

Full Council Meeting – 5 July 2022

Report of Councillor Fran Smith - Housing

Housing Development and Regeneration Team Housing Development and Regeneration Team

HRA New Homes

- The first 47 homes at North Taunton Woolaway Project (NTWP) Phase A are progressing with the first homes to be complete in the Summer 2022 and then more completions up to July 2023. These properties will be 2050 zero carbon ready with high levels of insulation, heat pumps, mechanical ventilation, photovoltaic panels, and battery storage. Several electric vehicle charging points will be installed.
- Discussions are ongoing with the Priorswood Community on the opportunity for community building to be managed and leased by the community.
- The purchase of owner occupier and private landlord properties continue to progress with two of the six remaining private dwellings progressing to purchase. Full Council approved the use of Compulsory Purchase Powers (CPO) earlier in the year and the CPO approach is being twin tracked alongside purchase through mutual agreement. The team continue to purchase through mutual agreement and therefore the need to use CPO powers is progressively reducing.
- Due to very unusual market conditions SWT is preparing to market test the next build phase of NTWP and deliver demolition through a separate contract for phase B/Ci.
- Phase E which is the refurbishment phase at NTWP has received planning permission and the Council is out to the market to procure a contractor. The scheme will receive funding from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund Wave 1 and will be part of our wave 2 submission. The refurbished properties will see a reduction in their heat consumption by over 75% meaning significantly less fuel will be required to heat the homes.
- The contract for 54 home zero-carbon development at Seaward Way, Minehead has commenced, and the site has been levelled and prepared for infrastructure and piling works. The scheme is a zero-carbon exemplar scheme which has been featured as a case study in the Good Homes Alliance good practice guide.
- Planning applications for the zero carbon affordable housing schemes, on various sites in Taunton, await Local Planning Authority approval. These schemes include a phosphate mitigation strategy which is supported by Natural England and the Environment Agency. If the mitigation strategy is approved by the local planning authority the approach could be repeated and create sufficient phosphate credits to support 800-1200 new homes or circa 2,240-3,360 bedspaces.
- The service is progressing at pace a low carbon retrofit strategy and delivery plan. The strategy will be considered by the Council late 2022/2023 however early Member Briefings are being arranged for the Summer. The council is

aiming to submit a substantial Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund Wave 2 grant bid in October 2022 and is also looking at ECO4 funding opportunities. SWT has been awarded SHDF 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.

- The service is bringing forward retrofit of 10 Woolaway homes at Oake to the same low carbon standards as NTWP phase E.
- Wordsworth Drive and Coleridge Crescent Flats Regeneration continues with the first tenants receiving rehousing offers through their gold band homefinder status.

Housing Strategy and Enabling

- New affordable housing in the district is set to see 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 Service and its partners anticipate 1000 new affordable homes will be lost or delayed due to the absence of phosphate mitigation strategies. This equates to circa 2800 bed spaces.
- 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 and have bid for an additional £500k in the 4th and final round of RSAP. The council aim to facilitate forty new bedspaces for the districts single homeless in 2022/2023.
- 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.
- The service continues 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. A housing needs assessment in Stogursey is leading into an action plan owned by the Parish Council. A formal request to EDF for £390k to continue the work coordinated by the Council has been submitted.
- The team continue to support the Health & Wellbeing Board and the Homeless Reduction Board which are both flexing as the Somerset Councils progress Local Government Reorganisation.

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).
- There is a small backlog of non-emergency jobs, although this has reduced, following the use of external contractors. Procurement of longer-term external support via MD Group is progressing and is due to commence in June 2022.
- Void repairs to meet our Lettable Standard remains a challenge, although performance is improving in this area. Again, we are looking to utilise MD Group to support on undertaking some of our Major Voids (those with two or more key elements required).

