

SWT Tenants Strategic Group

**Monday, 22nd November, 2021,
6.00 pm**

**The John Meikle Room - The Deane
House**

The logo for Somerset West and Taunton, featuring the text "Somerset West and Taunton" in white on a teal background with a white curved graphic element at the bottom right.

**Somerset West
and Taunton**

Members: **Alex Akhigbemen (Chair), Jessie Bunn, Paul Cram,
Colin England, Kevin Hellier, Ivor Hussey, Luke Manning,
Samantha Rickward, Cllr Mark Lithgow, Cllr Janet Lloyd and
Cllr Francesca Smith**

Agenda

- | | |
|---|------------------------|
| 1. Apologies | |
| 2. Notes from previous meeting including action points | (Pages 3 - 8) |
| 3. Directorate Report - Director and Assistant Directors | (Pages 9 - 14) |
| 4. TAG Annual Report - Wayne Hobson, Chair TAG | (Pages 15 - 20) |
| 5. Customer Service Report - Richard Burge | (Pages 21 - 24) |
| 6. AOB | |

Please note that this meeting will be recorded. At the start of the meeting the Chair will confirm if all or part of the meeting is being recorded. You should be aware that the Council is a Data Controller under the Data Protection Act 2018. Data collected during the recording will be retained in accordance with the Council's policy. Therefore unless you are advised otherwise, by entering the Council Chamber and speaking during Public Participation you are consenting to being recorded and to the possible use of the sound recording for access via the website or for training purposes. If you have any queries regarding this please contact the officer as detailed above.

Members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting and listen to the discussions. There is time set aside at the beginning of most meetings to allow the public to ask questions. Speaking under "Public Question Time" is limited to 3 minutes per person in an overall period of 15 minutes. The Committee Administrator will keep a close watch on the time and the Chair will be responsible for ensuring the time permitted does not overrun. The speaker will be allowed to address the Committee once only and will not be allowed to participate further in any debate. Except at meetings of Full Council, where public participation will be restricted to Public Question Time only, if a member of the public wishes to address the Committee on any matter appearing on the agenda, the Chair will normally permit this to occur when that item is reached and before the Councillors begin to debate the item.

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

The meeting room, including the Council Chamber at The Deane House are on the first floor and are fully accessible. Lift access to The John Meikle Room, is available from the main ground floor entrance at The Deane House. The Council Chamber at West Somerset House is on the ground floor and is fully accessible via a public entrance door. Toilet facilities, with wheelchair access, are available across both locations. An induction loop operates at both The Deane House and West Somerset House to enhance sound for anyone wearing a hearing aid or using a transmitter. For further information about the meeting, please contact the Governance and Democracy Team via email: governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

If you would like an agenda, a report or the minutes of a meeting translated into another language or into Braille, large print, audio tape or CD, please email: governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

SWT Tenants Strategic Group - 27 September 2021 held via Zoom Video Conference

Present: Alex Akhigbemen (Chair)

Jessie Bunn, Paul Cram, Luke Manning, Samantha Rickward,
Mark Lithgow and Janet Lloyd

Officers: Adam Evans, James Barrah, Ian Candlish, Chris Brown, Simon Lewis,
Sharon Yarde (Housing), Stephen Boland, Kerry Prisco and Tracey
Meadows (Governance and Democracy Case Manager)

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm)

16. **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Ivor Hussey, Kevin Hellier and Steve Smith.

17. **Notes from previous meeting**

The minutes from the previous meeting were agreed by the Chair and seconded by Cllr Janet Lloyd.

18. **Directorate Report**

The group discussed the Directorate Report item in the agenda pack. Presented by James Barrah (Director of Housing and Communities), Ian Candlish (Assistant Director- Housing Property), Chris Brown (Assistant Director – Development and Regeneration) and Simon Lewis (Assistant Director – Housing and Community Development)

Comments/questions from the group members included;
(summarised)

- With regards to the Government subsidy for the single homelessness issue, did this include converting commercial units? what was our strategy for bring empty properties back into use? *We were asking for a grant from Homes England to match some funding from the general fund to purchase from the market 6 units but we also do want to use 6 existing single bedroom Council homes and dedicate these for use of the single homeless. Environmental Health dealt with empty properties and there were usually issues why these properties were vacant. As a Housing Service do not have much of a strategy for this;*
- What were the plans for retrofit works in the future? *There was a programme running to replace existing electrical heating systems with Air source heat pumps. Unfortunately, we have had a high level of refusals on this, but we are encouraging tenants to take this up:*

- Would the Capital Works be completed in this Financial Year?
Unfortunately, due to Covid etc, some works would go into the next Financial Year;
- There were concerns from a tenant with the level of enforcement from the Compliance Team to keep the Communal areas of flats clear. Was this because of the Glenfel incident? *We have a zero-tolerance approach to keep tenants safe and allow the Emergency Services to evacuate the tenants safely. You are encouraged to speak to your Housing Officer or a member of the Compliance team with regards to any issues that arise;*
- Concerns that there was one rule for flats and one rule for houses regarding the zero-tolerance approach for putting rubbish bins outside of your front door. *A member of the Compliance team would come out to access this issue;*
- Concerns that there was no time frame from the estates walkabout once an issue had been reported with regards to a property. *A report would be written up by the Estates Officer and actions taken and rectified as per the Tenancy Agreement;*
- Extra staff was needed to reduce the time scales for getting people to court for ASB. This was causing misery to tenants who had to endure this for months on end; *The process took a while as we needed to produce evidence to the Judge that we had taken every opportunity for the issues to be resolved. We also needed to show the Judge that we had given the tenant every opportunity with help and support to change their behaviour before the tenant/family were evicted from their property;*
- Did the Council work with other organisations to help tenants that were struggling with ASB's due to their children being the source of this behaviour? *We link in with other agencies and if this went to court for possession of a property the Judge would expect us to have done this as it is good Housing management;*
- What happened if the source of ASB was a private tenant? *This would be difficult to influence on properties that we did not own. We could engage with the tenant write to their Landlord;*
- How were we going to evaluate how good the recent Customer Service training had been? *We had undertaken a mystery shopper exercise prior to the customer training exercise taking place and we would undertake this again once the training had finished. It should be noted that only eight members of the Customer Services team had been identified to undertake this training with the remainder not trained on Housing;*
- The Universal Credit top up of £20 per week would shortly cease. Do you anticipate that tenants arrears would increase? *This would have an impact on some households. Communications had been sent out to all our tenants that were on Universal Credit to warn them that that this would be stopped shortly by Government, and to say that we were here to help and to contact our Debt Adviser Officers should they need support;*

Resolved that the report be noted.

19. Performance Report

The Group considered the Performance Report presented by James Barraah (Director of Housing and Communities) and Kerry Prisco (Housing Accountant)

Comments and questions from the group included;
(summarised)

- Concerns that the use of electronic questionnaires for lettable standard and maintenance works were not being sent to every customer that had used the service; *The repairs questionnaire was a reasonable new piece of software that we are putting into place. This information comes on the back of the data that we hold on tenants, i.e. phone numbers ect. There were a few issues with this that we are looking into at present;*
- How many properties were void and how many of these were due to compliance works? *The compliance works forms part of a package of what is encountered at the property. We have to perform checks regarding electrical testing, asbestos testing and to make sure that the property was safe to work in;*
- 4.4 in the report reads that “action was required to control spending to ensure the outturn is on or close to budget”. What would these actions be? *Capitalising some of our costs is one option and taking appropriate financial advice. We do also have reserves that we could use, and a budget had been set aside for the upgrade of our housing management system;*
- Concerns that the overspend would increase the rent for tenants for 2022/23. Is there any assurance that this would not happen? *We had our rent policy that this previous group and our Members had signed off which follows Government direction on the formular rent that we are able to utilise and a methodology for a CPR + 1% rent increase and the business plan was set on this basis. Historically CPR has been low, but we have been seeing an increase. If we deviate on this, we need to look at how this would impact on our service. This would be challenging on our budget setting this year;*

Resolved that the report was noted.

20. **Equalities/Disability Report**

The group considered the Equalities/Disability Report, presented by Simon Lewis (Assistant Director – Housing and Community Development)

Comments/questions from the group included:
(summarised)

- Are the Trusted Assessors already in place or was this something that you were putting in place now? How do you get an Assessor to visit you? *we already have these Assessors in place, members of staff have been trained in this. We only deal with minor alterations such as grab rails etc. All other alterations would be undertaken by an Occupational Therapist to*

undertake a proper assessment. Homefinder has all the questions referring to disabilities and we can have further conversations with tenants about this;

- Appendix 1 reads, 'do you use a wheelchair' this seemed quite blunt. There was nowhere else on the form to add that you use crutches, walking sticks etc. It would be beneficial for the tenant to write what disability that they had. *There were pages of information on the Homefinder document with regards to disabilities. On each form there is a space for the tenant to tell us about the support that they need and why. The Homefinder Somerset Partnership Document was a universal document used in the whole of Somerset to find out what support the tenant needs in their property, we realise that the questionnaire was not perfect;*
- Does the partnership have regular meetings where you can take these sorts of questions that we were asking regarding the Homefinder questionnaires? *The Housing providers provide quarterly reports and put feed back onto Homefinder. I can feed this back, but I need to know what was not working. I.e. if we were not allocation houses properly to the right sort of tenants and there was evidence of this, but I would suggest that the housing providers across somerset would know that already and address this.*
- Concerns with the position of the bin store in flats for tenants with disabilities and these tenants having to move an already heavy bin over several steps to put it out for collection. These issues should be brought to you by the Housing Officers, not the tenants. *Unfortunately, the bin store has never been satisfactory. We could make adjustments on a case by case basis. This was a wider conversation that we needed to have. Somerset Waste Partnership do offer an assisted waste collection service for disabled tenants;*
- How does an existing tenant contact the Council for works to be done? You could also put in the information regarding assisted bin collection; *The tenant would contact their Housing Officer to report this, we can then action this in house. Further information would be signposted. Our next newsletter would promote this;*

Action

- Sam Rickward to work with Sharon Yarde on the newsletter and on comms for tenants regarding updates on their current Housing Officer and contact.

21. **Compliance Presentation (slide deck to be presented at the meeting)**

The Compliance Presentation will be discussed at the next meeting on the 22 November.

22. **Action points from the meeting**

- Compliance Team to contact group member, Luke Manning re: bins – Sharon Yarde;

- How many properties were currently void, how much money lost in income – Tony Knight;
- Flow chart, clear route for trusted assessor – Simon Lewis;
- Add Trusted Assessor to the Tenant's Newsletter – Sharon Yarde;
- Assisted bin collections for Newsletter and 'Sort it' collections – Sharon Yarde;
- Compliance slides to be put on the agenda for the next meeting – Sharon Yarde;
- Quick messaging route for change of TCM – Julie Sabey;
- AOB on agenda for the next meeting – Sharon Yarde:

(The Meeting ended at 8.15 pm)

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Tenants' Strategic Group – 22nd November 2021

Directorate Report

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

Report Authors: Assistant Directors and Housing Performance Manager

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 September 2021.

2. Recommendations

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

3. Background and Full details of the Report

Housing Development and Regeneration Team

HRA New Homes, Housing Strategy and Housing Enabling

- NTWP Phase A is progressing at pace with brickwork well underway. Some SCC Highway permissions are still required to support the creation of the new highway. Equans/Engie are reordering works to prevent delays. Discussions are starting with phase Ci tenants, preparing for them for decant and to receive Gold Band Homefinder status. A delivery programme for Phase E refurbishment is being finalised and a grant application has been submitted. The success of this will be known in December.
- The pre-contract agreement for the zero-carbon development at Seaward Way, Minehead, has been signed. We now anticipate that we will start on site in January rather than November as previously hoped. An approval from SCC is still required to progress the new levels of the site.

- Planning applications for the zero carbon affordable housing schemes on various sites in Taunton have been submitted. These schemes include a phosphate mitigation strategy which has also been submitted to Natural England.
- The Directorate has delivered three national and regional events in September and October on zero carbon new build. SWT works on zero carbon new build are being show cased in a series of best practice guides produced by the Good Homes Alliance.
- The Single Homeless and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Strategy and delivery plan was approved by Full Council in October. The service is leading the delivery of new single homeless supply, and several opportunities are emerging including successfully gaining new grant, funding from DLUHC (Department of Levelling Up, Homes and Communities), for 18 units of accommodation.
- The service is leading the thinking of the Council's HRA low carbon retrofit strategy. This work is gaining momentum and over the next 18 months a financial and delivery plan will emerge. SWT has submitted (as part of a consortium bid) a grant request under the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund and we will hear back in December if successful.
- New affordable housing in the district is set to see a higher-than-average number of properties completed this financial year. The pipeline of new units is currently at its strongest in the west of the district, which is unaffected by the phosphate mitigation planning requirements.
- The Housing Enabling team are also preparing the district for the impact of First Homes which is a Government initiative to increase low-cost home ownership.

Housing Property Team

Responsive Repairs and Void Repairs

- Emergency and non-emergency responsive repairs are being undertaken.
- Emergency jobs are being delivered within our defined timescale (24 hours from logging).
- There is a backlog of non-emergency jobs. This is however, reducing following the use of external contractors.
- Void repairs are also being undertaken, although returning the properties back to our Lettings team promptly remains a challenge. This is primarily due to ongoing difficulties in the recruitment of skilled tradespersons in-house, delays in asbestos surveys and works, and the availability of electricians.

Property Safety Compliance

- All property safety compliance checks and works continue to be undertaken. These include gas safety checks (LGSR's), water risk

assessments and remedial works, electrical inspections (EICR's), asbestos surveys and re-inspections, fire risk assessment and remedial works, fire safety checks, and lift and stair-lift checks and remedial works.

- Weekly review meetings are being held to carefully monitor and manage these safety critical areas.

Capital Programmes

- Capital Work programmes continue to be undertaken; with recent contracts commencing including kitchen and bathroom replacements, emergency lighting, additional electrical testing, and door entry systems.
- Procurement activities remain at a high level; with recent tenders including roofing, estate improvement works, and a consultancy review of our materials supply chain.
- A number of staff changes have recently taken place in the team, and recruitment for replacement staff is now underway.

Asset Management

- The implementation of the Open Assets module of our Capita software system has now successfully gone live. Post 'go-live' work is now underway, including the development of a suite of bespoke reports and further data-loading from stock condition and energy surveys.
- Accelerated programmes of Stock Condition Surveys and Energy Assessments continue to take place.
- Capital work programme planning (for both the 2022/23 financial year and forward plans) is actively being undertaken, as well as a review of their impact on our Business Plan.

Housing and Communities Team

Extra Care Housing

- The communal lounge areas are now re-opened for use by tenants, assisted dining, and for external providers to hire.

Sheltered Housing

- The meeting halls have now all re-opened. Tenants and external providers are able to book the space for group meetings and activities. Staff are supporting tenants to get new furniture and other items.
- The team are working with an external provider to plan Flexercise classes to take place in the meeting halls soon.
- Staff are completing aids and adaptations assessments, to enable tenants to continue to live well in their homes.

- Gardens are being wrapped up for winter and some flower beds are being changed to shrub beds, which can grow in all weather conditions and are more sustainable.
- Grit buckets are being refilled in preparation for winter.

Lettings

- The Lettable Standard document has now been to HMST and will be shared with the Tenant Strategic Group shortly, for their consideration.
- 181 properties have been re-let year to date (April to September).
- Customer satisfaction (year to date) is running at 98.25%. Recent comments on the process and properties include *“I love my house, I am more than very satisfied”*. Another satisfied tenant said they were *“very very happy with my new home and the lettings process. The TRG will be a good help”*. Compliments received about the Lettings team also included one from MIND. A MIND support worker emailed to say *“how amazingly sensitive”* a Lettings team member had been when dealing with a vulnerable and nervous MIND service user.
- The Home Moves Plus project is still on course to achieve the target figures, well in advance of the target date.
- Void property turnaround times are being adversely affected by shortages of SWT trades staff and supply chain issues within the construction industry.

Income

- Tenant arrears as of 20th October 2021 were £594,035.11 with 1405 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 two agency members of staff who have left the team as of 29th October. We are actively seeking to replace both team members, but this does mean a reduction in the capacity of the Rent Recovery team from five to three officers until the roles can be filled. Existing officers will be working hard to mitigate the impact this has on our tenants and our rent recovery.
- The Open Housing project continues to present challenges with workload, but we are making progress with our modules.
- We are currently working on a plan to rent more of our garages as well as updating the current garage Tenancy Agreement. We are also putting in place a new lean process, for the rent recovery of garages.

Tenancy/Estates

- Details of the revised block inspections schedule are now available on the website, with estates walkabout schedules due to be published online by 1st November. The revision was due to patch changes from six to eight Case Managers.

ASB

- The team have closed approximately half of the 62 open, active ASB cases reported to TSG in September (the actual number is to be confirmed). We are currently carrying out a data cleanse and tidy of the ASB monitoring sheet.
- The team are starting to record low level ASB cases on the ASB monitoring sheet and we anticipate that this will cause case numbers to appear higher in future months due to the new way of recording this information.
- We have been delivering training to the Council's Customer Champions so that they know how to receive, log and risk assess a report of ASB that comes into the contact centre. This will improve the experience for our customers and allow the team to deal with reports of ASB efficiently.

Housing Performance Team

- The Customer Service training reported on previously has been running throughout September, October and November 2021. To date 157 members of staff have been trained with a mop up session planned for on 17th November.
- The arranged complaints training through HQN has taken place for managers and those within the directorate who deal with complaints. All sessions have been undertaken and 74 members of staff were trained.
- A Senior Complaints Case Manager has been appointed to assist with improving complaints responses and outcomes.
- The Annual Report to tenants has been published on the website.
- We have produced an Autumn newsletter to tenants and leaseholders, which was delivered to doorsteps on or around the 1st October 2021.
- We have started to develop a "reporting a repair" online form. Currently in the draft stages with our business analysts.
- Submitted 2020-21 Housemark data and continue to submit Pulse data so that we can benchmark with other housing providers.
- Setting up of a "damp and mould" working group with engaged tenants. First meeting scheduled for 5th November 2021.
- A review of our Housing Policies has commenced with the HQN (Housing Quality Network), the review will include rewrite and introduction of new policies where required.

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: Shari Hallett

Telephone number: 07557 003944

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

Tenants' Action Group – Annual Report 2020-21 to the Tenants' Strategic Group

1. Introduction

The Tenants' Action Group had their first meeting (virtually on Teams) in November 2020, facilitated by the newly established Housing Performance team. In order to ensure that meetings could proceed when Covid prevented face to face gatherings, the group were supported by providing tablets to each member who did not have appropriate technology, SIM cards for those without access to internet and one to one visits to provide training. Some members had repeat visits to ensure they were given confidence to use the new technology.

Two members, who attend meetings together, decided to step back from the group until meetings could resume in person and 1 member resigned permanently due to health reasons, this left 7 members. Meeting online was more challenging and there were a reduced number of members at each meeting. Despite this, members supported bi-monthly meetings being held online, the group worked hard to write and agree a new Terms of Reference and start working with the Council to develop services and distribute funding to help local communities.

2. Work Undertaken

2.1 Terms of Reference

When the Housing Performance team started working with the group, they did not yet have an agreed Terms of Reference, this was the priority to ensure that the purpose of the group was clear. TAG decided to renew their membership with TPAS and make use of the consultancy time included in the cost of membership to get some advice on a new Terms of Reference (ToR). The new ToR was agreed in February 2021.

2.2 Estate Walkabout's

Members raised concerns over the prior notice for Estate Walkabouts and whether the information included in letters prior to walkabouts was clear and received in a timely manner to enable communities to be informed about who would be carrying them out, when and where. The subsequent action plan involved:

- Adding a photo of the staff member carrying out the walkabout to the letter
- Staff members carrying out Estate Walkabouts would be given a tabard to wear ensure they are clear and visible to community members
- TAG members would sign up to attend different walkabouts to ensure there was a representative present at each walkabout

Due to Covid restrictions, some of these actions have been delayed due to restrictions on the number of people allowed to gather. Recent patch changes have

also meant that we are awaiting an updated Estate Walkabout schedule from the Tenancy team. Once this is received TAG members will sign up to join walkabout. Photos have been added to prior notice letters however, there have been some inconsistencies with this therefore the group will continue to work with the council to improve this process over the coming year.

2.3 Leycroft Grove Estate Improvement Groundworks

Chair of the TAG, Wayne Hobson raised concerns over the progress of the improvement project that had been planned at Leycroft Grove, with £100k previously reported to have been put aside for the project which appeared to have been put on hold after transformation. Wayne and the group have worked hard to ensure that these improvement plans are followed up on, writing to the Director of Housing and holding the Council to account to follow through on its promise for improvement works for this area.

- The project has since been re-established, TAG were provided an overview of the project.
- At the most recent meeting the Capital Programme Manager updated the group to say that a preferred contractor had been selected.
- The project is currently on pause until approval is given from Highways at County Council – the Capital Programme Manager is chasing this as work cannot start until approval is received.

Monitoring of the Leycroft Grove project will continue to be on the agenda for the TAG in the upcoming year.

2.4 Funding through the Estate Improvement Fund

A fund of £10k held by the group dedicated to improving neighbourhoods via the purchasing of benches or other small items which improve community spaces, usually on recommendation from Officers.

In the last financial year, the group received 8 applications to the Estate Improvement Fund over the year primarily to provide replacement benches for community spaces and carry out ground improvement works to ensure community gardens were safe and accessible. An officer grant funding request was also received from the compliance team, to provide funds to replace Defibrillator Pads for various Sheltered Housing Schemes.

2.5 Funding for Local Community Projects through the Youth Initiative Fund

A fund of £20k held by the group, available via grant applications of up to £3k to support organisations and projects which seek to improve the lives, health and wellbeing of people aged 0 - 25 years old whose families are tenants of Somerset West and Taunton Council (SW&T) and to help such organisations and projects to become sustainable and more self-sufficient.

Despite the challenges presented by Covid, the group assessed 7 applications to the Youth Initiative Fund and subsequently distributed a £3k grant to 4 local organisations.

- **Arts Taunton** - Funding for 20 arts and wellbeing workshops in North Taunton Youth Centre youth centres and in after school sessions in Taunton Academy school reaching age group 11-25.
- **Somerset Art Works** - Funding to help run a programme of Family, School and Community Activities to provide Covid compliant creative activities for children and their families in Priorswood and Lyngford.
- **Wellington Counselling** - Funding for 60 hours of 1:1 counselling sessions for children & young people up to the age of 25. To pay for creating a survey that will enable the organisation to ask young people (11-25) within the known population of the tenants, what they want from Wellington Counselling by way of therapeutic support.
- **Youth Unlimited** - Funding for detached (street-based) youth work covering Taunton twice a week through the InteGr8 project.
- **Contribution to the SPARKLE Campaign** – A donation of £191 worth of presents was provided to the SPARKLE campaign last Christmas, to provide the children of local families in need with presents.

Development of the Youth Initiative Fund

The group have decided to re-name the fund to the Children and Youth Initiative fund after concerns were raised regarding the previous wording excluding organisations providing projects for younger children. The group wanted it to be clear that the fund is available for organisations working with children aged 0-25 years, hence the new name was agreed.

A new online application form has also been created alongside a webpage to be shared with local organisations, to make applying for and distributing funding for this financial year easier than ever.

2.6 Development of the Group

The group helped to design and choose a new logo for the Tenants' Action Group, this helps to raise awareness of the groups work as it can be added to publications or funding reports produced by local organisations that the group have supported.



Group members have attended training provided by TPAS on courses such as 'Holding your landlord to account' and the recent 'Complaints Masterclass'. Members are committed to widening their awareness of key issues in the sector by attending upcoming training courses over the next year.

Various articles have been posted in Tenants' Newsletters to attempt to raise awareness of the group and their activities and to encourage new members to join. Over the next year the Housing Performance team will continue to work with TAG to publicise their activities and help to recruit new members to bring the group back up to full membership of 10 members.

2.7 Involvement in the newly established Damp and Mould Task Group

The Chair of TAG Wayne Hobson will be part of the new Task Group established to review current procedures for dealing with damp and mould and produce an updated procedure which ensures damp and mould issues are dealt with efficiently and effectively for our tenants.

3. Financial Summary

The total budget assigned for 2020-21 was £44,300.

Name of Fund	Allocated Budget	Allocated Funds	Total Expenditure
Youth Initiative Fund	£20,000	YIF projects - £12,000 SPARKLE (Amazon gifts) - £191	£12,191
Estate Improvement Fund	£10,000	8 Benches - £3253 Defib Pads - £600	£3853
Other	£16,300	TPAS Subscription - £100 Expenses - £100 ICT Expenses - £858	£1058
Total Expenditure			£17,102

4. Looking ahead

In September the group had their first face to face meeting. It was wonderful to have everyone together in the same room and be able to catch up properly. Meeting in person meant that discussions flowed much more readily, and the group had a productive meeting regarding their forward plan. Over the upcoming year the group will:

- Continue to monitor the progress of the Leycroft Grove improvement works, receiving regular updates from the Capital Works Manager.
- Continue to work with the Council to improve the Estate Walkabout process.
- Participate in task groups such as the Damp and Mould start and finish group.
- Focus on 2 key aspects of the Housing Service, these are: Voids and Contractors. The group have previously had some involvement in monitoring the Voids process and they will be looking to reinstate this early in 2022.

5. Conclusion

Despite the challenges presented over the past year, the group have continued to stay connected through their online meetings and improve local communities and neighbourhoods through the distribution of funding. Over the next year, TAG is committed to increasing their membership and reinstating a more active role,

working with the council to improve their services and continuing to support as many local projects as possible through funding opportunities.

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Tenant Strategic Group – 27th September 2021

Customer Service Report, Quarter 1 & 2

Report Author: Richard Burge, Customer Services Manager.

Background

The Customer Service Team are responsible for first line contact with all customers, in addition to the Customer Call Centre the team also provide a face-to-face service in our Main Offices in Taunton, Wilton and Wellington. We also triage all incoming enquiries through our Firmstep system answering any queries we can directly and directing those we cannot to the correct team so they can be responded to. The Champions also manage incoming enquiry emails to our organisation email address.

Targets and Performance all lines April – September 2021

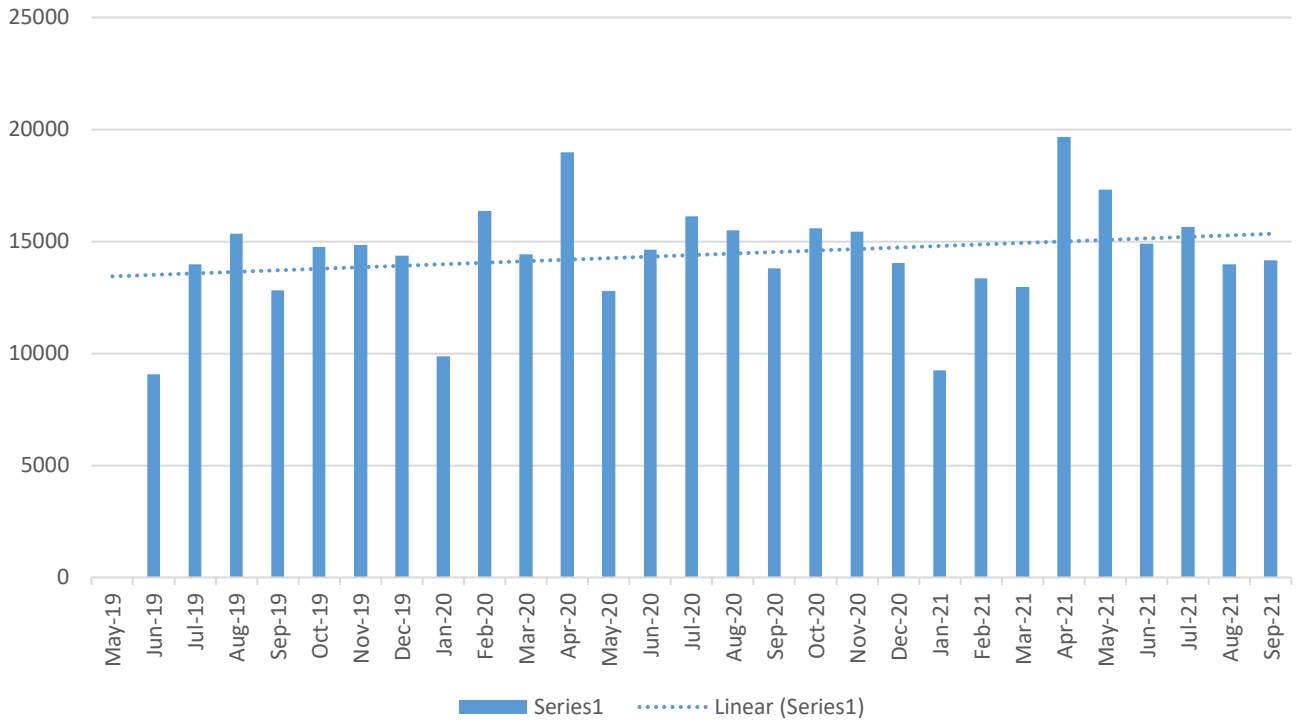
KPI	Target	Total Calls	Total Calls Abandoned	Abandonment %
Call abandonment rate	10%	97,865	15,891	16%
Average wait time (secs)	60 Seconds	161 seconds		

Our aim is to answer all calls within 60 seconds, but for June, the average call answering time was 161 seconds. The target has unfortunately not been met any month this quarter.

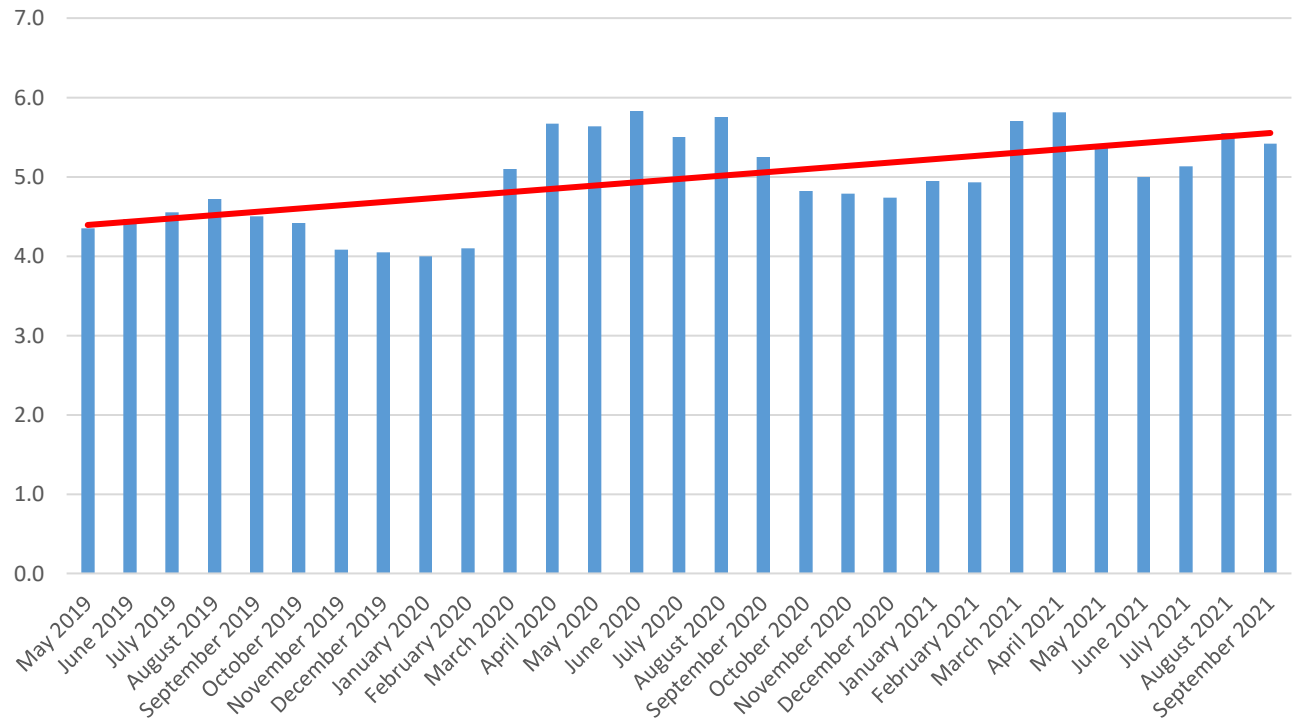
Housing Lines April – September 2021

KPI	Target	Total Calls	Total Calls Abandoned	Abandonment %
Call abandonment rate	10%	9,805	958	9.77%
Average wait time (secs)	60 Seconds	140 Seconds		

Call Volumes April – September 2021



Call Duration April – September 2021



There are several reasons for this dip in performance.

- Calls volumes have increased over the last 2 years as have the duration of those calls. The average call duration has risen by around 1 minute, this may not seem like a lot but with 1000 calls per day this equates to three extra staff needed.
- The disruption to waste collections since May causing additional calls.
- Resuming normal recovery processes for Council Tax, Business Rates and miscellaneous income which has also influenced call volume and duration.
- Call performance has also been impacted by the reopening of the Customer Hubs which has drawn Customer Champions away from call handling to manning the offices.

To improve our performance, we have filled two permanent vacancies and three additional Agency staff to cover the short-term challenges that launching Recycle More will bring.

We've been working with the Housing Team to identify and implement improvements in both front line and second line customer service. With the assistance of the Housing Team targeted training to our Champions has been delivered to increase their ability to resolve Housing enquiries at first point of contact. This has covered Anti Social Behaviour, the Tenancy Agreement and the use of our Housing computer systems which all Champions now have access to.

We have also set up a separate call queue just for Housing Tenancy and Estate calls, this allows us to direct calls from our tenants to the Customer Champions that have had additional training, monitor calls more closely and assess what kind of queries are coming in from our Tenants. Once we a significant sample of calls we'll be able to provide more targeted training and provide specific feedback to Housing on what issues are causing calls.

The new Housing Tenancy and Estates Line went live on the 26th September

Housing Tenancy and Estates Line April – September 2021

KPI	Target	Total Calls	Total Calls Abandoned	Abandonment %
Call abandonment rate	10%	930	108	11.61%
Average wait time (secs)	60 Seconds	107 Seconds		

While these figures cover Quarter 1 and Quarter 2, performance from the beginning of October has improved significantly with call abandonment rates dropping under target and call waiting times under 60 seconds. However, the Recycle More launch at the beginning of November is expected to have a significant impact on call volumes so this may impact service levels.

