to accurately forecast the timing of spend, and how much spend has ultimately been supported by additional funding. Forecasting of income and service demand has been susceptible to fluctuation during the year as national and local restrictions have been implemented and eased for various periods during the year, and resources have been diverted to COVID-related priorities. Additionally, budget monitoring accuracy has been exposed to risk as operating budgets were reorganised during the year to reflect the Directorate structure, and work has continued throughout the year to review and update the accuracy and alignment of budgets to service requirements.

### **4 Background and Full details of the Report**

4.1 This report informs Members of the Tenants Strategic Group of the HRA's financial outturn (a comparison of net spending against the budget for the year) for revenue and capital budgets in 2020/21.

4.2 Scrutiny and the Executive have received quarterly budget monitoring reports throughout the year which have highlighted variances from budgets and comments from the budget holders, as well as summarising the main risks and uncertainties as explained above. The forecast position has fluctuated during the year.

4.3 The outturn figures contained in this report are provisional at this stage. The financial outturn has been taken into account when preparing the Council's Draft Statement of Accounts, which is due to be approved by the Assistant Director – Finance (S151 Officer) at the end of June, and is now subject to review by the Council's External Auditor. Should the External Auditor identify the need for any changes to the Accounts these will be reported to the Audit and Governance Committee on 27<sup>th</sup> September this year.

## 5 Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

- 5.1 The HRA is a ring-fenced account used to manage the Council's housing stock of approximately 5,700 properties, with the Council acting as the Landlord. The HRA operates as a 'self-financing' service, with costs of the properties and associated services funded by housing rents and specific fees and charges. The HRA is working within a 30 year business plan, reflecting the long-term nature of the housing assets, and plans to break-even each year.
- 5.2 **Revenue Outturn Position:** The revenue outturn position for the financial year 2020/21 for the HRA is a net overspend of £15k (0.06% of gross income). The end of year position is closer to budget compared to the £247k underspend forecast at Q3. Table 1 below shows a high level summary of the revenue outturn against budget.

**Table 1: HRA Revenue Outturn Summary**

	Budget £000	Outturn £000	Variance	
			£000	%
Gross Income	-26,773	-26,919	-147	0.5%
Service Expenditure	15,027	15,569	543	2.0%
Other Operating Costs and Income	9,925	9,544	-381	-1.4%
Unearmarked Reserve Transfers	0	0	0	0.0%
Capital Financing and Debt Repayment	1,821	1,821	0	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>0.1%</b>

- 5.3 The department variances to budget are shown in Table 2, with explanations for the variances set out below.

**Table 2: Main Outturn Variances**

	Budget £000	Actuals £000	Variance £000
<b>Gross Income:</b>			
Dwelling Rents	-24,225	-24,278	-53
Non-Dwelling Rents	-719	-708	11
Charges for Services / Facilities	-1,457	-1,562	-104
Other Income	-371	-371	0
<b>Sub-Total Gross Income</b>	<b>-26,772</b>	<b>-26,919</b>	<b>-147</b>
<b>Service Expenditure:</b>			
Development & Regeneration	531	406	-125
Community Resilience	189	157	-32
Tenancy Management	1,999	2,378	379
Maintenance	3,813	3,709	-103
Assets	1,499	1,141	-357
Compliance	1,724	2,944	1,220
Performance	5,272	4,834	-438
<b>Sub-Total Service Expenditure</b>	<b>15,027</b>	<b>15,569</b>	<b>543</b>
<b>Central Costs / Movement in Reserves:</b>			
Revenue Contribution to Capital	0	0	0

	<b>Budget £000</b>	<b>Actuals £000</b>	<b>Variance £000</b>
Interest Payable	2,745	2,442	-302
Interest Receivable	0	-33	-33
Change in Provision for Bad Debt	180	-162	-342
Depreciation	7,000	7,297	296
Voluntary Repayment of Provision	1,821	1,821	0
<b>Sub-Total Central Costs / Movement in Reserves:</b>	<b>11,745</b>	<b>11,365</b>	<b>-380</b>
<b>Net Surplus(-) / Deficit for the Year</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>

