

## **Somerset West and Taunton Council**

**Tenants' Strategic Group – 22<sup>nd</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 29<sup>th</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 17<sup>th</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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

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