

Full Council Meeting – 8 February 2022

Report of Councillor Fran Smith – Housing

Housing Development and Regeneration Team (Chris Brown)

HRA New Homes

- North Taunton Woolaway Project (NTWP) Phase A is progressing and enjoyed a visit from the Executive in January. Block work continues and units are starting to benefit from some of the low carbon features to floors and floor and wall details. Equans/Engie have reprofiling works to minimise delays caused as a result of material supplies and highway permissions. Discussions are progressing with phase Ci tenants, preparing them for decant. Phase Ci will be placed in the second contract package for the NTWP which is timetabled for demolition and then construction to commence in May 2022. A planning application has been submitted for Phase E which is the refurbishment phase and a Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund grant application has been submitted which if successful will help support the costs of the retrofit. It is hoped to appoint contractors for phase E in April and for works to start in May.
- The 54 home zero-carbon development at Seaward Way, Minehead, commenced in January. The zero-carbon exemplar scheme which has been featured in as a case study in the Good Homes Alliance good practice guide will be complete by October 2024.
- Planning applications for the zero carbon affordable housing schemes, on various sites in Taunton, have been submitted to the local planning authority. These schemes include a phosphate mitigation strategy which has also been submitted to Natural England and the Environment Agency. If the mitigation strategy is approved the service believe it could repeat the mitigation strategy to support circa 600 new homes directly or through credits to private house builders.
- 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 the principles will influence SWTs social Housing Decarbonisation Fund wave 1& 2 grant applications. The three pillars of the emerging strategy are engaging and supporting our customers, fabric first and then overtime replacing fossil fuels with renewable heat and power provided via onsite, communal or grid-based systems.

Housing Strategy and Enabling

- The Single Homeless and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Strategy and delivery plan was approved by Full Council in October and Development Officers are supporting the delivery of new homeless bedspaces through a number of partners and direct council supply.
- The council is in the process of purchasing 2 new homes funded from Homes England and DLUHC (Department of Levelling Up, Homes and Communities) Rough sleeping accommodation programme grant which was awarded

recently. The service is also progressing with homeless service colleagues the lease, purchase or newbuild through modular approaches for circa 50 other homes.

- 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 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, providing new bed space and support to vulnerable customers. A housing needs assessment has recently concluded which will support the parish of Stogursey develop actions to increase affordable housing in the area. The service has appointed the Citizens Advice Service to extend its debt and money management service throughout the district and increase its outreach work.

Housing Property Team (Ian Candlish)

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 remains a backlog of non-emergency jobs. This is reducing following the use of external contractors, and we are continuing with procurement of further external support.
- Void repairs are also being undertaken, although returning the properties back to our Lettings team promptly remains a challenge. This is primarily due to delays in asbestos surveys and works, and the availability of electricians.
- We are also investigating software options to schedule and plan void works to help us improve efficiency in this area.

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.
- Additional contractors have been engaged to undertake further electrical inspections (EICR's) and associated remedial works.
- Property safety compliance procurement activities also continue, with recent tenders including further electrical inspections (EICR's), and additional asbestos management surveys.
- Weekly review meetings are being held to carefully monitor and manage all these safety critical areas.

Capital Programmes

- Capital Work programmes continue to be undertaken, with recent contracts commencing including roofing and ventilation.
- Procurement activities also continue with recent tenders including fire-safe flooring to flat block communal areas.
- Recruitment for vacant staff positions is underway, with one role now recruited to and shortlisting undertaken for another.

Asset Management

- Following the Open Assets module of our Capita software system going live, post-work is now underway, including the further development of a suite of bespoke reports and testing of data and functionality following additional data-loading from stock condition and energy surveys.
- 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 in conjunction with the Capital programme team.

Housing and Communities Team (Simon Lewis)

Extra Care Housing (Fiona Davies)

- Green Days (volunteers with learning disabilities) are now planned to do regular litter picks across both Kilkenny Court (Taunton) and Lodge Close (Wellington). They are also hoping to plan some coffee mornings and craft/activity sessions with tenants, when Covid allows.
- Furniture and kitchen items which are passed their best are being replaced, to make the shared lounge areas more welcoming to tenants when they are able to join in activities together.
- At Kilkenny Court, tenants who have the 'assist to dine' are now able to have these meals within the shared lounge, albeit socially distanced. At Lodge Close, this service is still being provided to tenants within their homes.
- Two tenants, who have learning and physical disabilities, from within our sheltered and general needs housing, have been successfully rehoused at Lodge Close, with a care package which supports and enables them to continue living independently. Both tenants (and dogs!) are really thriving in their new homes.

Sheltered Housing (Fiona Davies)

- All grit boxes were checked and either tidied up and refilled or replaced (where damaged) on all our sheltered schemes prior to Christmas.
- The meeting halls have continued to be open for groups to meet in, following the government advice for people to decide for themselves whether they want to socialise/mix with others.
- Regular estates checks continue on our sheltered schemes.

- The team has been impacted by Covid and seriously ill older family members, so delivery is concentrating on key tasks; sign ups, leaving wells, the daily Deane Helpline rota, estates and H&S checks, responding to low level ASB and unexpected incidents and completion of the annual reviews.

Lettings (Tony Knight)

- The Lettable Standard document has now been to HMST and is being discussed with Tenants Action Group on 21st January 2020. This will include discussions around Tenants Action Group viewing void properties when they are returned to SWT, prior to them being relet. Training will be required for Tenants Action Group members on health and safety.
- 273 properties have been re-let year to date (April to December).
- Customer satisfaction (year to date) is running at 98. Slight drop from previous month. 16 properties were re-let in December, 13 of those were contacted to get their views on satisfaction of the properties 13 responded and were satisfied, 2 remarked that they were dissatisfied with aspects of the property when they moved in, those tenants have been contacted, visited and the matters raised addressed. One satisfied tenant remarked " this is not what we expected - Its far more than we could ever have hoped for thank you"
- The Home Moves Plus project has now achieved the 100 bedroom spaces target which was set out at the commencement of the scheme this is 4 months early.
- Working in partnership Fiona Davis and her team in Sheltered housing the lettings team have matched tenants in need of support and adapted properties to properties that match their needs. This has improved the lives of those tenants who have contacted Fiona to express their thanks One such compliment was tenant "has been able to regain her confidence and is now able to get out and about more and her confidence and mental health have greatly improved. She is very grateful to have been able to stay within the scheme"

Income (Michaela Mullen)

- We have had 2 agency members off staff leave, one has been replaced and the other role is currently being covered by existing members of the team until a new person starts on 7th February. These changes with the agency staff have continued to cause disruption within the team, however the team are working extremely hard to cover this work.
- We have reduced the number of void garages by 14.5% since end of October, we will continue to work on this to reduce the number further.
- Post have been put on social media advertising the available garages in the Priorswood area of Taunton

Tenancy and Estates (Julie Sabey)

- We are now about to go out to recruit for two permanent posts within the team. Interviews are taking place on the 20th January and we are hopeful that this time around we can recruit permanent staff to these positions.

- I am now also looking to revise the current tenant's handbook and hoping to have a draft by the end of January/early February.

Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

- We have now introduced satisfaction survey's on closed ASB cases. We have sent 23 surveys out and had 3 responses this month.
- The three responses were negative – we have now amended the survey so that they can include contact details should they wish to discuss anything further. We will continue to monitor closely the responses that we receive.
- We currently have 66 open cases that we are working on some of which moving to legal.
- We are also busy with testing the ASB module on open housing and we pleased with the results

Housing Options (Louisa Hill/Sarah Richards)

- The new online self-referral system has been in place since mid-November, where customers are able to apply through the website and upload their supporting documents in advance of speaking to an officer. This system has enabled officers to prepare more tailored advice and assistance to customers at the first point of contact. We have seen a reduction in customers chasing applications through telephone contact. The number of homelessness applications remains constant with 84 received in October, 77 in November and 59 December (up to 24/12/21)

Rough Sleeper Provision

- The Rough Sleeper Team continues to work to its operational target of having no more than 5 rough sleepers sleeping out in the district. The team carries out fortnightly street counts in order to monitor numbers and engage with those who remain out. We currently have 7 rough sleepers in the district, two of whom are due to be relocated to their local areas of origin.
- The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Has launched the Protect and Vaccinate scheme with the objectives of increasing vaccination amongst people sleeping rough and providing emergency accommodation to keep people safe. SWT has received £115k in funding to increase vaccine uptake among people who are homeless and sleeping rough, to support those who are hesitant about getting their vital booster jabs and to provide bespoke accommodation solutions to bring the most entrenched people into accommodation. The RSI team are working with the Open Door Centre in Taunton, YMCA DG, Arc, local GPs and Homelessness Outreach Nurses to provide vaccination events at Lindley House, Canons Grove and the Open Door Centre and increase access to information to encourage take up.

Home finder

- The Home finder team continues to tackle the backlog of work. Response times in all workflows continues to reduce with applications being processed in 20 days which is a great achievement in addition to the delivery of a new system; and is in-line with wait-times in the other districts.
- We have taken further steps to integrate the work of Home finder with the Housing Options team with members of the Home finder team supporting customers who have a full housing duty accepted to them to bid on appropriate properties on Home finder. This has resulted in several families receiving offers of permanent accommodation allowing them to move out of temporary accommodation.

Somerset Independence Plus (SIP) (Christian Trevelyan)

- Through the Local Authority Delivery scheme (LADS) 1A funding of £518k and £800k for LADS 1B SIP has assisted the Social Housing Providers with 17 installs for LADS 1A and a planned 213 installs for 1B, with 13 owner occupiers included. The benefits will be felt by Homes in Sedgemoor, SHAL, Somerset West & Taunton tenants as well as owner occupiers across Somerset. The funding is on target to deliver within excess of 300 retrofit measures to households by the end of the scheme. The ECOFLEX scheme, SIP has signed declarations for over 2,000 households since September 2020. Working with the other Districts in Somerset, Sedgemoor is responsible for signing the declarations which enable retrofit contractors working in the Somerset area to fit installations to homeowners who agree to having work done.
- The Warm Homes Fund, which was a joint bid, submitted by SIP and the Centre for Sustainable Energy valued at £1.3 million towards first time gas central heating, air source heat pumps and fuel poverty advice. To date the scheme has assisted 21 owner occupied households across Somerset to have heating installed and insulation fabric. By the close of the scheme in May 2022, SIP will have assisted 275 households with their installs across both Somerset West and Taunton Council housing and owner-occupied housing across the County. There have been 6,000 households given fuel poverty advice since February 2020 (over 30% in SW&T), with a target in the bid of 3,800, over 87.9% of which were found to be in fuel poverty which is above the national average. 1,628 households received funds from the Warm Homes Fund to assist with their fuel bills to avoid defaulting on payments. The value of benefits to those households helped added up to £823,569. SIP is exploring the social impact of continuing the funding of the two Energy Advisors, South Somerset CAB Officer and Social Housing Officer beyond the end of the May deadline due to the value of the roles. SIP and the CSE have been approached by Public Health to assist with the Cold Weather Plan this Winter and have since been awarded £100,000 in additional support funding to grow the service. SIP Commissioning – Working up new tender frameworks for minor works and ramping contracts, hosted and managed by SIP in collaboration with SCC.
- The Partnership Manager is concluding negotiations with South Somerset to include South Somerset work into SIP. The Service Level Agreement is being signed by South Somerset. The service will be looking to recruit three additional ILO's, one in South Somerset, one in Somerset West and Taunton

and one in Mendip, bringing the compliment to six posts. The Partnership Manager is also leading on the Local Government Reorganisation alignment workstream with regards to SIP.

Housing Performance Team (Shari Hallett)

- Our Senior Complaints Case Manager has started reviewing our procedures for complaints handling.
- Two new Case Managers have started in post, replacing the four staff who have gained promotion to new roles. We will continue to recruit to the two remaining vacancies.
- Submitted 2020-21 House mark Pulse data so that we can benchmark with other housing providers.
- Continuing to develop a “reporting a repair” online form. Currently in the draft stages with our business analysts.
- The “damp and mould” for tenants has held it’s second meeting.
- During January our work with the HQN (Housing Quality Network) on policy review will commence.