

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Tenants' Strategic Group – 27th September 2021

Directorate Report

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Member for Housing.

Report Authors: Assistant Directors

1. Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

The report is to update the Tenants' Strategic Group on work being undertaken and progress made by the Housing Directorate since the last TSG meeting in July 2021.

2. Recommendations

The Tenants' Strategic Group is asked to note this report and are invited to ask questions.

3. Housing Development and Regeneration Team:

HRA New Homes, Housing Strategy and Housing Enabling

- Foundations have been laid and brickwork is starting on phase A of NTWP after groundworks commenced in August. Planning applications for phased demolition of phases B, C & D and new homes on phases B & C are now underway.
- The zero carbon development at Seaward Way, Minehead is progressing with a pre contract agreement to be entered imminently, with an anticipated start on site in November.
- The zero carbon affordable housing schemes to be built on various sites in Taunton are being submitted for planning approval following the schemes phosphate mitigation approach being submitted to Natural England to consider and support the mitigation strategy included in the planning application.
- The directorate has been invited to present at three national and regional events in September and November. The two specifications which SWT has developed for zero carbon homes both achieve 2050 targets although one has a more ambitious air tightness target which in turn leads to even lower use of heat and power in the home.

- The service is leading the delivery of new single homeless supply and several opportunities are emerging including attracting new Government subsidies and a Single Homeless and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Strategy and delivery plan will be presented to full Council in October for consideration.
- The service is leading the thinking of the Council's Housing low carbon retrofit strategy. This work is gaining momentum and over the next 18 months a financial and delivery plan will emerge.

Housing Property Team:

Property Safety Compliance

- Slides have been produced to demonstrate current position and progression and will be shared with the Tenants' Strategic Group at this meeting.

Capital Programmes

- Capital Work programmes that have been mobilised since the last report include Air Source Heat Pumps, heating improvements, external doors, fascias and soffits, windows, fire safety works and insulation.
- Other projects (namely kitchen and bathroom replacements, emergency lighting, additional electrical testing, and door entry systems) are expected to be mobilised during September.

Asset Management

- The implementation of the Open Assets module of our Capita software system project is almost complete, with go-live dates week commencing 6th September. Post 'go-live' work will then be required, particularly around the development of a suite of bespoke reports and the population of various other modules within the system.

Housing and Communities Team:

Extra Care Housing

- Visitors and tenants are now able to make their own decisions re: using PPE.
- There have been fewer Adult Social Care referrals for accommodation in our Extra Care properties since our last report, due to the impact of Covid related remote working by Social Services. This has resulted in longer void times in these schemes and this is being addressed with Somerset County Council by Simon Lewis.

- Plumbing updating works have taken place in Block A, B and the main building at Kilkenny Court.

Sheltered Housing

- We are on schedule for the meeting halls to re-open mid- September 2021.
- The group of tenants at Taunfield Close mentioned in our last report have recently been awarded some Tenant's Group funding to grow fruit and veg within the scheme.
- Since our last update in July, staff have met with the national consortium for older people's housing and support, known as EROSH (Emerging Role on Sheltered Housing). We will now start working on creating an accredited service and standard within our sheltered and extra care housing.

Lettings

- Home Moves Plus (HMP) work is having a positive impact on our tenants and we have received feedback recently from satisfied tenants.
- The new Locata software, which is a choice based lettings (CBL) system for local authorities is now up and running, meaning adverts for our available properties are easier to create and are more informative for our tenants. Any teething issues have been resolved easily and speedily.
- Leaving well visits are being embedded into the Sheltered and tenancy management teams to engage with tenants to return properties back to us in the best possible condition. Some positive feedback has been received from the Voids team.
- Re-let customer satisfaction was 100% in July, figures for August currently being collected.
- Average re-let times has improved overall. There has been a very strong improvement in major voids but minor voids has seen reduced performance.

Income

- Tenant arrears at the end of August 2021 were £536,947.36 with 1502 tenants in arrears. The team will continue to work in accordance with the "Lean Process" to reduce the arrears whilst continuing to support our tenants.
- We have recruited two additional agency member of staff who start in September to cover a secondment of an existing member of the team, as well as a member of the team who is focussing more on the OPEN HOUSING project.
- The Open Housing project continues to challenge the team to deliver 'business as usual'.

Tenancy/Estates

- We have increased from six to eight Case Managers, so from 1st September patch sizes have decreased. New patches will be advertised in the tenants newsletter.
- We are revisiting and planning new block inspections and estates walkabout schedules and these will be published on our website in the next few weeks.

- We have recruited a new Senior Housing Case Manager who started on the 23 August 2021 and a further Estates/Tenancy Case Manager who started on the 1 September 2021. Both are now in post and the team is back to full strength.
- The temporary ASB Case Manager (who was covering sickness) will move across to take on a new role as Tenancy/Estate Case Manager.

ASB

- We have currently just over 62 active open cases; with a small proportion of these being high level ASB.
- The team will now be looking to actively close cases that have not required any action for over a 28-day period.
- The team are moving towards taking legal action in some cases. For example, a recent case turned into a serious incident with police involvement and seizure action, and another involves several residents who may face either a Notice of Seeking Possession or a Community Protection Warning.
- Estates/Tenancy Case Managers will now be recording low-level cases on to the ASB monitoring sheet.

Housing Performance Team

- Customer service training has been arranged through an external provider for the whole of the directorate. This will run through September and October 2021.
- Complaints training through HQN has been arranged for managers and those within the directorate who deal with complaints. The first session has already taken place with more sessions to follow later in the month.
- The Annual Report to tenants has been written and designed, ready to be published shortly.
- We have produced an Autumn newsletter to tenants and leaseholders.
- We have started to develop a “reporting a repair” online form. Currently in the draft stages with our business analysts.
- We are working with the corporate insurance team to roll out the use of claim forms, which will provide a smoother and quicker way of handling claims made against the Council.
- Setting up of a “Damp & Mould” working group with engaged tenants.

4. Risk Assessment (if appropriate)

A risk assessment is not required to accompany this report.

5. Are there any Finance / Resource, Legal implications directly to do with this report?

There are no financial implications directly to do with the recommendations in this report

6: Are there any Equality and Diversity Implications?

There are no equality implications directly to do with this report

7. Are there any Data Protection Implications?

There are no equality implications directly to do with this report

Name of Contact Officers: **Sharon Yarde**

Telephone number: 07818529194

Email address: s.yarde@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk