

Public Agenda Pack



Notice of Meeting of

TENANTS' STRATEGIC GROUP

Monday, 22 January 2024 at 6.00 pm

**JMR Room, Deane House, Belvedere Road,
Taunton TA1 1HE**

To: The members of the Tenants' Strategic Group

Chair: Luke Manning

Vice-chair: Colin England

Alex Akhigbemen

Jessie Bunn

Ivor Hussey

Samantha Rickward

Councillor Fran Smith

Councillor Marcus Barr

Kevin Hellier

Abbie Johnson

Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts

For further information about the meeting, please contact
democraticservices@somerset.gov.uk

All members of the public are welcome to attend our meetings and ask questions or make a statement **by giving advance notice** in writing or by e-mail to the Monitoring Officer at email: democraticservicesteam@somerset.gov.uk by **5pm on Tuesday 16th January 2024**

This meeting will be open to the public and press, subject to the passing of any resolution under the Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A: Access to Information.

Issued by (the Proper Officer) on Date Not Specified

AGENDA

Tenants' Strategic Group - 6.00 pm Monday, 22 January 2024

1 Apologies for Absence

To receive apologies.

2 Welcome from the Chair

To receive a welcome from the Chair.

3 Minutes from the previous meeting (Pages 5 - 12)

To approve the minutes of the previous meeting of the Tenants' Strategic Group held on

4 Engagement Group Updates (Pages 13 - 18)

To receive an update and note the report.

5 New Housing Structure

To receive an update on the New Housing Structure from Chris Brown, Service Director of Housing.

6 HRA 30-year business plan

To receive an update on the HRA 30-year business plan by Chris Brown Director of Housing.

7 Directorate Report - Senior Management (Pages 19 - 28)

To note the report.

8 Budget Setting 2023-24 and fees and charges. (To Follow)

To note the report on Budget Setting.

9 Any other Business

The Chair to consider any other business.

This page is intentionally left blank



Minutes of a Meeting of the Tenants' Strategic Group held in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton TA1 1HE, on Monday, 27 November 2023 at 6.00 pm

Present:

Luke Manning (Chair)
Colin England (Vice-Chair)

Alex Akhigbemen
Kevin Hellier

Jessie Bunn
Ivor Hussey
Councillor Fran Smith

Council Staff/Officers Present:

Chris Brown
Shari Hallett
Simon Lewis
Sharon Yarde
Ian Candlish

29 Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1

Apologies received Councillor Marcus Barr, Samantha Rickward and Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts.

30 Welcome from the Chair - Agenda Item 2

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and went through the housekeeping announcements. Permission has been received from all the group for photos to be taken during the meeting by Craig Rossiter for project work. The Chair introduced Abbie Johnson who is interested in joining the Tenant Strategic Group.

31 Minutes from the previous meeting - Agenda Item 3

The minutes from the previous meeting held on the 25th of September were

approved noting the following action points from the last meeting including:

- Access to external bins for wheelchair users
- Regulations for bin placement near to properties

RESOLVED Minutes were noted.

32 Engagement Group Updates - Agenda Item 4

The Chair gave an overview of the various engagement groups and their activities. A summarised overview of activities and updates below:

- New member voted onto TAG.
- Estate Improvement Fund budget allocation update.
- Leycroft Grove improvements moving in the right direction.
- SPARKLE funding agreed for Christmas presents for children.
- Damp and Mould group to organise evening events for tenants to discuss the issue. To be discussed after the next meeting in January 2024.

RESOLVED. The report was noted.

33 TAG Annual Report - Agenda Item 5

Wayne Hobson discussed the TAG annual report. Summarised highlights of the report can be found below:

- Recruitment update for TAG.
- Update on chair and vice chair votes.
- Estate walkabouts (Easte Officers) update.
- VOIDS update.
- Financial Summary Update.

Following the report, the following questions and comments were raised:

- Lack of officer presence at meetings of TAG workgroups.

- The group would like to understand more about the remit of the officer's workload (for example who is in charge of certain maintenance areas).

RESOLVED. The report was noted.

34 Flooding Review - Agenda Item 6

Simon Lewis, Head of Housing, Income and Tenancy Management discussed the flooding review report. The report notes lessons learnt from the recent flooding of HRA properties in Wellington. Highlights of the report can be found below:

Lessons Learnt - What went well (summarised):

- Excellent response on the night and during the following days, where officers were on the ground daily, supporting every affected household.
- Elected to cover the costs of carpet replacement and removal of furniture during cleaning, as many tenants would have struggled to afford this.
- Officers went above and beyond, many volunteering and working anti-social hours and showing agility and flexibility to find solutions.
- Daily project meetings taking place and communications to tenants, with people on site every day meant our communications was clear and frequent.
- Regular communication with those displaced and with their properties being prioritised to be made ready to return.

Lessons Learnt - What could have gone better (summarised):

- Having a clear process, allocated coordinator, and allocation of resource for a significant event like this, including backfill / reprioritisation of work from the start and ensuring a rota of officer to avoid burn-out.
- Better anticipation of the sheer amount of work this would entail.
- Ability to get hold of Deane Helpline and for them to bring in support was limited.
- A wider list of officers available for call out in an emergency, particularly when bad weather is forecast.
- Ability to secure temporary accommodation was a significant challenge and needs to be easier.

After the report the group discussed the following questions and comments:

- Gully clearing increasing in high risk areas.
- Simon Lewis will return at a future meeting to provide an update on the progress of work noted in the report.

RESOLVED. The report was noted.

35 Update from Chris Hall - Agenda Item 7

Chris Hall, Executive Director of community services gave an update and answered questions that were pre-submitted to him prior to the meeting by the group. A summarised version of the questions and answers that were discussed below:

With how long the unitary taking to get everything in place and all the stories in the news what is being done to reassure staff and residence about the future of jobs and homes?

Answer: There is continuous dialogue with employees through their line management structure, internal communications such as Dragons Pen, the Communities Q&A sessions, and CEO briefing and Q&A. We have been clear to employees that this is a financial emergency and unprecedented in its scale and we are working to offer up an affordable budget for Members to decide upon in February.

The HRA is not required to make savings in the context of the creation of the unitary council, there are however financial pressures caused by inflation and the rent cap. Whenever inflation exceeds the rent cap the service effectively has less money to spend on its housing stock.

Service structures have been designed and are going through the process of validation with HR and Finance. With the financial emergency now in place we are having to further review if our desired structures are affordable within the current budget gap. Again, differences for HRA and GF.

Is there a plan in place with regards to how the service will move forward?

Answer: Yes, the HRA business plan continues to guide all activity and financing within the account, this is the 30-year plan that is reviewed annually. There is a need to consider the future landlord model for Somerset Council. This will take time and require consultation. Estimates for this are in the region of 2 years. Savings from a single landlord model would help support the HRA business case in future years.

When are people going to know who is doing what job going forward because at present there seems to be some confusion?

Answer: All employees remain on their current terms and conditions and job descriptions, there may be places where we have asked people to undertake different or additional tasks to meet gaps in the service, but this will be resolved once the service structures are consulted on and recruited to. We anticipate the changes to be minimal.

What is the new structure going to look like and when can we see this?

Answer: Once it is ready for consultation, we will share it with you. For it to be ready we must have sign off from HR regarding any roles or individual that are impacted by the proposals and from Finance to demonstrate that the structure is affordable. There are delays in this as those are shared functions of the council and priority is being given to resolving the financial crisis. No significant changes can happen unless there is consultation.

Delay is frustrating but financial survival of the council is the main priority.

With the current financial crisis with the council, what does this mean for my tenancy and how will it be affected?

Answer: The HRA does not have the same financial issues as the council's general fund at this stage. Therefore, any impacts within housing are limited to shared HRA and GF services and roles. That said if the council has no choice but to submit a s114 notice this has the potential to impact on grants received into the HRA. We feel a strong case can be made to retain these grants, but this is a matter beyond our control.

How are you going to try and save money?

Answer: The council has been operating in emergency environment for some months now, this focuses resources on the problem. We have been reviewing and reducing our in-year expenditure and recruitment needs. All expenditure over £100 and all vacancies now must go to a spend control board for authorisation. We have reviewed the capital programme both in year and for future years, reviewed the income opportunities and our fees and charges levels for 24/25. We are reviewing service savings options and service

reductions. We are reviewing our structures to establish what further reductions could be made, we are considering a voluntary redundancy scheme. We have reviewed the EMR's, and we are taking advice on the minimum level of general reserves we can hold. We are in conversation with government about the type of support they can offer. We are monitoring the action of other councils who have submitted a s114 notice to see what we can learn. We have brought in external support to review Adults and Childrens services and see what reductions may be deliverable.

We are recording our progress and reporting it via the Strategic Management Group to the Member MTFP board.

How many jobs could be lost?

Answer: It is difficult to put a number on this, but it is likely to be significant across General Fund services.

During and after Transformation, there was no Tenant Engagement, how can you re-assure us that this will not happen again during unitary?

Answer: Transformation was a long time ago. We are committed to maintaining tenant engagement throughout any changes.

How is writing to the local, town and district councils going to help save money?

Answer: We are seeking for City, Town, and Parish councils to fund some of the services that might otherwise be cut. This might be through a payment to SC, or an asset or service transfer / devolution. Therefore, less costs to SC. City, Town and Parish councils do not have the same limit on their proportion of the council tax and so can increase their fees to cover the devolved costs.

If the cost of services is going to go up, like council tax and rent, how will this affect the community all round for all of us?

Answer: For general fund services we are seeking to increase income to the maximum permissible levels, the max levels that the market can sustain, and the maximum permissible by government.

The services we are used to receiving are underfunded and if we want them to continue or reduce at a slower rate than taxation will have to change.

Council Housing rents are capped by government, any increase that is below

inflation is a real terms financial cut.

RESOLVED. The report was noted.

36 Q2 (July-Sept) Performance and Finance Report - Agenda Item 8

The group submitted questions to the Chair on the Q2 Performance and Finance Report which will be answered via email and sent to the group after the meeting.

RESOLVED. The report was noted.

37 The Directorate Report-Senior Management - Agenda Item 9

The group submitted questions to the Chair on The Directorate Report. Which will be answered via email and sent to the group after the meeting.

RESOLVED. The report was noted.

38 Any other Business - Agenda Item 10

The group noted the “Special Meeting” for budget rent and service charge setting. This will take place on 15th January 2024 and will be via Teams.

The group was read a statement written by Abbie Johnson as an expression of interest to join the Tenant Strategic Group and the group voted unanimously that Abbie will be joining the TSG.

There was no other business raised.

(The meeting ended at 7.15 pm)

.....
CHAIR

This page is intentionally left blank



Somerset Council

Tenants' Strategic Group – 22nd January 2024

Engaged Tenant Group Update – January 2024

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

Report Authors: Sharon Yarde

1. Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

To inform the Tenants Strategic Group of the work being carried out by the tenant engagement groups within Somerset Council.

2. Recommendations

For the group to acknowledge for reference

3. Update from our Engagement Groups

TENANTS' ACTION GROUP (TAG)

Purpose

To encourage a strong partnership between Council staff, the Tenants' Strategic Group, Councillors (particularly the Portfolio Holder and Shadow Portfolio Holder),

and Tenant Representatives To support the Council to engage and empower tenants and to represent the interests of tenants of the Council. To focus on community and neighbourhood issues and give the Council feedback on how it can improve its services. Consult with housing services and make recommendations for improvement. Provide feedback to the Tenants' Strategic Board on issues arising from meetings and to allocate funds to appropriate community projects.

