

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Tenants' Strategic Group – May 2022

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

- North Taunton Woolaway Project (NTWP) Phase A is progressing with the first couple of completions due in Summer followed by small numbers of units later in the year. Equans/Engie continue to work well on site. Phase B is now vacant, and progress is being made steadily on phase Ci although mutual terms are not currently agreed on one private landlord property. The team are recruiting to replace Mary Bryce who retired in March. Equans are presenting their contract proposal for phases B and Ci in May to the Council and SWT will then consider if the proposal is value for money and manages risk. Phase E has received planning permission approved and the specification for the new build should be finalised with procurement commencing.

- The 54 home zero-carbon development at Seaward Way, Minehead, commenced in January. The zero-carbon exemplar scheme which has been featured as a case study in the Good Homes Alliance good practice guide will be complete by October 2024.
- The service still awaits decisions in relation to planning applications for the zero carbon affordable housing schemes, on various sites in Taunton. These schemes include a phosphate mitigation strategy which is supported by Natural England and the Environment Agency. If the mitigation strategy is approved by the local planning authority the approach could be repeated and create sufficient phosphate credits to support circa 1000 new homes.
- The service is progressing at pace a low carbon retrofit strategy and delivery plan. The strategy will be considered by the Council late 2022/2023 however the principles will influence a significant SWT Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund Wave 2 grant application. SWT has been awarded SHDF Wave 1 funding to support a low carbon retrofit of council homes. The three pillars of the emerging strategy are engaging and supporting our customers, fabric first and then, over time, replacing fossil fuels with renewable heat and power provided via onsite, communal, or grid-based systems. The relationship between fuel poverty and low carbon retrofit will be explicitly considered within the strategy.
- New affordable housing in the district has seen 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 Single Homeless and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Strategy and delivery plan was approved by Full Council in October and Officers are supporting the delivery of new homeless bedspaces through several partners and direct council supply. The council has been awarded £750k through the government Rough Sleepers Accommodation Programme to accelerate the new provision Round three and has submitted a Round 4 bid for three schemes.
- The Housing Enabling team are preparing the district for the impact of First Homes which is a government initiative to increase low-cost home ownership.
- We continue to deliver the Hinkley Point C Housing Programme, working with partners to drive forward 11 key areas of work. This programme is providing new bed space in the district and support to vulnerable customers affected by the change in the housing market because of the uplift of workforce at HPC. An action plan is being developed with the Stogursey Parish Council and the housing service receive funds to support its Home Moves initiative. The service has appointed the Citizens Advice Service to extend its debt and money management service throughout the district and increase its outreach work.

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 small backlog of non-emergency jobs, although this has reduced considerably, following the use of external contractors. Procurement of longer-term external support via MD Group is progressing and is due to commence in June 2022.
- Void repairs to meet our Lettable Standard remains a challenge, although performance is improving in this area. Again, we are looking to utilise MD Group to support on undertaking some of our Major Voids (those with two or more key elements required).

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.
- An accelerated programme, using further additional contractors, to undertake outstanding electrical inspections (EICR's) and associated remedial works continues.
- Property safety compliance procurement remains busy, including a new longer-term electrical inspection and remedials tender, and extending required contracts for 2022/23 to take us through to LGR.
- Weekly compliance and additional review meetings are being held to carefully monitor and manage all these safety critical areas.

Capital Programmes

- A number of capital work programmes are on-site, including kitchen and bathroom replacements, re-roofing, and fire safety works (replacement fire doors and emergency lighting).
- Procurement activities also continue, including review of required capital programme works needed to meet the Decent Homes Standard (DHS), as well as our Retrofit aspiration.
- Recruitment for the vacant role of Capital Programme Manager is underway.

Asset Management

- Following go-live of the Open Assets module of our Capita software system, post go-live work is now underway, although some of this is dependent upon the Open Housing implementation to go-live in June 2022.

- 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 being undertaken, including (as mentioned above) both DHS and Retrofit.

Housing and Communities Team

Supported Housing (extra care and sheltered)

1. The officer team continues to be impacted by Covid, so delivery has concentrated on key tasks:
 - The sign-up of new tenants.
 - Supporting tenants who are returning home from hospital.
 - Health and safety compliance checks at our two extra care schemes including: Kilkenny Court and Lodge Close.
 - Carrying out “trusted assessor” visits for those vulnerable tenants who are in urgent need of aids and adaptations to support them within their home.
 - Carrying out health and safety checks at sheltered housing schemes.
 - Responding to general customer enquiries reported via the service’s Firmstep computer system; and
 - Responding to Deane Helpline issues where the tenants have not responded to their usual monitoring call out.
 - The team have been piloting a new way of working with Somerset County Council to improve joined up working. The pilot project provides greater and easier access to information on the tenants' officers are supporting as well as sharing selected information on tenants that would be useful to practitioners in the wider Early Help System. It is very early days, however, feedback from officers to date has been positive.
 - The team have recently taken part in a training session enhancing their awareness on a range of early interventions when responding to incidents of neighbour nuisance and or anti-social behaviour reported by tenants.

Lettings

- The total number of new lettings for April 2021- March 2022 = 350.
- The % of new tenants satisfied with the lettable standard of a property for April 2021- March 22 = 96%.
- The team have been fully engaged in configuring the new Open Housing Management System and undertaking testing in readiness for going live with the system in June 2022. Part of the team’s work in preparation for the launch has been to review their operation procedures. All this work is progressing well to date; and
- After having undertaking new system training and awareness sessions the team are involved in piloting a new way of working with Somerset County Council to improve joined up working. The pilot project provides greater and

easier access to information on the applicants' officers are considering for vacant council housing. It is very early days, however, feedback from officers to date has been positive.

Income

- The rent recovery case managers and the Debt and Benefit officers are working hard with tenants to ensure they are receiving the correct benefits and those that are being financially impacted by the current situation are claiming any grants or accessing funds they are entitled to claim.
- The team continue to push the lettings of garages. There are several voids especially in the Priorswood area, we do have a plan we are working on to reduce the numbers.
- One of the Rent Recovery case managers who was on secondment to another team has now been successful in securing that role permanently. The Rent Recovery role is being covered by agency staff at this time, however we will now start the recruitment process to fill this role.

Tenancy/Estates & ASB

- The teams are continuing to remain stable and settled. Although we have been affected by COVID this has been managed as best we can.
- We have now scheduled all blocks, estates and skip days for the coming year and these will be published in the tenants' newsletters and on our website.
- We are still seeing overall a drop in complaints within Tenancy.
- Teams are also managing their Firmstep enquiries and have made a real effort not to allow these cases to become overdue.
- As we move into Spring/Summer we are now experiencing more ASB cases, and we are closely managing these. We will monitor closely the impact and the causes of ASB incidents that are reported into the service.
- Our response to youth gang culture is ongoing. We have had some serious incidents recently of "youth gangs" causing ASB and criminal activity. We are working with the Police and partners can take swift legal action against any breaches of tenancy agreements involved.
- The team has also drafted up a new Tenants Handbook and this is currently being circulated for comments/amendments.

Housing Performance Team Housing Performance Team (Shari Hallett)

- We continue to support the work of the Tenants Strategic Group and Tenants' Action Group on the 12th May 2022 we are also holding a joint tenant meeting with Homes in Sedgemoor.
- The Tenants' Action Group have awarded £16,000 from their Child and Youth Initiative Fund.
- A "kiosk" (screen with internet access) has been funded and installed in the Priorswood Community Centre. A further kiosk has been ordered for the Link Centre at Halcon.

- The damp and mould group for tenants continues to meet and make progress.
- The tenants' spring newsletter has been posted to Tenants.
- Internally we continue to support the meetings that provide us good governance of our activities e.g., programme meeting, performance meeting, risk meeting, etc.
- Our assessment against the white paper continues.
- We are collectively working with Homes in Sedgemoor on local government reorganisation workstreams.
- The policy review work with the HQN (Housing Quality Network) is underway and TSG members will receive revised policy documents.

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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