## Income

- 5.4 **Dwelling Rents:** the budgeted income for 2020/21 is £24.225m, which reflects an assumption of 1.25% void losses and applying a 52-week year. During the year tenants were invoiced £24.278m which exceeds the budget estimate by £53k (0.22%). Thus more income has been recovered than predicted when setting the budget and providing an allowance for voids.
- 5.5 **Charges for Services / Facilities:** The budgeted income for 2020/21 for the Service Charge Income for Dwellings (after discounts have been applied to tenants such as Piper Charge to Sheltered Housing and Extra Care) less an average 1.25% void loss and applying a 52 week year, is £1.283m. Thus £76k more income has been recovered than predicted when setting the budget and providing an allowance for voids.
- 5.6 The Service Charge Income for Leaseholders income for non-scheme holders is invoiced in arrears and therefore the actual income received relates to expenses incurred in the previous financial year. The budget was estimated at £164k. There was an over-recovery of income of £39k compared to budget, reflecting the total of actual costs recharged.

## Expenditure

- 5.7 **Development & Regeneration:** The underspend relates to a few posts held vacant during the year. The delivery of new development projects has not required this resource as the service has focused on establishing a development pipeline. The development pipeline of 342 units is now established and following procurement and planning this resource in the structure will be required as the council moves into delivery increasingly from 2021/22.
- 5.8 **Community Resilience:** The underspend relates to some unbudgeted income for a One Team post and a general reduction in project expenditure on the One Team budgets due to COVID restricting activities.
- 5.9 **Tenancy Management:** There are several areas within this department that have underspent because of reduced activity due to COVID. This has in part offset the overspend which relates in part to (a) tenancy management staffing levels that have been activity maintained over and above establishment to support the transition to the new directorates operating structure and COVID activity, (b) increased council tax

liabilities from properties held vacant for longer due to COVID restrictions and (c) one-off costs to bring additional temporary accommodation units back online to support the COVID accommodation needs.

- 5.10 **Maintenance:** The underspend relates to COVID lockdowns delaying works (e.g. responsive repairs and void repairs).
- 5.11 **Assets:** The underspend relates to COVID lockdowns delaying works (e.g. pre-planned maintenance and SAP EPC & Stock Validation) as well as staffing costs where a post was held vacant during the year.
- 5.12 **Compliance:** The overspend is due to accelerated programmes of compliance activity (e.g. additional electrical testing and required repairs, and asbestos related works) as well as additional staffing costs within the gas team and electrical team.
- 5.13 **Performance:** The net underspend is a combination of: (a) reduced activity during the year due to COVID restrictions for both Tenant Empowerment and the Tenants Action Group, (b) an overspend due to higher agency costs for a period of time during the transition to new Directorate structure, (c) an underspend for the creation of a new performance team and the time taken to recruit to the positions, (d) an underspend on shared support staff, (e) an underspend on the overtime budget offsetting pressures across the service, and (f) an underspend on insurance premiums where the impact of the renegotiated contract that resulted in savings across the authority that were not reflected in the budgets for 2020/21 due to timings.

#### **Central Costs and Movement in Reserves**

- 5.14 **Interest Payable:** there is an underspend of £335k on interest payable as the HRA has taken out £30m of fixed rate loans during the year thus securing cheaper sources of debt, reducing internal borrowing.
- 5.15 **Interest Receivable:** a combination of new fixed borrowing and COVID reducing capex during the year this has resulted in investments exceeding capital financing requirements. Therefore £33k of interest receivable was gained during the year.
- 5.16 **Bad Debt Provision:** There is an underspend of £342k for the change in expected credit losses (bad debt impairment) for the year end. The total outstanding debt for dwelling rents, service charges and garage rents has reduced by £97k year on year (£672k 20/21; £769k 19/20). The reason for the underspend is a significantly reduced expected credit loss as a result of the Rent Recovery Team changing their approach, with more direct support to tenants realising a significant reduction in older debts.
- 5.17 **Depreciation:** Depreciation is transferred to the Major Repairs Reserve (MRR) and must be used to fund the capital programme and/or repay capital debt. Depreciation is calculated at the end of the financial year and is based on each of the major components of each property e.g. kitchen, bathroom, roof, etc. For 2020/21 the dwelling depreciation charge was £6.9m and the other land and buildings depreciation charge was £0.4m; a total of £7.3m against a budget of £7m which has resulted in an overspend of £0.3m compared to the original budget. The budget for next year has already been increased.

## 6 HRA Earmarked Reserves

- 6.1 The Council can set aside HRA funds for specific purposes to be used in future years. Table 3 below provides a summary of the HRA earmarked reserves and the movements during the year.
- 6.2 The balance as at 31 March 2021 committed to support spending in future years is £1.108m. The Social Housing Development Fund will be used to fund social housing development feasibility studies, stock appraisals and other asset management activities to progress the Directorate plan objectives. The remainder of the earmarked reserves have been specifically committed to be spent within the next three financial years.

**Table 3: Balance of HRA Earmarked Reserves held at 31 March 2021**

Description	Balance B/F £000	Transfer In £000	Transfer Out £000	Balance C/F £000
Employment and Skills Development	102	0	-102	0
Asbestos Surveys	102	0	-102	0
One Teams	37	0	-11	26
Social Housing Development Fund	1,232	0	-382	850
Contribution to Transformation	175	0	0	175
Lettings	0	57	0	57
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,648</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>-597</b>	<b>1,108</b>

## 7 HRA Unearmarked Reserves

- 7.1 The recommended minimum balance for the HRA General Reserve balance is £1.8m. Remaining at or above these targets provides added financial resilience. Table 4 below summarises the movement on the HRA unearmarked reserves during 2020/21. The balance as at 31 March 2021 (subject to audit) is £2.6m, which is £0.8m above the recommended minimum balance of £1.8m.

**Table 4: HRA Unearmarked Reserves Balance**

	£000
Balance Brought Forward 1 April 2020	2,701
Approved In-Year Transfers	0
Provision Outturn 2020/21	-15
<b>Balance Carried Forward 31 March 2021</b>	<b>2,686</b>
Recommended Minimum Balance	1,800
Balance above recommended Minimum Operational Target	886

## 8 HRA Capital Outturn Position

- 8.1 The HRA approved Capital Programme for 2020/21 was £31.7m. This consisted of £15.9m of new schemes approved for 2020/21 plus £15.8m of slippage from prior years. The HRA Capital Programme relates to schemes which will be completed over the next ten years.
- 8.2 In addition, £85.9m of supplementary budgets were approved by Full Council on the 7<sup>th</sup> July and 1<sup>st</sup> December 2020, and 19<sup>th</sup> February 2021 for social housing

development schemes to be delivered over several years and to be funded from RTB capital receipts and borrowing. There was also £9.97m for existing stock, mainly through major projects, approved by Full Council on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2021.

- 8.3 The Council is supporting the total investment through the use of the Major Repairs Reserve, Capital Receipts, Revenue Funding and Borrowing.
- 8.4 The actual spend on the HRA Capital Programme during 2020/21 was £9.1m. The major areas of capital spend during the year related to the capital maintenance for the existing housing stock and the development and acquisition of new stock.
- 8.5 A budget return of £230k for Aids and Adaptations and DFGs relates to a number of factors resulting in a recognition that the annual budget can be profiled lower for future years and that the underspend does not need to be carried forward. A budget return of £500 for The Outer Circle scheme which has completed under budget. The slippage of £104m will be carried forward for spend in future years. The HRA Capital Programme and outturn for the year is included in Appendix A.

