

Council Meeting – 30 July 2019

Report of Councillor Francesca Smith – Housing

Section 1 – Introduction

- 1.1** Since taking the post of Portfolio holder I have met with officers for Briefings and would like to thank them for their time in explaining the various roles and responsibilities. Some changes are already being made to enable the area to function more effectively and staff are settling into their roles. There are a lot of potential development sites throughout the council area and I am pleased that the first social rented houses have already been agreed to be built, since taking responsibility for housing and thank you for the cross party support. I will be visiting sites in the West Somerset area with officers to get an idea of where we can next enable more affordable/social housing and will update councillors when we can progress.
- 1.2** Work is currently being undertaken with Housing Tenant Engagement. The previous Tenant Services Management Boards and Tenants Forum are disbanded after the end of TDBC and new Forums and timetables are being worked on by officers in consultation with some Tenants. Regular Meetings in the future have been arranged between Officers and the Planning Portfolio holder Mike Rigby and Economic Development Portfolio holder Marcus Kravis and myself for Housing to ensure we have a full understanding and make decisions where our Portfolios cross each other.
- 1.3** I have asked for information regarding Modern Methods of Construction (Modular, Passiv) and look at whether certain sites would be suitable for this type of construction especially in regard of cost and speed of construction.
- 1.4** We will be working with a company called Leanpartners which will be looking at our processes and how we can become Leaner using Business Improvement Techniques.
- 1.5** In regard to the update about Grenfell, I have also requested officers circulate some more information to Tenants reminding them to keep community areas such as hallways and stairwells clear as it is a fire risk.
- 1.6** I have requested feedback from Tenants where the council have installed Solar Panels and AirSource Heat pumps in previous years to find out how beneficial they have been.
- 1.7** The Housing Business Plan is due to be reviewed now as it was last reviewed in 2016.

Section 2 – Housing Capital Programme

- 2.1 The key principles in drawing up the proposed 2019/20 Capital Programme were as follows:
- Completion of current programmes to replace kitchens and bathrooms, heating and hot water systems,
 - Focus on energy efficiency
 - Focus on removal of asbestos
 - Focus on fire safety
 - Completion of existing 5 year programme of planned maintenance work
- 2.2 The HRA Capital Programme budget 2019/20 is proposed as £7.43m, of which £4,107,000 expenditure is committed to ongoing programme. All programmes, with the exception of the Insulation programme, are across the councils housing stock.
- 2.3 The Insulation Programme is a pilot programme to increase energy efficiency and reduce instances of damp and mould in council housing stock. Due to the recent increase in damp and mould Housing Disrepair Claims within the Halcon Ward, we have selected the 504 properties in the Halcon Ward as the pilot area for the programme. ** Environmental improvements include schemes such as parking improvements, bin stores, scooter stores and charging points and communal outdoor space improvements.
- 2.4 I would welcome suggestions from Councillors on schemes for 2019/20.

Section 3 – Housing Repairs

Recruitment

- 3.1 Recruitment for new Locality Champions was completed in June. All offers have been made and the majority of the new staff have officially started working for SWT on the 1st July. Around a quarter of the housing repair staff decided to take voluntary redundancy, but sensible use of agency staff has allowed us to maintain steady staff numbers in most areas and performance has actually improved on last year.
- 3.2 We are currently carrying the following vacancies within a workforce structure of 64 voids and response repairs staff.

Electrician	Agency cover in place.
Gas Engineer	Agency cover in place.
Gas Engineer	Agency cover in place.
Plasterer	Agency cover in place.
Groundworker	Holding vacant.
Asbestos Labourer	Agency cover in place.
Asbestos Labourer	Agency cover in place.
Asbestos Labourer	Agency cover in place.

Asbestos Labourer	Agency cover in place.
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3.3 We have struggled to recruit gas engineers, but a market factor is being worked on to ensure any vacant roles are filled before winter. The asbestos labouring team didn't form part of the last round of recruitment, but roles will be advertised during July. The Repairs Case Management Lead role is also vacant currently, but this has been to advert and interviews scheduled for week beginning July 22nd.

Performance

3.4 Below is a list of the KPIs we report on quarterly to Council, and the Q4 18/19 and Q1 19/20 figures.

Emergency Response Repairs Completed within 24 hours: (Target: 99%)

Q4 18/19

LATEST PRIORITY	JOB NO	On Time		Av Days to Complete
P1	370	392	78.92%	N/A

Note: In reality % of completed jobs is thought to be much higher, but systems problems made it difficult to report accurately. These have now been fixed.

Q1 19/20

LATEST PRIORITY	JOB NO	On Time		Av Days to Complete
P1	383	379	98.96%	N/A

Non-Emergency Response Repairs Completed in time: (Target: 85%)

Q4 18/19

LATEST PRIORITY	JOB NO	On Time		Av Days to Complete
P2 (3 days)	261	195	74.71%	6
P3 (7 days)	367	304	82.83%	8
P4 (28 days)	1247	1215	97.43%	18
P5 (96 days)	7	7	100.00%	27
Total	1882	1721	91.45%	14

Q1 19/20

LATEST PRIORITY	JOB NO	On Time		Av Days to Complete
P2 (3 days)	294	252	85.71%	2
P3 (7 days)	333	311	93.39%	6
P4 (28 days)	1241	1186	95.57%	14
P5 (96 days)	3	3	100.00%	40
Total	1871	1752	93.64%	11

Percentage of Properties with Current Gas CP12: 100%

A CP12 is a landlord's gas safety certificate, which must be refreshed annually by law, and must not go out of date.
(Target 100%)

Q4 18/19: 100%

Q1 19/20: 100%

Void Properties Returned to the Council's Lettable Standard:

(Target: 100%)

Q4 18/19: 100%

Q1 19/20: 100%

Voids

Housing Repairs monitor the turnaround on void properties for 'DLO' repair times only. This does not include the time taken either side to let, and is not monitored corporately, but does form an important part of the corporate 'key in, key out' lettings KPI figure.

Q4 18/19**Major Voids (Target 35 days)**

Voids with 2 capital elements in the refurb, e.g. heating, kitchen, bathroom upgrade, full decoration throughout.

No of Voids	Average Turnaround
34	45.2

Minor Voids (Target 20 days)

No of Voids	Average Turnaround
26	22.9

Q1 19/20 (Provisional)

Major Voids

No of Voids	Average Turnaround
32	35.2

Minor Voids (Target 20 days)

No of Voids	Average Turnaround
51	22.5

Turnaround times are up on previous quarters due largely to the unusually high amount of major voids. This is normally around 75:25 major/minor, but was 50:50 during Q4 18/19. This quarter also coincided with a high number of workforce staff taking redundancy, so the reduced number of staff available also had an impact on turnaround times. Provisional figures for Q1 19/20 show things moving back towards what we would expect to see.

Section 4 – HRA Portfolio Compliance

4.1 Background

4.2 Statutory property compliance is founded on a complex set of regulations, covering some sixty-plus aspects of testing, assessment and inspection, and which the council must undertake to comply with current government legislation. However, for the purposes of this report on Somerset West and Taunton Council's HRA domestic portfolio, we focus on the six key areas of Property Compliance which are particularly pertinent to this premises archetype, namely;

- Asbestos
- Electrical
- Fire Safety
- Gas
- Lifts
- Water Hygiene

4.3 The report sets out our current status across the portfolio, what we are doing to mitigate where there are gaps, and what we are doing to work towards full compliance.

Summary Updates of Compliance Testing Regimes

4.4 Asbestos

4.5 The council made great progress with regard to managing asbestos throughout its HRA Domestic Portfolio, and by March 2018, had carried out the following surveys:

- All HRA Domestic Communal Areas
- 20% of HRA Domestic Premises
- All Garage Blocks

4.6 This survey programme's stated aim was to continue surveying 20% of the HRA Domestic Premises per annum, arriving at 100% of premises surveyed by 2022. Initially an asset management led programme, for 2018/9 the survey programme moved across to the asbestos team based within Deane Depot, where good progress continues to be made, with the survey regime being carried out in conjunction with capital works programmes.

4.7 Frequency of re-inspections are set out in management surveys, however as a general guide, domestic premises (individual flats and houses), should be re-inspected on a five-yearly cycle, and it was envisaged that the programme of domestic re-inspections would be carried out by a P402 / P405 qualified asset surveyor, and in conjunction with the stock condition survey programme which operates on a similar cycle. These will commence in 2020/21.

