



Somerset Council

Tenants' Strategic Group – 27th November 2023

Name of Report:

Interim Lessons learnt from recent flooding of HRA properties in Wellington

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1. Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

During an evening of the week commencing 18th September, heavy rain resulted in localised flooding that affected 19 HRA (Housing Revenue Account) properties in Wellington, primarily 17 bungalows at Bovet Street, as well as two houses at Oaken Ground.

The Housing Service provided a response on the night to support affected tenants, which included sandbagging of properties, clearance of drains, making properties safe, assurance and support for tenants and decanting tenants from 5 properties into hotels.

Since this date we have continued to provide comprehensive support to all of the households to ensure the properties have been properly cleaned, dried out, repaired and made good and the tenants have been supported, through what has been a very traumatic time for all affected.

2. Lessons Learnt

What went well:

- Excellent response on the night and during the following days, where officers were on the ground daily, supporting every affected household

- Excellent cross-working between Property Services and Tenancy Services, coordinating our support to tenants
- Supportive and caring approach which was customer focussed and empathetic.
- 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
- Dehumidifiers were provided to all properties early in the process and we committed to pay excess heating and electricity costs for their use.
- Creative support solutions identified for complex tenants bringing in other agencies as needed. For example, one very elderly tenant was partially sighted and had support needs and needed decant; we also had examples of people with significant hoarding and other tenants struggling with their mental health – all of whom required sensitive support to meet their needs.
- Regular communication with those displaced and with their properties being prioritised to be made ready to return.
- Daily project meetings taking place and communications to tenants, with people on site every day meant our communications was clear and frequent.
- We identified a cost effective, empathetic contractor to undertake the removal and cleaning works required for each property.

What could have gone better:

- 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.
- Needed a single point of contact to be responsible for identifying works required. In practice actions were being identified by officers on the ground and being phoned in by tenants which duplicated work.
- Understanding of insurance arrangements and earlier involvement of the Council's insurance agency (note self insurance requires service to take all responsibility for works and repairs)
- Ability to secure temporary accommodation was a significant challenge and needs to be easier
- A necessity to have professional, accredited cleaning and sanitisation of properties earlier in the process, which is certified.
- Necessity for dry certificates to evidence that property is dried.
- Few tenants had contents insurance and we require clearer principles on what the HRA will pay for when tenant does not have contents insurance – for future cases. This needs to align to a hardship policy and fund. Note our current position sends out mixed messages.
- A clearer position on when we would insist on a decant, normally when the property or a person is at risk by staying in their home. Most incidents where water has entered a property will require a decant.

- Clearer guidance on our position when tenant refuses to leave or to use dehumidifiers, or for contaminated carpets to be removed. Legal Services has advised that a signed disclaimer would not suffice.

3. Follow-up to Incident

We have held two lessons learnt meetings with a cross-section of staff and services involved in the incident and are developing a flowchart setting out the ideal process flow for future flooding incidents. We also intend to adapt this for other similar events such as fire. The process flowchart will be accompanied by prompt lists for staff involved in future incidents to aid them in what is required.

We will be concluding this work with an action plan to follow-up and resolve some of the issues identified (many of which have been set out above) and will get this approved by HSMT (Housing Senior Management Team).

A separate meeting has taken place with Property Services to identify properties and addresses that are prone to flooding to agree appropriate mitigation measures that can be put in place to reduce the risk of future flooding and / or limit the extent of damage caused. This includes improvement to drainage, guttering and downpipes and engagement of specialist flood consultants to assess other measures. This will include requests to colleagues in Highways to ensure sufficient maintenance of drains which are prone to causing our properties to be flooded.

Somerset Council and Wellington Town Council has organised a Wellington Flood Drop In event on 22nd November from 4pm to 7pm to hear from those affected and to capture any further insights and lessons from this event.

4. Recommendations

The Tenants' Strategic Group is asked to note the report and the progress being made to improve our approach to responding to flood incidents and to provide any comments and questions.

3. Background and Full details of the Report (insert here)

As set out above

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. However there could be some that come out of the final lessons learnt actions and plan once adopted.

6: Are there any Equality and Diversity Implications?

There may be equality impacts on decisions taken as a result of the final lessons learnt actions and impact assessments can be made if appropriate at this time.

There are no equality implications directly to do with this report

7. Are there any Data Protection Implications?

There are no data protection implications directly to do with this report

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