## **9 HRA Right To Buy (RTB) Capital Receipts**

- 9.1 The RTB scheme is a government scheme that enables tenants to purchase their homes at a discount, subject to meeting qualifying criteria. During 2020/21 the Council sold 34 homes through the RTB Scheme.
- 9.2 Through a “1-4-1 Agreement” with the Treasury / MHCLG, the Council can retain a small proportion of these RTB receipts and use them to fund new social housing. These receipts can only account for up to 30% spend on new social housing costs, with the remaining 70% coming from other funds such as revenue funding or borrowing. During the year the Government awarded a temporary amendment to the Retention Agreement which meant that, due to COVID, the Council was given until the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 to spend their receipts within the year.
- 9.3 From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 the Government has issued a policy change increasing allowable spend to 40% (from 30%) on new build development and extending the timeframe within which receipt must be spent to five years (from three years).
- 9.4 These receipts must be spent within three years of the capital receipt or returned to Government with interest at 4% over base rate from the date of the original receipt. To date, the Council has successfully spent all of their retained 1-4-1 receipts with no returns being made to the Treasury / MHCLG.
- 9.5 During the financial year 2020/21 the total attributable spend on eligible RTB schemes was £4.336m. This was a combination of the Council’s own new build development works plus 7 new build acquisitions at Pyrland Fields in Taunton and 8 buybacks (re-purchase of previously sold properties).

## **10 Links to Corporate Strategy**

- 10.1 The financial performance of the Council underpins the delivery of corporate priorities and therefore all Corporate Aims.

## 11 Corporate Scrutiny Comments / Recommendation(s)

11.1 To be updated following Corporate Scrutiny Committee on 7 July.

### Democratic Path:

- Corporate Scrutiny – 7 July 2021
- Tenants Strategic Group – 19 July 2021
- Executive – 21 July 2021
- Full Council – No

Reporting Frequency: Annually

### List of Appendices

Appendix A	HRA Capital Outturn 2020/21
Appendix B	For Information: Capital Programmes Budget 2021/22 to 2025/26

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## Appendix A: HRA Capital Outturn Position 2020/21

HRA Capital Scheme	Revised Budget for 2020-21 £	Actual Capital Outturn 2020/21 £	Budget under (-) /over spend on completed projects £	Budget not required £	Total budget c/f to future years (ongoing projects) £
Major Works	8,443,300	2,773,583			5,669,717
Fire Safety	2,150,000	596,033			1,553,967
Related Assets	100,000	69,927			30,073
Exceptional & Extensive	260,000	283,642			(23,642)
Vehicles	347,800	0			347,800
ICT	855,110	238,996	129,484		745,598
Aids & Adaptations & DFGs	629,090	398,824		-230,266	0
<b>Sub-Total Majors &amp; Improvements</b>	<b>12,785,300</b>	<b>4,361,005</b>	<b>129,484</b>	<b>-230,266</b>	<b>8,323,513</b>
<b>Social Housing Development Programme</b>	<b>100,988,490</b>	<b>4,784,946</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>-500</b>	<b>96,203,047</b>
<b>HRA TOTAL</b>	<b>113,773,790</b>	<b>9,145,951</b>	<b>129,487</b>	<b>-230,766</b>	<b>104,526,560</b>

## Appendix B: For Information: Capital Programmes Budget 2021/22 to 2025/26

	20/21 Carried forward £	Approved Budget 21/22 £	Approved Budget future years £	Total Budget 21/22 and future Years £
<b>Housing Revenue Account: James Barra</b>				
Major Works and Improvements	-1,044,000	9,970,000	34,847,000	43,773,000
Social Housing Development Schemes & Major projects	161,000	22,763,000	58,634,000	81,558,000
<b>HRA Total</b>	<b>-883,000</b>	<b>32,733,000</b>	<b>93,481,000</b>	<b>125,331,000</b>

**Note:**

This HRA budget reflects the CIT Strategies for the period of the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021-26 for future years. This enables capital programme delivery to be monitored for progress within and across years.

The Outturn budget Approved Budget rolled forward includes all Social Housing Development schemes approved for their duration plus one year of major works and improvements.

# Somerset West and Taunton Council

## Tenants Strategic Group – 19 July 2021

### 2020/21 Housing Scorecard as at March 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 March 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. The scorecard was presented to Tenants' Strategic Group in March 2021 covering the position up until January, this is the formal outturn report.

3.2 Over the last 12 months Covid has had a significant impact on some areas of our performance, but we can now see a pathway to returning to full and normal service delivery however demands on the service remain high.

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 2020-21	Target 2021-22	Unit	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21
<b>Customer</b>						
% of complaints responded to in 10 working days	100%	100%	%	89%	91%	95%

Improvement in complaints response times have been significant now that clearer routing and monitoring of complaints is in place. The April percentage has reduced to 81% due to significant service pressures, staff sickness and leave it has not been possible to investigate and close all complaints within the 10 working day deadline. Extensions that are agreed are not reflected in the figures.

Indicator	Target 2021-22	Amber Threshold	Unit	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21
<b>Customer</b>						
% of new tenants satisfied with the lettable standard of the property	85%	82%	%	82%	92%	100%

In March 2021 we “let” 21 properties, we have had 17 responses to our satisfaction questions. Of the 17 responses, 17 were satisfied with the standard of the property including a comment to say “I love my home and am very happy here”.

Indicator	Target 2021-22	Amber Threshold	Unit	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21
<b>Customer</b>						
% of tenants satisfied with most recent repair	85%		%	100%	83%	94%

We continue to use an electronic questionnaire sent to repair customers as soon as the repair completes. Results returned 94% satisfaction. During April and May this increases further to 95% response sizes are growing and it is encouraging to note that those who choose to respond are responding positively.

Indicator	Target 2020-21	Target 2021-22	Unit	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21
<b>Customer</b>						
Number of compliments received	6 per month	6 per month	Number	6	13	33

We have been receiving a steady number of compliments recorded formally since July 2020.

Indicator	Target 2020-21	Target 2021-22	Unit	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21
<b>Customer</b>						
Overall tenant satisfaction (STAR results)	82%		%	83%	83%	83%

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 2020-21	Target 2021-22	Unit	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21
<b>Operations</b>						
<b>Rent recovery</b>						
Income collected as a % of rent owed excluding arrears brought forward	98.3		%	99%	99%	99%
Total number of evictions	No target		Number	0	1	0

Our recent Rent Recovery performance is exceeding target, at the end of the financial year (end of collection period) our rent arrears were £589k. This is a reduction of £203k since September 2019 when we introduced our “Lean” approach (starting with £792k of arrears).

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 2021-22	Amber Threshold	Unit	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21
<b>Supported Housing</b>						
Sheltered housing - % of tenants receiving annual reviews of support plans	100%	99%	%	90.70%	93.80%	99.00%

Our performance has risen to almost 100% reporting 99% in March. Data in April and May 2021 is 99%. In April we set a new amber threshold of 99%. The team had a peak of cases to complete reviews over a limited period, but this peak has been smoothed. We are confident that vulnerable tenants are receiving regular contact.

### 3.7 Lettings and Voids

Indicator	Target 2020-21	Target 2021-22	Unit	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21
<b>Lettings and Voids</b>						
Average re-let time in calendar days (key to key)	23	44	cal days	58.5	57.2	54.1

Our review of our void processes has started to show improvements in our average re-let time performance. Covid 19 has forced changes to the overall voids process (for example social distancing means fewer trades in a property at any one time when undertaking repairs to meet the lettable standard). April and May are reporting 54 and 49.8 days, performance is improving.

### 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). As reported in March, 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 this 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. To support this view a manual exercise to reconcile the emergency jobs has taken place and confirmed 100% attendance for emergency jobs March to May inclusive.

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. MD group have been contracted to assist clearing the backlog.

### 3.9 Tenancy Management

Indicator	Target 2021-22	Amber Threshold	Unit	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21
<b>Tenancy management</b>						
Total new ASB cases in the month	n/a	n/a	Number	7	17	9
Total number of ASB cases that were closed in the month	n/a	n/a	Number	5	0	13
Number of new ASB cases reported per 1,000 properties	n/a	n/a	Number	1.23	2.98	1.58
Number safeguarding referrals	n/a	n/a	Number	2	1	3

**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. An ASB report will be presented to this group at the July 2021 meeting and will cover the current number of open cases.

**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 2020-21	Target 2021-22	Unit	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21
<b>Compliance</b>						
% of housing dwellings with a valid gas safety certificate (LGSR)	100%	100%	%	100.00%	99.96%	99.98%
% of communal areas with a Fire Risk Assessment (FRA) in place and FRA Review complete (where applicable)	100%	100%	%	65.44%	87.33%	100.00%

There was a requirement to maintain gas safety inspections during lock down and we have successfully managed to maintain apart from where Covid isolation or shielding has preventing access. April and May's 2021 figures maintain this trend at 100% and 99.98%

We undertook a new programme of FRA's with two external specialist consultants and we expected to be 100% compliant by the end of March 2021 as reported. This has been achieved and continued into April 2021.

### 3.11 Development

Indicator	Target 2020-21	Target 2021-22	Unit	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21
<b>Development</b>						
Number of SWT HRA new home completions since April 2019	1000 by 2049		Number	61	62	62

62 new homes have completed since April 2019. In June 2021 planning permission has been secured for 54 new homes at Seaward Way in Minehead.

#### Democratic Path:

- Monthly Housing Performance Meeting – 20<sup>th</sup> July 2021
- Tenants Strategic Board – 19 July 2021

Reporting Frequency: Quarterly

Contact Officers

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# Somerset West and Taunton Council

## Tenants Strategic Group – 19<sup>th</sup> July 2021

### New Build Council Housing Programme – Update Report

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Member for Housing

Report Author: Chris Brown, Assistant Director Development and Regeneration

#### 1. Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

*The report is to update the Tenants Strategic Group on the ambitions and scheme updates on the Council's New Build Housing Programme.*

#### 2. Recommendations

*The Tenants Strategic Group is asked to note this report and progress on the new build housing programme.*

#### 3. Risk Assessment (if appropriate)

- A risk assessment is not required to accompany this report. However key risks in the delivery of 100 homes over 30 years include:
  - Competition pressure on the Housing Revenue Account including statutory compliance, low carbon retrofit of existing stock and changes in government policy
  - Cost inflation including the impacts of covid, departure from the European Union and Phosphate mitigation to gain planning permission
  - Financial matters including the availability of subsidy, inflation, and interest rates

#### 4. Background and Full details of the Report

- SWT has an ambition to build 1000 new homes over 30 years.
- The eight Laxton Road apartments reported at the last meeting of the TSG are the first of these homes to be completed. The Laxton Road properties were completed in January to building regulation standards and have now set a quality benchmark for future developments to aspire.

- The Directorate has sought to improve on the Laxton Road standard by ensuring all new homes will achieve the Council's 2030 zero carbon aspiration and the Government's 2050 Zero Carbon target.
- The development schemes highlighted in this report will meet the 2030 and 2050 zero carbon requirements either on the first letting or as the national grid decarbonises or if tenants use green tariffs without the need for additional measures in the future.
- Over one hundred of the properties in the current programme will be zero carbon in occupation at their first letting as a result of high standards of insulation and onsite renewable heat and power.
- As new zero carbon homes are completed the directorate will need to consider change its approach towards maintaining, letting and advising tenants to help keep properties in good repair and for tenants to maximise their fuel cost savings.
- The following schemes will all achieve the 2050 zero carbon standard without additional investment.
  - Seaward Way, Minehead – 54 new homes starting on site this financial year
  - NTWP, Taunton – 228 new homes over four phases and a new community facility – Phase A is 47 new homes starting on site in August
  - Zero Carbon Home Pilot and Oxford Inn – Up to 61 Homes – the next stage is to gain planning permission for these schemes following consultation
- The short-term aim of the directorate is to deliver 347 new homes by 2028. In addition, a number of low carbon retrofit schemes are emerging which will be brought to the Tenants Strategic Group for information over the next few months.

### New Build Council Schemes

#### Seaward Way, Minehead

- After a year's work on our Seaward Way scheme at Minehead the directorate has received Planning Committee consent to build 54 homes.
- Classic Builders have been successful in bidding for the construction tender, and we have started work with them to refine the design and low carbon measures. Classic Builders were the main contractor at Laxton Road.
- Following a lead-in period start on site is anticipated in late summer this year. With some phases ready from early 2023, it is anticipated that the build will take just under two years to complete.
- In line with the Council's declaration to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030, the homes will be zero carbon in use.
- Local people in housing need living in or having connections to Minehead will have priority in obtaining one of these innovative homes for rent.



(Seaward Way, Minehead)

### Zero Carbon Affordable Homes Pilot and Oxford Inn

- The Council has provided a budget to build sixty-one zero carbon homes for rent over six sites.
- Public consultation has commenced encouraging the public to have their say about a planning application for the first 40 homes at various locations in Taunton.
- The sites include the vacant Oxford Inn where eight new homes are being proposed. Other sites include a site currently used for temporary accommodation (Wheatley Crescent) and the programme also includes four underused garage sites (Churchill Way, Wheatley Crescent and Charter Walk). The consultation for these scheme is underway and accessible through our website.
- The schemes will deliver a range of property types and sizes and some accessible homes.
- The homes will be highly insulated making them very energy efficient and zero carbon in use. The site will be fossil fuel free, and hot water and central heating supplied primarily using on-site renewable sources.
- This scheme is the first Council development which will be required to have a phosphate mitigation strategy before planning permission will be granted. The HRA is working on an innovative solution which if supported by Natural England will lead to a solution for other council led schemes for the HRA, town centre regeneration and homelessness.



(scheme impression on the site of the Oxford Inn)



(New Zero Carbon Homes on an underused garage site)

### **North Taunton Woolaway Project (NTWP)TWP**

- Residents have been patient as they had seen little activity on the ground of the North Taunton Woolaway Project (NTWP) since the demolition of Phase A properties last summer.
- The Council and ENGIE have now agreed the contract to build the first phase of the project and the first 47 of 228 homes.
- The design of the homes and community building have been significantly influenced by residents from the estate and architects have interpreted the thoughts of the community into the design of the homes, community building and public space.

- The first phase will include a range of property types including 2, 3 and 4 bedroom houses, 1 and 2 bedroom flats, bungalows and the community building.
- All properties will be built to at least the national space standard, which is circa 15% larger than the space standard for the current Woolaway homes.
- All homes will provide better space for mobility for residents, people visiting the properties and a number of properties will be fully wheelchair accessible homes specially designed to provide tenants with the space and adaptations required to meet their health needs.
- All homes will benefit from low carbon measures, including high standards of insulation in the fabric of the building (walls, roof, floor and triple glazed windows) and homes will also benefit from low cost heat and power through photovoltaic panels and batteries which will produce and hold electricity. Air source heat pumps will be installed to produce low cost heat.
- A range of other measures will be put in place, including those which reuse and recycle heat generated in the homes and smart technology, so tenants can understand how efficiently they are using energy. It is calculated that for a typical property fuel savings to the customer will be between 60%-80%.
- These homes will also use around 80% less carbon in occupation than new build homes built to the basic government building regulation standard. The properties will be compliant with the government 2050 targets and will be zero carbon on first let if tenants use green electricity tariffs.
- Preparation is currently underway to get the five Phase A sites ready for works, with groundworks starting in August. New homes will start to be complete and ready for occupation from forty-six weeks after the groundworks start. The NTWP team is working with ENGIE to prepare the contract for the next phases which will include the demolition of homes in the new year and an additional 51 homes.



CGI showing Phases B, C & D in the setting of Phase A, E and existing properties. (North

Taunton Woolaway project phases A, B and C)

- This major regeneration project has benefitted from residents influencing the designs and approach taken by the Council. The Implementation Working Group (IWG) and design group over several years have helped ensure the voice of the customers are heard and have improved the scheme through their commitment and hard work.
- The project is moving to a new phase where five working groups will help monitor progress. The working groups have unlimited spaces for tenants plus seats for residents from the wider community, Councillors, and organisations with specific contributions. The working groups are hosted by SWT and ENGIE. The working groups have terms of reference and the following aims;
  - Works and low carbon working group - this working group will monitor the works proposals of the contractor to check the requirements agreed during the consultation are being delivered. The group will also consider the promises made to the project through the contract and tender process. Other roles of the group will be to explore low carbon housing solutions, refurbishment specification and the planning application process for phases B-E.
  - Environment and green space working group – this working group will check the requirements already agreed by residents in relation to green space, open space, highways, verges, and boundaries during the consultation are being delivered. They will have a particular role in considering options to go forward to resident consultation on the green space in the neighbourhood. The working group will consider how the neighbourhood supports ecology, biodiversity, healthy lifestyles and complements the Taunton garden town principles.



(North Taunton Woolaway Project public space)

- Employment and training working group – This group will work with Engie and training and employment external partner specialists to maximise the employment, training, and skill development to residents of North Taunton. The group will monitor the effectiveness of the contractor in delivering the opportunities required through the contract.
- Community facility working group – this working group has a specific focus of considering sustainable options for the community facility to be built during phase A of the project. The community facility will be a shared NTWP office and community space during the lifetime of the project however at the end of the project the facility will need to be self-sustaining. The working group will work with the council and its partners to explore and create a sustainable business case. The community facility has been designed in such a way that it can be cost effectively converted to two homes at the end of the project if a community facility is not viable.
- Communication working group – this working group will monitor the council's communication strategy and help the council in practical ways such as checking the messages and language used by the council are appropriate and helpful to residents. The group will encourage the Council and Engie to ensure information continues to be shared with residents in a timely way and extend the formats available to customers.
- The NTWP recently delivered a project through the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme (QPLS) who worked with the community to decorate some of the hoardings funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.
- A trip to the Quantock Hills was arranged as part of an initiative to encourage engagement with our natural heritage.

- NTWP residents and the local community engaged in the hoarding painting and the trip. The trip was a great opportunity to get close to nature and wildlife nearby and bring your inspirations back to the neighbourhood for the community mural.
- The community mural is accessible to all and will be complemented by future visions of the scheme.



(North Taunton Hoarding Project inspired by Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme)



## 5. Links to Corporate Strategy

- *Building 1000 new build homes by 2050 is one of the main Council strategies.*
- *The council has declared a climate change emergency and zero carbon homes fits with the council's ambition to achieve zero carbon by 2030.*

## 6. Finance / Resource Implications

- There are no financial implications directly to do with the recommendations in this report

## 7. Legal Implications (if any)

- There are no legal implications directly to do with the recommendations in this report

## 8. Climate and Sustainability Implications (if any)

- *The council has declared a climate change emergency and zero carbon homes fits with the council's ambition to achieve zero carbon by 2030.*

## **9. Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications (if any)**

N/A

## **10. Equality and Diversity Implications (if any)**

- There are no equality implications directly to do with the recommendations in this report
- New build homes programme is providing affordable rented accommodation which will be accessible through the home finder scheme.
- The developments are primarily general needs accommodation build to M2, M3 and M4 standards. This means that all properties are accessible for people with mobility needs and some properties are fully wheelchair accessible.
- Homes are a range of sizes from 1 bed apartments to 5 bed houses.

## **11. Social Value Implications (if any)**

- *The NTWP in particular seeks to encourage an economically stronger community and inspire an uplift in quality of life indicators including employment, training and health outcomes.*

## **12. Partnership Implications (if any)**

N/A

## **13. Health and Wellbeing Implications (if any)**

- *The NTWP in particular seeks to encourage an economically stronger community and inspire an uplift in quality of life indicators including employment, training and health outcomes.*

## **14. Asset Management Implications (if any)**

None directly to do with this report

- *The NTWP is replacing defective non-traditional woolaway homes with new low carbon homes*

- *The zero carbon affordable homes and oxford inn schemes are replacing poor quality or redundant HRA assets with new affordable homes*
- *The Seaward Way project is using a council owned asset in the west of the district to build the first council homes in the West for over thirty years.*

**15. Data Protection Implications (if any)**

N/A

**16. Consultation Implications (if any)**

No implications directly to do with the recommendation in this report

**17. Scrutiny/Executive Comments / Recommendation(s) (if any)**

N/A

**Democratic Path:**

- **Scrutiny / Corporate Governance or Audit Committees – No** (delete as appropriate)
- **Cabinet/Executive – No** (delete as appropriate)
- **Full Council – No** (delete as appropriate)

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

**List of Appendices (delete if not applicable)**

Appendix A	None
Appendix B	
Appendix C	

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*(IF YOU HAVE ANY QUERIES REGARDING THIS TEMPLATE PLEASE CONTACT THE GOVERNANCE TEAM [governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk](mailto:governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk))*