Update

TAG held their AGM on 11th January 2024, all other meeting dates for 2024 have been agreed.

Leycroft Grove continues to be on the agenda and appears to be moving in the right direction, work has started, drainage put in and some pathways. The Chair meets with Stephen Boland each month to look at progress.

The group also assessed an application for the Child Youth Initiative Fund: This was unanimously agreed to fund. They had further questions from a previous application which Angela Bolitho answered, however they agreed to put the application on hold and look at it again in March if funding is still available.

VOIDS

Purpose

To review the turnaround times for VOIDS, to understand the challenges and to ensure that our homes are meeting the lettable standard. To also understand if leaving well visits are being conducted where properties are left in an appalling condition and the costs involved in getting these properties back to the lettable standard.

Update

This will be conducted by four members of the TAG group: Brian Wyatt, Sally Mitchell, Catherine Jarvis and Christine Smith. Meeting with Ollie Warcup and Tony Knight has been completed. Viewing dates were put on hold until 2024, these will be planned for January 2024 upon Tony Knights return from leave.

GROUNDS MAINTENANCE

Purpose

To work with the grounds maintenance team and Stephen Boland to ensure that the service provided complies with the Grounds Maintenance Schedule. To address the comments about grounds maintenance made in the last Tenant Satisfaction Measures and to make grounds improvements in our communities.

Update

The groups last meeting was cancelled due to the weather, they have planned a meeting in January to look at some of the trees in the area that are causing issues due to size and location, the tree specialist (Dan Mancini) will be in attendance. The group are continuing to work well with Jack Mount and Stephen Boland, and photographs have been taken of some of the work already completed, which will be shared in the spring.

DAMP AND MOULD (Members from both TAG and TSG)

Purpose

To monitor the implementation of the Damp and Mould Action Plan. To ensure that it is delivered as promised within a reasonable time scale. The group meets every 2 months.

Update

The group would like to organise some evening events in community halls for tenants to be able to come and discuss damp and mould and other housing related issues. The group decided to put this on hold until the housing structure has been announced and will discuss in the next meeting in February 2024.

LOW CARBON/COMMS (Members from TAG and TSG and new tenant representatives)

Purpose

To help create the Low Carbon strategy and a communication strategy. Understand retrofit and how it is achieved.

Update

The Low Carbon group has come to an end, the Low Carbon Strategy was taken to full council and agreed in December 2022. A draft of the Communication strategy was reviewed by the group on 24th May and their approval was given. This group was key in putting these 2 strategies together.

CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING

Purpose

To ensure that the Capital Programme is on track to deliver. Sam Rickward is the elected Capital Programme Monitor who meets with Nigel Loxton.

Update

Resources

All 3 new appointments for contracts managers now in post. One graduate has commenced. There are 2 positions for Liaison officers and 1 Contract manager in the new structure.

Kitchens

Novus have now finished their contract. Three contractors now appointed for new framework. The pilot kitchens have been completed and are of a good standard.

The 3 contractors are Bell Group, LCB Group, and Church farm maintenance.

Bathrooms

The tenders have been agreed and 3 contractors have been appointed. The intention is to have 3-4 pilot properties completed by the end of January.

Roofing

Progressing well, DR Jones have currently added another team to speed up progress.

Windows & Doors

Nationwide now progressing well, their intention is to complete 10 properties a week going forward. This maybe a big ask, as some of this relies on Assets giving them the information required.

Heating

Liberty have completed the pilot properties. We are happy with their quality of work, and they can proceed with the programme.

Fire Doors

CLC contract completed. A tender will go out end of Q1 2024, subject to budget.

Electrical testing

Progressing well, the intention was to be 100% compliant by December. MD are being held up with access to properties and therefore currently running at 94.2% compliant.

Procurement

Pending Tenders, Fire doors, Electric heating, communal flooring, Planned decorations.

TENANCY AGREEMENT MEETING

Purpose

To look at the tenancy agreement in conjunction with Homes in Sedgemoor (HiS) and change where necessary. Sam Rickward from Somerset Council and Craig Green from HiS meet with Simon Lewis and a core group of managers to 'walk through' their current Tenancy Agreement and suggest constructive changes.

Update

Further work needs to take place to propose a suitable set of words and then to consult tenants more widely on the proposed updates and to consider and take account of any feedback. Input from Legal Services is required to agree the best pathway to approve and adopt the new tenancy agreement.

This piece of work is currently on hold due to shifting priorities and resource and will be revisited at a later time.

VOIDS CONTRACTOR PROCUREMENT

Purpose

To involve tenants in the procurement of a new contractor for our void properties.

Update

Wayne Hobson and Livi Mongare met with Barabara Bottomley, Ollie Warcup, David Carpenter and Michael O'Halloran and looked at proposed options. Another meeting is planned for February.

COMMUNAL CLEANING PROCUREMENT GROUP

Purpose

To involve a couple of tenants in the procurement of a new contractor for a new cleaning contract in communal areas.

Update

Livi Mongare and Luke Manning are involved in this project, the first meeting has taken place, and another meeting will take place in February. There will need to be a consultation regarding the specification of the communal cleaning service that is 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: Sharon Yarde

Telephone number: 07818529194

Email address: sharon.yarde@somersetcouncil.gov.uk



Somerset Council

Tenants' Strategic Group – Monday 22nd January 2024

Directorate Report

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Member for Communities

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 November 2023.

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

HRA Growth and Business Function

- The service launched its post LGR (Local Government Reorganisation) structure in December and is working to embed the structure over the next 6 months. The structure recognised the responsibility of the council for 10,000 homes and the ambition to become a top quartile performing social landlord.
- The structure includes a Growth and Business Function aimed at emphasising the importance of increasing the number of homes in the HRA and ensuring the strategic and financial needs of the Single HRA are delivered through the In-House Service and the ALMO (Homes in Sedgemoor)
- The service has concluded its budget planning for 2024/2025 and its review of its 30-year business plan. The business plan is particularly important as it projects the costs of the council's core landlord services as well as funds for capital programmes and new build. The Business plan covers the expenditure for all 10,000 Council homes.
- The Council is set to see the largest number of new and acquired homes for many years with 300 new homes to the HRA between 2023-2026. The business plan annually will consider new schemes of which there are a number.
- Over 30 NTWP (North Taunton Woolaway Project) Phase A are now let with the 47 being let within the few weeks.
- NTWP is the first scheme in the country to receive Homes England Regeneration funding. The Council has signed a contract and will receive £5m additional subsidy for phase A, B and Ci.
- The contract for the demolition of NTWP Phase B, Ci and Di and Wordsworth Drive and Coleridge Crescent Flats is approved. The demolition will take place February and into Spring
- The procurement of a main contractor for NTWP will conclude in January and if successful the new contractor will be appointed to start in the new financial year.
- Seaward Way/Rainbow Way, Minehead is progressing well. A second community drop in event will take place in January and the first eleven properties should be let before April.
- The Regeneration at Wordsworth Drive and Coleridge Crescent flats continues to progress well with site security and demolition the focus of the team.
- The housing service is leading the acquisition of 31 homes in the County which will be held in the Housing Revenue Account. These properties will be let to Refugees for the first tenancy with flexibility for future years to let as General Need Homes. The homes are 100% funded by the Local Authority Housing Fund and other subsidy available to the council. To date ten homes have been purchased with nine more in conveyancing. Customers will have a secure tenancy agreement.
- The service will conclude in March its programme which has purchased five homes which are to be used as Housing First properties for people who were Sleeping Rough. An additional 5 Housing Revenue account properties have been switched from General Need through this programme. The funding to purchase the properties is all grant funded.
- The service is progressing with a Low Carbon Retrofit Strategy and Delivery plan significantly influenced by tenants. The In-house housing service has several retrofit grants including ECO4, Social Housing and Decarbonisation Fund Waves

(SHDF) 1 & 2. All schemes are starting to deliver with measures such as improved glazing, loft insulation, improved ventilation, LED lighting, Air Source

- Heat Pumps, Solar, PV, and External Wall Insulation being used on different properties to achieve EPC C or Net Zero.
- The HRA has Private Water Treatment Plants (Septic Tanks) and is currently replacing one of the oldest. The council will progress the replacement of others. The replacement of tanks with more environmentally sensitive tanks may allow the HRA to receive credits in relation to Phosphates.
- The Housing Strategy team are writing two important strategies which are the Somerset Housing Strategy and Somerset Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy. Both strategies will be complete prior to March 2025.

Property Team

Responsive Repairs and Void Repairs

- The most recent available data for repairs performance, November 2023, shows a slight reduction with emergency responsive repairs at 99.4% and non-emergency responsive repairs at 98.1%. We are continuing to seek to recruit to vacant trade roles to ensure we have sufficient resources available to meet demand, but this remains challenging.
- Responsive repair request call-handling is currently still being taken by call-handlers within the Corporate Customer Service team. However, we have plans in place to enable this activity to be taken 'in-house' within the Housing Directorate in the future (thus allowing a smooth 'one and done' appointment-based service offer to the customer).
- We continue to develop and implement activities within our Repairs Service Improvement Plan (RSIP). This includes improving IT systems, and we are about to launch an Open Contractor project review to ensure the system is fit-for-purpose as we improve future service delivery.
- We continue to undertake void repairs to successfully meet our Lettable Standard. Procurement activities for external contractor support for void repairs are ongoing and will be tendered in early 2024.
- Our materials supply chain process continues to operate well overall, with regular review of the Core list. We are also in discussions with the supplier regarding their Social Value offer.

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, lift and stair-lift checks and remedial works, and radon monitoring.

- The Fire Safety Audit by SWAP (Southwest Audit Partnership) is now complete although we are still awaiting their final report. We will incorporate their recommended actions into our overall Property Safety Compliance Action Plan.
- Our Electrical Inspection testing programme continues to improve compliancy in this area, with the latest data showing 94.24% (see Capital Programme section below for further details).
- A programme of urgent fire door replacement and fire door powered openers is being undertaken. A further programme of fire safety works (following Fire Risk Assessment recommended actions) is being procured.
- Weekly compliance meetings, together with monthly reports to the Executive team, are ongoing to carefully monitor and manage housing property safety.

Capital Programme

- Our Capital Programme team are delivering our electrical inspection testing programme with both the main contractor delivering the programme and support from our in-house electrical team. A consumer unit replacement programme is shortly due to commence (awaiting National Grid to schedule their contractor switches which are needed prior to our being able to commence works).
- A new programme of kitchen and bathroom replacements has commenced with three new contractors. Initial pilot properties are being undertaken to ensure quality standards can be achieved, with an accelerated programme planned for Q4.
- Procurement activities also continue, including review of required capital programme works needed to meet the Decent Homes Standard (DHS), incorporating our Retrofit aspiration.

Asset Management

- We are undertaking option appraisals to enable the purchase of 31 units funded by the Local Authority Housing Fund.
- We have undertaken a desktop review of our properties that potentially contain Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) and have passed this information to SC colleagues in the Corporate Assets team who are arranging on-site surveys to confirm whether this is present.
- The service continues to carry out energy surveys which are required to understand pathways to Zero Carbon and which low energy funding regime properties are best placed in. These surveys are influencing the capital investment programme.
- The service is working on the medium-term financial plan (MTFP) and 30-year investment plan which will feed into future budgets and the 30-year Business Plan. Ensuring homes meet the Decent Homes Standard (DHS) remains a high priority for the service and properties requiring these works have been identified and placed in the capital programme.

- We are undertaking option appraisals for potential disposal of existing properties in the HRA which no longer serve as appropriate homes for our tenants.
- Stock condition surveys, and validation surveys (i.e. checking that works identified for programmes of replacement in the near future require the works to be undertaken now) are progressing with pace, which enable us to prioritise those most in need of upgrading, smooth the programmes to improve our financial planning, reduce the number of remedial repairs required and meet the Government's Decent Homes Standard (DHS).

Income and Tenancy Management Team

Sheltered & Extra Care Housing

- Flood update – we supported the tenants to have sterile cleaning of their property. Dry reports for every property were also completed and carpets fitted. All homes were visited, and additional works planned and arranged. Whilst this has been an upheaval for some of the tenants, they have been pleased that so many steps have been taken to make their homes safe. During the period we were dealing with the flood, we identified some tenants whose needs now exceed them being able to live independently and we have been able to support them to move to somewhere more appropriate, both within and outside of Council housing stock. This has impacted on our usual service delivery.
- We have taken part in the sessions to develop a flow chart for dealing with floods in future, reflecting on what we now know.
- The team has supported work to address issues around the fire door installation programme, including adapting some of them to ensure sheltered housing tenants are able to all use the new doors safely. This has also had an impact on our usual service delivery.
- A new model of Policing has been introduced in Wellington and we have been liaising with the local One Team Coordinator, to ensure information regarding tenants is passed through promptly to our staff within the area, to respond (matters such as unexpected deaths, concerns for vulnerability and exploitation).
- When officers conduct annual reviews with tenant, they sometimes identify people struggling with living on an upper floor (where there is no lift). This leads to a fire risk assessment and an evacuation plan being carried out. Sometimes we require tenants to move and when they agree we support them to update and bid on Homefinder. In some cases, where the person has local support and links, we occasionally look to do a direct match. If a tenant is not willing to move, staff discuss the best options for them if there was to be a fire.
- Work is continuing to take place re: the 'digital switchover,' which is planned for 2025. This is to ensure that all our tenants have digitally compatible lifelines.
- We have had conversations with Musgrove Park Hospital & Adult Social Care regarding improving referrals into Extra Care, including referrals from people who are ready to be discharged from the hospital, but who are needing to be

- re-housed, due to being unable to return to their own home (due to lack of accessibility etc.) We are continuing to work with these colleagues to improve this process and have made several referrals to Adult Social Care, for tenants who need care assessments, reviews, who are self-neglecting etc.
- The Sheltered Housing Manager I attended the LETRA Lane Estates residents meeting on behalf of the housing team and have followed up on several matters that were raised.
- We have held several multi-disciplinary team meetings for tenants who have more complex needs, to ensure that they have the support they need to sustain their tenancy.
- We had 4 staff providing cover over the Christmas to New Year period and have made sure tenants who can continue to have calls from Lifeline during the holiday period.

Lettings

- The feedback the team have received from tenants on both the lettable standard of the properties and our lettings process has remained high throughout 2023;
- More new build properties in the North Taunton area have been handed over and let. A few of weeks ago I had the pleasure of being shown around one of the homes by the new tenant/s. Their previous home had been demolished and they had received the keys to their new home a couple of weeks earlier - they were really pleased with their new 'forever home;'
- All the flats that are scheduled for demolition at Wordsworth Drive have been vacated with all the tenants moving on successfully;
- No recruitment of the Home Moves Plus officer has taken place at this stage, although downsizing is still a service offered to our tenants.
- Following the Christmas closedown of Homefinder Somerset the lettings team have this week (02.01.24) recommenced their advertising activities.

Income

- The Rent Recovery team are still working at reduced staff level, the team are working hard to give our tenants continuous support and ensure they are claiming everything they are entitled to. Recruitment to the vacant post will now commence.
- The case manager who deals with all the garage stock is leaving the organisation on 12th January, we are currently working on a plan to cover this workload while we undertake a recruitment exercise to fill this role.
- The Debt and Benefit team are also working at reduced capacity due to 1 staff member being absence from work. The remaining officer is now providing support for the whole of the housing stock, however some response times slightly longer than possible and some tenants sign posted to other organisation for help and support.

- We are working towards our new phone system being introduced before the end of January. Voicescape will enable us to make outbound calls much more effectively and should therefore help us with the collection of rent arrears.

Tenancy/Estates & ASB

- Having a full complement of Case Managers has had a positive impact on the team with the team managing their workloads and keeping up with the enquiries that come in daily. Permanent recruitment is being planned for the New Year.
- The success of the outright day possession order against the male tenant in Wellington, resulted in him leaving the property on the day of the order and therefore we did not have to utilise a bailiff warrant; this meant that the community will now be able to settle down and enjoy a quieter Christmas period.
- The case in Wellington related to a teenage boy with undiagnosed mental health issues has quietened down as the boy has not been allowed to return to the property due to his bail conditions. The family are now attempting to secure new alternative accommodation. We will work closely with them to do what we can to support them with this.
- We have updated regularly on a case where an aggressive tenant; who has had a restraining order against a member of our team; prior to the Christmas period moved to London and through the support services in London he has now engaged with, he has given notice on his property in Taunton. His tenancy ended on the 25th December 2023. We can now advise that his tenancy has terminated, and the property will now be sensitively let. The team are more relaxed about working in and around the Taunton area as this threat against them has ceased.
- Moorland Road – the recent problem of anti-social behaviour continues to be monitored but there have been no further problems reported. This will continue to be closely monitored. We are working with our Lettings Team to ensure that future voids in the area are sensitively let to enable the community to settle down and recover.
- Although workloads remain busy, we are seeing that the more serious anti-social behaviour has calmed down, which is usual and to be expected for this time of the year.
- The Priorswood regeneration area was busy leading up to the Christmas break as we had new properties to let. This went smoothly and people are happy and now feeling the benefits of their new home.
- In the New Year we are going to be actively working with the development team getting familiar with the new properties that are coming over in Minehead. Our first visit to the site is planned for the 31st January 2024

Housing Performance Team

- Supporting and enabling the work of the Tenants Strategic Group (TSG) and Tenants' Action Group and the subgroups is a key focus for our team. We

have agreed a comprehensive training plan for TSG group members for 2023/2024 and membership of ARCH as well as TPAS. Our engaged tenants have already attended 6 training sessions.

- TSG voted and welcomed a new member to the group and another interested tenant is attending the January 2024 TSG meeting.
- The process designed through the Damp and Mould group for tenants has gone live in our software and this work continues to support the progression of the Damp and Mould Action Plan.
- The Low Carbon Working group has ended; they achieved a new Low Carbon Strategy and a Communication plan.
- Collectively we are continuing to work with Homes in Sedgemoor on local government reorganisation workstreams. We continue to meet regularly.
- We have completed the second tenant satisfaction survey for 2023, the results will be reported to TSG in March. The team dealt with 43 flags requiring urgent attention and investigated 301 comments.
- We have also submitted data to Housemark, our benchmarking organisation, to understand how our TSM (tenant satisfaction measurement) data compares to other providers.
- We continue to strive for improvement in our complaint handling and are facing challenges in our response times, however Housing Ombudsman has not investigated any complaint made against us since April 2023. The team has had to deal with staff absence in this area which has been challenging. Complaints performance is reporting to TSG through the performance quarterly reports and again in more detail in the complaints annual report to TSG.
- We have listened to tenant concerns, and we are keen to improve how we communicate as a service with customers. This year we have opened several communication channels with tenants including online newsletters, tenant liaison officers in our capital works teams, texting and we will use a system called voicescape shortly to reduce abortive telephone calls. We are enhancing our website content, and we are using new formats such as videos and quick surveys embedded in articles. We agree that we can go further still, and we are currently proposing a dedicated in-service communication team. The service remains committed to introducing a tenant's portal to allow tenants to self-serve 24/7 and we are keen to have a social media presence.

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?

Page 8/

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: shari.hallett@somerset.gov.uk

This page is intentionally left blank