

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Tenants' Strategic Group – 25th July 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

HRA New Homes, Housing Strategy and Housing Enabling

- North Taunton Woolaway Project (NTWP) Phase A is progressing with the first couple of completions due in Summer followed by small numbers of units later in the year. Equans/Engie continue to work well on site. Phase B is now vacant, and progress is being made steadily on phase Ci although mutual terms are not currently agreed on one private landlord property. Due to inflation and the challenges facing developers the Council is market testing phases B and Ci and will lead the demolition of these phases. Phase E has

received planning permission approved and the specification is going out to tender.

- The 54 home zero-carbon development at Seaward Way, Minehead, commenced in January. The zero-carbon exemplar scheme which has been featured as a case study in the Good Homes Alliance good practice guide will be complete by October 2024.
- The service has six planning applications for the zero-carbon affordable housing awaiting presentation to planning committee. We believe the service has an appropriate phosphate mitigation strategy and the applications will be heard at the August committee. The service hope to create excess phosphate credits as the housing service has three different approaches to mitigate against phosphate. The approaches could support circa 1000 new social and private homes which are currently unable to receive planning permission.
- The service is progressing at pace a low carbon retrofit strategy and delivery plan. A new tenants retrofit group will meet from July to consider and influence the strategy and delivery plan. The strategy will be considered by the Council in December 2022. SWT has been awarded SHDF (Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund) Wave 1 funding to support a low carbon retrofit of council homes. The three pillars of the emerging strategy are engaging and supporting our customers, fabric first and then, over time, replacing fossil fuels with renewable heat and power provided via onsite, communal, or grid-based systems. The relationship between fuel poverty and low carbon retrofit will be explicitly considered within the strategy.
- 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.
- 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.
- The Housing Enabling team are preparing the district for the impact of First Homes which is a government initiative to increase low-cost home ownership.
- 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 ERDF for a further wave of funding (£390k) to continue many projects up to December 2023.

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

- Following go-live of the Open Assets module of our Capita software system, post go-live work is now underway, although some of this is dependent upon the Open Housing implementation to go-live. This has unfortunately been further delayed.
- Accelerated programmes of Stock Condition Surveys and Energy Assessments continue to take place.
- Capital work programme planning (for both the 2022/23 financial year and forward plans) is being undertaken, including for both DHS and Retrofit.

Housing and Communities Team

Supported Housing (extra care and sheltered)

Unfortunately, the service has continued to be run with a much-reduced staff capacity, due to extended staff sickness and absence. Some staff are also returning to work on significantly reduced hours. The staff who are in work are working extremely hard to covering work within their patch and across other colleague's patches too. The Manager is hoping to recruit a temporary member of staff, to enable the team to 'catch up,' with the annual reviews.

The team has continued to;

- Sign-up new tenants and support tenants and their families (where there has been a death) through the 'leaving well' process;
- Keeping the DHL (Deane Helpline) daily rota covered and responded to;
- Install Pipelines, for new tenants and arrange replacements, for existing tenants;
- Responding to the enquiries coming through Firmstep;
- Completing estates checks, where possible;
- Dealing with lower level ASB;

- Referring tenants to specialist support when needed;
- Complete aids and adaptations assessments and order to support tenant's independence within their home;
- Present cases for direct match, for tenants no longer able to manage a home with stairs, as part of the PEEP evacuation work being undertaken in partnership with the Compliance Team, including re-housing within extra care schemes for tenants with a current/future care need;
- Attend initial Open Housing training;
- Arrange for clearance of properties, following a death and where there is no NoK, including issuing required legal notices;
- Working with Solicitors on a possible eviction and ensuring alternate services are involved to step in and provide a suitable accommodation offer;
- Supporting a Housing 1st tenant, being housed within a sheltered housing scheme;
- Responding to formal tenant complaints

Lettings

- Total new lets from 1st April 2022 to date is 54. Of which 27 were Minor Voids with an average Keys to completion 32 days. 27 Major voids had an average works duration of 56.4 days the combined average works duration 44.2
- Satisfaction surveys are now being sent out via email. Uptake has not been high at this stage- Although there had been an issue with the technology which has now been overcome.
- Open Housing Management System work continues. Lettings team have been both testing and training on the Open system.
- Lettable standard is now live on the SWT website. TAG is now working with Voids/lettings on the Voids Group. The group will view returned SWT properties as they are when returned to SWT at the commencement of the void period. The same property will then be revisited at the conclusion of the void period and signed off having been marked against the lettable standard by the Voids group.

Income Team:

- Recruitment to 2 full time vacant posts within the team is underway. Michaela Mullen is the team manager leading on this task;
- Increased focus is being given to training users on our new IT housing management system prior to its launch towards the end of July 2022. The system holds all our tenant rent account details and is run by the officers who manage tenant rent accounts.
- Officers within the team are having a lot more in-depth contact and conversations with tenants about paying their rent, especially where there is financial hardship. The team are working hard to maintain and sustain tenancies, rather than terminate them and eviction is used as a last resort.

Tenancy/Estates & ASB

- The teams are continuing to remain stable and settled.
- Skip days are now ongoing and although we experienced initial problems with the skip provider which have now been resolved. Our communities are utilising and making good use of the skips.
- Complaints and general enquiries (Firmstep) are being managed well. We are noticing that the number of low-level neighbour nuisance is on the rise. This is both time consuming and complex as the team are dealing with allegations and counter allegations; and work to ensure that the tenants' expectations in what we can do are managed correctly.
- Youth gang culture is still ongoing and having an impact on our estates. We continue to work with partners to try to tackle these issues. We will also ensure that all families involved where they are tenants have been visited and that words of advice/warnings are given; where necessary Acceptable Behaviour Contracts are agreed and signed by both parents and youths where needed.

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 23rd August 2022 we are also planning to hold our second joint tenant meeting with Homes in Sedgemoor, specifically to engage tenants on LGR.
- The damp and mould group for tenants continues to meet and has agreed a set of actions.
- A new Low Carbon Working group for tenants has their first meeting in July.
- The tenants' summer newsletter has been posted to Tenants.
- 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. Unfortunately, we have seen a downward trend which is consistent with the current trend for the social housing sector. Some results mirror our lessons learnt from complaints analysis. A full report will follow in September's meeting.
 - Overall satisfaction 76%
 - Satisfaction of being treated fairly and with respect 82%
 - Satisfaction with the neighbourhood as a place to live 80%
 - Satisfaction that the home is well maintained and safe 79%
 - Satisfaction with knowing how to complain 79%
 - Satisfaction with being kept Informed 78%
 - Satisfaction that landlord listens and acts 62%
 - Satisfaction with complaint handling 61%
 - Satisfaction with grounds maintenance 57%
 - satisfaction with communal areas 55%

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