

Full Council Meeting – 5 October 2021

Report of Councillor Fran Smith – Housing

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 also being submitted to Natural England for consideration and support.
- The directorate has been invited to present at three national and regional events in September and November. The two specifications which SWT has developed 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 MHCLG and Homes England subsidies.
- The service is leading the thinking of the Council's HRA low carbon retrofit strategy. This work is gaining momentum and over the next 18 months a financial and delivery plan will emerge.
- The Single Homeless and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Strategy and delivery plan will be presented to full Council in October for consideration.
- Challenges relating to phosphate mitigation means the west of the district is set to benefit proportionately more from the new supply of new affordable homes.
- The Housing Enabling team are also preparing the district for the impact of First Homes.

Housing Property Team

Responsive Repairs and Void Repairs

- Emergency responsive repairs continue to be delivered within our defined timescale (24 hours from logging).
- Non-emergency responsive repairs are also being undertaken, but there remains a backlog following Covid restrictions. Whilst this is reducing, we

continue to face difficulty in recruitment of skilled trades staff to resolve this. We are continuing to use an external contractor (MD Group) to assist in dealing with this backlog and we are ensuring that we are keeping tenants informed.

- Void repair work to meet our Lettable Standard continues, but again difficulty in recruitment of skilled trades staff is putting pressure on this area of activity.

Property Safety Compliance

- All property safety compliance checks and works continue to be undertaken, with most areas maintaining 100% compliance.
- We are accelerating our electrical inspection programme following a procurement exercise to appoint an additional three contractors. We are also working to undertake further updated asbestos management surveys.

Capital Programmes

- Capital Work programmes currently on-site include heating improvements, external doors, fascias and soffits, windows, insulation, and emergency lighting.
- Further programmes including kitchen and bathroom replacements, replacement fire doors, and roofing are due to be mobilised shortly.
- 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

- Our accelerated programme of Stock Condition Surveys and Energy Assessments to improve data in these areas continues to be undertaken.
- The Open Assets module of our Capita software system has gone live and we are now in the process of developing a suite of bespoke reports, as well as planning for implementation of additional modules within the system.

Housing and Communities Team

Housing Options

- Housing Options are moving to a more efficient way for customers to get advice and assistance with their housing problems, promoting self-service with an improved website and the ability for Customers to make applications for assistance online and upload documents whilst retaining our telephone and face-to-face services for those who are particularly vulnerable and who, even with assistance are unable to access online provision.
- This service will mean Customers will get more timely and focused advice from the right person and improved access to the service to those who have

other responsibilities during working hours. This approach is being trialled with Partner agencies in October and will hopefully be launched alongside the new website and wider promotion of our service in November.

Rough Sleeper Provision

- The Rough Sleeper team have received very positive feedback from the visit by the MHCLG in July. The Government advisors were impressed with how the team is working with those who remain rough sleeping and with the proactive engagement with former rough sleepers who are now in accommodation. Rough sleeping numbers have reduced radically since the beginning of Covid and continue to fall. The latest rough sleeper count found 5 people sleeping out.

Homefinder

- On 2nd August the four districts of Somerset launched the new Homefinder website. This offers a newly configured application form and a fresh, updated website that is informative and easy to navigate, as well as including new functions such as property alerts.
- As expected, there were a few blips transferring to the new system, but we are happy to report that these have been smoothed out and the transfer went extremely well. As the team get used to the new system, applications are taking slightly longer to process and with this in mind, we have taken on an additional temporary member of staff to help process the new work as well as address the backlog that the team is still working through.
- The Homefinder policy is due for its annual review in October, but we are not expecting any significant changes.

Somerset Independence Plus (SIP)

- SIP received the letter of award of £100,000 on 16th August 2021 from the South West Energy Hub for our bid for Capacity Building Funds. The fund will be used to employ two Project Officers who will work in the energy retrofit sector alongside social housing providers and agencies working with the owner occupied and private landlords to train small and medium enterprises to 'PAS 2035:2019' and develop the supply chain. The Project Officers will also assist with deployment of the SW Energy Hub contractors as part of LADS2 and search/develop future funding opportunities and monitor delivery. The project will be over a twelve-month period.
- SIP is developing a Home Maintenance service. The purpose will be to provide advice and guidance to owner occupiers looking to undertake minor repairs to their home such as new locks on doors, gutter clearance, small plumbing jobs etc. They will be signposted to Small and Medium Enterprises in the local area and SIP will provide small grants and loans to help assist with the costs. SIP will not be looking to provide vehicles and staff to carry out the work as from previous schemes, there needs to be a local identity with local contractors to increase take up.

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 since our last report, due to the impact of Covid related remote working.
- Some plumbing updates have taken place across the whole site.

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.

Lettings

- Home Moves Plus (HMP) work is having a positive impact on our tenants and we have received feedback recently from satisfied tenants.
- The Locata software is now up and running, meaning adverts 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 turn-around.

Income

- Tenant arrears at the end of August 2021 were £537k 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'. A proposal to help the team mitigate the challenges presented by the Open Housing project has been submitted for management consideration.

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 serious 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.
- Submitted 2020-21 Housemark data and continue to submit Pulse data.
- Setting up of a “Damp & Mould” working group with engaged tenants.