

## SWT Tenants Strategic Group

Monday, 26th September, 2022,  
6.00 pm

**Somerset West  
and Taunton**

The John Meikle Room - The Deane  
House

[SWT MEETING WEBCAST LINK](#)

---

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

### Agenda

- |   |                 |
|---|-----------------|
| 1. Apologies  |                 |
| 2. Welcome from the Chair   |                 |
| 3. Minutes from previous meeting  | (Pages 5 - 10)  |
| 4. Q1 Performance Report and Finance Report 2022-3 Shari Hallett and Kerry Prisco               | (Pages 11 - 20) |
| 5. Directorate Report- All Assistant Directors  | (Pages 21 - 28) |
| 6. Tenant Satisfaction (TSM) presentation- Sharon Yarde<br>This item will be printed separately |                 |
| 7. Any other business   |                 |



**ANDREW PRITCHARD**  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Please note that this meeting will be recorded. At the start of the meeting the Chair will confirm if all or part of the meeting is being recorded and webcast. You should be aware that the Council is a Data Controller under the Data Protection Act 2018. Data collected during the recording will be retained in accordance with the Council's policy. Therefore unless you are advised otherwise, by entering the Council Chamber and speaking during Public Participation you are consenting to being recorded and to the possible use of the sound recording for access via the website or for training purposes. If you have any queries regarding this please contact the officer as detailed above.

Members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting and listen to the discussions. There is time set aside at the beginning of most meetings to allow the public to ask questions. Speaking under "Public Question Time" is limited to 3 minutes per person in an overall period of 15 minutes and you can only speak to the Committee once. If there are a group of people attending to speak about a particular item then a representative should be chosen to speak on behalf of the group. These arrangements do not apply to exempt (confidential) items on the agenda where any members of the press or public present will be asked to leave the Committee Room.

If you would like to ask a question or speak at a meeting, you will need to submit your request to a member of the Governance Team in advance of the meeting. You can request to speak at a Council meeting by emailing your full name, the agenda item and your question to the Governance Team using [governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk](mailto:governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk)

Any requests need to be received by 4pm on the day that provides 1 clear working day before the meeting (excluding the day of the meeting itself). For example, if the meeting is due to take place on a Tuesday, requests need to be received by 4pm on the Friday prior to the meeting.

We are now live webcasting most of our committee meetings and you are welcome to view and listen to the discussion. The link to each webcast will be available on the meeting webpage, but you can also access them on the [Somerset West and Taunton webcasting website](#).

The meeting rooms, including the Council Chamber at The Deane House, are on the first floor and are fully accessible. Lift access to The John Meikle Room (Council Chamber), is available from the main ground floor entrance at The Deane House. The Council Chamber at West Somerset House is on the ground floor and is fully accessible via a public entrance door. Toilet facilities, with wheelchair access, are available across both locations. An induction loop operates at both The Deane House and West Somerset House to enhance sound for anyone wearing a hearing aid or using a transmitter.

Full Council, Executive, and Committee agendas, reports and minutes are available on our website: [www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk](http://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk)

For further information about the meeting, please contact the Governance and Democracy Team via email: [governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk](mailto:governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk)

If you would like an agenda, a report or the minutes of a meeting translated into another language or into Braille, large print, audio tape or CD, please email: [governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk](mailto:governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk)

## **SWT Tenants Strategic Group - 25 July 2022**

Present: Councillor Luke Manning (Chair)

Councillors Jessie Bunn, Paul Cram, Colin England, Ivor Hussey, Samantha Rickward, Mark Lithgow and Janet Lloyd

Officers: Claire Reed (Housing), Stephen Boland, Ian Candlish, Simon Lewis, Tracey Meadows, Sharon Yarde (Housing), Ollie Warcup, Tony Knight and Sharon Sloan and Tracey Meadows

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm)

### **52. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Alex Akhigbemen and Kevin Hellier. James Barraah and Shari Hallet also sent apologies.

### **53. Welcome from the Chair**

The new Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

### **54. Minutes from previous meeting**

#### **Action points raised from the Chair**

The Chair raised a query on telephone training in relation to Housing queries. He requested that when staff spoke to customers on the telephone, they treated customers with respect and directing the customer to the correct department.

He also stated that a member of the public had put in a complaint to SWT regarding no response from their Housing Officer for not answering emails or returning calls. The Chair request that this concern be investigated.

The Chair also raised a query on who trained the Out of Hours service, Deane Helpline.

The request was raised that The Wellington Office be re-opened as customers in Wellington that required advice would have to come to Taunton. Stated that the Wellington Town Council had spare offices that could be used for this.

Update on TAG regarding grassing cutting was made. The response was that *TAG had their meeting on Thursday, an update would follow.*

### **55. Update on the voids workshop lean process**

The report provided:

- Members with information on our void property performance in relation to the Council owned stock;
- Statistical information covering the period 2020-2022 with a specific focus on the month of June 22;
- The Council's approved lettable and returns standard for voids as set out in Appendix 1;

During discussion of this item the following points/queries were raised; (summarised)

- How many void properties did you revisit within 3 months to re-do repairs? This would provide the group with a better statistic on the tenant satisfaction table and how the void team were performing. How long were properties empty before work commenced on them? *With regards to tenant satisfaction on void performance, 65% of people were contacted over a period, not just one phone call. The table in the agenda stated the length of time that the property was empty before work commenced on them, usually 3-4 days;*
- Concerns that voids were not surveyed for asbestos and decorating completed before tenants moved into the properties; *An asbestos survey was needed before the tenant moved into the property. The asbestos would be removed before the tenant moved in this could take up to 25 days before completion. Other surveys regarding upgrades to bathrooms and kitchens would also be completed in this time;*
- Concerns with the statement on that "major capital works statement as part of the capital programme where possible, after the tenant moved in rather than during the void. This would also be more cost effective through economies of scale". This work needed to be completed before the tenant moved in; *This has been discussed and we had also discussions with the TAG. The TAG has been invited to inspect void properties from the start of the process to completion to a lettable standard;*
- Can you confirm that major works can be completed in 25 days? *Yes, we can also get on with other works whilst the asbestos works were completed;*
- What was the time limit for asbestos removal? *The property was surveyed with a report submitted back if asbestos was found in the property. A 14 day notice to HSE, certificate is then issued to AA Woods for removal;*

The report was noted.

At this point in the meeting Tony Knight and Ollie Warcup left the meeting.

## 56. **Housing Ombudsman Self assessment**

The report was to update the Tenant's Strategic Group on work currently being undertaken by the Housing Performance team, to ensure that the directorate was compliant with the Housing Ombudsman's revised Complaint Handling Code by 1 October 2022.

During discussion of this report the following comments/queries were raised; (summarised)

- Accessibility and awareness - 2.3 in our packs states that " we are compliant but as an improvement, we will add wording to the website to say the policy is available in different formats upon request" for customers suffering with poor eye site they will not be able to see this in the first instance, we need to get the message out that there is information out there in different formats; *we do hold a database for customers that require large print at the point that the customer signs up. Currently 80 people have already signed up for this. As an action point, we will take this back to Customer Services to make sure that all the information is available on our website to comply with the Housing Ombudsman's code;*
- A Scrutiny group for complaints was needed to assist and see what complaints were received from the public and how they could be resolved from the tenants point of view; *we were currently exploring an option for a tenant panel or Scrutiny group to see where we can make this more efficient. No tenant details would be identified in this process;*
- Was there a possibility that a lot of the complaints that came through were not complaints in the first place? *Concerns with communications issues for a response from Officer's were the main concerns for complaints. This was something that we were working on currently;*
- Concerns that issues were dealt with so slowly with the Council procedures, we needed to get better at this and build bridges with tenants going into unitary; *The IT systems were being improved to enable better working practices and getting the right person for the role. It should be noted that all correspondence was logged as a complaint even if it is a service request;*

The report was noted.

#### 57. **Finance Out turn report**

This report contained information related to Somerset West and Taunton Council's (SWT) Housing Revenue Account's (HRA) financial performance for the 2021/22 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 27th September this year.

During discussion of this report the following comments/queries were raised; (summarised)

- In the report it stated that political demands had continued to place financial pressure on the HRA during 2021/22. Can you confirm what there were? *We will find out this information from the Accounting Manager and get back to you with this information;*

The report was noted.

## 58. Directorate Report

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

This included reports regarding;

- HRA New Homes, Housing Strategy and Housing Enabling;
- Responsive Repairs and Void Repairs;
- Property Safety Compliance;
- Capital Programmes;
- Asset Management;
- Supported Housing (extra care and sheltered);
- Lettings;
- Income Team;
- Tenancy/Estates & ASB;
- Housing Performance Team Housing Performance Team;

During discussion of these items the following comments/queries were raised; (summarised)

- Confirmation on emergency and non-emergency responsive repairs being undertaken and what is classed as an emergency with the out of hours service (Deane Helpline); *Emergency was classed as a risk to life or property. A list is given to Deane Helpline to define, and we do periodically review this;*
- Concerns that engineers were still turning up without an appointment; *we will take this away and review;*
- Concerns that ASB was getting worse on estates and measures needed to be taken to nip this in the bud. Worries that the Police did not respond to complaints of ASB; *If it was one our properties causing the ASB complaint, we would get the Estate Officer to talk to the parents if it was children in the property causing the bad behaviour. You could also contact Community trigger, which gives victims of persistent anti-social behaviour reported to any of the main responsible agencies (such as the council, police, housing provider) the right to request a multi-agency case review of their case where a local threshold is met. Agencies, including local authorities, the police, local health teams and registered providers of social housing have a duty to undertake a case review when someone requests one and their case meets a locally defined threshold. Each area chooses a lead agency to manage the process, this is usually the council or police;*

- ASB is not solely down to youths, there were also adults with mental health issues that were not getting any help. Organisations were so stretched that these people were failed by the system and not getting the help they need. As a landlord of these tenants, you should be doing a lot more to help them. *The thresholds to get these interventions were unfortunately very high;*
- Surprised with the grounds maintenance figure of 57%. All residents complained about the lack of grounds maintenance in the area; *This was a drop on last year;*

The report was noted.

59. **AOB**

The TSG group reported that a few of the group Members went to the National TPAS Conference. The Chair stated that he was very lucky in the courses that he choose and felt that he had learnt a lot and had come away with tools to support him in his role.

Group member, Sam Rickward reported that she had enjoyed the conference and learnt a lot from the Ombudsman. She also stated that she felt that TPAS was geared up for Housing Associations not Local Authorities of which we were a huge minority where the Housing Associations had a vast amount of housing stock and more staff.

Another organisation has been identified that was better pitched for Local Authorities. The STG asked if this could be explored as they felt that this would be more suitable for the group.

**Action points**

Meeting 25/07/2022	
CS training on open Housing, official request to speak to Housing Officer-Luke and Simon Lewis to discuss	SL
Who trains the Helpline?-what training do they receive?	RB
Could the Wellington Office hold a drop-in centre so tenants do not have to come to Taunton?	JB/RB
Send Chair the complaint process flow chart	CR
Speak to Jess about accessibility, where is it on the website.	SY
Should SWT be doing something more than offering 'documents are available in other formats upon request'?	SH
What are the Political demands in Out-turn report?	KP
Script for DHelpline re: emergency, send it to TSG	RB
MD group-repairs -Action point to speak to MD Group re: appointments, appointments not been made	IC/ RP
How many voids to you need to revisit, a better way to score satisfaction?	TK
Scrutiny group for complaints: Paul, Ivor, Jess and Colin	CR

(The Meeting ended at 7.50 pm)



# Somerset West and Taunton Council

## Tenants Strategic Group – 26<sup>th</sup> September 2022

### 2022/23 Housing Performance and Finance Report Quarter 1 April – June 2022

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

Report Author: Shari Hallett (Housing Performance Manager) and Kerry Prisco (Management Accounting and Reporting Lead)

#### 1 Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides an update on the housing performance through key performance measures and financial information for the first quarter of 22/23 (April to June 2022).

#### 2 Recommendations

2.1 To note content of the housing scorecard for quarter 1 (April to June 2022). The executive summary of the HRA finance report (2022/23 Housing Revenue Account Financial Monitoring as at Quarter 1).

#### 3 Housing Performance Scorecard

3.1 The Housing Performance Scorecard is a tool to measure our performance in key areas. The scorecard was last presented to Tenants' Strategic Group (TSG) in May 2022 covering the performance in Q4 (Jan-Mar). This report covers the first quarter of 2022/23 April-June.

3.2 This report covers a total of 22 measures. Customer 5, Rent Recovery 2, Supported Housing 1, Lettings and Voids 1, Housing Repairs 2, Tenancy Management 4, Compliance 6, Development 1. Additional compliance measures have been added to this report.

3.3 15 indicators have targets, 12 are green (on target or better), two are red (off target but targets are 100%) and one is amber.

#### 3.4 Customer

Indicator	Target 2022 -23	Amber Threshold	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22
<b>Customer</b>					
% of stage 1 complaints closed in 10 working days	100%	95%	38%	63%	73%

This year we are reporting Housing Revenue complaints separately to those outside social housing in line with Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM).

The Housing Ombudsman’s revised Complaint Handling Code now allows the 10 working day target to start from the point the complaint is triaged and acknowledged with the customer, rather than from when the complaint was received by the Council. This has made a positive improvement to the response time figures which previously showed as (May 44% (now 63%), June 68% (now 73%). However vacancies in key areas, staff leave and sickness continues to impact our ability to respond to complaints on time. Extensions that are agreed are not reflected in the figures.

Indicator	Target 2022 -23	Amber Threshold	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22
<b>Customer</b>					
% of new tenants satisfied with the lettable standard of the property	85%	82%	100.00%	-	100.00%

During April, May and June, satisfaction surveys were conducted with all new tenants. Satisfaction remains high. In the March 2022 meeting of TSG the number of new lets each month was requested alongside this satisfaction percentage.

April 2022: 17 properties let, (13 responses), 100% satisfaction

May 2022: 19 properties let (this was the first month of electronic surveys, no survey responses received as there was an ICT error with the survey link)

June 2022: 19 properties let (6 responses), 100% satisfaction

Indicator	Target 2022 -23	Amber Threshold	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22
<b>Customer</b>					
% of tenants satisfied with most recent repair	85%	78%	92%	87.5%	94.1%

We continue to use an electronic questionnaire sent to customers of our Repairs service as soon as the repair completes. Data above reports the results of those surveys.

Satisfaction with repairs formed part of the pilot Tenant Satisfaction Measures survey completed in May 2022 on the telephone with customers to provide further data on this indicator. 75% of customers surveyed in this perception survey are satisfied with the way SWT deals with repairs and maintenance.

At the Tenants’ Strategic Group meeting in January, we were asked to specify numbers of transaction surveys going out and responded. This data was discussed fully in the March meeting, and it was decided that surveys would continue to be sent, although statistically this is a low sample and not sufficiently indicative. New software will be sourced once Open Housing is live, with consideration given to digitally excluded customers and how surveys may be able to be completed on the handheld devices of

trade staff.

In April 2022 301 surveys were sent, with 26 responses received giving an 92% satisfaction rate (24). In May 2022 296 surveys were sent, with 32 responses received giving a 87.5% satisfaction rate (28). In June 2022 331 were surveys sent, with 17 responses received giving a 94% satisfaction rate (16).

Results returned indicate that we are exceeding target for our levels of satisfaction where surveys are completed (it is acknowledged that not all tenants are currently receiving surveys as it is restricted to mobile users with access to internet via their phone). However, it is encouraging to note that those who choose to respond are responding positively.

Indicator	Target 2022 -23	Amber Threshold	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22
<b>Customer</b>					
Number of compliments received	n/a	n/a	3	6	11

We have been receiving a steady number of compliments and the total for the year to date is 20.

Indicator	Target 2022 -23	Amber Threshold	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22
<b>Customer</b>					
Overall tenant satisfaction (STAR/TSM results)	77%	75%	83%	76%	76%

Our STAR survey during November/December 2020 recorded 83% tenancy satisfaction overall. During 2022 we are surveying twice, as a TSM (tenant satisfaction measure pilot), once in May and one in November to obtain our statistical sample. The May survey results indicate a drop in overall satisfaction to 76%. This result is disappointing, however a decline of 5% landlord satisfaction is reported by Housemark across the sector. We are examining the results of this survey and preparing an action plan to address points raised by survey respondents. We will repeat the survey again in November to complete the sample size and gain an overall result.

### 3.5 Rent Recovery

Indicator	Target 2022 -23	Amber Threshold	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22
<b>Rent Recovery</b>					
True current tenant arrears at the end of month %	2.72%	3.02%	2.51%	2.65%	2.61%
Total number of all evictions	n/a	n/a	0	1	1

The performance in rent arrears is now being measured by the Housemark indicator

“true current arrears”. Performance in this area is currently on target, the rent arrears figure at end of June was £707,796.

There have been 2 evictions from April 2022 - June 2022 due to rent arrears.

We are currently undertaking a ‘deep dive’ review of rent recovery now that Open Housing is in place and the team can be re-established to bring greater focus to this service. This review will give us an up-to-date detailed view on current trends and direction of travel in terms of our debt and set out our next steps in terms of performance improvement.