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.
- Property safety compliance procurement remains busy, including a new longer-term electrical inspection and remedials tender, and extending required contracts for 2022/23 to take us through to LGR.
- 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, re-roofing, and fire safety works (replacement fire doors and emergency lighting).
- 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.
- Recruitment for the vacant role of Capital Programme Manager is underway

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 in June 2022.
- 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 (as mentioned above) both DHS and Retrofit.

Housing and Communities Team

Supported Housing (extra care and sheltered)

The officer team continues to be impacted by Covid, so delivery has concentrated on key tasks:

- The sign-up of new tenants.
- Supporting tenants who are returning home from hospital.
- Health and safety compliance checks at our two extra care schemes including: Kilkenny Court and Lodge Close.
- Carrying out “trusted assessor” visits for those vulnerable tenants who are in urgent need of aids and adaptations to support them within their home.
- Carrying out health and safety checks at sheltered housing schemes.
- Responding to general customer enquiries reported via the service’s Firmstep computer system; and
- Responding to Deane Helpline issues where the tenants have not responded to their usual monitoring call out.
- The team have been piloting a new way of working with Somerset County Council to improve joined up working. The pilot project provides greater and easier access to information on the tenants’ officers are supporting as well as sharing selected information on tenants that would be useful to practitioners in the wider Early Help System. It is early days, however, feedback from officers to date has been positive.
- The team have recently taken part in a training session enhancing their awareness on a range of early interventions when responding to incidents of neighbour nuisance and or anti-social behaviour reported by tenants.

Lettings

- The total number of new lettings for April 2021- March 2022 = 350.
- The % of new tenants satisfied with the lettable standard of a property for April 2021- March 22 = 96%.
- The team have been fully engaged in configuring the new Open Housing Management System and undertaking testing in readiness for going live with the system in June 2022. Part of the team’s work in preparation for the launch has been to review their operation procedures. All this work is progressing well to date; and
- After having undertaking new system training and awareness sessions the team are involved in piloting a new way of working with Somerset County Council to improve joined up working. The pilot project provides greater and easier access to information on the applicants’ officers are considering for vacant council housing. It is early days, however, feedback from officers to date has been positive.

Income

- The rent recovery case managers and the Debt and Benefit officers are working hard with tenants to ensure they are receiving the correct benefits and those that are being financially impacted by the current situation are claiming any grants or accessing funds they are entitled to claim.

- The team continue to push the lettings of garages. There are several voids especially in the Priorswood area, we do have a plan we are working on to reduce the numbers.
- One of the Rent Recovery case managers who was on secondment to another team has now been successful in securing that role permanently. The Rent Recovery role is being covered by agency staff at this time, however we will now start the recruitment process to fill this role.

Tenancy/Estates & ASB

- The teams are continuing to remain stable and settled. Although we have been affected by COVID this has been managed as best we can.
- We have now scheduled all blocks, estates and skip days for the coming year and these will be published in the tenants' newsletters and on our website.
- We have received a second stage complaint and one complaint is potentially moving to the Housing Ombudsman service – however we are still seeing overall a drop in complaints.
- Teams are also managing their Firmstep enquiries and have made a real effort not to allow these cases to become overdue.
- As we move into Spring/Summer we are now experiencing more ASB cases, and we are closely managing these. We will monitor closely the affect what the causes are of ASB incidents that are reported into the service.
- Youth gang culture is still ongoing, and we had a serious incident last week with recent history of “youths' gangs” coming to an address and surrounding area, resulting in violence and weapons being brandished. SWT staff accompanied Police in a house raid the following day. This has meant that we can prepare swift legal action against the breaches of tenancy agreement.
- The team has also drafted up a new handbook and this is currently being circulated for comments/amendments.

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 focus on early intervention and prevention continues. In April, 77% of all prevention cases were closed with a positive outcome.
- A meeting is planned with supported accommodation providers in June to discuss the implementation of a referrals and move on panel. This panel aims to ensure that the right customers are placed in the right supported accommodation at the right time.

Temporary accommodation:

- The focus in recent weeks 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.

