

Housing Performance Report

Adults, Health and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 19th Sept 2017

Author: Head of Housing and Community Safety

Wards: All

Parishes Affected: All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 The report sets out the key current challenges and successes in the Housing Service.
- 1.2 The report enables members of the Committee to have a wider appreciation of the work undertaken by the Housing Service to enable the Committee to discuss priorities and challenges in the service area.
- 1.3 The links to the Swindon Vision in particular, Priority One: Improve infrastructure and housing to support a growing, low carbon economy and Priority Four: help people to help themselves while always protecting our most vulnerable adults and children.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 2.1 Review the content and structure of the report to assist future reporting requirements to this Committee.
- 2.2 Comments on the challenges and successes identified in section 3.0 of this report are welcomed.

3. Detail

- 3.1 **Housing and Adult Social Care joint work programme.** Housing Officers increasingly work with some of the most vulnerable individuals within our neighbourhoods. This traditionally has been seen through the work on homelessness, sheltered and supported housing as well as the growth of Homeline (Community Alarm system). To build on this a cross service area work programme has recently been completed on a number of activities to make best use of Council resources and add to the savings already achieved in Adult Social Care. This included:

- Developing and refurbishing new affordable homes to meet complex needs, including 24 assisted living bungalows at the Hawthorns, due to complete in December 2017

Housing Performance Report

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- The increased use of Assistive Technology within the home, speeding up hospital discharges, the latter has been assisted by amending shift patterns to cover weekend hospital discharges
- To enable the more timely and appropriate housing allocations of more complex cases a Housing and Adult Social Care Panel was established, this now meets only on an ad hoc basis following the appointment of a specialist Social Care Lettings Officer who works with all interested parties
- A recent **Department of Health Grant Award of £340,000** to apply some of the most advanced technology to the new development under construction at the Hawthorns in Gorse Hill, Bembridge Close in Park North and at Linden Avenue in Pinehurst
- Adopting a Design Guide for Dementia Friendly Housing. This is currently being used to inform the Housing Capital Refurbishment programme but ultimately will also be used for new build schemes. The Guide was circulated to Committee members last year, further copies are available on request
- Scoping a Supplementary Planning Guidance Note for new build assisted living and care homes. This will be drafted for approval by Planning Committee, preparation includes developing an evidence base and a consultation and so this is likely to be presented to Committee in 2018.

3.2 **Homelessness.** The Council continues to manage its homelessness services well. During 2017/18 based on recent challenging trends it is expected that an estimated 60 households will be accepted each quarter. However due to a high number of successful prevention cases, in the first quarter of 17/18 only 31 were accepted. The Homelessness team are also on target to deliver 90 preventions a quarter. Further details on preventions can be reported on request. However a budget pressure is emerging due to a new “Flexible Homelessness Grant” being approximately £400k less than allowances previously paid through housing benefit towards temporary accommodation costs. Representations have been made to central government to try and help mitigate this budget pressure, the outcome of this will, if available, be reported at your meeting.

3.3 **Greenlight to Housing.** As a responsible Social Landlord, the Council introduced a new process to create lasting and sustainable tenancies, by in particular preventing the early onset of debt. Prospective tenants are helped to be ‘tenancy ready’ by providing advice on maximising benefits, training, volunteering and offered help into employment as well as budgeting advice. Changes to welfare benefits encourage individuals to start or return to work as well as finding the most affordable housing options. Officers will report back

Housing Performance Report

Adults, Health and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 19th Sept 2017

finding on this new programme to the Housing Management CMAG once it has been in operation for 12 months.

- 3.4 This will be particularly important for claimants under 35 means from 1st April 2019, all tenants under the age of 35 in receipt of housing benefit/Universal Credit will only be eligible to claim the shared housing accommodation rate. This will leave a shortfall of approximately £29 per week in their rent. In the Summer Budget 2015, the Chancellor announced removal of entitlement to the housing element of Universal Credit (currently Housing Benefit) from young people aged 18-21, with some exceptions, from April 2017. The benefit cap limits the total amount of benefits to be claimed. From November 2016, the amount reduced from £500 to £385 per week for a single parent or for a couple with or without dependent children and £258 for a single person. Individuals or families who are affected will have to pay the shortfall in their housing benefit.
- 3.5 The 'Greenlight to Housing' programme provides applicants with an opportunity to engage in the programme with the aim of helping them secure social housing in the future. As the changes relates to those of working age, it not necessary for those of pensionable age. To ensure applicants who are placed into temporary accommodation are moved as soon as possible into social housing which is more affordable; those people accepted as homeless and in temporary accommodation will also be able to access the 'Greenlight to Housing' programme.
- 3.6 **Repairs and Improvements.** The Council continues to meet the *Decent Homes Standard* for all of its tenanted property. The Standard is designed to enable households to live as comfortably as possible in warm, dry homes with modern facilities. During 2017/18 works include 300 new central heating systems, over 500 new kitchens, 150 properties receiving new doors and windows, over 200 new bathrooms with over 2000 of its properties benefiting from major improvement works in 2014/15. Gas Safety checks remain a priority and the service is on target to once again complete this on every property in 2017/18. Fire Risk Assessments to high rise blocks are also a particular priority, this is detailed in another report on your agenda. The ongoing challenge of improving non-traditionally built stock presents a number of risks over the next 5-10 years. The Council will continue to improve these on a worst first basis. Urgent Repairs targets (within 1 day) are challenging given the nature of these callouts however the work force are exceeding their target of 80% completion on first response by achieving 89.5%. Void repair times (time to turn around an empty property, complete repairs and let it) are also on track, returning properties back into use on average within 28 days (target 35 days).
- 3.7 Demand for **disabled adaptations** is increasing and this reflects demographic changes and health improvements enabling more households with disabilities to

Housing Performance Report

Adults, Health and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 19th Sept 2017

remain living independently at home. Corresponding demand for Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) in the private sector has only been able to be met through effective assessment and targeting of funds in conjunction with Adult Social Care. Properties and households benefiting from disabled facility grants has increased as follows:

2012/13	95
2013/14	105
2014/15	108
2015/16	137
2016/17	156
2017/18 (Qtr 1)	37

- 3.8 In addition disabled facility improvements to Council housing amounted to 203 properties in 2016/17, to date for 2017/18 129 properties have either been improved or have been approved for adaptations.
- 3.9 As part of the changes in the private rented sector, Government has resolved to extend Mandatory **House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licensing** to a greater proportion of the HMO stock. It is likely that this will now take in all HMOs with 5 or more person regardless of the number of stories in the property. In Swindon this will increase the number of HMOs that must be Licensed from the current 120 to around 600 – 800. Much work is being done to ensure that we are as ready as we can be for this very significant change. Although this became law earlier in the year regulations on how this is to be implemented are awaited, recent advice is that this will be sometime in Autumn 2017.
- 3.10 The Council's preparations for this change in law include focused activity in the Broadgreen area. The Council successfully bid for just under **£280,000 from the Home Office under the national *Migration Fund***. Due to the nature of Swindon's housing stock and market; the great majority of HMOs in Swindon will fall under a Licensing scheme following these changes, and this will allow for much more effective regulation of the sector.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 The Committee can choose how to operate performance reports from the Housing Service. Feedback on this initial report is welcomed

Housing Performance Report

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5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct financial or procurement implications arising from this report.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.2 Section 21 of the Local Government Act requires every local authority to establish an overview and scrutiny function to hold the Executive to account, undertake policy development and review, monitor, and improve performance.

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.3 There are no other direct implications arising from this report. Any further implications will be identified when a topic is reviewed by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and in any recommendations made by it.

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.4 No Diversity Impact Assessment is required at this stage. Any DIA that is required during review of topics included within the work programme will be identified at the appropriate stage.

Risk Management

- 5.5 No risk management issues have been identified at this stage. Any risk management issues will be identified at the appropriate time when a topic is under review by the Overview Scrutiny Committee and if it makes any recommendations.

6. Consultees

- 6.1 The Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 None

8. Appendices

- 8.1 None