### 3.6 Supported Housing

Indicator	Target 2022 -23	Amber Threshold	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22
<b>Customer</b>					
<b>Supported Housing</b>					
Sheltered housing - % of tenants receiving annual reviews of support plans	100%	99%	96.90%	96.90%	97.40%

Our performance continues at just below 100% reporting 97.4% for June (this shortfall represents 23 tenancies). We are confident that vulnerable tenants are receiving regular contact based on a current assessment of their need. Temporary resource has been recruited to ensure that service is maintained during prolonged periods of staff absence. The team have now had some staff return from sickness and increased capacity will allow us to bring performance back to 100% in the next quarter.

### 3.7 Lettings and Voids

Indicator	Target 2022 -23	Amber Threshold	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22
<b>Lettings and Voids</b>					
Average re-let time in calendar days (key to key)	44	53	42	49	40

We are pleased to report that our plans to improve turn-around times has brought us back to target performance by March 2022 and continues.

### 3.8 Housing Repairs

Indicator	Target 2022 -23	Amber Threshold	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22
<b>Housing Repairs</b>					
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 previously reported, this data is unfortunately not currently available for non-emergency repair reporting purposes. Data and software changes are being implemented to enable accurate reporting of this non-emergency repair indicator.

### 3.9 Tenancy Management

Indicator	Target 2022 -23	Amber Threshold	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22
<b>Tenancy Management</b>					
Total new ASB cases in the month	n/a	n/a	16	20	15
Total number of ASB cases that were closed in the month	n/a	n/a	4	0	27
Number of ASB cases open on the last day of the month	n/a	n/a	44	64	52
Number of new ASB cases reported per 1,000 properties	n/a	n/a	2.80	3.50	2.63

**ASB** - These figures represent “high level” ASB cases opened and closed in the month. We are content with our performance in this area but ideally would like the numbers to be as low as possible. Benchmarking data shows top quartile performance June 2022 is 2 cases or less per 1,000 (median performance is 3.64 cases), our performance is close to top quartile performance.

**Safeguarding** – We currently raise low numbers of safeguarding referrals to Somerset County Council. This quarter we have made 6 referrals. 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. Awareness and training in the Council has taken place to ensure that all incidents are identified and managed within policy.

### 3.10 Compliance

Indicator	Target 2022 -23	Amber Threshold	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22
<b>Compliance</b>					
% of housing dwellings with a valid gas safety certificate	100%	n/a	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
% of housing communal areas with a valid electrical safety certificate (EICR)	100%	n/a	99.73%	100.00%	100.00%
% of communal areas with all asbestos safety checks complete	100%	n/a	98.92%	100.00%	100.00%
% of communal areas with a Fire Risk Assessment (FRA) in place and FRA Review complete (where applicable)	100%	100%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
% of communal areas with all periodic water safety equipment checks complete	100%	n/a	97.30%	97.30%	100.00%
% of passenger lifts and through floor lifts with annual and 6 monthly service and inspection complete	100%	n/a	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

We are pleased to report 100% compliance in these areas during June. During April there were 3 items delayed, one each in electrical certification, water safety equipment checks and asbestos condition inspection. These delays were due to delayed receipt of certification from our contract suppliers on both water and electrical inspection condition reports following a system patch.

### 3.10 Development

Indicator	Target 2022 -23	Amber Threshold	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22
<b>Development</b>					
Number of SWT HRA new home completions since April 2019		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 onsite delivering 47 new properties in North Taunton. In June 2021 planning permission was secured for 54 new homes at Seaward Way in Minehead and we started on site January 2022. Further homes will be started in North Taunton during this year.

#### 4. Executive summary of the HRA Finance report (2022/23 Housing Revenue Account Financial Monitoring as at Quarter 1).

The full finance report will be presented to the following elected committees, Community Scrutiny on the 31 August 2022, Executive on the 21 September 2022. Papers are therefore in the public domain (only the executive summary has been presented as requested by TSG).

4.1 Executive Summary - This report provides an update on the projected outturn financial position of the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the financial year 2022/23 (as at 30 June 2022).

4.2 It is well reported that the economic situation is challenging with the cost of living crisis, high inflation, and rising interest rates. These factors will hit our communities and businesses, and the Council is also not immune as seen in the latest forecasts. The risks to day to day service costs are seen with inflationary pressures for rising costs of utilities, energy, fuel etc and a provision for potential staff pay award exceeding budget.

