

## SWT Tenants Strategic Group

Monday, 20th July, 2020,  
4.00 pm



Somerset West  
and Taunton

### Webcasting - Virtual Meeting

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**Members:** Alex Akhigbemen, Jessie Bunn, Cram, Dennis Galpin, Hellier, Ivor Hussey, Corrine McMylor, Livi Mongare, Francesca Smith and Janet Lloyd

### Agenda

1. **Apologies**
2. **Notes from previous meetings** (Pages 5 - 16)  
Minutes of the meetings 16 December 2019 and 15 January 2020
3. **Public Question Time**
4. **Declarations of Interest**
5. **Tenants Strategic Group - Terms of Reference** (Pages 17 - 24)
6. **Director of Housing and Communities update report** (Pages 25 - 30)
7. **Zero Carbon Affordable Homes Pilot Project** (Pages 31 - 36)
8. **Forward Plan including future dates**

### **Future dates for 2020/21 – all meetings to start at 6pm**

21 September 2020  
23 November 2020  
25 January 2021  
22 March 2021  
24 May 2021  
19 July 2021

### **Areas of discussion for future meetings;**

Housing Performance;  
New build council housing;  
Government White Paper – a new deal for Social Housing;  
Compliance, with a particular focus on fire safety;

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "James Hasset".

**JAMES HASSETT**  
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

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If an item on the agenda is contentious, with a large number of people attending the meeting, a representative should be nominated to present the views of a group. These arrangements do not apply to exempt (confidential) items on the agenda where any members of the press or public present will be asked to leave the Committee Room. Full Council, Executive, and Committee agendas, reports and minutes are available on our website: [www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk](http://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk)

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**SWT TENANTS STRATEGIC GROUP**

**MONDAY, 16TH DECEMBER, 2019**

**Present: Jessie Bunn,  
Dennis Galpin, Richard  
Hirsch, Ivor Hussey and  
Livi Mongare**

**Also in Attendance:**

**Officers: James Barrah, Si  
Lewis, Stephen Boland, Ric  
Wiseman, Tracey Meadows**

**Apologies: Francesca Smith, Janet Lloyd and  
Alex Akhigbemen**

**8 Apologies**

Apologies were received from Alex Akhigbemen, Judith Hegarty, Paul Cram and Corrine McMylor

**9 Notes from previous meeting 11 November 2019**

The minutes of the meeting of the Strategic Tenants board held on 11 November 2019 were signed and taken as read.

**10 Public Question Time**

No questions were received for Public Question Time.

**11 Declarations of Interest**

Declarations of Interests.

Mrs J Bunn All Items SWT Housing Tenant Personal Spoke and Voted  
Mr D Galpin All Items SWT Housing Tenant Personal Spoke and Voted  
Mr K Hellier All Items SWT Housing Tenant Personal Spoke and Voted  
Mr I Hussey All Items SWT Housing Tenant Personal Spoke and Voted

**12 The year ahead for Housing (verbal update) - James Barrah, Director of Housing**

The Director of Housing presented a verbal update on the year ahead for Housing and the key priorities for the service in the coming 12 months.

**Corporate picture**

**Monday, 16th December, 2019**

The recent transformation process has had an impact on our services as a Local Authority with the new adapted and streamline ways of working. Due to the grant from the Government ceasing in the next financial year we need to make sure that we can financially sustain our future and generate other savings.

During the transformation process, services to tenants has caused some disruption with changes in personnel and gaps in service and our response time, which we are trying to address. Services will continue to stabilise and improve.

There have been changes to our leadership of the new Council with the Liberal Democrats now in power and the leading opposition group being the Independent group. The new leadership have come in with energy, ideas and a new corporate plan that has two key features, one is housing and the other is a strong drive for climate change. This will be echoed in what we are trying to do in our housing services. Our new Chief Executive brings a sense of focus and urgency to get things done in our communities and is very keen for us to get out into the community and stretch ourselves and improve the customer experience across the district.

With the recruitment of the new directors the organisation will be divided into four directorates and housing will be one of those four. There will be some recruitment as the new structure will have a greater emphasis in some key areas, firstly around development. Our business plan review will allow us to take more borrowing on with removal of our debt cap, this will allow us to build more new homes than we can at present and finance those safely within the business plan.

## **Compliance**

The key themes around this would be fire safety implications, we need certainty about what we can build and can't build, what safe materials we can use and to make sure that the correct components were fitted. Tenants would be involved in the decision making as we need to ensure that a range of tenants have their say. Clarity would be sought on this as soon as possible and reported back.

Actions around fire risk assessment works have taken place, we need to get back to clear hallways, upgrade windows that open into hallways, fire doors and bin stores.

We are continuing with our electrical safety installation tests with a catch up programme ongoing.

Gas safety checks are good, and we need to maintain this.

Social Housing Regulator – in January we will be subject to regulatory intervention around consumer standards and for the very first time our rent standard will be scrutinised along with the regulator for social housing. The regulator has been scrutinising the social housing sector for many years, they rate and assess on their governance and viability and also some discussion on the standard around tenant engagement. This would drive us to perform at a higher level to make sure that we are doing a good job and to keep standards high.

Development and regeneration – our debt cap has gone. We have been working with Savills to ascertain how we can borrow money to build more homes. It was established that over the next 5 years that we can borrow money to build 500 new homes, this includes the North Taunton development.

Regeneration – The North Taunton development would deliver a great housing scheme which would add to our stock of social housing.

Woolaway – we have plans to regenerate these remaining Woolaway homes.

Climate Change – the Council needs to lead the way to address climate change. When new kit is to be installed in properties we need to make sure that we sell the product to the tenants successfully as we are still getting some refusals. The standards on new builds will also need to be discussed with zero carbon being an option on some properties.

Efficiencies – leads on the big three processes, income, repairs and voids. There has been some strong engagement with the team.

Communities – ensuring our services are to the benefit of the customer and supporting communities where we know that there is ongoing hardship.

Comments from members included;

- Have we higher properties at present? *We do not have anything over four stories;*
- Are you looking at external bin stores? *This is flagged in the fire risk assessment programme;*
- What is the rough age of our oldest properties *1950's*

### 13 **North Taunton Woolaway Project - Richard Wiseman**

The Property Investment Manager, Richard Wiseman updated the group on the North Taunton Woolaway project.

Reported that the Government has stated that the Woolaway homes were no longer fit for purpose and would continue to be an increased maintenance burden for the Council which will impact on the new homes project. This is why we have decided to make a flagship housing scheme out of them. Neither the former Taunton Deane BC nor West Somerset DC has embarked on anything of this scale. With all 5 phases we will be creating 276 homes which will become a net increase of 86 new homes.

We will continue to work with the community to make sure that tenant's needs are provided for. Planning permission was granted for Phase A unanimously by the Planning Committee on the 27 March 2019. The Design Review Panel considered the design and community consultation process undertaken was extremely rigorous and considered to be outstanding and the design has the full potential to be exceptional. Phase A will start early next year.

Comments included;

- Were there any problems decanting residents from their properties? *No properties were made available with moving fees paid;*

**14 Housing development pipeline - Richard Wiseman, Programme Manager**

The Property Investment Manager, Richard Wiseman updated the group on the Housing development pipeline

Reported that we have completed 4 short term let units in Outer Circle and we converted the old link centre into 1 bed flats, these were perfect for someone who wanted to be in a short term let.

The garages in Laxton Road had been demolished to provide 8 new units, building would start in the New Year.

We are currently looking at Wellsprings Road to potentially put 10-15 new units. These could potentially be manufactured homes.

Milton Road – three garages were not in use which we could build on without buying the land as it is already ours.

Blackdown Road garages – you could develop quite a lot of home on this piece of land.

There is more new homes in the pipeline that we are in the process of negotiation.

Comments from Members included;

- What is the life time of a Roll along? *About 70 years, it is made out of wood and steel;*

**15 Housing information, communication and technology update - To follow**

The Housing Director, James Barrah updated the group on Housing information, communication and technology

(Slides to be included with the minutes)

Reported that Open housing will replace the existing Academy system. 5 new posts will be created to implement the new system. The system is an Activity premises database within it the process and the work flows need to be consistent with how we do things and then staff need to be supported on how they make the transition across. Stated that Open Assets was already funded and already underway. This system is our Asset Management Database which holds the records of our homes. All information about the properties will have a unique record number and hang off of one record. These are some of the things Open Assets will provide for us. Phase 1 which includes the stock condition, decent homes, data, asbestos the energy rating, scenario planner which looks at options on where we would spend money on the properties is all part of phase 1 and looking to go live in February 2020. Our data was at present in a test environment subject to user acceptance testing. We need to get this over the line to start using the system effectively.

Thoughts on how to engage the customer would be looked at and reported back.



No comments were made on this subject

16 **Housing retrofit and new build thermal principles - Richard Wiseman, Programme Manager**

The Property Investment Manager, Richard Wiseman updated the group on Housing retrofit and new build thermal principles

Premium green homes were reported as cheap to live in by residents as well as reducing our carbon footprint and may reduce maintenance costs over time because it generally requires a high skill and better quality level of building so you are looking at reducing your energy usage, the use of solar energy, reducing the amount of water usage, the building materials with doors and windows produced to minimise the loss of heat.

A project to build 111 Lang easy forms was achieved in Wellington. Lang easy forms are a type of non-traditional properties which will last for at least 20/30 years, but we are not in a position in regenerating those so previously the Wellington Woolaway project focused on some of those as they were harder to heat and we still had 300 or so of them. We took these homes and insulated them we put in new windows and doors and we changed the heating systems which increased the energy rating systems on these homes. 30 properties in Slapes Close, Taunton were also updated.

Tenants in these properties were spending £1,600 per year on heating. Our intent was making these properties cheaper to run and to make them more comfortable and attractive, this would also have an impact on our carbon emissions as a business.

A new strategy will be coming forward which will state that we want to address climate change, we want to improve the performance of our properties, we want to deliver a package of works rather than individual components and we will redirect some of our investments to groups of properties in order to try to do this and increase the EPC rating across our stock. These homes will be passively heated buy ourselves. A strategy document proposing this will be produced next year.

Comments made by Members included;

- Are you looking at a programme for new installation for sheltered housing? *We will be looking at this in January;*
- I would like to see more solar heating;

**Duration of the meeting:** 6.00 - 7.45 pm

Chairman at the meeting on  
Monday, 16 December 2019



## **SWT TENANTS STRATEGIC GROUP**

**WEDNESDAY, 15TH JANUARY, 2020**

Present: Alex Akhigbemen, Jessie Bunn, Dennis Galpin, Livvi Mongare and Ivor Hussey

Officers: James Barrah (Director, Housing) Stephen Boland (Housing Landlord Specialist), Kerry Prisco (Finance Specialist)

### 17 Apologies

Apologies were received from Kevin Hellier and Richard Hirsch

18 Notes from previous meeting on 16 December 2019 (to follow)

19 Housing Review Account Business Plan 2020-2050

### **HRA Business Plan 2020-2050 - Report of The Director of Housing**

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan contained the financial model of the service for the next 30 years. A number of largely external changes meant that a full refresh of the Business Plan was necessary. This report identified the changes and the impact of these. The report also set out a new vision for the Housing Service and plans for growth in the number of new homes we plan to build. The report also proposed a new rent policy following the end of a period of four years of imposed rent reduction, this would provide a refreshed income position on which to build future plans set out in this report.

Officers worked with external housing and business planning advisers Savills to create a new structure and approach to modelling future financial planning. The proposed Business Plan represented the current established position, it incorporated assumptions concerning future projected substantial growth and gearing primarily to invest in new homes, that have been accommodated within the plan. This substantially increased level of investment was possible due to the imposed debt cap on the business having been removed, and represented higher levels of investment and borrowing than the service had previously undertaken. This created substantial

opportunity to do more, but also would increase risk, factors which would need to be balanced carefully by the Council in the coming years.

