

SWT Tenants Strategic Group

Monday, 27th September, 2021,
6.00 pm

**Somerset West
and Taunton**

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

Agenda

- | | |
|--|-----------------|
| 1. Apologies | |
| 2. Notes from previous meeting | (Pages 3 - 6) |
| 3. Directorate Report | (Pages 7 - 12) |
| 4. Performance Report | (Pages 13 - 20) |
| 5. Equalities/Disability Report | (Pages 21 - 30) |
| 6. Compliance Presentation (slide deck to be presented at the meeting) | |



**JAMES HASSETT
CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

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SWT Tenants Strategic Group - 19 July 2021 held via Zoom Video Conference

Present: Alex Akhigbemen (Chair)

Paul Cram, Kevin Hellier, Ivor Hussey, Luke Manning, 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), Julie Sabey (ASB Case Manager), Simon Lewis (Assistant Director - (Housing and Communities), Kerry Prisco (Specialist - Finance) and Tracey Meadows (Governance and Democracy)

Also Present: Councillors Mark Lithgow and Janet Lloyd

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm)

9. **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Colin England and Jessie Bunn.

10. **Minutes from the previous meeting**

The notes from the previous meeting on the 24 May 2021 were approved.

11. **Directorate Report**

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/questions from the group members included;

- Concerns with maintenance scheduling. Schedulers not contacting tenants with appointment times for maintenance staff to carry out repairs. There were also times that staff were turning up to properties that had already been repaired; *we were still being challenged with Covid and the backlog of repairs. Additional tradesman were being sought to carry out the backlog of work. We are also updating out IT system for scheduling works;*
- Concerns that void turnaround times were still quite high and not on target; *Again, Covid has had an impact on this with trade staff etc, but this is being looked into and processes would be put in place to speed this process up;*

- What is classed as a reasonable turnaround? Concerns that this is holding up other areas like Homefinder/Regeneration Programmes; *we are trying to get the property advertised on Homefinder sometimes before the work starts. We are also interviewing and allocating properties. For a minor void this is 30 day and longer for a major;*
- Sheltered housing voids seem to be taking longer, 12 weeks in Monmouth Road; *There were several mitigating circumstances behind why this was being held up. We are aware of this and looking to resolve the issues;*
- Under the Housing and Communities team, do you know how many residents in the housing stock were registered as disabled as there was nothing on the Homefinder forms to ask if a tenant was disabled? *We do have statistics around this. We collect this data as part of the Homefinder application form. A tenant Census would be completed to capture this process to include into our processes. The tenants that were registered disabled would be brought back to the next meeting in September;*
- The Council needed to build their own policies and structure around disabilities and not rely on Occupational Therapists who had their own structure and may not fit in with the Council policies; *In the past we have relied on our Aids and Adaptions process or our Disabilities Grant Process. There was another layer of service delivery that needed looking at on how we provided these services;*
- we needed to look at our Policies from a customer basis; *this was something that we are looking at to get this process right;*
- why has it taken so long for the Disabled Policy to be looked at? *We have an Equalities Policy in place, but these Policies do need looking at to see that we are covering all needs and decision making;*
- Training for staff needs to be undertaking on dealing with all aspects of the public; *We were working with customer services to try to help with this training on how we deliver this service. We can share details at a later date;*
- Information was needed from Officers on the training progress as we did not want to come back in 6 months with the same concerns from the group members;

The report was noted.

12. **Finance Outturn Report**

The group considered a Financial Monitoring – Outturn Position 2020/21

Questions/comments from the group included;

- Concerns that the ICT costs had increased; *this was an approved Capital Budget, new system implementation that had started during this financial year;*

The report was noted.

13. **2020-21 HRA Scorecard**

The group considered the HRA Scorecard 2020-21 report.

Comments/questions from the group included;

- Concerns with the Gas Compliance Company not updating their systems as received a Certificate for the previous tenant (6 months for the correct Certificate to come through) also the tenancy satisfaction statics, how were you getting this information; *once a repair was completed a repairs survey was sent to the tenant that can be completed using a QR Code. Initially only low numbers received. Will provide feedback at the next meeting on why one of the group members had not received this survey despite work being completed on the property and the long period for the delay in issuing Gas Safety Certificates;*
- Figures required for the outstanding ASB cases for 3,6 and 12 months old *would be brought back to the next meeting;*

The report was noted.

14. **Development update Report (New Build Council Homes)**

The group considered the report on the ambitions and scheme updates on the Council's New Build Housing Programme

Comments/questions from group members included;

- Would tenants be moved into the new builds at Priorswood when all the phases were finished, or would they be moved in when each row of homes were ready. If it is the former, would the tenants Council tax be reduced on this? *This was not on our agenda due to the amount of rent already lost to the Council. Phase A would be ready to move in first, but it would still be a building site;*
- The Government recently announced that they have set aside 11 billion for housing, would we be bidding for money for new homes? *We would be using the Right to Buy Receipts. Seaward Way and zero carbon right to buy would be our main subsidy. We are also trying to bid for brown field regeneration money as the site was a brown field site;*

The report was noted.

15. **Anti-Social Behaviour**

The group considered the presentation on Anti-Social Behaviour

Comments/questions from the group included;

- The group acknowledged that this work would be difficult and challenging for the team. They praised the team for their hard work;
- How many cases that you deal with were under 18. Were there other organisations that you brought in to help the parents deal with their children? *We list the parents as the tenants and make it clear to them that their child's behaviour would have an impact on their tenancy. We have used multi agencies partners who have gone door to door in an area where there had been a recent spate of ASB. Activities would be put on in the summer months to engage with the local children;*
- Concerns that some of these cases had been going on for a year, would these tenants be supported? *We do signpost support groups which the tenant can contact;*
- ASB needs to happen a lot quicker than it does at present, tenants do not feel supported and no one had given consideration for the victims; *most ASB cases take a year to get to court, this was not a quick process. We need to collate as much information as possible to get the best possible outcome for the tenant;*

The report was noted.

(The Meeting ended at 8.15 pm)

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Tenants' Strategic Group – 27th September 2021

Directorate Report

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Member for Housing.

Report Authors: Assistant Directors

1. Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

The report is to update the Tenants' Strategic Group on work being undertaken and progress made by the Housing Directorate since the last TSG meeting in July 2021.

2. Recommendations

The Tenants' Strategic Group is asked to note this report and are invited to ask questions.

3. Housing Development and Regeneration Team:

HRA New Homes, Housing Strategy and Housing Enabling

- Foundations have been laid and brickwork is starting on phase A of NTWP after groundworks commenced in August. Planning applications for phased demolition of phases B, C & D and new homes on phases B & C are now underway.
- The zero carbon development at Seaward Way, Minehead is progressing with a pre contract agreement to be entered imminently, with an anticipated start on site in November.
- The zero carbon affordable housing schemes to be built on various sites in Taunton are being submitted for planning approval following the schemes phosphate mitigation approach being submitted to Natural England to consider and support the mitigation strategy included in the planning application.
- The directorate has been invited to present at three national and regional events in September and November. The two specifications which SWT has developed for zero carbon homes both achieve 2050 targets although one has a more ambitious air tightness target which in turn leads to even lower use of heat and power in the home.

- The service is leading the delivery of new single homeless supply and several opportunities are emerging including attracting new Government subsidies and a Single Homeless and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Strategy and delivery plan will be presented to full Council in October for consideration.
- The service is leading the thinking of the Council's Housing low carbon retrofit strategy. This work is gaining momentum and over the next 18 months a financial and delivery plan will emerge.

Housing Property Team:

Property Safety Compliance

- Slides have been produced to demonstrate current position and progression and will be shared with the Tenants' Strategic Group at this meeting.

Capital Programmes

- Capital Work programmes that have been mobilised since the last report include Air Source Heat Pumps, heating improvements, external doors, fascias and soffits, windows, fire safety works and insulation.
- Other projects (namely kitchen and bathroom replacements, emergency lighting, additional electrical testing, and door entry systems) are expected to be mobilised during September.

Asset Management

- The implementation of the Open Assets module of our Capita software system project is almost complete, with go-live dates week commencing 6th September. Post 'go-live' work will then be required, particularly around the development of a suite of bespoke reports and the population of various other modules within the system.

Housing and Communities Team:

Extra Care Housing

- Visitors and tenants are now able to make their own decisions re: using PPE.
- There have been fewer Adult Social Care referrals for accommodation in our Extra Care properties since our last report, due to the impact of Covid related remote working by Social Services. This has resulted in longer void times in these schemes and this is being addressed with Somerset County Council by Simon Lewis.

- Plumbing updating works have taken place in Block A, B and the main building at Kilkenny Court.

Sheltered Housing

- We are on schedule for the meeting halls to re-open mid- September 2021.
- The group of tenants at Taunfield Close mentioned in our last report have recently been awarded some Tenant's Group funding to grow fruit and veg within the scheme.
- Since our last update in July, staff have met with the national consortium for older people's housing and support, known as EROSH (Emerging Role on Sheltered Housing). We will now start working on creating an accredited service and standard within our sheltered and extra care housing.

Lettings

- Home Moves Plus (HMP) work is having a positive impact on our tenants and we have received feedback recently from satisfied tenants.
- The new Locata software, which is a choice based lettings (CBL) system for local authorities is now up and running, meaning adverts for our available properties are easier to create and are more informative for our tenants. Any teething issues have been resolved easily and speedily.
- Leaving well visits are being embedded into the Sheltered and tenancy management teams to engage with tenants to return properties back to us in the best possible condition. Some positive feedback has been received from the Voids team.
- Re-let customer satisfaction was 100% in July, figures for August currently being collected.
- Average re-let times has improved overall. There has been a very strong improvement in major voids but minor voids has seen reduced performance.

Income

- Tenant arrears at the end of August 2021 were £536,947.36 with 1502 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 two additional agency member of staff who start in September to cover a secondment of an existing member of the team, as well as a member of the team who is focussing more on the OPEN HOUSING project.
- The Open Housing project continues to challenge the team to deliver 'business as usual'.

Tenancy/Estates

- We have increased from six to eight Case Managers, so from 1st September patch sizes have decreased. New patches will be advertised in the tenants newsletter.
- We are revisiting and planning new block inspections and estates walkabout schedules and these will be published on our website in the next few weeks.

- We have recruited a new Senior Housing Case Manager who started on the 23 August 2021 and a further Estates/Tenancy Case Manager who started on the 1 September 2021. Both are now in post and the team is back to full strength.
- The temporary ASB Case Manager (who was covering sickness) will move across to take on a new role as Tenancy/Estate Case Manager.

ASB

- We have currently just over 62 active open cases; with a small proportion of these being high level ASB.
- The team will now be looking to actively close cases that have not required any action for over a 28-day period.
- The team are moving towards taking legal action in some cases. For example, a recent case turned into a serious incident with police involvement and seizure action, and another involves several residents who may face either a Notice of Seeking Possession or a Community Protection Warning.
- Estates/Tenancy Case Managers will now be recording low-level cases on to the ASB monitoring sheet.

Housing Performance Team

- Customer service training has been arranged through an external provider for the whole of the directorate. This will run through September and October 2021.
- Complaints training through HQN has been arranged for managers and those within the directorate who deal with complaints. The first session has already taken place with more sessions to follow later in the month.
- The Annual Report to tenants has been written and designed, ready to be published shortly.
- We have produced an Autumn newsletter to tenants and leaseholders.
- We have started to develop a “reporting a repair” online form. Currently in the draft stages with our business analysts.
- We are working with the corporate insurance team to roll out the use of claim forms, which will provide a smoother and quicker way of handling claims made against the Council.
- Setting up of a “Damp & Mould” working group with engaged tenants.

4. Risk Assessment (if appropriate)

A risk assessment is not required to accompany this report.

5. Are there any Finance / Resource, Legal implications directly to do with this report?

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

6: Are there any Equality and Diversity Implications?

There are no equality implications directly to do with this report

7. Are there any Data Protection Implications?

There are no equality implications directly to do with this report

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Somerset West and Taunton Council

Tenants Strategic Group – 27 Sept 2021

2021/22 Housing Scorecard Quarter 1

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 performance for the first quarter of 21/22 (April-June 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 July 2021 covering the performance of the 20/21 financial year. This report covers the first quarter of 21/22.

3.2 Over the last 18 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 and increasing.

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 2021-22	Amber Threshold	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21
Customer					
% of complaints closed in 10 working days (as per policy)	100%	95%	81%	80%	92%

Improvement in complaint response times has been significant now that clearer routing and monitoring of complaints is in place. There was a dip in performance during April and May due to significant service pressures, staff sickness and leave where 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. June has seen an

improvement towards our targets.

Indicator	Target 2021-22	Amber Threshold	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21
Customer					
% of new tenants satisfied with the lettable standard of the property	85%	82%	95%	100%	100%

In April 2021 we “let” 33 properties, we have had 22 responses to our satisfaction questions. Of the 22 responses, 18 were very satisfied with the standard of the property and 3 were satisfied. In May and June all respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with the standard of their new property.

Indicator	Target 2021-22	Amber Threshold	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21
Customer					
% of tenants satisfied with most recent repair	85%	78%	95%	95%	91%

We continue to use an electronic questionnaire sent to repair customers as soon as the repair completes. Results returned 95% satisfaction in both April and May. During April and May this decreases slightly to 91%, response sizes are growing and it is encouraging to note that those who choose to respond are responding positively.

Indicator	Target 2021-22	Amber Threshold	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21
Customer					
Number of compliments received	6 per month	4 per month	11	6	6

We have been receiving a steady number of compliments recorded formally since July 2020. In June we turned a complaint into a compliment as the tenant was so impressed with our complaint response.

Indicator	Target 2021-22	Amber Threshold	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21
Customer					
Overall tenant satisfaction (STAR results)	82%	81%	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 2021-22	Amber Threshold	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21
Operations					
Rent Recovery					
Income collected as a % of rent owed excluding arrears brought forward	99%	98%	101.6%	103.22%	103.85%
Total number of all evictions	n/a	n/a	1	0	0

The performance is over 100% because tenants have paid more than is due in the period i.e. they are paying towards their rent arrears as well as paying the current rent due in the period – in setting the target the formula assumes arrears balances brought forward are being excluded but the income tenants have actually paid towards their arrears is not being excluded.

There has been 1 eviction executed since April 2021, this eviction was due to rent arrears.

3.6 Supported Housing

Indicator	Target 2021-22	Amber Threshold	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21
Operations					
Supported Housing					
Sheltered housing - % of tenants receiving annual reviews of support plans	100%	99%	98.8%	99.1%	98.9%

Our performance continues at just below 100% reporting 99% in May. 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 based on a current assessment of their need.

3.7 Lettings and Voids

Indicator	Target 2021-22	Amber Threshold	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21
Operations					
Lettings and Voids					
Average re-let time in calendar days (key to key)	44	48	54	49.8	53.9

The average re-let time for council properties over the past quarter was 52.1 days and did not achieve the target of 44 days. This performance indicator is widely used by housing providers, and the target has been set to reflect national best practice. Good progress is being made towards achieving specific targets for both Major voids and Minor voids. However, there have been a higher proportion of major voids, which take longer, and this has a negative impact on the average re-let time which is why it is above target. This is a large area of work with approximately 100 voids every quarter. There are a number of challenges facing void work, particularly regarding some of the compliance issues, which are having an impact across the housing sector.

3.8 Housing Repairs

Indicator	Target 2021-22	Amber Threshold	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21
Operations					
Repairs					
Completion of housing emergency repairs within 24 hours	100%	95%	100%	100%	100%

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 and July, 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 is now ongoing and has confirmed 100% attendance for emergency jobs.

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	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21
Operations					
Tenancy Management					
Total new ASB cases in the month	n/a	n/a	8	6	2
Total number of ASB cases that were closed in the month	n/a	n/a	0	1	16
Number of ASB cases open on the last day of the month	n/a	n/a			50
Number of new ASB cases reported per 1,000 properties	n/a	n/a			0.04
Number safeguarding referrals	n/a	n/a	0	2	0

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. We are working closely with the ASB team to refine our data for ASB and confirm the figures that our reports are providing. This work is ongoing and accounts for the gaps in the data above.

Safeguarding – We currently raise low numbers of safeguarding referrals to Somerset County Council. This quarter they have been particularly low with just 2 referrals in the quarter. 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 2021-22	Amber Threshold	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21
Operations					
Compliance					
% of housing dwellings with a valid gas safety certificate (LGSR)	100%	n/a	100.00%	99.98%	100.00%
% of communal areas with a Fire Risk Assessment (FRA) in place and FRA Review complete (where applicable)	100%	n/a	100.00%	98.59%	100.00%

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

Our trend from last year of high performance with FRAs in place has continued, we have achieved 100% of communal areas with an FRA in place and FRA review complete at the end of the quarter. There was a slight dip in May 2021 however this was resolved a week later at the start of June.

The 100% performance of both indicators has continued for July and August.

3.11 Development

Indicator	Target 2021-22	Amber Threshold	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21
Development					
Number of SWT HRA new home completions since April 2019	1000 by 2049	20 per year	62	62	62

62 new homes have completed since April 2019, the performance indicates this cumulative number of homes built. Contractors are now onsite delivering 47 new properties in North Taunton. In June 2021 planning permission has been secured for 54 new homes at Seaward Way in Minehead.

4 Finance Performance

- 4.1** This report provides an update on the projected outturn financial position of the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the financial year 2021/22 (as at 30 June 2021).
- 4.2** The revenue position is under significant pressure as it continues to be affected by the ongoing impact of COVID and operating within an environment of economic recovery. The service has a backlog of responsive and planned maintenance and compliance works to be undertaken. Costs are escalating in terms of materials, staffing, compliance, and servicing costs. Future financial pressures are still to be confirmed in terms of staff pay award, income collection, cost of implementing regulatory changes, and the cost of implementing a unitary authority. A thorough analysis of risks and uncertainties facing the HRA has been undertaken and careful monitoring of these will continue for early indications of emerging financial pressures.
- 4.3** There is currently sufficient capacity in general reserves to cover new in-year pressures identified to date and the current forecast outturn position. However, this significantly reduces the HRA's headroom to react to any new pressures that may emerge in this or future financial years.
- 4.4** Whilst best endeavours to forecast with as much accuracy as possible we have seen a historical change in forecasts each quarter and to year end. However, action is required to control spending to ensure the outturn is on or close to budget.

- 4.5 The housing senior management team are currently working through options to see what can be done to contain the overall position.
- 4.6 The current HRA Revenue Budget forecast is a projected overspend of £610k.
- 4.7 The HRA Capital Programme has a total approved budget of £118m. The profiled budgeted spend for 2021/22 is £29m and this is currently forecast to underspend by £7.7m.
- 4.8 The unearmarked reserves are projected to be £2.273m which is £273k above the recommended minimum balance of £2m.
- 4.9 The earmarked reserves opening balance is £1.1m. It is proposed that £869k of earmarked reserve balances will be returned to general reserves to mitigate in-year budget pressures.

Democratic Path:

- **Monthly Housing Performance Meeting – 21st September 2021**
- **Tenants Strategic Board – 27 Sept 2021**

Reporting Frequency: Quarterly

Contact Officers

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Somerset West and Taunton Council

Tenants Strategic Group – 27th September 2021

Housing Service approach to equalities and equalities data held

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Member for Housing

Report Author: Simon Lewis, Assistant Director, Housing and Communities

1. Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

The report is to provide members of the Tenants Strategic Group with an overview of how the Housing Service collects and uses equalities data to make the services we provide better for disabled tenants.

2. Recommendations

The Tenants Strategic Group is asked to note the findings and next steps from this report and are invited to ask questions.

3. Background and Full details of the Report

Housing Data on disabilities

Equalities data is collected as part of the process of a prospective tenant applying for social housing. We hold relatively detailed information on disabilities, collected during the Homefinder application process. This includes information on any physical and mental disabilities, learning difficulties and any related support needs that they have. Relevant questions from the Homefinder application form have been extracted and are shown in Appendix A. Far more detailed assessments are undertaken for any placements made into Extra Care Housing Schemes, in partnership with Somerset County Council.

During the Homefinder application process, where a disabled adapted property is required by an applicant, the Homefinder Officer would usually require an assessment from an Occupational Therapist as part of the evidence required for banding.

All of the information provided is passed to the Housing Provider (in this case ourselves as a landlord) when making offers of properties. However, before we accept the tenancy, there is a verification process where a Lettings Officer meets

with the tenant (during Covid this has been done by phone call) to verify and check the information that was included on the Homefinder application (this is especially important if the application was done a while ago and needs might have changed). This also includes a check of income such as disability living allowance and other benefits which form part of the affordability checks.

How we use the information

Information is held on the Academy Housing System and Tenancy Officers, Supported Housing Officers, Rent Recovery Officers and Lettings Officers access this prior to a visit. The officer reviews the case notes on Academy and identifies any disabilities or additional needs and then tailors their support and approach to reflect this.

We also offer enhanced accessibility options for tenants such as making publications available in large print and corporately we place a lot of emphasis on ensuring our website is disability friendly (it was recently assessed as 4th best in terms of accessibility out of 413 public sector websites), so that information is easily accessible for example for visually impaired tenants using screen-reader software.

We always carefully consider providing a range of options for tenants to engage with services, so for example although we encourage people to engage with us online where possible, we always offer the option of phone calls and visits where more appropriate.

An area where we are looking to improve is on the Property Services side of the business where the link to the Open Contractor system (where repairs appointments are made) does not make disability information easily ready for repairs schedulers and staff. This is being addressed through configuration of the new Open Housing System which will be in place by April 2022 and will ensure that flags are clearer and interface across to Open Contractor for Repairs schedulers to see whether a tenant has a disability when making repairs appointments which will allow conversations to take place about reasonable adjustments.

We also provide comprehensive support to tenants for adaptations to properties. We have recently shared the Adaptations Policy and Procedures for TSG to review and some of the key points from this were:

- We have a clear policy and procedure that shows how we support tenants who require adaptations to their homes. Responses to this can include major adaptations ranging from wet floor shower rooms to extensions; as well as minor adaptations for which we have staff trained as 'trusted assessors' to be able to support tenants in getting the right minor adaptations (ramps, grab rails etc) for their circumstances and property.
- We are targeting certain property types so that when they become void and require bathroom replacements that they automatically get upgraded to a wet floor shower room, thus increasing our stock of adapted properties. These

homes are then targeted at letting for disabled applicants on Homefinder or for internal transfers for tenants requiring adapted homes.

- In some circumstances where a property is not appropriate for a major adaptation, we support the household to find and move to an alternative suitable property within our stock.

In the 2021/22 financial year, the HRA will spend nearly £500k on this area of the business, setting a budget of £300k for major adaptations and £70k for minor adaptations. Additionally, we pay £60k contribution towards the costs of the Somerset Independence Plus service and the Independence Advice Centre (management, technical officers, running costs etc) and a further £30k contribution toward the cost of an Adults Occupational Therapist and Children's Occupational Therapist, to work alongside us.

A review of our Academy data shows that we have 1540 households with tenants that have notified us they have some form of disability. This equates to around 27% of our households. A breakdown is provided in Appendix 2.

This data is really helpful and we utilised this during the pandemic so that we could make welfare calls to people who were deemed as clinically vulnerable. We had data provided to us from the NHS and County Council Social Care team to help target individuals to call but we also used our own Housing data to make phone calls to people who were elderly, living alone or with disabilities to ensure that during lockdown they had support networks in place. This resulted in us making many hundreds of calls and then led to personalised interventions and support visits when required.

Keeping data up to date

Keeping our data up to date is a challenge and we rely on tenants telling us when their circumstances change. However, as part of our new Open Housing suite we are including a Tenants Portal which will allow tenants to go online and update their own personal information and we will be encouraging them to use this to ensure that information such as their contact details and any disabilities or additional needs are kept up to date.

How we adapt our Policies and processes to take account of disabilities

The Council has legal requirements to comply with the Equalities Act 2010 and to meet the Public Sector Equality Duty and the Council has set a number of equality objectives under this duty. A corporate report was taken to the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee on the 13th September outlining our progress against this and this can be viewed here: [Agenda for SWT Audit and Governance Committee on Monday, 13th September, 2021, 6.15 pm - Modern Council \(somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk\)](https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/agenda-for-swt-audit-and-governance-committee-on-monday-13th-september-2021-6.15-pm-modern-council)

Key messages from this report are:

- Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) has been shortlisted as a finalist for this year's Municipal Journal Achievement Awards in recognition for its work to support neurodiversity in the workplace.
- The SWT website has been independently assessed as the 4th best in terms of accessibility out of 413 public sector websites (Q2 2021 Sitemorse Index)
- SWT Achieved Level 2 (Disability Confident) of the Disability Confident Scheme
- A joint officer and member equality group is now in place and meeting regularly.
- We have commenced the rollout of Equality Impact Assessment refresher workshops for officers within SWT,
- A Consultation Toolkit has been created and launched within SWT (which highlights the importance of engaging with people with Protected Characteristics).

There is also an action plan for 2021/22 included as part of this report.

In Housing we ensure that all housing policies have an Equalities Impact Assessment to assess how new policies will negatively impact (or enhance) services for those with protected characteristics under the Equalities Act (which includes disabilities).

The Equality Act provides a duty to make reasonable adjustments for a person placed at a **substantial disadvantage** because of their disability compared with non-disabled people or people who don't share that disability. (Substantial meaning more than minor or trivial.) All staff undertake mandatory annual training to ensure that they understand their legal duties with respect to this Act. However we are currently making enquiries of managers to ascertain where we feel gaps are and further training should be provided to make this support better.

Next steps

The Housing Service is commissioning work on our Housing policy and procedures to address gaps and ensure these are fit for purpose for a modern housing organisation. The commission includes a requirement for a review of our main services that interface with tenants to ensure they are disability friendly and that reasonable adjustments are being made. We will review the findings of this work to improve how our services support tenants with disabilities and will also consider as part of this what further training is required for our staff.

The Assistant Director for Housing and Communities is engaging with the Corporate Equalities Lead to determine how our Housing equalities work can better link into the Member Equalities Champions and wider equalities groups to help add value and challenge to our own approach.

4. Risk Assessment (if appropriate)

A risk assessment is not required to accompany this report.

5. Are there any Finance / Resource, Legal implications directly to do with this report?

There will be a financial cost for the commissioned review of our approach to equalities in our day to day service provision, however this will be incorporated within the cost of the wider policy review work. Any resultant future improvements to service offers or approach could have further financial implications

6: Are there any Equality and Diversity Implications?

The purpose of this report is to focus on our approach to equalities and ultimately improve it and therefore this should lead to an enhanced service provision for groups with protected equalities characteristics, particularly those with disabilities.

7. Are there any Data Protection Implications?

There are no equality implications directly to do with this report

List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Extracted Questions from Homefinder Application form asking questions related to disabilities

Appendix 2: Current disability profile of SWT Tenants

Name of Contact Officer: Simon Lewis

Telephone number: 07584175213 Email address:
s.lewis@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

Appendix 1: Extracted Questions from Homefinder Application form asks questions about the applicant and all other household members:

- Do you use a wheelchair?
- If Yes, please describe any difficulties you have using, storing or charging it.
- Do you have learning disabilities?
- If Yes, please provide details of how this impacts on your daily life?

The Income Section then asks for details of all income which includes:

DLA Care Rate High/Medium/Low (Monthly) £

DLA Mobility Rate High/Medium/Low (Monthly) £

PIP Daily Living Standard/Enhanced (Monthly) £

PIP Mobility Standard/Enhanced (Monthly) £

Carers Allowance (Monthly) £

Section 5 enquires about what support household members currently receive:

Is anyone you have listed on your application getting support from Social Services, the probation service or any other organisation at the moment?

If yes please list anyone who gets support and who they get it from:

Please tell us about the personal circumstances that you or they need support for: -

- Mental health problems/dementia
- Alcohol problems
- Domestic abuse
- Learning disabilities
- Physical or sensory disability
- Drug problems
- Other support needs
- HIV/AIDS

Please use the space below to tell us about the support you need and why?

Has your property been adapted for your households needs?

If yes please tell us what has been done

If no, do you need your property to be adapted for your household's needs?

If yes, has an Occupational Therapist visited your property to assess your housing needs?

If yes, please provide the name of the Occupational Therapist

If yes, what date did the Occupational Therapist visit?

Does living in your home affect the health of you or any household member?

If yes please complete the Housing & Your Health section of this form on page 21.

Do you wish to be considered for any of the following accommodation?

- Housing adapted for physical disability
- Housing adapted for wheelchair use
- Housing with visiting support
- Housing with support worker
- Housing for people with Learning Disabilities

Guidance Notes

Housing Adapted for physical disability may include adaptations such as grab rails, electrical sockets at a higher level, and taps with levers etc.

Housing Adapted for wheelchair use means that doorways will be wider, there will be ramps and no stairs, showers are likely to be of level access design etc.

Sheltered Housing - Sheltered housing residents have their own flat or bungalow. These are linked to a community alarm system to enable residents to call for help in an emergency.

Extra Care Housing For customers in need of additional support often provided 24 hours a day. Extra care housing is not currently advertised through the choice based lettings system. If you apply for extra care housing your needs will be assessed by the relevant agency.

Housing with Support worker this is available for people with a range of support needs including, for example, people with learning difficulties, young people, young mothers, ex-offenders or people with a mental health problem. Referrals to such schemes are usually made through social services.

I provide or receive essential and critical medical or other support or care within the Homefinder Somerset area where significant harm would result if this was not provided - Please state where:

What is your reason for needing to be rehoused?

Options include:

- Reasons of poor health / disability
- Require sheltered accommodation

Please use this space to give us any further information about why you need to be re-housed, any reasons why you need special assistance or other help and any further contact details...

Section 11 – Housing and your health – to be completed by those where their current housing is affecting their health...

This section asks for contact details of GP or consultant

Asks whether person is in hospital waiting to leave, and details

Please describe the disability or illness you have (including any mental health issues) and the problem that it causes for you in your current accommodation...

Tell us changing how you will live will improve your health...

Please tell us about any treatments / medications you are receiving or taking...

Have any adaptations been made in your home to help you cope (e.g. stair-lift, walk-in shower, grab rails)? Please provide details...

Have you applied for any adaptations?

	No difficulty	Some difficulty	I need some help	I rely on someone else
Getting around coping with stairs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Getting around using the toilet and bathroom	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Getting around leaving and arriving home	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Getting around – walking and moving around:

- I am fully mobile
- I can walk to the nearest bus stop or shop without too much difficulty
- I use walking aids or manage with help
- I use a motorised scooter
- I use a wheelchair
- I rely totally on a wheelchair and help

Getting around – Daily life activities:

- I collect my own pension or benefits
 - Someone collects my pension or benefits for me
 - I do all my own shopping
 - I can do light shopping
 - Someone helps me to do light shopping
 - I am unable to do any shopping
 - I do my own house cleaning
 - I have help with my house cleaning
-

Appendix 2 – Current Disability profile data of SWT Housing Tenants

We have 1540 households either with Tenant 1 or Tenant 2 with some kind of disability, from hearing to mobility scooter.

Below are a count of tenants with any of these disabilities, a tenant can have more than one of these ticked in our system.

Row Labels	Count
DEMENTIA	25
DISABLED	868
DISABLED HEARING IMP	227
DISABLED LEARN DIFF	67
DISABLED MENTAL HEAL	393
DISABLED MOBILITY	713
DISABLED OTHER	879
DISABLED OTHER 2	490
DISABLED PREFER NOT TO SAY	21
DISABLED SPEECH IMPAIRMENT	8
DISABLED VISUAL IMP	143
DRUG RELATED PROBLEM	2
MOBILITY SCOOTER	73
REGISTERED DISABLED	86
TERMINALLY ILL	2
VULNERABLE	272
WHEELCHAIR USER	70
Grand Total	4339