4.3 The headline estimates for **revenue costs** are:

Revenue Budget	£0.745m forecast overspend	Red
General Reserves	£2.468m forecast balance = favourable (though low) compared to £2m minimum requirement	Amber
Earmarked Reserves	£54k opening balance	Green

4.4 The projected overspend of £0.745m is significant, driven mainly by forecast costs of void repairs, tenancy management costs and the estimated pay award. This will be carefully monitored with updates reported to Members on a quarterly basis. The level of General Reserves does provide the ability to cover the current predicted overspend, if required, but does not provide resilience to mitigate the risk of any further significant overspend or additional pressures. Housing Management will take steps to reduce and halt spend especially for discretionary activities, to help mitigate the current position, and to try to maintain a more secure reserves position.

4.5 Members will be aware that budget setting for 2022/23 was significantly challenging, where some budgets required re-basing especially around repairs and maintenance, and consequently the service will be pursuing efficiency targets into next financial year and beyond.

4.6 Whilst best endeavours are used to forecast with as much accuracy as possible we have seen a historical change in forecasts each quarter and to year end. However, it is essential that control over spending continues to reduce the forecast overspend and maintain adequate reserves.

4.7 The HRA **Capital Programme** has a total approved budget of £109.4m. The profiled budgeted spend for 2022/23 is £36.347m and this is currently forecast to underspend in

the year by £2.052m; £1.679m due to slippage of work into 2023/24 and £249k budget to be returned.

**Democratic Path:**

- **Housing Briefing - 13<sup>th</sup> September 2022**
- **Tenants Strategic Board – 26<sup>th</sup> September 2022**

**Reporting Frequency: Quarterly**

**Contact Officers**

Name	Shari Hallett, Kerry Prisco
Direct Dial	Shari 01823 219425 Kerry 01823 218758
Email	<a href="mailto:s.hallett@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk">s.hallett@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk</a> <a href="mailto:k.prisco@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk">k.prisco@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk</a>



## **Somerset West and Taunton Council**

**Tenants' Strategic Group – 26<sup>th</sup> September 2022**

### **Directorate Report**

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

Report Authors: Assistant Directors and Housing Performance Manager

#### **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 September 2021.

#### **2. Recommendations**

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

#### **3. Background and Full details of the Report**

##### **Housing Development and Regeneration Team**

- North Taunton Woolaway Project (NTWP) Phase A is progressing with the first couple of completions due and visits are being arranged for members of the Tenants Strategic Group, Tenants Low Carbon Retrofit Working Group and members in September. These will be the first 2050 zero carbon compliant new build council homes. Equans/Engie continue to work well on site and the contract for demolition and new build of phase B and Ci is being drawn up. Unfortunately, inflation is creating problems throughout the economy and building homes is affected as significantly as any other sector. We recognise that the increase cost of building homes is no longer a risk but

a reality. The housing service will continue to review its capital programmes with finance colleagues to manage inflationary pressures as best as possible.

- The 54 home zero-carbon development at Seaward Way, Minehead, commenced in January. The zero-carbon exemplar scheme will shortly commence piling works. Discussions on the schemes Electric Vehicle Charging Points and technology to monitor carbon efficiency are well advanced.
- The service had six planning applications for the zero-carbon affordable housing awaiting presentation to planning committee. The service is progressing one and withdrawing one application. Four applications will remain in the planning pipeline until agree phosphate mitigation approaches are confirmed.
- Full Council approved in September investment in ten woolaway homes in Oake. These homes will have comprehensive 'all walls out' refurbishment and will achieve a zero-carbon standard. SWT calculation believe the energy required to heat these improved homes will reduce by three quarters.
- The service is progressing at pace a low carbon retrofit strategy and delivery plan. A new tenants' low carbon retrofit group has met and is influencing the strategy and delivery plan. The strategy will be presented at a Members Briefing in September and progress to Full Council in December 2022. SWT has been awarded SHDF (Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund) Wave 1 and is bidding for Wave 2 funds. In addition, a significant Energy Company Obligation fund has been reserved by a large energy provider for a neighbourhood based ECO4 programme.
- The Asset management team is refining how they handover capital investment programmes to the capital programme team including greater detail on the properties included in the five-year medium term financial plan (MTFP), alignment of retrofit and decent homes programmes, alignment of component specifications to ensure retrofit, decent homes, compliance and repair service needs.
- Capital programme verification and low carbon retrofit surveys are being prioritised to support capital programme delivery 2022-2025
- New affordable housing in the district has seen a higher-than-average number of properties completed this financial year. The pipeline of new units is currently at its strongest in the west of the district, which is unaffected by the phosphate mitigation planning requirements. Future supply in the district is at risk due to the inability of private and social housing developers to progress developments without a phosphate mitigation strategy. As time passes this will place greater demand on existing supply and home finder.
- The Single Homeless and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Strategy and delivery plan was approved by Full Council in October and Officers are supporting the delivery of new homeless bedspaces through several partners and direct council supply. The council has been awarded £750k through the government Rough Sleepers Accommodation Programme to accelerate the new provision Round three and a further £80k in Round 4.
- We continue to deliver the Hinkley Point C Housing Programme, working with partners to drive forward 11 key areas of work. This programme is providing new bed space in the district and support to vulnerable customers affected by the change in the housing market because of the uplift of workforce at HPC. The service has submitted a request to EDF for a further wave of funding