The assumptions made within the business plan were prudent without being excessively restrictive; they provided for inflation on income and costs at prevailing rates which were aligned, allowed a considerable investment in existing stock, a substantial investment in new homes leading to a net increase in properties, whilst debt forecast at elevated levels to today at the end of 30 years. The peak debt of the plan was £164.4 million in year 11, which would not have been possible under the previous HRA regime with a debt cap of £115.8million.

Somerset West and Taunton Council owns and manages affordable housing of over 5700 homes mostly at social rent levels. This “business” within the Council had a turnover of £26M. Income was derived mostly from rents from tenants but also from service charges and other fees. Expenditure was made up of Council staff delivering services to tenants along with repairs and maintenance and other improvements to existing homes and investment in new much needed homes, and the repayment of borrowing.

The finances of the Housing Service was held within a ring-fenced account called the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) which was separate from all other Council finances in that the money was only to be used for providing services to tenants.

In 2012 the Council moved away from a national subsidy system, which meant an annual payment from the HRA to central government, to be ‘self-financing’. As part of the self-financing agreement, a mandatory one-off payment of £85.12m

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was made to government, in return for being able to retain all income locally to manage and maintain the housing stock. The total debt in the HRA at the start of self-financing was £99.7m. Financially this was a positive step for the Council and it released more resources to be invested locally on additional services and new homes.

In order to manage the freedoms gained by the HRA through self-financing, a new 30 year Business Plan (2012-2042) was introduced. This set out the Council’s overall aims and objectives for Housing Services, as well as laying out plans to manage the increased risks and opportunities. The HRA Business Plan had been reviewed and updated regularly since 2012, but recently there had been many

changes in national policies and local aspiration that meant a full update of the Business Plan was once again required.

Since 2012 the HRA had been subject to an imposed notional debt cap, essentially setting a limit on the borrowing the service could undertake which provided a constraint on growth of the service in terms of investment in new homes. The HRA debt cap was £116M. Following many years of lobbying by the sector, the debt cap was removed, which heralded a new era of growth opportunity, as the business could afford to prudently borrow significantly more to allow more investment in existing and new homes.

The Council along with all Registered Providers (RPs) of social housing was subject to a four year period of enforced rent reduction. This step imposed in 2016 essentially removed £185M from the 30 year business plan at this time. Measures were taken at this stage to reduce costs and manage this reduction in revenue whilst continuing to invest in properties and in services for tenants. The period of rent reduction was now at an end and provided the opportunity to once again apply appropriate and modest rent increases to ensure the business kept track of increases in its operating costs.

The Council had declared a climate emergency, many tenants struggled to be able to afford to heat their homes, particularly as many homes were hard to heat due to poor thermal performance. The ability of the HRA to invest in communities especially with regard to the built infrastructure created an opportunity for funding to be targeted at these issues.

During the discussion of this item the following comments were made;

- How are we tackling the back log of Fire risk assessments? The fire related works was driven by our own risk assessment. This relates to the communal areas in our flats. A refresh on all of our assets was completed post Glenfel. A review process was now underway with all of the fire risk assessments. We are also employing a Fire Consultancy to come and do some audit of our more complex locations.
- How are the Lease Holders being encouraged to have their fire doors replaced to come up to our standards? There routes that we can enforce that or we may decide that we will replace them anyway as part of our programme;
- The one year introductory tenancies, do they automatically become secure? If we have issues during the introductory period they will be reported. Breaches with tenants will take steps to give warnings and then will escalate to serving notice. If

this is not followed we will then seek Legal Proceedings for possession. We will have to demonstrate that we have followed all the processes;

**Resolved** that the board were happy to recommend the Policy.

## 20 HRA Budget Setting 2020/21

An update was given on the HRA Budget Setting for 2020/21. Stated that the HRA is a ring fenced account used to manage the Council's housing stock of some 5,700 properties, with the Council acting as the Landlord.

This report updates Members on the proposed HRA Annual Revenue Budget and Capital Programme for 2020/21, the proposed Rent Setting for the average weekly rent for 2020/21 and the proposed Fees and Charges for 2020/21. These proposals would enable the Council to set a balanced budget for the HRA for 2020/21.

In accordance with the Regulator of Social Housing's new Rent Standard from April 2020, the Dwelling Rent for 2020/21 for existing tenants will be an increase of CPI+1% to the average weekly rent, from £80.87 per week to £83.05 per week. For new tenants only this will be an increase of CPI+1%

plus an additional 5% for general needs to the average weekly rent, from £80.87 per week to £87.21 per week. An additional 10% for sheltered/supported and extra care dwelling rents to the average weekly rent, from £80.87 per week to £91.36 per week.

To increase non-dwelling rent and service charges in line with national policy by CPI+1% for 2020/21, with the exception of garages for private and shared ownerships tenants which would increase from £10.32 (including VAT) to £12.00 (including VAT).

**Resolved** that the Board Members were happy to support the recommendations proposed to the Executive and Full Council.

Meeting ended at 19:00







*Governance Team to populate Report number: Report Number: SWT \*/20*

<b>Report Version No:</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>REPORT SIGNED OFF BY?</b>	<b>Date: 14<sup>th</sup> July 2020</b>
1) Service Manager – Stephen Boland	Yes
2) Legal	N/a
3) Finance/s151	N/a
4) Governance Team	N/a
5) SMT	N/a
6) Informal Executive	N/a
7) Governance Team	N/a

## **Somerset West and Taunton Council**

### **Tenants’ Strategic Group – 20<sup>th</sup> July 2020**

#### **Terms of Reference for the Tenants’ Strategic Group**

**This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Member for Housing, Councillor Francesca Smith**

**Report Author: (Stephen Boland – Housing Landlord Specialist)**

#### **1. Purpose of the Report**

To present to the Tenants’ Strategic Group Terms of Reference.

#### **2. Recommendations**

Members are invited to consider and support the following recommendation:

- To approve the Terms of Reference for the Tenants’ Strategic Group.

### **3. Risk Assessment (if appropriate)**

There are no specific risk management issues.

### **4. Background and Full details of the Report**

The proposed Terms of Reference describe the role, aims, objectives and expected conduct of the Tenants' Strategic Group and are to be adopted at the start of the Tenants' Strategic Group's formal existence.

The Terms of Reference state that all tenant representatives will be appointed to the Group following election by all direct tenants of the Council. It is proposed that the election process will be carried out during the period from July 2020 and ending with the appointment of a new group in January 2021.

### **5. Links to Corporate Strategy**

There are no specific links to corporate aims.

### **6. Finance / Resource Implications**

There are no financial comments in relation to this report.

### **7. Legal Implications (if any)**

There are no specific legal comments.

### **8. Climate and Sustainability Implications (if any)**

There are no specific climate or sustainability implications.

### **9. Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications (if any)**

There are no specific safeguarding and or community safety implications.

### **10. Equality and Diversity Implications (if any)**

Reference is made within the Terms of Reference that the Tenants' Strategic Group has a collective responsibility to uphold the best possible standards in term of equality.

### **11. Social Value Implications (if any)**

None for the purposes of this report.

**12. Partnership Implications (if any)**

There are no specific partnership implications.

**13. Health and Wellbeing Implications (if any)**

None for the purposes of this report.

**14. Asset Management Implications (if any)**

None for the purposes of this report.

**15. Data Protection Implications (if any)**

None for the purposes of this report.

**16. Consultation Implications (if any)**

Existing members of the Tenants' Strategic Group held a workshop session on the 15<sup>th</sup> January 2020 and their comments and feedback has informed the development of what is proposed.

**17. Scrutiny/Executive Comments / Recommendation(s) (if any)**

None for the purposes of this report.

**Democratic Path:**

- **Scrutiny / Corporate Governance or Audit Committees – No**
- **Cabinet/Executive – No**
- **Full Council – No**

**Reporting Frequency:** **Once only** (Terms of Reference to be reviewed every two years).

**Contact Officers**

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*(IF YOU HAVE ANY QUERIES REGARDING THIS TEMPLATE PLEASE CONTACT THE GOVERNANCE TEAM [governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk](mailto:governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk))*

**Tenants' Strategic Group**

**Terms of Reference**

**2020**

**1. Membership and meeting arrangements**

- 1.1 The membership of the Tenants' Strategic Group will comprise of up to 12 members (including 10 direct tenants of Somerset West and Taunton Council and two Councillors).
- 1.2 Each elected Councillor, one from each of the two main groups at the Council, will be selected by his or her political group.
- 1.3 The Housing Portfolio holder and Shadow Portfolio holder will attend ex officio; other members able to attend as observers.
- 1.4 The Chair of the Group will be one of the tenants and will be elected at each Annual General Meeting. The Group may elect a vice-chair (preferably a tenant representative).
- 1.5 Tenant representatives will be appointed to the Group following election by all direct tenants of the Council.
- 1.6 If there are equal number of candidates for available Group positions and the candidates meet the eligibility criteria they may be deemed as elected unopposed and no election is necessary.
- 1.7 Group members will be expected to maintain close links with other elements of the tenant engagement structure at the Council.
- 1.8 Tenant members will stand for a period of up to 3 year, with an eligibility of reappointment after two years.
- 1.9 This structure shall be reviewed every two years and will also take into account the need for all sections of the community to be represented, in order to ensure membership of the Group is representative of tenants as a whole.
- 1.10 Tenants are not eligible to be elected or serve as a tenant representative on the Group if:
  - They are not a tenant or partner or spouse of at least five year's standing of a tenant living at the same household;
  - They are under 18 years old;
  - They are in serious breach of their obligations as a tenant;

- They become incapable due to a mental disorder;
- They do not have a good rent payment and tenancy history;
- They are a Councillor of Somerset West and Taunton;
- They are a member of staff in Somerset West and Taunton's housing service; or
- One of their family members or household is a current member of the Group.

1.11 Membership shall also cease if he or she:

- Resigns by written notice to the Chairperson.
- Misses three consecutive meetings (without reasonable excuse) when they will be deemed to have resigned. The member will be contacted to enquire about their absences.
- Brings the Group into disrepute.

1.12 If a member resigns or relinquishes their position the resulting vacancy will be filled as follows:

- A previously unsuccessful candidate who received the most votes will be asked to fill the vacancy.
- If the candidate is unavailable or unwilling to be co-opted, other candidates will be considered in the order of the number of votes received.
- Should the above provision fail to find a representative, Group members, with the Housing Specialist, will agree on a representative to be co-opted until the next election.

1.13 All members are volunteers. No payment will be received for any work done by them on behalf of the Group. However when attending training or meetings of the Group, members may claim travel, childcare or other carers expenses.

1.14 No substitute members shall be permitted.

1.15 All members must participate in training programmes and seminars aimed at enhancing Group members' roles.

1.16 The Group will be supported by the Housing Performance Team. Organisation and administration of the Group will be provided by the Council's Governance Team. The Director of Housing and other staff, as appropriate will attend and advise the Group.

1.17 There will be 6 meetings per year plus 'special' meetings as necessary. The dates, times and venues for the meetings will be agreed annually.

1.18 Minutes of previous meetings will be circulated within 7 days after the meeting and will include notice of the agenda items for the next meeting.

- 1.19 Agendas and supporting papers will aim to be made available at least one week prior to meetings of the Group. Late reports will be circulated as soon as possible and the Group will determine whether to consider them.
- 1.20 Members of the public will have the right to attend a Group meeting except where confidential or exempt information is likely to be disclosed, and the meeting, or part of it, is therefore held in private.
- 1.21 Members of the public can submit questions or make statements to the Group related to items on the agenda, so long as these are received one week in advance of the meeting.
- 1.22 Group meetings will be limited to 2 hours. Any issues not addressed in this time will be carried over, unless members agree otherwise.
- 1.23 Members of the Group are required to disclose the existence and nature of any personal interests which they have in any item of business to be considered at a Group meeting, ahead of its discussion.
- 1.24 The Group will not be involved with day to day operational matters or matters of detailed service delivery or performance.

## **2. Terms of Reference**

- 2.1 The Tenants' Strategic Group will represent all direct tenants of the Council at a high level of the Council's decision making process to enable tenants to have their voices heard, making it easy to raise concerns to those in the Council who make the decisions and to influence and shape what the Council does. The Group is an integrated and integral part of the wider council governance and performance structure.
- 2.2 The role of the Tenants' Strategic Group is set out below:
  - To help run the housing function (landlord) by providing oversight, challenge, direction, and recommendations to help with decision making;
  - To work with officers to set the annual budget for housing and determine spending priorities, as well as monitoring spend throughout the year;
  - To be consulted on and advise on key changes to strategy, policies, significant service changes and development proposals;
  - To review overall service quality (including reviewing key performance indicators on a quarterly basis);
  - To maintain an overview of the development of tenant involvement and empowerment; and
  - To report to Council annually, and provide recommendations regarding the housing function.
- 2.3 Members will receive appropriate training in governance skills, housing, finance, legal requirements and policy areas (as necessary).

- 2.4 The Tenants' Action Group will provide feedback to the Tenants' Strategic Group from their meetings so that the Tenants' Strategic Group can consider whether issues arising should impact on strategic discussions and policy development. The Tenants' Strategic Group will also feed information back to the Tenants' Action Group so that its members develop a better understanding of how services are performing and gain greater transparency about any decisions made.

### **3. Code of Conduct**

- 3.1 All members of the Group are expected to follow the good practice principles for effective meetings, as set out below:
- All questions should be directed through the Chairperson;
  - Everyone should be given equal respect and personal verbal attacks against members of the Group will not be tolerated;
  - The Chair's position should be respected at all times;
  - Any conflict of interest must be declared to the Group at the start of the meeting;
  - No member of the Group should behave in a way likely to bring the reputation of the Group into disrepute;
  - Members will be expected to read papers before the meeting;
  - All members are expected to take part in training where this is agreed;
  - All members of the Group are required to make their best efforts to attend meetings or to send their apologies; and
  - The Chairperson will have the authority to give a verbal warning to any member of the Group to leave the meeting.

### **4. Equal opportunities**

- 4.1 All members are required to comply with equal opportunities statements of the Council.
- 4.2 Members of the Group using racist, sexist or other inappropriate language or behaviour will be subject to an agreed procedure and may be removed from the Group.

### **5. Annual review**

- 5.1 These Terms of Reference will be reviewed every two years.



*Governance Team to populate Report number: Report Number: SWT*

<b>Report Version No:</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>REPORT SIGNED OFF BY?</b>	<b>Date: 14/07/20</b>
1) Service Manager – James Barrah	YES
2) Legal – Lesley Dolan	N/A
3) Finance/s151 – Paul Fitzgerald	N/A
4) Governance Team - <b>Name</b>	N/A
5) SMT	N/A
6) Informal Executive	N/A
7) Governance Team - <b>Name</b>	N/A

## Somerset West and Taunton Council

### Tenants Strategic Group – 20 July 2020

#### Housing Director Update Report

**This matter is the responsibility of Executive Member for Housing, Councillor Francesca Smith**

**Report Author: James Barrah –Director of Housing**

#### **1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report**

To update the Tenants Strategic Group on key issues across the Housing and Communities Directorate since the last meeting and in particular to reflect on the Directorate response to the Corona virus pandemic. The report also raises some key issues forming the workplan of the Directorate over the coming weeks and months.

#### **2 Recommendations**

2.1 For the Tenants Strategic Group to note the report.

### **3 Director of Housing and Communities update.**

#### **Covid 19 Response**

Understandably most of the focus of the Directorate since the last meeting has been in relation to our response to Covid 19, we have strived to provide the best support to tenants and the ongoing provision of essential services through this period as we could. I would like to acknowledge the flexibility, commitment and hard work of the team during the last few months, it has been exceptional in a period when our team will have had a range of their own personal impacts to address, I am very proud of them all.

Our activities during the lock down period are set out in the report but some key support is as follows:-

- We redeployed staff to contact all tenants over 55 or with a disability (3500) to check they were ok and to provide support if required.
- Letters were sent to residents to remind them of services and signpost to support.
- Supported tenant reviews were completed for sheltered tenants.
- Welfare Visits were undertaken where we could not make contact or had particular concerns, this resulted in some Adult Social Care referrals.
- Returning calls to those who requested regular call back.
- Provision of funded lifelines where we felt this necessary.
- Provision of food parcels from our distribution hub

#### **Recruitment**

We have more recently been undertaking recruitment activity to fully populate our structure following the organisation realignment into 4 Directorates. This process is going well with some internal and external appointments. This will ensure we have resources in the right place to take the business forward and deliver our ambitions.

**Hinkley Point C - Housing Funding Strategy:** We have £1.4M of developer contributions to invest in new housing initiatives. This includes proposals to support new affordable housing at Seaward Way (Minehead), provision of additional Temporary Accommodation, and investment in support services.

#### **Directorate Governance**

We are in the process of establishing our new Housing Performance Team but work is also underway to establish a new Performance framework and reporting structure for the Directorate, and we plan to increase our resident engagement capacity to improve our delivery in this area.

### **5. Assistant Director -Housing Development and Regeneration update.**

Since April, seven new HRA homes have been acquired at Pyrlands Fields (making 17 in total) and five buy back properties have been identified for Buy back. The new SWT build Laxton Road scheme will complete eight homes this year.

Although lockdown has led to contractors reducing capacity on sites, our officers have used this time to prepare SWT new build schemes for member approval and to allow delivery as soon as possible after lockdown. Engie were selected as main contractor for North Taunton Woolaways and LA Moore have continued work on Phase A properties with demolition due to complete by November to allow work to then commence on site. 27 North Taunton Voids

have been made ready to support homeless families over the next 3-5 years which will have the added benefits of a rental income and preventing blight.

The team has prepared proposals for members for a 50 unit Zero Carbon Affordable Homes pilot and enabling works. The three priority schemes for the service are North Taunton Woolaways, Seaward Way and Zero Carbon Homes. Other Scheme sites include the Oxford Inn Taunton and Woolaway properties in Oake are also being prepared ready to progress at the appropriate time.

Housing enablers have been working with social housing partners to understand the Covid impact on their schemes and to be support them resuming delivery. Discussions are taking place with Homes England on accessing available grants for new build. Rural enabling work has seen a strong pipeline of homes coming forward and a partnership project with Exmoor national park is being finalised.

## **6. Assistant Director -Housing Property update.**

### **Responsive Repairs, Void Repairs and Safety Checks**

Essential emergency repairs have been ongoing through Covid and we have continued to meet our target response times on this work, despite resource pressures due to Covid restrictions. We moved to emergency only repairs once lockdown started but are now working on our backlog and have resumed non-emergency repairs (both backlog and new repair requests). It should be noted, however, that it will take some time to return to normal levels of service delivery in all areas of repairs work. Non priority repair requests slowed down during the lockdown period, we did however reach a backlog of 700 jobs. In the last few weeks non priority repairs have increased so it is likely the backlog may increase as the team try to deliver current jobs along with reducing the backlog.

Void repairs have been undertaken during the period, although reduced capacity and a need for social distancing in properties has inevitably led to delays in completion. We are developing plans to mitigate further delays and reduce our empty properties. We have maintained 100% compliance on gas safety checks as required by law, during lockdown.

### **Housing Property Safety Compliance**

Significant progress on property safety compliance has been made, including:

- Fire Safety – ongoing delivery of Fire Risk Assessment (FRA) remedial actions; including fire safety housekeeping, signage and upgrading fire doors. We have started FRA sample audits to further validate safety measures on our properties.
- Asbestos – produced a new Asbestos Policy and procedure, and undertaken asbestos management surveys to communal areas.
- Electrical Safety – recommenced a programme of electrical checks to communal areas.
- Water Safety – procured contractor to undertake a programme of Water Risk Assessments.

### **Housing Asset Management**

We are developing an approach to enable a return to survey work, including energy surveys and stock condition surveys. These will facilitate proposals to be developed for future energy efficiency programmes and planned maintenance work.

## **HRA Capital Programmes**

All capital programmes ceased during lockdown. In the meantime, we have procured contracts and are planning our approach to recommence works, starting with external works (e.g. external painting and replacement soffits and gutters).

## **7. Assistant Director – Housing and Communities**

### **Income**

The Income and Rent Recovery teams have worked hard to support all our tenants through the financial effects of COVID-19, giving advice and helping tenants claim for benefits they are entitled to and make payment plans for ongoing payments. They continue to take the “Lean” approach and although arrears have risen slightly over the last couple of months (£711k) a reduction of £80k since the Lean review started. Across the country Registered Housing Providers have seen a 10% increase in arrears since April and SWT are slightly lower than that figure.

### **Anti Social Behaviour**

Some increase in this area and officers are reviewing how cases are managed to ensure earlier involvement through our Tenancy Team and we are also reviewing our ASB policies.

### **Supported Housing**

During lockdown, phone contact was made with all sheltered and extra care tenants, to check welfare and remind them of support available. We also referred to Village Agents for practical support for those shielding. Food parcels were delivered to tenants in crisis and in-person welfare checks for those not contactable by phone.

The vast majority of ‘Supported Housing Tenant Reviews’ have been completed, to provide current contact and medical information for Deane Helpline colleagues to respond to emergency call outs. Many tenants were also added to the Deane Helpline daily welfare calls schedule, to support those who were unable to get support from family or friends. Sheltered tenants are receiving a monthly welfare check by phone. Home visits are made only when necessary and safe to do so. Tenants needing aids and adaptations are assessed by phone and visited where necessary to complete the assessment.

Extra Care tenants were requested not to have visitors, to reduce the risk of Covid. Our staff and care providers have worked together to ensure tenants have food and medications and that people are not feeling isolated. Gardening staff have completed some works across the sites and this has been positive for tenants to see.

### **Somerset Independence Plus (SIP)**

The Somerset Independence Plus has continued to work during the Covid Crisis and have been supporting clients by telephone as well as working with the Housing Options team occupational therapists. The team have been able during this time to identify client’s requirements and prioritise ready for when work can commence with the contractors and suppliers. Site visits to void properties have been undertaken in preparation and outdoor works where possible have been commenced. Indoor work is hoping to commence where safe to do so this month.

### **Homelessness and Rough Sleepers**

During Covid, the Homelessness team initially saw demand drop off as S21 eviction notices were withdrawn by government. However this is now picking up again and we anticipate a surge in demand once lock-down lifts and the full impact of Covid is felt on the economy. We

are trying to mitigate this by encouraging landlords and tenants to contact us early if they are facing problems with rent.

To protect rough sleepers during Covid, we created the Canonsgrove rough sleeper accommodation to take rough sleepers off the streets and decant tenants from Lindley House into self-contained accommodation. We also brought 26 units forward at the Beach Hotel, Minehead. There are now 50 tenants at Canonsgrove, all who have individual support plans and receive support from a range of agencies. We are working hard with partners to find a sustainable solution to keep rough sleepers off the streets and build on the success of this project. Workshops with partner organisations and SWT officers are underway to develop proposals and recommendation for a solution for the future.

### **Lettings and Homefinder**

When Covid started we stopped advertising new properties on Homefinder Somerset as only essential moves were allowed. Work continued so that tenants were ready for sign-up, to reduce delays when restrictions changed. We also facilitated direct matches into our properties for those who did meet the 'essential moves' criteria, which allowed us to minimise rent loss and free up temporary accommodation.

Restrictions have now been relaxed and we are advertising properties again and starting to enable moves for those who have been waiting for their property. We are in the process of allocating the 17 new properties at Pyrland Fields which we expect to be tenanted from mid-July.

A slowdown in demand during lockdown has also allowed the Homefinder team to successfully reduce a backlog of work. As restrictions have lifted the team have experienced a return to normal levels of new applications and an increase in phone calls. We have started running Homefinder renewals which will be a significant piece of work to ensure all applications are up to date and relevant.

### **Democratic Path:**

- **Scrutiny Committee – No**
- **Executive – No**
- **Full Council – No**

**Reporting Frequency: Once only**

### **Contact Officers**

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*(IF YOU HAVE ANY QUERIES REGARDING THIS TEMPLATE PLEASE CONTACT THE GOVERNANCE TEAM [governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk](mailto:governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk))*



# SWT Tenants' Strategic Group – 20 July 2020

## Zero Carbon Affordable Homes Pilot

### 1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 In 2019, the Council declared a climate emergency and committed to working towards achieving carbon neutrality and climate resilience by 2030. As a result SWT is developing policies and delivering actions to reduce the pace of climate change. In 2020 the Council agreed a Housing Revenue Account (HRA) 30 year Business Plan. This plan included an ambition to develop 1000 new affordable homes for the HRA over 30 years. These ambitions have been joined in this proposed pilot scheme to build up to fifty (50) zero carbon council homes and create a blueprint for future affordable housing developments in the District.

### 2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Executive Committee makes the following recommendations to Full Council:

- (a) Approve the development of up to fifty (50) Zero Carbon Affordable Homes.
- (b) Allocate a Zero Carbon Affordable Homes Capital budget of £10.8m to deliver up to fifty (50) new homes which will include Right to Buy Receipts on all eligible units plus additional borrowing. This comprises a supplementary capital budget increase of £9.3m and a transfer of £1.5m from the social housing development budget within the existing approved capital programme.
- (c) Support the use of underused SWT garage sites and one temporary housing site for new zero carbon affordable homes.
- (d) Delegate authority to the Housing portfolio Holder and Director of Housing and Communities, in consultation with the Assistant Director – Finance (Section 151 Officer), to sign off the plans for each site.
- (e) Delegate authority to the Housing portfolio Holder and Director of Housing and Section 151 Officer to determine the final funding profile for this scheme once the development plans of each individual site has been finalised to identify which elements qualify for RTB funding.
- (f) Note the use of affordable rents for new build HRA homes in line with the 2020 Rent Setting Policy. The affordable rents will be set to ensure scheme viability at between 60% and 80% of market rent.
- (g) Agrees to suspend investment and letting of garages on the identified sites and support the negotiation of alternative garage accommodation for garage tenants and garage owners, and where required the Director of Housing and Communities negotiate and complete the purchase of privately owned garages.

### 3 Background and Full details of the Report

- 3.1 The Zero Carbon Affordable Homes pilot aims to build up to fifty (50) low carbon

affordable homes within thirty (30) months.

- 3.2 The pilot will provide the opportunity for learning and a specification to support future SWT low carbon developments and in particular low carbon affordable housing.
- 3.3 Seven (7) sites have been identified for these homes including six (6) garage sites identified through the garage site review. The seventh and largest site is currently used for the provision of temporary accommodation.
- 3.4 The sites are all in SWT ownership although circa 6 garages have been previously sold and require purchase through negotiation with the owners.
- 3.5 The planning process will consider any necessary garage/parking re-provision which may be required due to the loss of garage sites. However many garages are not used for vehicles and some re-provision is possible within alternative SWT garage sites.
- 3.6 The pilot will need to ensure the re-provision of accommodation to compensate for the loss of twelve (12) units of temporary accommodation. This could be achieved through off site lease or purchase arrangements.

#### The proposed development sites

- 3.7 The garage site review is looking at 146 SWT garage sites. Around twenty (20) sites have been identified to date with development potential. These sites are either underused, require investment and/or are causing blight.
- 3.8 Many of these are small and difficult sites to develop but the pilot provides an opportunity for SWT to retain the assets and reuse land for a new purpose. The garage sites vary in their potential and their site constraints.
- 3.9 Garage site constraints include:
  - being of a small size and less inviting for development contractors
  - trees and buried services
  - more costly to develop as build economies are difficult and more infrastructure and site set up works are required
  - there are privately owned garages within the Council-owned sites
  - sites may be overlooked from neighbouring properties or subject to previously granted access rights restrict land use
  - little or no room for construction site compounds
  - narrow access to the sites
  - many of these sites will not be suitable for traditional building methods
- 3.10 The Council owns land and twelve properties, including eight (8) poor quality prefabricated homes and 4 small one bed units, at Sneddon Grove, Taunton. This site has some site constraints including maturing trees and current service layout. The properties are occupied as temporary accommodation and alternative temporary or permanent accommodation would be required though or outside of the scheme. Recently the Council has increased its supply of temporary accommodation and time is available to manage licences to allow the site to be developed.
- 3.11 Although the seven sites have the potential for circa 60 units it is envisaged the pilot will be constrained to fifty (50) or fewer dwellings or the blend of dwellings may



change due to site constraints.

### Building Zero Carbon Affordable Homes

- 3.12 Zero carbon homes are becoming more common and the technology to build low carbon homes using traditional or off site manufacturing techniques is becoming better understood.
- 3.13 SWT has been exploring off-site manufacture able to meet the Council's carbon neutral ambition. The Council is not committed to off-site construction to deliver zero carbon homes however on some sites new methods of construction are better suited. Off-site manufactured homes can be delivered quicker than traditional housing as the site preparation and build process can take place simultaneously.
- 3.14 Officers believe that off-site manufactured units or panellised systems could be better suited to managing some of the garage site complexities and provide an opportunity to deliver more units on sites which have otherwise low development potential.
- 3.15 It is intended to deliver up to fifty (50) affordable homes for rent. The final mix of unit types and sizes will emerge through the ongoing site assessment studies, procurement and planning processes.

### Developing a low carbon standard for SWT

- 3.16 Most low carbon exemplar schemes focus on a fabric first (well insulated, air tight homes requiring little energy to heat) and renewable heat and energy often from on-site technology.
- 3.17 These qualities produce great homes for the user and require little energy to heat. The SWT zero carbon affordable homes pilot aims to deliver dwellings which are carbon neutral when occupied.
- 3.18 However, the pilot seeks to go further and develop its knowledge in relation to Net Zero Carbon Homes. Net Zero Carbon Homes are homes which are not only carbon neutral during their occupation but also in their manufacture and disassembly. A Net Zero Carbon Home is therefore a much bigger challenge than a zero carbon home as we need to measure and develop an understanding of the use of carbon in the materials, transportation of materials and labour, construction, maintenance and reuse of components or materials.
- 3.19 With the decarbonisation of the grid on-site renewable energy will reduce in importance in delivering zero and net zero homes and considerations in relation to the materials, transportation of materials and construction processes will increase in importance to climate change.
- 3.20 Understanding carbon capture and energy use in the construction of homes is less well understood and we aim to develop SWTs understanding during the delivery of these homes.
- 3.21 To understand the performance of homes ongoing data collection and analysis is required. One of the aims of the pilot is to incorporate a data collection rigour which will allow the carbon and energy performance be measured and therefore allow the

council to evidence carbon and cost benefits. Ensuring the council is able to evidence carbon and fuel benefits will increase the opportunity for customers and development partners to support and adopt a higher standard.

- 3.22 The pilot will contract an energy advisor to develop our capacity to measure carbon and energy and a longer term project, ideally with local colleges linked to a university, will be run to help collect and analyse data to evidence low carbon living benefits when the homes are occupied
- 3.23 As each site is developed it is intended to create temporary show homes to help promote low carbon living. It is envisaged that the show homes would support SWT climate change awareness events and opportunities to support school and college curriculums.
- 3.24 The pilot seeks to develop an approach to low carbon which considers a broad range of carbon and energy factors through benchmarking alternative tender proposals against the London Energy Transformation Initiative (LETI) standard.
- 3.25 The LETI standard is one of several standards which the council has considered but is unique in its emphasis on the use of carbon and energy in the use of materials and construction of the house and in the rigor of collecting data to evidence carbon and energy savings. A summary diagram of the LETI standard can be found in Appendix 2.
- 3.26 The LETI standard considers four (4) key criteria:
- Carbon capture and energy use in the manufacture/construction of homes
  - Fabric first / well insulated and air tight buildings
  - Renewable heat and energy
  - Data collection and analysis
- 3.27 In addition to benchmarking against the LETI model the programme will be guided by the Taunton Garden Town principles and SWTs Design Guide and Checklist.

### Procurement

- 3.28 A traditional development approach would tend to require the development of a client specification, progress planning permission and then procure a development partner to deliver the specification. The pilots approach is to recognise that offsite manufacturers tend to have a single or limited number of products which vary in quality and characteristic. Therefore we need to engage with manufacturers and test their product qualities before appointing.
- 3.29 The pilot is therefore seeking to use a competitive dialogue procurement process. This procurement approach allows a two stage tendering process where a short list of contractors is created after an initial tender process. The initial procurement stage usually allows two or three strong contractors to enter a conversation with the client to explore their offer in more detail for example through site visits, additional examination of their products, materials and approach. A second procurement stage will lead to a lead contractor(s) being appointed.
- 3.30 The use of a competitive dialogue process will allow SWT to be better able to measure bidders against the LETI benchmark standard. The procurement process

will also require certain quality hurdles to ensure the form first approach retains prominence for example thermal insulation values.

#### Rents for new build zero carbon homes

- 3.31 The Council wishes to retain flexibility over setting affordable or social rents to ensure homes are truly affordable to those in housing need whilst ensuring new housing schemes are financially viable. The approved HRA rent setting policy April 2020 provides the following guidance on rent charges for new homes. The guidance does not recognise the additional cost savings to the tenant of Zero Carbon Homes over the benefits in quality and thermal efficiency of a modern new home which achieves build regulation standards of thermal comfort.

#### What benefits will the Council gain as a result of this pilot?

- 3.32 The council will benefit from:

- Up to 50 Zero Carbon Council owned and managed homes which are close to Passivhaus standard (high quality low carbon homes)
- 50 HRA affordable rented homes with on-site renewable heating and energy (no gas)
- Neighbourhoods where SWT's Garden Town and Design Guide and checklist have been applied
- Better use of Council assets and the removal of some blighted sites
- A build specification that is capable of being used or adapted to future council affordable housing schemes
- An investment solution to resolve poor quality temporary accommodation
- Test the alignment of planning and housing in the delivery of low carbon homes
- The collection of a significant amount of knowledge gained through the delivery of the schemes and applied to the pipeline of council developments
- A number of challenges which the council will need to consider to sustain its zero carbon ambition and move towards a net zero carbon homes. Some of these may also come forward within the pilot:

#### Key Milestones

- 3.33 The timescales proposed are ambitious. Officers have appointed a number of contractors to support feasibility work including engineers to survey the sites, architects and an EA to prepare initial tendering briefs with the council and site capacity drawings.

- 3.34 Next Steps

- July – procurement of energy consultant
- Pre application planning discussions June/July
- July onwards - Consultation with garage tenants and negotiation with garage owners to purchase or swap their garages
- July procurement of architect
- August – commence procurement of main contractors potentially through a competitive dialogue process with site visits
- September – November - Main contractor appointment

- December 2020 – April 2021 - Planning permission progressed
- April – July - Start on site and off site construction phase 1 – 4-6 month programme
- Phases 2 and 3 follow including reducing the use of Sneddon Grove for temporary accommodation and providing suitable accommodation in other localities.

Chris Brown  
Assistant Director Housing Development and Regeneration  
July 2020