

## SWT Tenants Strategic Group

Monday, 21st September, 2020,  
6.00 pm



Somerset West  
and Taunton

[SWT VIRTUAL MEETING WEBCAST  
LINK](#)

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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

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|---|-----------------|
| 1. Apologies  |                 |
| 2. Notes from previous meeting  | (Pages 5 - 10)  |
| 3. Directorate report - James Barrah, Chris Brown, Ian Candlish, Simon Lewis, Shari Hallett   | (Pages 11 - 18) |
| 4. Tenant Strategic Board Election - Sharon Yarde   |                 |
| 5. Housing Policies and Tenants Strategic Board Policy comment - Shari Hallett  |                 |
| 6. Allocation and Lettings Policy - Louisa Hill   | (Pages 19 - 22) |
| 7. Tenancy Policy - Stephen Boland  | (Pages 23 - 30) |
| 8. Tenants Strategic Board - Policy comment and sign off  |                 |
| 9. AOB  |                 |
| 10. Housing newsletter details  |                 |
| The housing newsletter will be arriving in the post this week. If you would like to view it on line, please go to,                        |                 |
| <a href="https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/housing-newsletter/">https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/housing-newsletter/</a> |                 |

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James Hasset". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

**JAMES HASSETT  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

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Any requests need to be received by 4pm on the day that provides 2 clear working days before the meeting (excluding the day of the meeting itself). For example, if the meeting is due to take place on a Tuesday, requests need to be received by 4pm on the Thursday prior to the meeting.

The Governance and Democracy Case Manager will take the details of your question or speech and will distribute them to the Committee prior to the meeting. The Chair will then invite you to speak at the beginning of the meeting under the agenda item Public Question Time, but speaking is limited to three minutes per person in an overall period of 15 minutes and you can only speak to the Committee once. If there are a group of people attending to speak about a particular item then a representative should be chosen to speak on behalf of the group.

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Due to the Government guidance on measures to reduce the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19), we will holding meetings in a virtual manner which will be live webcast on our website. Members of the public will still be able to register to speak and ask questions, which will then be read out by the Governance and Democracy Case Manager during Public Question Time and will be answered by the Portfolio Holder or followed up with a written response.

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## **SWT Tenants Strategic Group - 20 July 2020 held via Zoom Video Conference**

Present: Alex Akhigbemen, Cram, Dennis Galpin, Hellier, Ivor Hussey, Corrine McMyler, Livi Mongare, Francesca Smith and Janet Lloyd

Officers: James Barrah, Stephen Boland, Chris Brown, Ian Candlish, Simon Lewis and Shari Hallett (Housing Performance Manager) and Tracey Meadows (Democracy and Governance)

Also Present: Councillor Weston

(The meeting commenced at 4.00 pm)

### **1. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Jessie Bunn

### **2. Notes from previous meetings**

(Minutes of meetings 16 December 2019 and 15 January 2020 circulated with the agenda)

Resolved that the minutes of the Strategic Board held on 16 December 2019 and 15 January we confirmed as a correct record.

### **3. Tenants Strategic Group - Terms of Reference**

#### **Terms of Reference**

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. More details are to follow on this.

Members were asked to support the recommendation to approve the Terms of Reference for the Strategic Group.

#### **Comments made by board members included (responses in italic):**

- Item 1.7 states that group members will be expected to maintain close links with other elements of the tenant engagement structure at the Council, can you please explain? *We have a Tenant's Action Group,*

*currently the acting Chair of the group is Wayne Hobson. They come together to look at the day to day operations. They provide us with feedback on how we are doing on the ground on a daily basis. The Chair has an opportunity to come and speak to the Strategic group to discuss their observations that they have made as there may be issues that are common across our service area that they are seeing routinely and may have views on raising them with the Strategic Group to get those matters addressed.*

**Resolved** that the group accepted the recommendation.

#### 4. **Director of Housing and Communities update report**

Director of Housing and Communities update report

The Director of Housing and Communities, James Barraah along with Simon Lewis (Assistant Director, Housing and Communities), Chris Brown (Assistant Director, Redevelopment and Regeneration) and Ian Candlish (Assistant Director of, Housing properties) updated 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 work plan of the Directorate over the coming weeks and months.

#### **Comments made by board members included; (responses in italic)**

- Regarding the reviewing of anti-social behaviour policies, what sort of urgency are you looking into this as I have an existing problem that has been made worse than it needs to be by existing policies? *We are looking into these policies right now, we need to make sure that our internal processes are efficient, we have a number of tools that we can use and probably need to be a bit quicker than we have done in the past. We need to make sure that when we have cases we need to have clear evidence to ascertain who is at fault. The policy will be updated over the next month;*
- Can you tell me when the emergency call line for repairs will be switched off? *This issue has been picked today so we will rectify this;*
- If there is another flare up in the South West of Covid 19, will we have to renew our processes or are we ready for another local flare up? *The situation in the South West is something that all parties have been watching quite carefully, you saw the reports of people hitting the beaches in high numbers which was not ideal in the circumstances and then just last week an illegal rave in Bath. Our location has meant that firstly our incident rate has been low compared to the National picture, also our location means that we will see an increasing number of people looking to travel to the area for a break, holiday or recreational purposes and second homes is another feature. The surveillance that is underway is keeping a careful eye on that. Our R rate was slow in coming down. The response to any local incident is driven by the County Councillors as a public health responsibility and all partners contribute to that, there is a local outbreak control plan in place it really depends on what happens, what the outbreak*

*might be, what premises are involved and the impact on Somerset West and Taunton Council and depends on the local flare up or outbreak. A lot of these arrangements will be tested when there are local incidents. Information sharing nationally on outbreaks is continuous where we get information fed back to us from Government agencies and responsibility has now been handed to Localities to better manage local outbreaks which is a good thing as local mechanisms are closer to those communities so can respond quicker. We need to remain vigilant and adhere to our own processes in protection for our own staff and just remain a vigilant as possible;*

- I do not believe that buy backs are a good use of our funds, so I am happy that we are not buying back so many this year. Will the 365 new properties that we will be building in the future will these consist of new or redevelopment or is this purely new properties?

*The Council has a strong commitment to building its own stock so you will see at least 95% of those 364 units over the next 7 years will be Council new build Council led homes so that is a very positive statement. Previously we have had to gear up for a development programme and this takes time so those 364 units will be over 7 sites. The use of buy backs and acquisitions have been a very useful filler because whilst we haven't had a development programme of the scale that we have now and that will increase further we still have Right to Buy receipts coming in that we have had to use and if we don't use them we either offer them as grants to Housing Associations or we give that money back to Government so the use of buy backs and acquisitions has been a necessary strategy to enable money to go out of the door but going forward we are trying to spend as much as 100% as possible of the Right to Buy receipts on new build Council homes. The only buy back that we are likely to buy are the odd properties to help development progress and ex Council flats will be beneficial from a management point of view.*

*We are working very closely with Engie at North Taunton. This week we are signing a PCSA agreement which is a pre contract agreement for them to development all their ideas in detail, so money is invested up front to make sure that we get a clear picture of what Engie are promising. We will work very closely with Engie to develop a full contract to be signed in November. We have a lot of lessons to learn, our Zero Carbon project, Seawood Way project, these will all bring forward challenges. Somerset West and Taunton Council is not the most experienced Council when it comes to new development but there are some Officers within the team who have got a lot of experience and we need to make sure that experience is shared amongst the team as we have a large programme ahead of us;*

- Are the homes that Engie are building energy efficient? We will be having discussions with Engie on low carbon homes. our specifications were quite good since they were written down for the tender, this is one area that we have asked Engie refine the bid to make a better proposal to make the properties more energy efficient on phase A, B through to E will be a better standard;

- Do we sign post customers to other agencies to deal with Anti-Social Behaviour issues? *We have a team who deal with these issues if it is more serious and we do use mediation to try to resolve tenant minor issues. We can use other tools if it gets more serious. We use MIND for Mental Health needs ;*
- Is there a refurbishment programme for the replacement of windows? *We performed some procurement work during the lock down period and windows was one of those. We have got down to two different suppliers that we are doing bench marking and costings against. Due to the lockdown we were unable engage with these suppliers as they were shut down so that slowed engagement with them. This is on our active procurement works at the moment. No start date at present but we are eager to get this work done this financial year;*
- When will the Deane House be open to tenants? *We are in the process of looking at our reception re-opening by appointment. With the Police in the building there has been more activity in the building. A more structured response will be given to you with regards to time scales. As for staff, this will take longer as we need to be confident that we can protect our team in the building;*
- Although we are building new homes we need to keep our eye on the ball with our existing stock, have you plans to bring our existing stock up to standard? *There are challenges in making sure that we have investment for both parts. In the business plan review we spoke about new objectives, one of those objectives was investing in our existing homes and neighbourhoods alongside new homes to make sure that it was a key strategic objective for us. We also did a refresh of our stock data that give us our 30 year projections of investment cost for the replacement costs for bathrooms and Kitchens etc. We also need to make sure that we have sufficient budgets to undergo our repairs. We are always looking to improve our data and at present we are conducting surveys to look at the energy performance of our stock and Carbon neutral homes;*

**Resolved** that the Tenants Strategic Group note the report.

## 5. **Zero Carbon Affordable Homes Pilot Project**

### **Zero Carbon Affordable Homes Pilot Project**

Assistant Director Housing Development and Regeneration, Chris Brown inform the group of the Zero Carbon Affordable Homes Pilot Project;

Stated that 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.



## Comments made by Board Members included (responses in italic);

- Concerns with the displacement of existing parking provisions on garage sites that have been identified for housing; *there are going to be displacement of vehicles parking on the streets. We have not yet had planning approval on each site and this may have a big impact on how many sites can be built out. Alternative garage space may be offered but may not be convenient to some of the users. The wider question is the car use, rural areas usage would be essential for a long time to come and many of us think that our cars are essential where ever we live. We need to think if parking is a requirement in the future. We need to challenge this and push more public transport. Planning permission will force us to address that point;*
- Good report and very ambitious and I am looking forward to it. What are the risks with this project once it is finished? We do not want tenants knocking the properties about. I suggest that a tenancy agreement is drawn up to stipulate to the tenant that no internal structural alterations are to take place in the properties. If we have that in our tenancy agreement that will safe guard our investment; *there will be risks with the sites themselves, so achieving 50 homes is a risk after we look at all the services the parking challenges, the existing access and any ownership, these might whittle down a bit and we may not achieve the 50. There are risks with the procurement process, we need to make sure that contractors deliver our high standards. Speed is another risk with challenges on time and the planning process, change of blend of units, more 2/3 in bedroom sizes. And risk to Right to Buy, we need to make sure that we spend the money;*
- With difficulties in the planning process, is our planning department on board with what we want to achieve? *We expect them to be positive about this as many of the things that they want we are proposing. The design guide talks about good space standard, good quality design and low carbon homes. This will be an area of learning because for the first time we are putting a lot of schemes through planning.*
- We are happy to have Cllr Fran Smith backing these schemes and you also have the boards backing;

**Resolved** that the report is noted.

## 6. Forward Plan including future dates

### Forward Plan and future meeting dates;

Future dates for 2020/21 will be as follows (all meetings will commence at 6pm);

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

Areas for 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

(The Meeting ended at 6.17 pm)

## Housing Directorate Report to Housing Strategic Board

21st September 2020

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### Director of Housing and Communities Introduction

#### Unitary Authority

Somerset West and Taunton Council has given its support to the Stronger Somerset Business Case, which proposes two new unitary Councils and a combined authority. The Full Council met on Thursday 10 September to debate the proposal which was approved following its endorsement by the Scrutiny Committee. The proposal has also been supported at Full Council meetings at Mendip, Sedgemoor and South Somerset District Councils.

The district authorities worked together on the Stronger Somerset plan which focuses on extensive reform of way councils work and an end to the current two-tier system of local government with county and district councils.

Councils are expected to receive a formal invitation from the Government to submit their business cases. There will be an eight-week Government-run consultation later in the year and councils have been advised that new organisations will be in place by April 2022.

### Housing Development and Regeneration Team

#### Housing Strategy

- Members have approved the Hinkley Point C Housing Strategy and the implementation stage of the various projects will now progress.
- Work is progressing across partners across the County to adopt a health, care and housing memorandum of understanding as are discussions regarding the establishment of a Homelessness Reduction Board.
- Eco Flex scheme is now being adopted in SWT which provides access to fuel poor private households for energy saving measures such as insulation, fuel switch, etc.

#### Housing Enabling

- A programme aimed at increasing affordable homes in the most difficult parts of the district through a community led approach is commencing with the recruitment of a part time specialist officer to work primarily in the Exmoor National Park with communities including Parish Councils. The Programme

aims to unlock rare development opportunities through community awareness and activity.

- Work is taking place with planning to understand the implications of the planning white paper on affordable housing supply in Somerset.

## **HRA New Homes**

- There are 309 HRA homes at various stages of delivery. Laxton Road (8 units) will be ready to let around Christmas followed by NTWP phase A homes (47) and zero carbon homes with five sites prioritised for early delivery (43 units)
- Plans are progressing well for other schemes at Seaward Way (53 units in the west of Somerset) and Oxford Inn (11 units in Taunton). Both these schemes will follow the Council's approval route with the aim of achieving executive support and member approval in December 2020. Seaward Way has the benefit of an allocation of funds from the Hinckley Point C Housing Strategy.
- The hope is to have an approved pipeline of 373 units which will front load the Council's and HRA business plans ambition of 1000 units over 30 years.
- Many of these homes will create or adopt the SWT low carbon standard which is emerging as a standard that provides close to zero carbon in occupation (very low energy use by the customer based on a fabric first approach) and reduced energy and carbon use in the construction and maintenance of the homes in line with the London Energy Transformation Initiative (LETI) approach
- The Council is working with our contractor Engie to improve the low carbon qualities of the NTWP new homes and the refurbished homes. SWT is looking to improve the fabric of the homes over the tendered requirements and current building regulation requirements.

## **Housing Property Team**

### **Responsive and Void Repairs**

- All responsive repairs (both emergency and non-emergency) are now being undertaken, with measures in place to keep both residents and staff safe from COVID-19 whilst work is carried out.
- During lockdown only emergency repairs were undertaken and this has led to a backlog of non-emergency repairs. This backlog is reducing but it will nevertheless take some time to return to normal levels of service delivery in all areas of repairs work.
- Void repairs were undertaken during lockdown but reduced capacity and a need for social distancing in properties led to delays in completion and a backlog occurring. This backlog has now been resolved.

### **Property Safety Compliance**

Progress on property safety compliance includes:

- A review of all compliance areas against every property.

- Recruitment to two new posts within the Property Compliance team - a Compliance Manager and a Landlord and Compliance Specialist.
- Additional asbestos management surveys.
- New Asbestos Management and Fire Safety policies and procedures.
- Further programme of Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs).
- Visits to advise residents on fire safety and enforce clearance of communal areas.
- Undertaking FRA recommended remedial actions and maintenance inspections.
- Continuing with Gas Safety checks.
- Undertaking a programme of Water Risk Assessments.
- Carrying out electrical checks to communal areas.
- A comprehensive update report was recently provided to the Audit and Governance and Audit committee.

### **Housing Asset Management**

- Stock condition surveys recommenced.
- Procurement of external resource to undertake additional energy surveys.

### **Capital Programmes**

- All capital programmes ceased during lockdown. However, procurement was undertaken and contracts are now recommencing.
- External painting and replacement soffits and gutters being undertaken.
- Kitchen, bathroom, window, insulation and heating programmes to recommence shortly.
- Contractor availability likely to be a challenge in completing all programmes planned for 2020/21.

## **Housing and Communities Teams**

### **Supported Housing**

- Staff capacity has continued to be reduced, due to Covid related absences (sickness and childcare).
- A reduced, phone based service has continued to be provided for all sheltered and extra care tenants, with home visits only being completed where necessary.
- Many of our older tenants have continued to shield, or live in a similar way to how they were during the lockdown, to reduce Coronavirus risks to themselves and others.
- Many tenants have reported that they are happy to be receiving welfare checks and support by phone, as they are feeling anxious about having visitors and using PPE/not having access to much PPE.

- Tenants have been reassured by staff who are visiting using the appropriate PPE.
- Staff have been able to complete aids and adaptations assessments within tenant's homes, to enable them to have the support they need to remain independent within their home.
- Staff are offering Deane Helpline welfare calls and other useful helpline numbers for tenants to access support and feel less isolated.
- Our Extra Care sites have remained Covid-free, thanks to tenants and Care staff following the government guidance and precautions. Staff have been on-site every week, to complete maintenance, gardening and health and safety checks.
- Some temporary housing placements within Extra Care (from hospital discharges) have been able to remain within the schemes, on a permanent tenancy, with the care support they require.

## **Lettings**

- At the beginning of lockdown we suspended the advertising and letting of properties whilst the voids team concentrated on properties to be used as emergency accommodation for homeless applicants due to the closure of commercial Bed and Breakfasts.
- Government guidance was issued advising only essential home moves would happen, in line with this we direct matched 13 properties that had been held during lockdown that the voids team were then able to turn around to those tenants in our temporary accommodation who were owed a Homeless duty which also freed up some of this much needed accommodation.
- Procedures for the team were amended to comply with Covid risk assessments, verifications were carried out remotely and viewings were still carried out but with the Officers allowing the prospective tenant to view the property independently.
- The 17 properties at Pyrlands Fields were successfully let, some to North Taunton decant residents and the team are now up to date with any backlogged properties and are getting back to normal timescales.
- SWT has been successful in securing Hinkley C funding to create the role of a Home Moves Plus Officer Full time for 2 years. This post will work within the Lettings team to work with tenants to encourage and facilitate moves for those currently under-occupying properties and allowing SWT to make best use of its stock for the benefit of all those on the Housing Register. The Officer will promote their service to existing tenants and develop an excellent knowledge of our stock and identify those who are under-occupying. The Officer will provide assistance with joining Homefinder Somerset to encourage a move via the Housing Register, especially those in 4 bed plus properties who will be awarded a priority on Homefinder for downsizing, they will also explore the option of mutual exchange and also promote the Transfer Removal Grant that financially incentivises a move for those who qualify. This role is important in promoting the best use of our stock and

ensure that tenants are in the most suitable and sustainable properties for their needs.

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

- As we have moved out of lockdown, the hard work of the team is paying off as contractors return to site to full capacity. There were a few minor hiccups but I'm glad to report the supply chain and contractor availability has held up with no major incidents.
- All technical staff are undertaking full site visits since the middle of July conscious and adhering to the Covid19 risk assessments that are in place to protect both clients and staff. SIP have just launched a new service to tackle hoarding. Designed to assist clients who have extensive problems with clutter in their home.
- The Independent Living Officers' will centre their level of intervention based upon the clutter scale. Besides working with the client to clear the property, they will also put in place an agreed plan with the client to prevent hoarding in the future. Besides hoarding the ILO's also undertake Homes Safety Checks and low level mental health advice. Home Safety checks through a detailed survey of the home to identify any hazards and suggest mitigation measures to eliminate or reduce the risk, such as sign posting to the fire service or remedial works through the technical team. Low level mental health advice which is fundamentally a service to identify clients with mental health issues and provide a sign posting service to the appropriate mental health teams. Working alongside them in finding solutions to support their mental health and resume independent living.
- SIP has successfully recruited a Hospital Resettlement Coordinator. Working out of Musgrove Park Hospital and surrounding NHS Community Hospitals, the post will be responsible for assisting patients with a smooth discharge from hospital into their home setting. The post will be jointly managed by Health and Somerset Independence Plus. It is an 18 month post, funding will be from the Better Care Fund. Historically there has been a national problem in the hospitals with bed blocking and failed discharges. Delays where the patient was awaiting a care package in their own home made up 20.8% of all delays in 2018/19. On a daily basis 10 in every 100,000 of the population of Somerset were delayed from leaving hospital during that year. In March 2019, 1,065 hospital days were lost due to bed blocking which equates to 34 beds at a cost of £1,810,500 in one month. The post will plan home based solutions ahead of the point of discharge avoiding the common issue of overstatement of need which slows down release from hospital. The post will be actively involved in attending discharge plans and preoperative meetings, facilitating and coordinating services both inside and outside in the wider community with agencies and SIP ILO's to ease patients out of hospital and into their home setting.

- Homefinder continues to carry a backlog, in part this is due to an increased demand on the service and a renewed interest in people updating their applications due to changes in personal circumstances due to Covid-19. The team also provide telephone support to the wider Homeless team who have also seen an increased demand on their service. In addition we have started to run renewals and are sending out a couple of hundred a week as we need to ensure we hold up to date data, this also encourages applicants to contact the service and increases demand. It is an important process to complete as Homefinder Somerset will influence decisions in other areas of work and we need to ensure that if we choose to transfer data to a newly procured system next year that we are only paying to transfer the data we need to. The timetable for the procurement of the new system is still as planned and the partnership is looking to issue the invitation to tender in the next couple of weeks. Homefinder will be included in the review of the Homeless Service by the newly appointed Managers.

### **Income**

- The Rent Recovery team continues to work to support our tenants through the effects of having a reduced income or in some cases redundancy due to COVID-19. They continue to embrace the "LEAN" approach to rent recovery and the rent arrears are showing the benefit of this (£670K).
- The team have now started to make appointments in Deane House for those vulnerable tenants who cannot manage their accounts or benefits claims over the phone or digitally, and are referring tenants to I2A to help them back into work.
- Conversations are now being held with Taunton Citizen Advice on restarting the Money Matters drop in surgeries. We are also in the process of recruitment for a second Debt and Benefit Officer which will mean we are a full team.

### **Anti-Social Behaviour**

- In the last quarter we have been reviewing the existing ASB policy, with the team now working on processes to work alongside this. Although we had an increase in serious ASB cases during Covid this is now starting to slow down a little and the team have seen the number of new cases declining. The two dedicated officers have a caseload of 38 open cases which is around average. It should be noted that these are the more complex cases and lower level ASB and nuisance are handled by Tenancy Management or Supported Housing Officers.

### **Tenancy/Estate Team**

- The team are now preparing schedules for re-introducing Estate Walkabouts, Community skip days and block inspections, We are hoping to get this back up and running by end September/early October and in a way that keeps staff and our customers safe.



- We have worked on a process for delivering Annual Tenancy Checks with an officer visiting households to assess the condition of the tenancy and property. This process includes an inspection of the property/garden and for the officer to work on any issues that arise. This has involved chasing outstanding repairs, making referrals to other services such as MIND and a befriending service; carrying out property and garden inspections; assisting the tenant to get furniture and giving them support and advice. As working on minor hoarding issues. This trial period has already proved to be adding value to both the customer and us.
- Recruitment for two full time tenancy/estate offices is currently ongoing to give a full complement of staff.

## **Housing Performance Team**

- The Housing Performance Team has been created to drive service improvements in our customer experience and service delivery as well as oversee housing governance.
- A series of governance meetings and activities are already underway.
- Recruitment of the team of seven is also underway and work has already started on our complaints responses. By December we will self-assess our performance against the new Housing Ombudsman code.
- Engagement and communication with our tenants will be key activities. This month a newsletter will be sent to around 6000 tenants and work will commence on our engagement plans.
- We have been focussing efforts on our complaints performance, understanding our complaints process and closing off any open complaints. On the 4<sup>th</sup> September we were showing 44 open complaints and 20 (45%) were closed during that week and work has been ongoing to close the remaining complaints as soon as possible. Customers have been contacted and the process of investigation and resolution started, it is the "official" closure that has taken longer than the 10 days targeted. We are looking at how we can improve this performance within our directorate.



# ALLOCATIONS & LETTINGS POLICY

DRAFT

## ALLOCATIONS & LETTINGS POLICY

Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) is committed to allocating and letting our social housing stock in a fair, transparent and efficient way, making the best use of our stock whilst taking into account the housing need and aspirations of our customers and potential customers. We will deliver this service in accordance with and by referring to the following:

- The Regulator of Social Housing Consumer Standards in particular, The Tenancy Standard.
- Homefinder Somerset (HFS) Common Lettings Policy.
- SWT Housing Service will participate in the Homefinder Somerset Partnership, the partnership operates a countywide choice based lettings scheme which is administered by the Local Authorities of Somerset.
- SWT is committed to creating balanced and sustainable communities, when making allocations we will consider if a potential customer has the ability to sustain a tenancy, and if required will ensure that relevant support agencies have been engaged from the outset of a tenancy
- SWT works in Partnership with relevant agencies following the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangement (MAPPA) protocol which supports the management of registered Offenders and those assessed as being a risk to the public.
- SWT will assist in the rehousing of Asylum Seekers and persons from abroad, in accordance with statutory and regulatory requirements. We will accept referrals from the Local Authority for Asylum seekers with “limited leave to remain” as well as the NASS scheme (National Asylum Support Scheme)
- SWT are able to let properties outside of the HFS scheme, this will only be done in extreme circumstances when all alternative options have been exhausted and significant risks are present, these circumstances will be considered on a case by case basis and will require the Lettings Manager’s approval.
- To ensure fairness and transparency, where we identify an applicant has a significant relationship either with SWT or an employee of SWT, we will ensure that any proposed let is reviewed with the Housing Portfolio Holder before the allocation is confirmed.
- We will seek to allocate our housing stock in a way that ensures best use of the property, this will include where there are significant Aids and Adaptations, property size and also the local situation (ensuring adherence to Section 106 agreements. We will achieve this by effective use of adverts, using appropriate labelling and working with partners such as Housing Occupational Therapists.
- In some circumstances we may implement the use of Local Lettings Plans (LLP’s) in order to address issues or concerns in a defined area for a limited period of time, usually as part of a Housing Development Project or to manage serious Anti-social Behaviour (ASB).
- We will encourage our tenants to arrange their own home moves by mutual exchange and providing free subscription for our existing customers to a national home swap service **THIS IS UNDER REVIEW DUE TO HOMEFINDER NOT CONTINUING WITH MUTUAL EXCHANGES.**
- We will seek assist our existing customers who need to downsize to a smaller property by supporting them through the application and lettings process and by provision of a Transfer Removal Grant, once the home move is completed.
- We will review our allocations and lettings performance and consult on this policy by seeking comments from customers, stakeholders and partners, as well as reviewing against good practice and regulatory and legal requirements.
- We will not usually make an allocation to an applicant where they or a member of their household has a recent history, (defined as the last 2 years) of ASB. We will take into account, the extent of the ASB, its impact on the local community at the time, the length of time since the activity occurred, but also what the applicant or household member has done to change their behaviour and be better able to sustain a tenancy with SWT.

This policy and its associated procedures will be reviewed annually and authorised prior to release by The Director of Housing for SWT. The policy will be counter signed by the CEO of SWT.

DRAFT

Name:.....

Position: Director of Housing

Date:.....

Name:.....

Position: Chief Executive Officer

Date:.....



SWTTP  
Revision: 01  
Revision Date: July 2020

The logo for Somerset West and Taunton, featuring the text "Somerset West and Taunton" in white, bold, sans-serif font, set against a teal background with a white curved graphic element on the right side.

# TENANCY POLICY

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## Housing Directorate

### Tenancy Policy

#### **1.0 Introduction**

The last review of the Council's Tenancy Policy was carried out in 2013/2014. During this period the Tenant Service Management Board received two reports, one in September 2013 and a further report June 2014. The Council's Community Scrutiny Committee also received a report in November 2014. In June 2020 the Council carried out a review to ensure its Tenancy Policy remains current.

It is good practice for all registered providers of social housing to have in place a tenancy policy that sets out the type of tenancies that they grant, the circumstances that each will be granted etc. This policy sets these out for Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) as a landlord of social housing.

This policy has been created with reference to the Countywide Tenancy Strategy for Somerset – June 2012; Homes and Community Agency Regulatory Framework for Social Housing Providers in England – April 2012; Localism Act 2011; and several relevant Housing Acts.

#### **2.0 Policy purpose**

This policy aims to:

- Ensure all tenancies are granted fairly;
- Ensure SWT's approach to granting tenancies is transparent; and
- Contribute towards maintaining healthy and sustainable communities.

#### **3.0 Types of tenancy**

We will grant several tenancy types; and all current tenants will remain on their existing tenancy types:

##### **3.1 Introductory tenancy**

Introductory tenancies will be granted to all tenants new to SWT. The purpose of an introductory tenancy is to allow SWT to be satisfied that the tenant or tenants are suitable to have a secure tenancy.

Introductory tenancies will not be granted for:

- SWT tenants who are transferring to another dwelling house within our stock, unless they are already introductory tenants, in which case they will be granted a new introductory tenancy;

- Tenants of another registered provider or local authority who transfer to SWT, unless they are already introductory tenants, in which case they will be granted new introductory tenancy; and
- Tenants who are granted temporary accommodation. Such tenants will be granted a non-secure tenancy.

Introductory tenancies will usually last for twelve months from the tenancy start date and if a tenant's conduct raises concern then the introductory period can be extended for a further six months, giving an introductory period of eighteen months in total.

Before the start of an introductory tenancy, tenants will be told that they will be granted a secure tenancy upon successful completion of their introductory tenancy period.

Following the successful completion of the introductory tenancy period an introductory tenancy will automatically become a secure tenancy.

### **3.1.1 Right to appeal**

Tenants may appeal against or complain about the reasons given and the decision to extend an introductory tenancy period from twelve months to eighteen months.

### **3.1.2 Outline of the appeal process:**

- Tenant receives notice advising review decision;
- The appeal should be submitted within twenty one days of the date of notice, unless there are exceptional circumstances which have caused the delay;
- Tenants submit written appeal or attends an oral hearing, giving reason/s why s/he thinks the decision is unfair;
- A housing officer to review the decision and make written recommendations to their line manager;
- The manager will then make the final decision; and
- Tenant will be notified in writing of the decision and the reasons for the decision on the appeal.

### **3.2 Secure tenancy**

Secure tenancies will be granted to:

- SWT secure tenants who are transferring to another dwelling house;
- Tenants of another registered provider who are either secure or assured tenants and transferring to a SWT dwelling house; and
- All SWT introductory tenants who successfully completed their introductory period.

### **3.3 Demoted tenancy**

The Council can apply to the Court to demote a secure tenancy, as a penalty against tenants who have been involved in anti-social behaviour. The Court has no power to demote a tenancy other than for anti-social behaviour.

Where appropriate, SWT may take legal action to obtain demotion orders against secure tenancies as part of an approach to tackling serious and persistent neighbour nuisance and or anti-social behaviour.

Where a secure tenant is demoted and the demotion period is completed successfully, the demoted tenancy will automatically become a secure tenancy.

Demoted tenants do not have the same rights as secure tenants. For example, they do not have the right to exchange; succession; take in lodgers; sublet; or Right to Buy.

### **3.4 Non secure tenancy**

The tenants residing in a dwelling house that is designated as temporary accommodation will be granted a non-secure tenancy.

Such tenancies do not have the same security of tenure or rights as those set out in secure tenancies.

### **3.5 Licences or forms of agreement**

Where a tenancy is not appropriate we will offer licences or forms of agreement - for example, where a decant property is made available to a secure tenant who has to move temporarily to have works carried out.

## **4.0 Mutual exchange**

Under the Housing Act 1985 S92 a secure or assured tenant has the right to exchange their tenancy with another secure or assured tenant, subject to the written consent of his/her landlord

Under the Localism Act 2011 if at least one of the tenants, party to the mutual exchange, has a secure tenancy begun before April 2012 and at least one of the tenants, party to the mutual exchange, has a flexible tenancy, then such exchanges must be administered by surrender and the granting of new tenancies. In such circumstances, a tenant who holds the secure tenancy, predated April 2012 and has remained social housing tenants since that date will be granted a secure tenancy. This will ensure that existing tenants retain similar security of tenure to that of their original tenancy. Any flexible tenancy tenants have a secure tenancy.

## **5.0 Tenancy succession**

Existing SWT secure tenancies that commenced from the date of the introduction of this policy will only allow there to be one statutory right of succession to a spouse or civil partner or a member of the deceased tenant's family, limited to son or daughter only.

Note: In the operation of this aspect of the policy the housing manager/s will, in making their decision to re-let a dwelling house, take account of the needs of vulnerable existing occupiers by reason of age, disability or illness as well as existing occupiers with children.

## **6.0 Redevelopment or major works**

Tenants who have been moved into alternative accommodation during any redevelopment or other major works will be granted a tenancy with no less security of tenure on their return to settled accommodation.

## **7.0 Links to strategies, policies and associated documents:**

This policy has links with the following documents:

- Somerset Tenancy Strategy
- Somerset Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy
- Homefinder Somerset Common Lettings Policy
- Anti social Behaviour Policy
- Allocations Policy
- Decanting Policy
- Tenancy Management Policy
- Mutual Exchange Policy

## **8.0 Links to other procedures:**

This policy has links with the following procedures:

- Allocations
- Tenancy management
- Anti social behaviour
- Mutual exchange
- Homelessness
- Lettings
- Decanting

This policy and will be reviewed every two years ensure that the policy meets its stated objectives and complies with legislative changes. Prior to release the reviewed policy will be formally agreed by Director of Housing at Somerset West and Taunton Council.

Name:.....

Position: Director of Housing

Date:.....

### DOCUMENT HISTORY

Revision	Description of Changes	Date of Revision
01	First issue	2014
02	Policy update	2020

