

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Tenants' Strategic Group – Monday 24th May 2021

Website Improvements

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Member Cllr F Smith.

Report Author: Shari Hallett (Housing Performance Manager)

1. Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

At the last meeting the Chair of the meeting requested a report summarising website improvements. The report has been compiled to demonstrate improvements made since end of October 2020 and to provide information to members of the group.

2. Recommendations

Members of the Tenants' Strategic Group are asked to note and comment on the report content.

3. Risk Assessment (if appropriate)

Not applicable.

4. Background and Full details of the Report

Please see report below.

5. Links to Corporate Strategy

The website pages produced by Housing and Communities support the Somerset West and Taunton strategic themes “a transparent and customer focused council” and “homes and communities”.

6. Finance / Resource Implications

Not applicable, website improvements have been made by members of the Housing Performance Team.

7. Legal Implications (if any)

Not applicable.

8. Climate and Sustainability Implications (if any)

No direct carbon/environmental impacts arising from the recommendations.

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

Not applicable.

10. Equality and Diversity Implications (if any)

Not applicable, website meets accessibility criteria and can be navigated by customers using screen readers.

11. Social Value Implications (if any)

Not applicable.

12. Partnership Implications (if any)

Not applicable.

13. Health and Wellbeing Implications (if any)

Not applicable.

14. Asset Management Implications (if any)

Not applicable.

15. Data Protection Implications (if any)

Not applicable.

16. Consultation Implications (if any)

Data from the STAR survey 2020 was used to initiate some of the improvements in this report.

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

Not applicable, report for Tenants' Strategic Group.

Democratic Path:

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

Reporting Frequency: Ad-hoc

Contact Officers

| | |
|-------|---|
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Housing and Communities

Website progress report

1. Introduction

The Housing Directorate started to reform in July 2020. By the end of October 2020 the Housing Performance Team was staffed and work on the website could start alongside other priorities.

2. Background

The current website for Somerset West and Taunton went live when the new council was created April 2019. At that time services were merged into one area called “customer” and there was not a “housing directorate”. This influenced how webpages were created.

With the newly created Housing Directorate, it is possible to take ownership of specific pages and post up our own content as part of the Somerset West and Taunton Council website. Our website must be compliant with accessibility standards and fully usable to those who may be unable to see and using screen reader technology or have other disability. This means that pictures are very limited and details on each page are kept uniform.

3. Improvements

The Housing Performance Team have made a number of improvements and changes which are summarised below:

3.1 Page updates

We have been working on checking and updating our housing webpages. This work will be ongoing; however, contacts have been established within departments for this to become a smoother process in future. A few of the larger alterations completed have been listed below.

- Checking and update of all pages
- Sheltered housing - update of information and officers.
- Duty to refer - An update to this process has taken place (see below) and so the webpage was altered to support this.
- Tenant engagement page - Updated to include new TSG members.

3.2 New content

We have been working with various teams to create new content for the website and there have been a number of new pages created in the last 6 months including:

- Stay safe and warm this winter (now unpublished but will go up again next year)
- TSG election (now offline again)
- Downsizing webpage
- Star survey results webpage
- Capital works programme
- Covid-19 housing advice
- Electrical safety (private landlords)
- Housing newsletter
- Annual report to tenants
- Estate inspection schedules for both General Needs and Sheltered Housing

(Screen captures of screens are shown)

Capital works programme

As a social housing landlord Somerset West and Taunton council are working to continually improve our housing through our Capital Works programme. This is a programme of home improvements that are both ongoing and planned for the near future. You can see an outline of some of our plans listed below.

Please be aware that due to Coronavirus the dates and contractors for these works are subject to change.

Kitchen Replacements

In line with constant updates to our asset data following recent and ongoing stock condition inspections we are currently undertaking kitchen upgrade and replacement works in our older properties. This programme currently has no proposed completion date due to every changing data we gather but is run on a yearly programme.

Contractor: Mi-Space
Estimated renewal date: 31/12/2020

Bathroom Replacements

In line with constant updates to our asset data following recent and ongoing stock condition inspections we are currently undertaking bathroom upgrade and replacement works in our older properties. This programme currently has no proposed completion date due to the every changing data we gather, but is run on a yearly programme.

Contractor: Mi-Space
Estimated renewal date: 31/12/2020

Window Replacements

Due to changing regulations, standards and improvements with regards to the manufacturing of windows we are currently embarking on a long term investment programme to replace the current windows within our housing. This work is also part of our plan to help reduce the carbon footprint of our properties in line with government guidelines.

Contractor: Wrekin Windows
Estimated finish / Renewal date: 31/03/2021

Related pages

- [Council and social housing](#)
- [Improving your home](#)
- [Improvements and repairs](#)

Covid-19 Housing advice Council tenants

Following the lockdown announcements, a review of essential services has taken place in line with current government guidance and consideration of the rising number of positive Covid-19 cases in our area. Our priority is to keep our customers and staff safe during this period and as such there are some services that are altered or we will not be providing, please see the service area drop downs below for up to date information about how we are currently operating.

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Repairs and maintenance | ▼ |
| Supported housing tenants | ▼ |
| Support with rent payments | ▼ |
| Use of meeting halls | ▼ |
| Planned works and programmes | ▼ |
| Tenant support | ▼ |
| Lettings | ▼ |
| Homelessness and Homefinder Somerset | ▼ |
| Development and regeneration | ▼ |

To ensure we can continue to offer services throughout this Covid-19 period we are asking all tenants to please adhere to the following requests below:

- If anyone in your household is self-isolating with symptoms or has tested positive with Coronavirus you must let us know in advance of our teams arriving at your house.
- We will do our best to call ahead on the day of your repair to confirm our arrival time.
- We will ask you and all members of your household to isolate in another room while we complete work in your home.
- Please ensure you follow the two-metre social distancing rules whilst we are in your home.
- If you do not follow these requests when we arrive our staff will make the decision not to complete the visit and you will need to reschedule.
- If you do not follow these requests and your service request is an emergency, we will look to isolate the problem from outside of the property where possible.

Related pages

- [Housing repairs](#)
- [Paying your rent or service charge](#)
- [Universal credit](#)
- [Test and Trace Support Payment](#)

Your views

Somerset West and Taunton

Somerset West and Taunton Council - Tenant Satisfaction Survey 2020

About the survey

In November 2020, many of you took part in an important survey.

The survey focused on how happy you are with the way Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) delivers key services and maintains your homes. The survey was anonymous and carried out by an independent market research company - Acuity Research & Practice.

The survey was carried out by telephone interviews.

A total of
506
tenants took part.



Thank you to all of you who took part!

This report contains key results from the survey in respect of tenants' opinions about their homes and the services received.

If you would like to find out more information about the survey or how to get involved please contact Sharon Yarde
S.Yarde@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

3.3 Emails

We send regular (quarterly) emails to residents and non-residents who provide their email address via the website, sending them links to the newsletter and relevant articles. The screen shot below shows you the style of the email that is sent.



3.4 New processes

3.4.1 Contact my housing team - Firmstep form / webpage

Looking at our STAR survey feedback and considering the customer journey we realised that contacting the right officer was not straightforward. We recognised the need for our tenants to be able to easily see who their designated housing officers were and wanted to create a lookup for tenants to use on our website.

We have developed a form called “contact my housing officer” that can be used to route enquiries to the relevant Case Manager (housing officer). The form has been live since the end of March and we will examine data to show its effectiveness in July. The data will show if any areas of the business could be dealt with by Customer Contact at first point rather than waiting to be routed to Housing Case Managers.

Home Services

Housing Team contact request

Before you begin Enquiry details Your details

Use this form to request contact from Somerset West and Taunton Housing Team if you have enquiries relating to:

- your tenancy
- your rent (including debt and benefit enquiries)
- Council-owned garages

Do not use this form to:

- [request a repair](#)
- [make a complaint](#)
- ask about [Homefinder](#) or [housing options](#)

What do you wish to contact us about? *

Garages

Residential properties

However, as we were starting to design this process, we realised that what would be even more useful, with benefits to tenants, our customer contact team and our case managers, would be to create a new contact form that makes contact easier and tells our tenants who their officers are. The housing performance and business analyst teams worked together to produce this new form that can be used via our SelfService portal and by customer contact when taking phone calls. So far we have had great feedback and will review effectiveness.

As an extension of this work, we also created a new webpage called contact my housing team as a one stop shop on the website to help our tenants and customers get into contact with the right team. Each area has a short service description and contact method clearly linked from the webpage. Below you can see a screen shot showing a few of the entries.

Contact my housing team

We have information available across our website on a number of areas in housing, you'll find the links to the pages below, if your query can't be answered on our website we will be happy to help. In order to get in touch with the right members of our team please see which contact method is most appropriate for your query below, alternatively you can call Somerset West and Taunton on [0300 304 8000](tel:03003048000) and speak to our customer contact team.

Who are my housing team?

We want our tenants to know who their designated Tenancy Management or Sheltered Housing and Rent Recovery Case Managers are. Use our new [housing team contact form](#) and enter your address to see who the case managers are for your property and to contact them, see below for more information on how our team can help.

Tenancy management and sheltered housing

Our tenancy management team can help you with: general needs housing enquiries, succession and assignments, tenancy sign ups, new tenancy visits, mutual exchange applications and enquiries, keeping pets, subletting, ending a tenancy, annual tenancy checks, estates inspections, block inspections, parking issues, untidy gardens, tenancy fraud and anti-social behaviour.

You can contact your Tenancy Management or Sheltered Housing Case Manager using the [housing team contact form](#). Please only use this form for housing queries if you are an existing tenant, all other enquiries should be made using the [general enquiries](#) form.

Reporting anti-social behaviour

You can find out more about anti-social behaviour on our [anti-social behaviour](#) page.

To report ASB please use the [housing team contact form](#). You can use this form to report both low level ASB and neighbourhood nuisance as well as serious cases of anti-social behaviour. Please only use this form for housing queries if you are an existing tenant, all other enquiries should be made using the [general enquiries](#) form.

Related pages

- [Antisocial behaviour](#)
- [Housing options and homelessness](#)
- [Council garage](#)
- [Paying your rent or service charge](#)
- [Housing repairs](#)

3.4.2 Duty to refer – The housing options team got in contact with us to make some changes to their webpage following a streamlining of their duty to refer process. The new process allows organisations with a duty to refer to create their own Jigsaw accounts and to follow the process of their referral all the way through, reducing double handling of information and saving time for our officers.

Homelessness duty to refer

Under the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) some public authorities must notify the local authority's housing advice department of anyone they consider may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless within 56 days.

The authorities that must do this are:

- prisons
- youth offender institutions
- secure training centres
- secure colleges
- youth offending teams
- probation services (including rehabilitation companies)
- Jobcentre Plus
- social services authorities
- emergency departments
- urgent treatment centres
- hospitals providing inpatient care

Before making any referral you must have permission from the individual to send the referral along with their contact information, and have allowed them to identify which authority in England they wish to be referred to.

If you are one of the listed authorities and are working with a client who is homeless or threatened with homelessness, please visit the [Jigsaw website](#) and complete a referral, subject to their consent being received. Once the referral has been received, you will be able to review it's progress via your account.

Agencies other than those specified are still able to refer to an authority if they are aware of a person or persons threatened with homelessness within 56 days - or actually homeless - using the duty to refer form.

More information can also be found on the [duty to refer homelessness](#) GOV.UK website

Related tasks

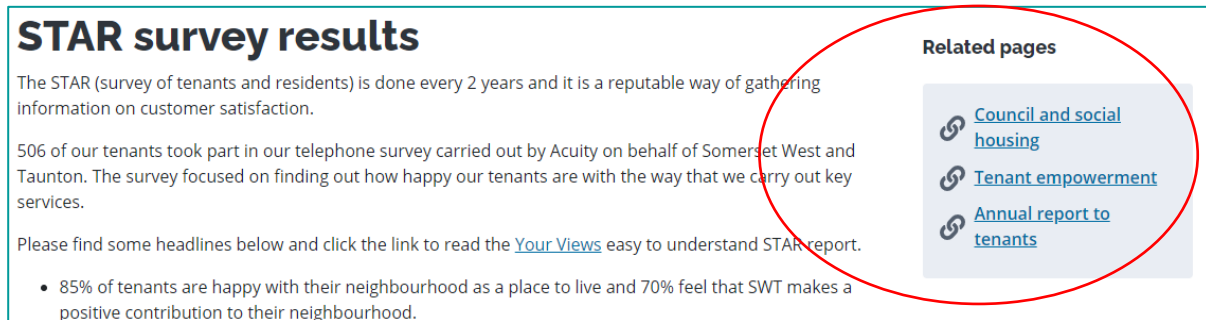
[Homelessness](#)

Related pages

- [Check your housing choices](#)
- [Emergency housing](#)
- [Homelessness Reduction Act](#)
- [Homelessness support](#)
- [Housing options](#)

3.5 Background improvements

- We have created better links between relevant pages to help visitors to the website find where they need to go or other pages they might be interested in.



STAR survey results

The STAR (survey of tenants and residents) is done every 2 years and it is a reputable way of gathering information on customer satisfaction.

506 of our tenants took part in our telephone survey carried out by Acuity on behalf of Somerset West and Taunton. The survey focused on finding out how happy our tenants are with the way that we carry out key services.

Please find some headlines below and click the link to read the [Your Views](#) easy to understand STAR report.

- 85% of tenants are happy with their neighbourhood as a place to live and 70% feel that SWT makes a positive contribution to their neighbourhood.

Related pages

- [Council and social housing](#)
- [Tenant empowerment](#)
- [Annual report to tenants](#)

- We have been expanding our knowledge and understanding about accessibility requirements of the website, working with Ian Groves and consulting gov.uk resources. This is particularly poignant for housing in terms of PDF accessibility, as we do have several PDF documents linked to our webpages and it is important that they meet the expected criteria and are suitable for those using screen readers or other accessibility aids.

4. Next Steps

- We await the new housing computer software and that will allow us to launch a Portal to residents. This will be at the final stage of the new computer software delivery as the software has to be running first before the portal can launch. It is likely to be live in around 18 months depending on progress with the software.
- The contact my housing officer form will help route enquiries whilst we wait for delivery of the portal. Whilst we use this form we will collate data about the contact my housing officer form usage and use that data to examine where we can improve our offer e.g. training customer contact officers to assist at first contact or providing online means of completing items.
- Examine how best to provide an online method of reporting repairs. In the past this has not been effective for our residents who reported the repair online. Residents had to be contacted again for more information or to arrange an appointment. There are options that can be delivered through the portal in 18 months but we are also exploring options that could be set up in the interim period.