

Annual Report 2019/20

Report of Councillor Fran Smith – Housing

In light of the current events with the Corona virus I would like to thank all the officers who have been working on our contingency plans, for their commitment to providing a service for our tenants and the wider community, and also to our staff who are implementing the plans in these very difficult and unprecedented times.

Housing Landlord

The following is a summary of the key activities within the housing landlord service over the past 12 months:

- We are largely on course in achieving our targets of investing £7m on our capital programme covering improvements to kitchens, bathrooms, heating systems, roofing, windows, fire safety, door entry systems etc;
- The removal of the debt cap for the Housing Revenue Account in 2019 resulted in us undertaking a fundamental review of our HRA Business Plan to set our finances and objectives for the future. We have established three new objectives for the service:-
 - Delivering more new homes.
 - Providing great customer service
 - Improving our existing homes and neighbourhoods
- We have also been able to plan to undertake significantly increased investment in new homes and will commit to deliver 1000 new Council homes over the life of the plan.
- We are now starting to see real improvements in the level of delivery against our Grounds Maintenance specification on our housing estates. We are working closely with the Tenants Action Group to oversee progress on this.
- We are currently on site building new homes at Laxton Road and phase A of our substantial regeneration of our stock, in North Taunton is now on site.
- Our investments in reviewing our processes on rent collection and responsive repairs have delivered results, with arrears falling by £160,000 and with nearly 300 household's no longer in debt. We are now offering repairs appointments at first point of contact and offering some non-urgent appointments same day.

Homelessness and Rough Sleepers

- We have been successful in working with partners to provide night shelters for rough sleepers and in securing £290,000 for the continuation of the Rough Sleepers Initiative in 2020/21. The number of rough sleepers in the area has fallen considerably following this work.

Housing Enabling and Development

- SWT Affordable Housing Delivery Partnership has been reinvigorated to increase affordable housing delivery across the Council area. The Enabling Team are involved with over 60 active sites to secure delivery of affordable homes, including schemes in our rural communities
- The Enabling Team are working on a specialist housing project to increase provision of high quality wheelchair adapted affordable homes.

Housing Strategy

- We have adopted the countywide Somerset Housing Strategy and are working with Homeless Managers to deliver on the adopted Homelessness Strategy
- We have been successful in a bid for LGA funding to improve links with Health, Care and Housing for vulnerable people

Somerset Independence Plan (SIP)

SIP has had a hugely successful year. A summary of the service outturn for 2019/20 is shared below:

- 55 Disabled Facilities Grant's will be completed in non-council houses and 29 in the council stock;
- 25 loan referrals to Wessex Resolutions exceeding our target of 18 for this year;
- Undertaken 300 minor works requests and installed over 50 modular ramps in SW&T. Our Independent Living Officers have visited over 350 properties in the SW&T area to provide home safety checks, and other forms of advice to keep people safe in their homes.

The year ahead:

- Investing in the safety of our homes will continue to be a big focus in 2020/21, we will be undertaking an additional £2M on safety related improvements during the year.
- The service continues its work to upgrade several of its key IT systems, for example: Housing Assets, Housing Contractor and Housing Landlord; our programme of ICT replacements will be a substantial project for us during the year.
- The Council has declared a climate emergency. We know that some tenants struggle to afford to heat their homes. We will work hard to develop a programme of investment to improve thermal efficiency of our properties. via heating replacement, window replacements and improvements to insulation. We will also explore how we can support our residents with signposting and advice on matters such as energy saving and energy switching;
- Adoption of the Hinkley Housing Fund Strategy and Action Plan (Phase 3);
- We will roll out a plan to overhaul how we provide homelessness support to customers locally, with a significant focus and investment in prevention.