

REPORT TO:	HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM: 9
DATE OF MEETING:	31st JANUARY 2019	CATEGORY: RECOMMENDED
REPORT FROM:	STRATEGIC DIRECTOR (SERVICE DELIVERY)	OPEN
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SUBJECT:	OVERVIEW OF HOUSING SERVICE	TERMS OF REFERENCE:
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL	

1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the progress made within the Housing Service since January 2018 is noted.
- 1.2 That the Committee endorses the proposed future work programme to deliver further improvements to the Service

2.0 Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to update members with regard to the progress made so far in improving the Housing Service since the commencement of the new Housing Management Team in January 2018.

- 2.1 The report also advises members as to the anticipated work programme for the coming year to deliver further improvements to the Service.
The report highlights activities in the following areas;
 - Repairs and Improvements
 - Housing Management
 - Supported housing
 - Community Engagement

3.0 Detail

3.1 Stock Condition Survey

- 3.1.1 The Council appointed Savills in (June 2018 to undertake a Stock Condition Survey and provided a final report to the Council. This has now been completed. The survey consisted of a review of all existing data and a physical survey of 10% of the housing stock. Special attention was paid to the 'non-traditional' or system built properties within the stock and also to blocks of flats with internal and external communal facilities. The Stock Condition Survey suggests that the focus of repair and improvement works for the next ten years should be the external and structural condition of dwellings and the land

around them. This is in line with Tenant Satisfaction (STAR) survey which was reported to Committee on 22 November 2018 and highlighted tenant's lower satisfaction levels with communal areas and estates.

3.1.2 The contents of the report are in the process of being validated in order to prepare a programme of works. This will also be aligned with the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan and will form part of a revised Asset Management Strategy. This will be reported to Committee during 2019.

3.1.3 A further piece of work will be undertaken to produce option appraisals of stock where major works may not be economically viable in accordance with the 2016-2046 Asset Management Strategy; agreed by the Housing and Community Services Committee in October 2016. This is particularly the case with the 'non-traditional' dwellings and also blocks of flats. This further study will also consider the development potential of these areas and any adjacent sites that are already owned by the Council.

3.2 Derbyshire Fire Service

3.2.1 Derbyshire Fire Service has carried out a review of fire safety in Council dwellings. The outcome of this review will also be considered within the planning of a major works programme and also in the delivery of the two recently awarded fire safety contracts mentioned later in this report.

3.3 Repairs Review/Housing Quality Network

3.3.1 Housing Quality Network (HQN) has completed its review of the Responsive Repairs, Planned Maintenance and Disabled Facilities Grants Services. The recommendations within the report will inform the development of a three-year plan to improve the entire Service covering:

- A strategic approach to Asset management Gas Servicing and cyclical maintenance
- Responsive Repairs
- Void Repairs
- Contract Management
- Management of the Direct Labour Organisation (DLO)

3.3.2 A project plan for the delivery of these improvements is under construction and will be presented to members during 2019. A number of short-term actions to improve the Service are already in place, including the re-specification and procurement of cyclical maintenance and responsive repair's support.

3.3.3 A schedule of health and safety training is in place, covering, sharps, ladders, ladder inspection, asbestos, abrasive wheel, and electrical safety. Site Management Safety Training (SMSTS) has been completed by property surveyors and inspectors and a new fleet of vans is in use. The new fleet of vans will shortly be complemented with a complete new set of tools and equipment for the DLO.

3.3.4 The HQN review also covered the provision of adaptations in Council properties and also in private sector properties which are funded by Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG). A review of existing policies in both areas has been identified as being necessary. This review will consider the option of aligning the private sector DFG process with the provision of adaptations in council properties.

3.4 Procurement

3.4.1 The current contract for Responsive Repairs (including void works) expires on 31 March 2019. The contract for Planned and External Maintenance expired on 31 December 2018.

3.4.2 This contract was also used for the provision of repair and maintenance services to the Civic Centre and other public buildings. A new single “whole house” contract for all of these works is being tendered through a procurement framework. This contract will commence on 1 April 2019 and the Committee will be informed of the outcome of the tender exercise. The contract aims to provide a streamlined approach to contract management and also to improve the standard of empty and relet properties. This contract will deliver the planned maintenance programme mentioned earlier in this report.