(£390k) to continue many projects up to December 2023 and discussions continue by the council in relation to additional funding as significant housing demand pressure continues to create problems for the housing market.

## **Housing Property Team**

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

- Emergency and non-emergency responsive repairs are being undertaken.
- Emergency jobs are being delivered within our defined timescale (24 hours from logging).
- The backlog of non-emergency responsive repairs has now been eliminated, following the use of external contractors. MD Group are providing ongoing support to a small proportion of repairs where required to cover internal staff resource shortfalls.
- Undertaking void repairs to meet our Lettable Standard remains a challenge, although performance continues to improve in this area. Again, we are working with MD Group to support on undertaking some of our Major Voids (those with two or more key elements required).
- We are undertaking a recruitment process for a Maintenance Manager, following the previous postholder leaving SWT.
- 

### **Property Safety Compliance**

- All property safety compliance checks and works continue to be undertaken. These include 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.
- An accelerated programme, using further additional contractors, to undertake outstanding electrical inspections (EICR's) and associated remedial works continues.
- Weekly compliance and additional review meetings are being held to carefully monitor and manage all these safety critical areas.

## **Capital Programmes**

- Several capital work programmes are on-site, including kitchen and bathroom replacements and fire safety works (replacement fire doors and emergency lighting). Progress on these programmes is slower than desired however, and we are working with the relevant contractors to seek improvements on output.
- Procurement activities also continue, including review of required capital programme works needed to meet the Decent Homes Standard (DHS), as well as our Retrofit aspiration.
- A new Interim Capital Programme Manager has been recruited.

## **Asset Management**

- Post 'go-live' work on the Open Assets module of our Capita software system is now underway, following the Open Housing implementation.
- Programmes of Stock Condition Surveys continue to take place.
- Capital work future programme planning is being undertaken, including for both DHS requirements, and retrofit aspirations.

## **Housing and Communities Team**

### **Supported Housing (extra care and sheltered)**

- The officer team is now almost back to capacity, although there are the usual absences for summer leave, so a more normal service has returned to tenants.
- The team continue to complete; sign ups; enrol tenants with Deane Helpline; fit lifelines; annual reviews; aids and adaptations assessments; manage 'ending well' when a tenant dies.
- A temporary member of staff has started, for a 3-month period, to enable the team to catch up on the overdue annual reviews.

- The team are now completing the bi-monthly estates and block checks within their patches, following up with tenants, as needed.
- The team continue to work hard to promptly respond to general customer enquiries, reported via Firmstep.
- The DHL daily rota continues to be staffed Responding to Deane Helpline issues where the tenants have not responded to their usual monitoring call out.
- Some new furniture is being purchased for the meeting halls at Creedwell Orchard and Heathfield.
- Staff are facing some challenges when a tenant dies and there are no next of kin available to end the tenancy, and where tenant (with no next of kin) no longer has the capacity to live independently, and is moved into Nursing care, by Adult Social Care. The challenges are re: how the tenancy is ended, as this can happen in different ways, which can take a varied amount of time to complete.
- A successful skip day and community BBQ was held at Creedwell Orchard in partnership with local PCSO's, to enable people to get rid of unwanted belongings.
- We have supported some tenants living in upper floor flats to move to ground floor flats and bungalows, as their needs have changed, and they have no longer been able to manage the stairs safely, or easily exit if there was a fire emergency.
- We have been working with the RSI Team, to support Housing First clients to move into sheltered housing and co-working to ensure that this can be successful for these tenants. There have been some challenges regarding this, in terms of individuals not being able to access care in their homes, due to the lack of available carers.