4.8 Flat block communal areas require an annual re-inspection and these will be undertaken by asset surveyors and aligned to the Fire Risk Assessment programme, which has a similar frequency target

Electrical

4.9 Progress is being made on the 5-yearly cyclical programme of fixed-wire inspections. Through transformation the programme fell behind somewhat, but processes now in place to bring this to conclusion within the next 24-months, and in line with stated target date.

4.10 The checks will also include communal areas, which have never previously been considered, together with the installation of emergency lighting as and where required.

4.11 Monitoring and programming will be greatly aided with the implementation of Open Assets, which will allow more detailed and accurate reporting, as well as depository for all certification.

Fire Safety

4.12 The council's status with regard to Fire Safety in HRA domestic flat blocks is strong, having completed fire risk assessment on all premises last autumn as a follow-up to our post Grenfell tragedy response.

4.13 We are preparing the 2019/20 programme which will 'smooth' out the peaks and troughs of the past over a 12-month period. This programme will require the completion of new in-house survey forms, moving away from the tick-box format of the old reports to a new, and more descriptive format, allowing

colleagues and tenants to better understand what the risks are, and how to mitigate against them.

- 4.14** In light of the government's response to the Grenfell Enquiry, the council will need to do more to demonstrate that it is meeting its obligations, including creating or the designation of roles for an 'accountable person' and 'building safety manager'. We will need to further engage with tenants, and make them aware of their responsibilities under the new regulations.

Gas

- 4.15** With regard to HRA domestic portfolio, the council has a very strong and robust system of Gas Safety Checks utilising GasTag, which provides an up-to-date and accurate status report of compliance. Current levels of compliance are at 100%

Lifts

- 4.16** We have very few passenger lifts within our HRA portfolio, these principally being confined to extra and sheltered care premises, with a full service regime in place. There are a number of stair-lifts within domestic premises, and these are subject to annual checks. Where stair-lifts are used in communal areas of flat blocks, we will look to phase these out as soon as practicable. Gaps in testing are principally due to access issues.

Water Hygiene

- 4.17** The home is not viewed as a high-risk area with regards to water hygiene, given that there is a regular 'turn-over' of supply, with water not sitting within pipework for very long. Previously this has been managed through encouraging tenants to take ownership, the issuing communications in newsletters, advising how to negate risks, etc.

- 4.18** However, best practice indicates we should demonstrably be carrying out testing at a sample group of premises to ensure there are no underlying or inherent risks from Legionella, or any other waterborne bacteria. We will aim to do this in 2019/20, using Void premises for this purpose, sampling 10% of homes, so as to better understand any issues within housing stock.

Next Steps

- 4.19** In addition to the measures outlined above, and to which the council is already committed to, we will also look to develop strategies around Radon, Sewage Safety and Air Handling Systems, as well as ensure that new technologies, such as PV are included in any future regimes.
- 4.20** Key to managing property compliance, and developing our maintenance strategies, is the introduction of a smarter digital platform. The council is now committed to delivering this through the Open Assets Database, which will not only help mitigate against the risks, but also to visibly demonstrate compliance.

- 4.21 We will also introduce the SFG20 platform, providing a library of some 900 maintenance task schedules across all portfolios, and which will be used to benchmark our own Deane Depot staff, as well as contractors carrying out PPM and compliance works across our HRA domestic premises.

Conclusion

- 4.22 The council continues working towards best practice with regards to property compliance of our HRA properties. We are aware of our liabilities and understand the work and measures to be 100% compliant in all areas, but also that there is still much more to do. It is important that the council recognises this, and makes satisfactory financial provision, as well as making available the dedicated resources to meet legislative, statutory and regulatory obligations.

Section 5 – Building a Safer Future

Background

- 5.1 The Grenfell Tower fire was a tragedy and showed a need to make major changes and improvements to the building safety system. The Independent Review led by Dame Judith Hackitt, found that there are issues in the way some high-rise residential buildings are built, managed and looked after. Her review also found that sometimes residents are not confident that their buildings are safe and have been unable to get their concerns taken seriously.
- 5.2 To address these issues, the government have developed a set of policy proposals to improve the fire and structural safety of high-rise residential buildings. These proposals will include:
- clearer responsibilities for those building or managing these buildings;
 - a stronger voice in the system and better information for residents;
 - greater oversight by regulators; and
 - tougher enforcement when things go wrong.

What are the implications for Somerset West & Taunton Council?

- 5.3 Dame Judith Hackitt's Independent Review recommended applying new requirements for buildings over 10 storeys. However the government have looked again at the evidence and propose a wider scope because of the numbers of fires in these buildings and the risk to people's safety. They are now proposing that the new building safety regime will be for buildings that are:
- lived in by multiple households; and
 - 18 metres high (6 storeys) or more.
- 5.4 Home Office research also shows that fire incidents in supported/sheltered housing can be high, so they want to design a system to include buildings

where vulnerable people sleep, can be included. This is particularly relevant to SW&T with the Kilkenny Court and Lodge Close facilities.

- 5.5** Throughout the consultation document, there are continued references and indicators that this is just the first step, and that the scope will be adapted and expanded to cover more buildings over time.
- 5.6** For Somerset West and Taunton Council, the key implications will now centre on two key areas:
- The new dutyholder regime.
 - Putting residents at the heart of the new regulatory system

The new dutyholder regime

- 5.7** For the new building safety regime to work, the council will be required to clearly set out who is responsible for keeping the building safe, this will involve:
- Creating a new 'accountable person' role. This named person will be the dutyholder responsible for making sure that building fire and structural safety risks are reduced as much as reasonably practicable when people are living in the building.
 - Dutyholders will create a 'safety case' which contains all the important information about a building that shows how the dutyholders are managing any fire or structural risks on an ongoing basis.
 - The accountable person may also employ a 'Building Safety Manager' who has the right skills and expertise to look after the building(s). Their role would be to help the accountable person by doing the day-to-day work involved with keeping a building safe. e.g. the Building Safety Manager would be there to deal with any safety problems they find or are reported by residents in the block(s) they are responsible for.
- 5.8** The council will also be responsible for ensuring premises are safe throughout various stages of its life, through the creation of a Golden Thread of building information. This will be a key set of documents, held digitally on building information, and will include information on the structure of the building and any changes made to the building through refurbishment. It will also allow the dutyholder to demonstrate how they are managing risks at 'gateway points', including:
- Part A – duties when a building is being designed and built
Part B – duties when people are living in the building
Part C – duties that run throughout the building's life cycle
- 5.9** The new system will also make sure that all dutyholders employ people who are suitably qualified and competent, the consultation document classifies competence as an individual having the ability to apply the necessary skills, knowledge and behaviours to make informed decisions and carry out their job effectively.

Putting residents at the heart of a new regulatory system

5.10 The views and concerns of residents should never be ignored by those responsible for managing the safety of their buildings. The accountable person will have specific duties to residents, which will include:

- Providing residents with the information they need so that they understand the protections in place to keep their building safe from structural or fire issues.
- Setting out how we engage with residents and how residents can get involved, and benefit from participating in building safety.
- To ensure residents can raise safety concerns, the accountable person will need to have a clear process for how they will respond to residents' concerns.

5.11 These proposals will give residents a stronger voice too, allowing them to hold us responsible for the safety of their buildings, and to account. Residents will be empowered by having better access to information about their building and have more of a say over decisions made about the fire and structural safety of their building, such as:

- Requesting detailed information about their building and fire safety.
- The ability to raise concerns where individuals may be putting themselves and their neighbours at risk. There will be a clear obligation on residents to co-operate with the work of the accountable person to keep the building safe.
- Residents will be able to take urgent safety concerns to the new regulator if the accountable person fails to deal with them properly.

Enforcement, compliance and sanctions

5.12 Through strong oversight by the new regulator, those responsible for the safety of buildings must comply with their responsibilities and will be held to account if they do not. The Independent Review found that those responsible for the safety of buildings were not discouraged enough from failing to comply with their responsibilities as they are not often held to account by the current regulators.

The government will now take a tougher approach to those that do not comply with their responsibilities under the new regime, and are proposing to:

- Create new criminal offences to make sure that those responsible for the safety of residential buildings throughout their lifecycles, comply with their responsibilities;
- Give the new regulator the power to take quick and effective action, through monetary penalties such as fines, when the requirements of the new regime have not been met.

What we will do

- 5.13** Somerset West and Taunton Council are in the fortunate position that we have no buildings that fall into the high-rise and high-risk category, but we do have extra-care facilities, with a number of tenants requiring sheltered accommodation within our general needs portfolio, and of course, a significant number of flat blocks, lived in by multiple households.
- 5.14** The accountable person will be the Chief Executive, although they will delegate day-to-day responsibility to the Property Compliance and Health and Safety Specialists. We are proposing the creation of two additional case manager posts who will be designated Building Safety Managers to comply with these latest regulations.
- 5.15** We are already doing much in the way of communication through tenant board meetings, but we will do more to engage with our community, including publishing Fire Risk Assessments and other safety information on notice boards within flat blocks, setting up fire safety workshops for tenants and formalising channels of communications for tenants to raise concerns with us.

Section 6 – Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Update

- 6.1 Staff structure** – We currently have 2 x FTE ASB Case Managers in the new organisational structure. Richard Lynett is a temporary member of staff providing extra resource to the ASB service whilst we transition into the new model.
- 6.2 Officer patches** – Officers are aligned with One Team areas, disbanding the previous model of a centralised team to ensure local knowledge and readily available resource to the One Team partnership. When demand dictates, we can surge resources where required such as Organised Crime in Duke Street where multiple officer presence is required.
- 6.3 Performance** – Due to transformation and the departure of the ASB Manager performance in recent months has not been recorded. The ASB team will be focussing on this in the coming weeks, providing new satisfaction surveys with information to victims on available local support groups and information on how to apply for a Community Trigger as recommended in the Victim Commissioner Report published April 2019.

6.4 Casework

ASB cases recorded between 12/07/2018 to 12/07/2019 (12 months)

- 6.6** 67 new cases were opened during the period, 26.4% higher than the previous 12 months. Increase in noise, harassment and drug misuse complaints. Reports of physical violence and alcohol related incidents have slightly reduced.

Alcohol	4
Communal area	1
Drugs misuse/Dealing	10

Garden Nuisance	4
Harassment	16
Hate Crime	1
Noise	16
Other Crime	9
Physical violence	2
Pets	2
Vehicles	2
Total	67

6.7 Closed cases

61 cases were closed during the period, of which 49 were closed as a success at a rate of 73.3%. The remaining 12 cases were closed for the following reasons; 4 x no action required; 3 x duplicate cases; 1 x termination of tenancy; 1 x deceased; 3 x no contact.

Section 7 – Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

- 7.1** There has been a slight decrease in the number of approaches since April against the last year's approaches. Apart from that there is no unusual trends in approaches.
- 7.2** Staffing levels in the team are now full for case managers dealing with homelessness approaches. We still need to employ a private sector officer to increase the number of properties available for those approaching for assistance under prevention or relief.
- 7.3** Have increased the No First Night Out houses to 3 private rented properties equating to 13 additional bed spaces. No first night out is to prevent new people to the street from the same pathway as entrenched rough sleepers who make this way of life look glamorous.
- 7.4** We have bid and been successful in funding for two tenancy support officers in the rough sleeper team to work with those clients who have gone into the 'no first night out' houses.

7.5 Current Figures

Homelessness:

Approaches (Apr – June): 178
Cases closed (Apr – June): 258

Current Open Caseload: 221 open cases

B&B and TA:

B&B Breakdown:

Families: 2 – both one parent and one child
Couples: 1 – pregnant couple
Singles: 5

Total – 9 adults and 2 children

Temporary Accommodation:

- 25 units are occupied with 5 empty properties going through void process – total 30 units.
- All accommodation is self-contained and is either our own stock or private leased flats from Magna Housing.

Current TA make up:

- 10 families with 1 child
- 1 family with 2 children
- 1 family with 4 children
- 1 family with 5 children
- 3 couples who are pregnant
- 9 single applicants

B&B Spend:

April to June - £27,029.99

Rough Sleepers:

Street Homeless Figures:

- Taunton – 12 which is an increase of 4 from the street count actual figures last month
- W Som - 4

Prolific Beggars (Taunton only): 2 beggars – the team are currently collating information to take enforcement action against them.

Councillor Fran Smith