3.5 New Contracts

3.5.1 New contracts have already been awarded for:

- Active Fire Safety (fire and smoke alarms installation and servicing)
- Passive Fire Safety (fire doors, compartmentation of buildings)
- Asbestos surveys (to communal areas, properties undergoing works)
- Asbestos removal (safe removal of asbestos)

These contracts cover the housing stock and other public buildings owned by the Council.

3.5.2 The provision of cleaning services to blocks of flats, community rooms, and vacant properties is covered within the repair and maintenance contract. A new improved specification for the provision of these services has been developed and a contractor is being sought through a procurement framework. A new separate cleaning contract will commence on 1 April 2019 and seeks to address the levels of dissatisfaction with the cleanliness identified in the STAR survey

3.6 Housing Management- Welfare Reform

3.6.1 Universal Credit was implemented in two stages in South Derbyshire, in June and then November 2018. An implementation plan developed by Housing, Revenues and Benefits and Partner Agencies has helped to minimise the impact of changes on existing claimants.

3.6.2 There are currently 36 Council tenants in receipt of Universal Credit. In eight of these cases there has been a six-week wait for the initial payment to be made.

Phase two of the Implementation Plan is being developed and members will be updated on the impact on Council tenants and the general public later in the year.

3.7 Anti-Social Behaviour /Tenancy Management

3.7.1 To assist in managing the emerging new types of anti-social behaviour including “cuckooing” in Council properties, the current procedures and processes for dealing with tenancy management issues have been reviewed. New procedures supported by a newly developed Information Technology (I.T.) Module and further staff training will be in place from March 2019. New working arrangements including joint training and briefing sessions for all Housing Staff are already in place.

3.8 Void Process Review

3.8.1 The process for managing the repair and letting of empty properties has been reviewed and the new process will be implemented from March 2019. The aim of this process is to let properties at a suitable standard more promptly and in a transparent and accessible manner for customers. New arrangements for letting difficult to let properties are already in place.

3.9 Rent Arrears Process Review.

3.9.1 Rent arrears processes have been reviewed in order to assist with the general management of rent accounts and specifically the provision of more direct support to tenants facing financial difficulty and/or their management of Universal Credit. The new process relies more on personal rather than written contact and providing more support to tenants with managing their income and expenditure. The necessary changes to the Housing Management I.T systems to facilitate this new process are in the process of being implemented.

3.10 Vulnerable people/tenancy management

3.10 The Housing Service and in-house cleaning team have carried out a pilot project to clean and clear properties where vulnerable tenants have been unable to comply with the conditions of their tenancy. This pilot project is part of the development of a new method for managing the tenancies of vulnerable people, ensuring that they are able to sustain their tenancies and do not become the victims of cuckooing or other criminal or abusive behaviour. This process will replace the Tenancy Audit process previously reported to Committee. All Housing Services staff have been trained with regard to the Vulnerable Adult Risk Management (VARM) process.

3.11 Estate Management

3.11.1 Concerns have previously been raised by members with regard to the management and condition of Council Housing properties and land. As indicated earlier these concerns have been reflected in the responses of Council tenants to the STAR survey. This Committee agreed a new set of Service Standards for the management of internal and external communal areas in March 2018. A schedule of works to prune and maintain hedges and shrub beds in Housing Areas has now commenced, the new schedule for cleaning internal areas will commence in April 2019 at a higher specification than at present. A schedule of regular inspections of shared facilities on estates is currently being implemented.

3.12 Flat Inspections

3.12.1 Alongside the recent STAR tenant satisfaction survey a follow-up survey of tenants in flats with communal facilities has been carried out. This has provided more detail with regard to the issues raised by tenants living in these blocks. This information will be used alongside the stock condition data to inform major investment decisions regarding physical improvement to these blocks.

3.13 Supported Housing

3.13.1 Work is in progress on the action plan arising from the review of supported housing reported to Housing and Community Services Committee in April 2017. The contract with DCC for the provision of Telecare/Careline services has been extended for a further two years. DCC is also in the process of consulting Service Users and providers on the future provision of these services in line with its County-wide strategy "Housing an Ageing Population a strategic vision" A formal response to this consultation has been prepared and will be reported separately. A new contract for the provision of Floating Support (wardens) is also proposed and is reported separately.

3.14 Tenant Satisfaction Survey (STAR)

3.14.1 The STAR Survey reported to members in November 2018 highlighted tenant dissatisfaction with how their views on services are responded to and how well the Council performs at communicating with them in general.

To address these issues a more regular survey framework is being designed which will collect satisfaction data on key services more regularly. This data will then be used to drive a service improvement framework which will focus on improving those services identified by tenants. This framework will be managed by the Community Engagement Team within Housing Services.

3.15 Annual Report

3.15.1 The 2017/18 Annual Report for Tenants is currently being prepared. The report focuses on the provision of housing services for vulnerable tenants and residents in South Derbyshire and will be published by the end of March 2019. The report will be made available to tenants and stakeholders 'online' with printed copies available on request. The final draft of the report will be presented to this committee in March 2019

3.16 Allocations and Homelessness

3.16.1 A project team is in place to review the current Housing Allocations Policy. This review will consider the issues already raised by members regarding the allocation of flats and sheltered accommodation. A draft Allocations Policy for consultation with members, stakeholders and the public will be presented to Housing and Community Services Committee early in 2019/20. Alongside this review the Council will be seeking to re-tender the provision of software to deliver the Choice Based Lettings system for managing the Housing Register and allocating properties. The Housing Service will be exploring and assessing the options for the procurement of this software either on a stand-alone basis or in partnership with other providers in the region.

3.17 Homeless Legislation

3.17.1 The Homeless Reduction Act was introduced in April 2018 which imposed new and extended Homelessness duties on local councils. In order to manage the implementation of this new legislation the Council has implemented new software funded by central government. The Council has provided additional staffing resource.

3.17.2. Better Care Fund support has been obtained to fund a contract to assist applicants with mental health and housing issues. So far the Council have dealt with 442 applications compared with 392 at the same stage in the previous year. Despite this the Housing Options Team has been successful in reducing both the number of cases having to be placed in Bed and Breakfast (B&B) and also the average length of stay in B&B this year. For the first time in the last three years the annual count of rough sleepers in the area was nil. During early December 2018 the team also achieved 'nil' households in Bed and Breakfast accommodation.

4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Further reports will identify these implications for the individual work streams identified.

5.0 Corporate Implications

Employment Implications

5.1 There are no direct Employment Implications arising from this report, Further reports will identify these implications for the individual work streams identified.

6.0 Legal Implications

6.1 There are no direct Legal Implications arising from this report, Further reports will identify these implications for the individual work streams identified.

7.0 Corporate Plan Implications

7.1 The actions outlined in this report contribute to the following aims within the Corporate Plan

- PE1. Improve the quality and make best use of existing Council housing stock to meet current and future needs.
- PE2. Maintain regular contact with tenants, with a focus on those identified as vulnerable
- O5. Improve the way in which Housing Services gathers reports and acts on customer satisfaction data.
- O5. Deliver a first class Repairs Service (strategic review of repairs and improvements).

8.0 Risk Impact

8.1 The proposals to change the eligibility criteria for Careline and Telecare Services may have an impact on the Corporate Risk to Core Funding and the Service Delivery risk, "loss of income to the Housing Revenue Account" If the proposals are implemented the likelihood score for this risk will be reviewed.

9.0 Community Impact

9.1 Consultation

The STAR tenants survey has identified the levels of tenants satisfaction with current services and areas for further improvement in services.

9.2 Equality and Diversity Impact

There is no direct impact on Equality and Diversity arising from this report. Further reports will identify these implications for the individual work streams identified.

9.3 Social Value Impact

There is no direct impact on Social Value arising from this report. Further reports will identify these implications for the individual work streams identified

9.4 Environmental Sustainability

There are environmental sustainability issues addressed within the repair and maintenance tender process and other maintenance contracts, including the safe disposal of waste.

10.0 Background Papers

None