

Council – 6th September 2022

This report is the responsibility of Executive Portfolio Holder for Housing – Cllr Francesca Smith.

1. Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

The report is to update Members on work being undertaken and progress made by the Housing Directorate since the last Full Council meeting.

2. Recommendations

Full Council 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 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 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 procurement of a contractor to deliver refurbishment to 27 Council woolaway homes at NTWP [phase E will conclude shortly.
- The 54 home zero-carbon development at Seaward Way, Minehead, commenced in January. The zero-carbon exemplar scheme will shortly commence pilling 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 agreed phosphate mitigation approaches are confirmed.
- 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.
- 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 homefinder.
- 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

- The team have successfully launched their new lettings module within the Open Housing system;
- Work is ongoing to support some existing council tenants to permanently decant from their homes at Wordsworth Drive and within the North Taunton Regeneration Project area;
- The team's Home Moves Plus project officer's latest report shows:
- To date 51 households have successfully downsized to properties more suitable for their needs. This has resulted in 1 x 5 bed house, 4 x 4 bed houses, 26 x 3 bed properties and 20 x 2 bed properties becoming available for letting to applicants who are registered with the Council's Homefinder Somerset Scheme;
- The team records tenant satisfaction on a monthly basis. For the month of July tenant satisfaction for both the lettings process (100%) and the standard of property (80%) continues to be high.

Income

- 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 following. 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 effective 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 Options

- The Housing Options service continues to be busy with an average of 120 approaches from customers who need housing advice or at risk of losing their accommodation each month. The main cause of homelessness in the district remains family evictions.
- The team's renewed focus on early intervention and prevention continues. In Q1 of 2022-23 an average of 65% of all prevention cases were closed with a positive outcome
- There is increasing pressure on the service as a result of Homes for Ukraine scheme placements breaking down. On average, the team are dealing with one enquiry a day from Ukrainian households or their sponsors who wish to end the sponsored placement. The impact of the scheme is a risk for the Council in respect of capacity to respond and the likely costs that will be incurred when emergency accommodation needs to be provided
- All vacant posts in the Housing Options team are currently being advertised in efforts to shore up the team structure going into LGR next year

Temporary accommodation

- The recent focus on improving pathways into and out of temporary accommodation continues. This has included the implementation of a fortnightly task and targeting meeting across relevant teams to ensure that there are actions in place to facilitate timely move on.
- New procedures are currently being embedded within the team with a clear focus on reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation

however it is recognised that it will take some time before the impact of these changes can be evidenced.

- The impact of Homes for Ukraine scheme placements breaking down is being closely monitored in relation to temporary accommodation with average costs for a family placement averaging £1000 a week at present; these costs are heavily influenced by a lack of affordable accommodation due to the current holiday season and the ongoing impact of Hinckley
- A business case has been submitted to repurpose a vacant position within the structure to add much needed resource to the temporary accommodation team.

Rough Sleeping Initiative

- At the end of Q1 2022 there were 37 customers engaged with the *Rough Sleeping Pathway*. Of these, 6 customers were in *Stage 1* (initial intervention and assessment), 21 customers are in *Stage 2* (intensive support) and 10 customers are in *Stage 3* (community-based living with floating support).
- Three customers with a history of entrenched rough sleeping and complex needs are now living in their *Housing First* homes. These are the first *Housing First* properties delivered by the Council as part of the Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme (RSAP) funding. Renovations on a further property has been started and this will be adapted to accommodate a customer with mobility needs
- All vacant posts in the RSI team are currently out to advert; recruitment for these posts was delayed as a result of late funding confirmation by DLUHC
- The Canonsgrove decant continues to progress well with 15 residents remaining. Move on plans for all remaining residents are currently being finalised.

Home Finder

- Work continues to enhance and streamline the processes in place for receiving and assessing Homefinder applications with a focus on ensuring that customers are aware of the supporting documentation required and can upload this directly to their application
- The impact of this work has been positive with 63 applications having been made live in July.
- In Q1 of 2022-23 just under 900 new applications were made to Homefinder Somerset in the Somerset West and Taunton district.
- The team continue to support customers to bid on appropriate properties, this work continues to provide positive outcomes and is closely linked to ensuring that customers move on efficiently from temporary accommodation.

Somerset Independence Plus (SIP)

- Since the 1st April 2022, the Adaptations element of the service has received 249 requests for service, mainly Disabled Facilities Grants, preliminary Means Tests, and requests for feasibilities. There are 124 cases waiting on the waiting list for a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), down 25 since the 19th July 2022 because of cases being allocated to Officers. Of the 124, 41 are in the Somerset West and Taunton area. In terms of tenure;
 - 18 are tenants in the Council's own stock
 - 7 owner occupier and privately renting with
 - 16 tenants who are Registered Providers
- The backlog was because of the addition of South Somerset District Council purchasing the services of Somerset Independence Plus (SIP) in April of this year. All clients on the waiting list have been sent a letter informing them that we have received the referrals from their Occupational Therapist and an approximate date when they will receive a call from the Technical Team to visit them and begin the application process. It is estimated that the waiting list will below 70 by the end of October given current staff resources. The oldest case for the Council currently waiting dates to May 2022.
- Other highlights for the adaptations service;
 - The team have approved 40 DFG's since the 1st April 2022
 - Completed 40 DFG's since the 1st April 2022
 - Closed 105 enquiries 42 of which are in the Somerset West and Taunton area
- The Independent Living Team have completed 750 home safety checks in response to requests from Public Health for the Ukrainian Resettlement programme. SIP recently received £100,000 from Public Health to employ two additional Independent Living Officers to manage home safety checks for the future Afghan and Syrian resettlement programme as well as to maintain the current demand from the Ukrainian crises and to enable the service to manage its core work i.e., hoarding, home maintenance and Trusted Assessor. The team have begun threading hoarding clients into the workstream now that they are on top of the home safety inspections. They have a backlog of 35 clients waiting for initial contact, down from 50 a month ago.
- The business plan for the energy arm of the SIP business is being finalised. The service will provide a complete retrofitting service for clients who are both vulnerable and able to pay. Funding will be utilised from the Warm Homes Fund, LADS 1B and the Sustainable Warmth which amounts to circa £6.7 million for the insulation and heating measures. A key foundation of the business plan is to reintroduce area renewal, an approach will see blocks of terraces and an area identified through various datasets as key areas of deprivation and property type. A whole house approach will be taken to retrofit with a successful tendered contractor undertaking the work. This way of working reduces material and labour costs verses pepper potting i.e., individuals applying anywhere in the Council area. Frome has been identified as the initial pilot. LADS 2 delivered by e-on has seen 92 households in Somerset West and Taunton benefit from insulation and solar PV.

- 27th September sees the launch of the new Independent Living Centre in Mendip. Designed on the principles of the pioneering model in Wellington. The centre will formally be opened by Cllr Bill Revans. There will also be a TEC / Sensory lounge within the building allowing practitioners and the public the opportunity to try technology that can help people make daily living easier. There will also be a soft relaunch of the Wellington site later in the year following a refresh of the facilities to include new thinking.
- SIP is working with Public Health, the Centre for Sustainable Energy, and the Village Agents to put in place our Winter Plan. The aim of the plan is to assist the vulnerable, elderly and fuel poor households to cope with soaring fuel bills as a result of the war in Ukraine and the price cap, plus the impending cold weather. The Winter Plan will be in place from the 1st September. The plan will include distribution of the Household Support Fund, case worker support from SIP to assist with income maximisation and how to use heating controls, training with agencies in the field and promotion of the CSE energy advice line and expansion of the staff numbers in the CSE to cope with the increased calls. This is in addition to the ongoing retrofit activity by SIP and the roll out across Somerset of ECOFLEX 4 by our Retrofit Project Officer.

Housing Performance Team

- We continue to support the work of the Tenants' Strategic Group and Tenants' Action Group. On the 23rd August 2022 we will 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 including changes to our website information.
- A new Low Carbon Working group for tenants has their first meeting in July and a further meeting in August.
- 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 for comment.
- We have completed the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Code self-assessment and reported those results to Tenants' Strategic Group in the July meeting. A copy of the self-assessment will also be available on the website shortly.
- Our headline Tenant Satisfaction Survey results (completed in May 2022) have been received. Consistent with the current trend in the social housing sector we have seen a downward trend in overall satisfaction. A full report will be presented to Tenants' Strategic Group in the 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%

Councillor Fran Smith

Email address: cllr.f.smith@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk