



**Tenants' Strategic Group – Monday 27<sup>th</sup> November 2023**

### **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 May 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**

## Regeneration

- NTWP (North Taunton Woolaway Project) is the first scheme in the country to receive Homes England Regeneration funding. The Council will receive £5m additional subsidy for phase A, B and Ci. Homes England have congratulated the service on such as strong bid and were particularly impressed with the initiatives which are being delivered in addition to the building of new affordable homes. There were over 800 bids on Homefinders for the 21 flats which are shortly being handed over. The handover has unfortunately been delayed due to the need to complete work to the highway. This has caused some concern from customers waiting for their new home.
- The contract for the demolition of Wordsworth Drive and Coleridge Crescent Flats is close to being signed. Only household awaits decanting, and a property has been identified.
- Seaward Way/Rainbow Way, Minehead is progressing well with a recent community drop in event seeing around fifty families visiting the scheme and supported with registration on Homefinder.
- The Regeneration at Wordsworth Drive and Coleridge Crescent flats continues to progress well with only one tenant awaiting decant at Coleridge Crescent and only the shop tenanted at Wordsworth Drive. The team has recently been working to make the site more secure following a spate of thefts. The demolition contract procurement is progressing and will see the two blocks demolished next year.
- 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 and Asylum Seekers 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 four homes have been purchased with fifteen more in conveyancing. Customers will have a secure tenancy agreement.
- The service is progressing with a low carbon retrofit Strategy and Delivery plan. The In-house housing service has several retrofit grants including ECO4, Social Housing and Decarbonisation Fund Waves (SHDF) 1 & 2. The SHDF grants are funding surveys, new components as well as five graduate recruits in the housing service. 350 properties are in the pipeline for energy works.
- The service has commenced its budget planning for 2024/2025 and is reviewing its 30-year business plan. The business plan is very 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 homes.
- The service has delayed the consultation on its new structure. It is hoped to consult on the new structure shortly. The TSG will receive a presentation on the new housing structure.
- 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.
- Although recent affordable housing completions in the County by Registered Social Landlords and private developers have been quite good the future pipeline is low. Although the government has announced some changes to ecology

requirements which could unblock some developments there is insufficient detail about this change to understand if more homes can be approved by planning.

## **Housing Property Team**

### **Responsive Repairs and Void Repairs**

- Performance for emergency responsive repairs is being maintained at 100%, and non-emergency responsive repairs continues to improve and is within our set target of 93%. Nevertheless, it remains challenging to recruit to vacant trade roles and we are liaising with the Recruitment team to seek a resolution to this issue.
- Responsive repair request call-handling is currently still being taken by call-handlers within the Corporate Customer Service team, although we are reviewing options for how this key activity may best be provided as part of our staff restructure proposals.
- We continue to develop and implement activities within our Repairs Service Improvement Plan (RSIP), including improving IT systems (e.g., job diagnosis and appointments, trades scheduling, contractor portal, etc.).
- We continue to undertake void repairs to meet our Lettable Standard and are maintaining a 100% target for new tenants to be satisfied with the lettable standard of their new home. We are about to go out to tender for external contractor support for void repairs to ensure we can meet our KPI (Key Performance Indicators) void turnaround targets.
- Our materials supply chain process is now fully embedded and operating well.

### **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.
- We have now received Savills' Property Safety Compliance Assurance Audit Report which is overall positive. We are developing an Action Plan to implement their recommendations to further improve in this area and ensure we continue to meet legislative changes.
- The Fire Safety Audit is now complete and we are awaiting their draft report. We will provide feedback to TSG once we have received this and agreed a management response.
- Our Electrical Inspection testing programme has notably increased our compliance percentage in this area.
- We continue to undertake a range of procurement activities to deliver compliance programmes, particularly in relation to fire safety programmed works.
- Weekly compliance meetings are ongoing to carefully monitor and manage all these safety critical areas.

## **Capital Programmes**

- 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. We are now looking to increase this further by implementing a consumer unit replacement programme, although this has been delayed by the lead-in time for National Grid to schedule contractor switches needed prior to our being able to commence works.
- A range of capital work programmes continues on-site, including kitchen and bathroom replacements, replacement fire doors, windows, re-roofing, and environmental improvements.
- 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).

## Housing and Communities Team

### Sheltered and Extra Care Housing

- The team have all attended the 'Managing Conflict' training which ran recently.
- The team has been impacted by covid type illness over the past month.
- There has been a flood at Bovet St, which significantly affected 17 homes. Kath Jones, the allocated Case Manager has been a star and worked tirelessly to support tenants through what has been a stressful and upsetting time. Unfortunately, many tenants did not have insurance due to the cost. The whole team has been supporting by taking on additional work in Kath's patch and supporting her on the ground, ensuring; tenants had a safe alternate place to stay; had help to remove damaged items; keeping them up to date re: the drying out and sanitising process etc. Our maintenance team have also been amazing and Housing Options has supported us to book alternate accommodation where needed. The flood has been very overwhelming for all involved and we have repeatedly gone beyond our landlord responsibilities to support our tenants. This has included providing replacement carpets for tenants without insurance, removing damaged belongings, benefits check to ensure tenants are claiming their entitlement, liaising with other services and businesses to ensure our most vulnerable tenant could be appropriately housed. There are still some weeks to go, but we look forward to seeing the tenants back in their homes and getting on with their lives.
- Despite the flood and reductions to staffing due to planned leave and sickness, the team have worked incredibly hard to continue to provide a 'normal' service to our tenants although this has, at times, had to be reduced. The team has continued to deal with sign ups, leaving wells, completing annual reviews, estates check and dealing with complaints.
- I have begun meetings re: the 'digital switchover,' which is planning the work that will need to be undertaken for Lifelines to be replaced to keep up with the changes taking place in 2025.
- I am continuing to be in regular contact with the contact centre managers, to ensure that calls are routed to the right person, for the quickest response/reply.

### Lettings

- Customer satisfaction remains high with both lettable standard of the properties and the lettings process. Positive feedback has been received.

*"Very satisfied my depression whilst not cured is way better i have many more good than bad days now it has made such a difference to us all it is now a family home thank you."*

*"Very satisfied. we are so much more settled as a family the change has had a massive positive impact on all of us the children are so much more*

*independent – my son has slept in his own room, the first time in years from the day we moved in. We are very settled and very grateful.”*

- North Taunton viewings and lettings went very well. Sadly, delays have been incurred to the moving in dates caused by a highways issue. This has impacted badly on those tenants moving into the new regeneration flats. North Taunton regeneration team are dealing with this delay. Teamwork between the lettings team, the regeneration team and the estate team helped making the allocation of these properties, a smooth piece of work.
- The Lettings team have supported the sheltered housing team in identifying potential properties that could have been used as decamp properties for Bovet Street flood victims at this point none of those have been used.
- “Sensitive let” tags have been used to support allocations in ASB (Anti-social behaviour) affected areas in order that we can reduce the impact of ASB on those communities.
- The Lettings Estates and Regeneration team have worked collaboratively to deal with all Wordsworth Drive and Coleridge crescent tenants the last tenant to be moved out of the regeneration area is moving into their new home in November 2023.
- No recruitment of the HMP (Home Mover Plus) officer has taken place at this stage, although downsizing is still a service offered to our tenants.
- The Lettings team remains settled work demand is remarkably high case officers carrying more than 25 cases against a normal figure of between 13 and 15.

## **Income**

- 14 Hardship Applications have now been approved totalling £11,136 one further application is waiting for approval. The team has identified other tenants who they will now be working with to complete applications to apply for the funding. So far, we have not refused any applications.
- The Debt and Benefit Officers are involved with several complex benefit claims, which can be very time consuming, they are working hard to resolve these issues to get the best outcomes for our tenants.
- Due to having reduced staffing in the Rent Recovery team, the existing 4 Rent Recovery Case Managers are now working at maximum capacity to ensure the account on the vacant “patch” are being actioned each work and that those tenants are not falling further into arrears.

## **Tenancy/Estates & ASB**

- Casework continues to remain high for both areas of the team. Many of enquiries we have noted are from our more complex customers who require immediate solutions to their issues, but this is just not always possible.
- We have secured an outright 56-day possession order against a sole tenant (male) in the Wellington area. This male has for several years caused serious anti-social behaviour due to his behaviour when drinking.
- We have been dealing with a succession case where a male succeeded the tenancy but not the property (due to it being an under-occupation case). A Trial took place in May 2023; and we were expecting the warrant to be executed in October however the tenant appealed and there will be a further court hearing later this month.
- The antisocial behaviour team is supporting a new case in Wellington related to a teenage boy with undiagnosed mental health issues who has been targeting his neighbours and the local community. Neighbouring families have been tolerant, but behaviours have escalated, and they now believe it is out of control. Serious incidents have occurred which have included him physically targeting their property (smashing windows and doors) and causing substantial damage to vehicles. We are working closely with our multi-agencies partners to find a resolution including the police and Childrens Social Care. If a solution is not able to be found, then we will need to instigate legal action against the tenancy.
- We have been working closely with a new tenant who has had to flee harassment and intimidation from the neighbour; this is a serious hate crime. The family have gone back into the homeless system; whilst they can secure other accommodation in another area; this has affected the sole tenant and his three young children. We are now waiting on the Police investigating this matter; we have been advised by our legal team that they need to provide us with evidence before we can act against the tenants that have done this. We will keep challenging the Police to do this as we are still waiting on an outcome. Our legal team have advised that without the Police involvement it will be one word against the other. We have been advised that the tenant endured racism; has had his windows shot at; and was financially exploited by them.
- Anti-social behaviour at Moorland Road – we have reported previously on this and the issues we have been experiencing, particularly with two teenage children on the estate. We have had some positive outcomes with Children's Social Services removing one of the perpetrators to short-time respite until a permanent placement can be found. The other remains at home but has an injunction against her which was obtained by the Police; this is being closely monitored. We have held off from submitting our court case whilst this continues to have settled down the girl's behaviour; but we are ready to take immediate court action if any further nuisance/anti-social behaviour becomes known or is linked to her. We are keeping the community informed of this.
- Also, we are again dealing with another aggressive tenant; he has had a restraining order against a member of our team; last week very offensive graffiti was found with our team member named and the Police have secured CCTV footage which identifies the culprit. A statement has been given to the Police and I believe that they will be proceeding to arrest this tenant over the next few days. If there are charges brought against him this may give us the opportunity to take legal action against him.

- We have now been successful in recruiting two temporary officers for a three-month period to assist with the heavy workload, and until we have overcome the job evaluation issues to recruit permanently. One Case Manager started this week and the other will start in the next two weeks. This will involve some induction period and then we will be expecting them to be able to take some of the pressure from the rest of the team.

### **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 and membership of ARCH as well as TPAS. Training is underway, training from the HQN (Housing Quality Network) in relation to the consumer standards has taken place along with other sessions.
- 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 continued to meet with a new focus on communication.
- Collectively we are continuing to work with Homes in Sedgemoor on local government reorganisation workstreams.
- We are starting to prepare for the second tenant satisfaction survey in November 2023 and results will be reported to TSG, the results from May 2023 were reported in the September meeting. 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. 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 have also noticed your calls are now being answered quicker and there are fewer callers ringing off. We are enhancing our website content which will provide more electronic contact to housing. The service has enjoyed using new formats to share information including video and quick survey opportunities embedded in articles. We agree with tenants that we can go further still, and we are current proposing and costing 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. proposal is being finalised to streamline repair call handling to take a repair and book a



repair within the same call. We hope that tenants have noticed a change and agree that communication is moving in the right direction. We look forward to doing even more.

**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?**

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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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