Rough Sleeping Initiative

- At the end of April 2022 there were 49 customers engaged with the *Rough Sleeping Pathway*. Of these, 8 customers are currently in *Stage 1* (initial intervention and assessment), 29 customers are in *Stage 2* (intensive support) and 9 customers are in *Stage 3* (community-based living with floating support).
- Two customers with a history of entrenched rough sleeping moved into 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. One property has been purchased which will provide a further *Housing First* home and this will be adapted to accommodate a customer with mobility needs
- The learning from the Council's *Housing First* project is being shared across the Somerset districts.

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 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)

- With the integration of South Somerset, the Technical Team are fully focused on managing the influx of cases which have emerged, approx. 64 referrals. Added to the cases in the partnership area brings the waiting list up to 84. Staff resources are adequate to manage the numbers.
- The Technical Team completed 172 major adaptations in 21/22 financial year 62 of which were in Somerset West and Taunton. The Independent Living Officers a record 210 interventions from a target of 150.
- The Business Support Team within SIP received a record 1,000 requests for grants and Independent Living Officer services. All with a first response time of 3 working days.
- SIP continues to work with Public Health to manage the Ukrainian Refugees coming into the UK. The Independent Living Officers have undertaken 310 inspections on behalf of Public Health with another 167 booked in. It is thought the numbers will taper off middle of July. The peak has almost passed.
- The Independent Living Officer team is almost fully staffed now with Jane Bailey, Deb's Hunter-Wyatt, new recruits Paula Webber and Ann-Marie Williams. Paula transferred from the Lifeline team bringing extensive

experience from her previous role and Ann-Marie worked for the CCS as a Village Agent with plentiful experience in Social Care. The team interviewed on Friday for a role funded by Mendip District Council.

- LADS 1 – Completed 29 installations, with 49 installations committed but not yet installed, 31 installations at application stage, awaiting confirmation of the measure. Total spend to date is £175,219 with £304,693 committed and the value of applications in hand is £182,329. The average preinstall EPC is E, post install is averaging C/D. Supply chain is stable and installers performing but inflating materials costs risk reducing the number of measures. UPVC windows and doors are currently on long lead in times delaying some completions.
- The Warm Homes Fund – Cat 1 - 73 households have applied for first time gas central heating. 43 non-social households have received a Warm Homes Fund contribution where Ecoflex does not fully fund the install. Preinstall EPC averages an F, post install a D. WHF contribution to date is £109k, committed and not yet installed is £37k. 44 air source heat pumps have been installed in social housing. Cat 3 – 4,299 households have been contacted, record created, and fuel poverty advice discharged. 89.3% of which are in fuel poverty. 1,174 households receiving Warm Homes Fund support worth £1,136,276. 97 non-fuel poor households receiving Warm Homes Funding support worth £39,453.
- SIP was successful with the bid for HUGs funding to aid households who are off gas with insulation and heating measures. The funding amounts to £1.7 million for Somerset. The eligibility criteria are like the LADS funded schemes.

Housing Performance Team

- We continue to support the work of the Tenants Strategic Group and Tenants' Action Group on the 12th May 2022 we are also holding a joint tenant meeting with Homes in Sedgemoor.
- The Tenants' Action Group have awarded £16,000 from their Child and Youth Initiative Fund.
- A "kiosk" (screen with internet access) has been funded and installed in the Priorswood Community Centre. A further kiosk has been ordered for the Link Centre at Halcon.
- The damp and mould group for tenants continues to meet and make progress.
- The tenants' spring newsletter has been posted to Tenants.
- Internally we continue to support the meetings that provide us good governance of our activities e.g., programme meeting, performance meeting, risk meeting, etc.
- Our assessment against the white paper continues.
- Monthly House mark Pulse data is sent so that we can benchmark with other housing providers.
- We are collectively working with Homes in Sedgemoor on local government reorganisation workstreams.
- The policy review work with the HQN (Housing Quality Network) is underway and TSG members will receive revised policy documents.