## Lettings

- Satisfaction surveys are now being sent out via email. Uptake has not been high at this stage- The previously report IT issue has been resolved however uptake remains low so a hybrid approach is being adopted. Any feedback that can be used to improve services is being responded to. Current satisfaction is 80%.
- Since the last report in June a further 83 properties have been re-let.
- The average turnaround times were 49 days in June 40 days in July and 50 days in August.
- In that period there has been the implementation of the "Open Housing" software and significant annual leave within the lettings team in August.

## **Income Team**

- Following interviews, a new case manager has been recruited into the team. The appointed person will join the team early in October 2022 and brings a wealth of previous experience after having carried out a similar role with another local authority housing provider;
- The team's two debt and benefit advisors have been working alongside the Department for Work and Pensions and our local community employment hubs, as well as a range of other organisations to deliver a community event on the 14<sup>th</sup> September 2022 in Taunton. Support and advice will be available to those attending, including Citizen Advice, Christians Against Poverty, the DWP, Credit Union, SPARK, Navigate, Somerset Waste Mr Fixy and the Repair Café, Somerset Independence Plus, Libraries and the Centre for Sustainable Energy;
- Following a backlog of court hearings, Taunton County Court are getting back to normal in terms of the administration of court applications.
- The team have successfully implemented their new rent accounting modules within the Open Housing system with all officers receiving comprehensive training. The team are now looking into utilising automation software that encourages customers to get in touch. If successful, this will provide the team with more capacity to focus on the most complex rent recovery cases.

## **Tenancy/Estates & ASB**

- After a period of stability within the team we now hold a vacancy for a tenancy/estate Case Manager. One of our temporary case managers has moved out of the area. We are now waiting for authorisation to recruit to this position as soon as possible as the team continue to be very busy.
- The Skip day events are now coming to an end; these events have continued to be very popular and have been well utilised by our tenants. This year, we did experience ongoing problems with the skip provider, and we will be looking to avoid these issues in future or seeking an alternative skip provider.
- The team are now getting familiar with Open Housing, and this appears to be going well. As we move away from tenants' enquiries going into Firmstep and utilising Open Housing; we are noticing that the triaging of these enquiries needs to improve, we will be working with our customer champions to get this right.
- The ASB team have had a busy Summer with ASB; with several cases now moving to legal action or due to enter court stage imminently.
- We have recently received good news from our specialists' contractor dealing with the severe infestation of bed bugs to two neighbouring properties. Terminix have confirmed that one property is now officially bed bug free; the sniffer dog has now thoroughly checked the property; after three months of extensive treatments. We will shortly be having the property thoroughly cleaned before the tenants moves back in. Next week we hope to have similar feedback from the adjoining property. Once work is completed, we have a six

month guarantee but we are hopeful that the bed bugs have been finally eradicated.

### **Housing Performance Team Housing Performance Team (Shari Hallett)**

- We continue to support the work of the Tenants Strategic Group and Tenants' Action Group. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2022 we held our second joint tenant meeting with Homes in Sedgemoor, specifically to engage tenants on LGR. As a result of these meetings a set of Frequently Asked Questions has been produced for tenants in SWT and HiS. This is now live on our website and will be published in the next newsletter. The date of the next meeting has been provisionally set as 24<sup>th</sup> November 2022.
- The damp and mould group for tenants continues to meet and has agreed a set of actions including several new webpages which are being worked on and will be live shortly.
- A new Low Carbon Working group for tenants has their first meeting in July and had meetings in August and September.
- The tenants' autumn newsletter is being produced ready to land on doorsteps in October.
- We are collectively working with Homes in Sedgemoor on local government reorganisation workstreams.
- The policy review work with the HQN (Housing Quality Network) continues and TSG members will receive revised policy documents.
- Our headline Tenant Satisfaction Survey results (completed in May 2022) have been received and were reported at the last meeting in this report. This month we are bringing a more detailed report.
- Open Housing the new housing management software went live 27<sup>th</sup> July 2022. We are now finalising the tenant portal which we hope to be live in October. The portal will give tenants direct access to rent balances, tenancy and personal details, repair history, view communication, view housing officers. It will also give links to make payments and raise repairs and other communications.
- We have published our assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code (which was reported to the July meeting) on our website.

#### **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

Name of Contact Officers: Shari Hallett

Telephone number: 07557 003944

Email address: s.hallett@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk