

Repairs & Improvements to the Council's Housing Stock

Adults' Health, Adults' Care and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 7th November 2017

Author: Head of Housing and Community Safety

Wards: All

Parishes Affected: All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 This report is a response to a resolution at the Adults' Health, Adults' Care and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 19th September 2017, which requested a report on repairs and improvements to be undertaken on the Council's housing stock (Minute 19, 2017/18 refers).
- 1.2 The report allows Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review the strategy for repairs and improvements to the Council's housing stock.
- 1.3 Repairs and improvements to the Council's housing stock is directly linked to the Council's Priority 1: "Improve infrastructure and housing to support a growing, low-carbon economy."

2. Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 2.1 Note the existing strategy and make comment and give advice on proposed changes to improve the delivery of repairs and improvements to the Council's housing stock.

3. Detail

- 3.1 The Council owns and manages a housing stock of approximately 10,200 properties located in a relatively small geographical area. A high proportion of the housing stock was built between the periods 1945 to 1966, which led to approximately 42% of it being built using non-traditional construction methods. Sheltered housing accommodation accounts for around 15% of the housing stock. Approximately 40% of the housing stock has been constructed as purpose-built blocks of flats.
- 3.2 The Council has an integrated team with its own in-house workforce, which mainly delivers day to day repairs, minor adaptations, the annual gas servicing/safety check programme, electrical repairs and asbestos removal works. External contractors currently deliver vacant property repairs, capital and planned maintenance works, statutory compliance works including electrical testing, major adaptations and asbestos survey work to enable improvement work to be carried out safely.

Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Gerry O'Connor, tel. 01793 463452 or go'connor@swindon.gov.uk.

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- 3.3 An independent 10% sample Stock Condition Survey (SCS) was undertaken by Pennington Choices Ltd, which reported in April 2016 that 98.6% of homes complied with the Decent Homes Standard (DHS). Good progress has been made to eradicate non-decent homes with 99.7% of the stock meeting decency standards by April 2017. The twenty-four remaining properties that fail the standard are to be surveyed and programmed for replacement or renewal work during this financial year, 2017/18.

Repairs

- 3.4 The Council has an agreed standard for repairs which are defined as being an emergency, urgent, and routine and has set timescales for each. Approximately 40,000 repairs are carried out each year. Customer satisfaction results remain high with over 94% of tenants that returned a survey consistently stating that they were satisfied with the repairs service for the last 2 years.
- 3.5 It is good practice to undertake periodic surveys to be able to measure customer satisfaction levels, benchmark performance and assess trends over time. Independent surveys using the same set of core questions were carried out in 2006, 2008 and 2013, which show an upward trend in tenant satisfaction with the repairs service, as follows:
- 3.5.1 79% of tenants were satisfied with the overall repairs service,
- 3.5.2 Tenants were most satisfied with "the attitude of the workers" (93%),
- 3.5.3 Tenants were "least" satisfied with "time taken before work started" (83%), and
- 3.5.4 Improvements from previous surveys.

	2013	2008	2006
Satisfaction in dealing with repairs	79%	70%	71%

- 3.6 An independent survey is planned to be carried out during this financial year, 2017/18, which will give an update on tenant satisfaction with the repairs service.
- 3.7 There has been a continuous drive to reduce reliance on external contractors to support the delivery of routine repairs. Not enough time has been given to support and supervise our trade operatives, therefore, the repairs team is being re-structured to increase capacity to supervise and improve coordination of works. This will also help with the review of processes and procedures to re-schedule repairs that are not completed at the first visit.

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- 3.8 Virtually all repairs are given an appointment and trade operatives use hand-held devices to receive their work and schedule completed work to keep property maintenance records up to date for all properties. It is proposed to implement digitalisation of services so that tenants are able to log and make their own appointments for repairs. It is a priority to enhance customer access for the repairs service, which is linked to the housing IT system is being updated during the next 12 months.

Improvements

- 3.9 A report was submitted to the Council's Housing Cabinet Member Advisory Group (CMAG) on 11th October 2017 to get feedback on the proposed Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Asset Management Strategy 2017. This strategy sets out the investment requirement for the housing stock, involvement of tenants in setting priorities, strategic priorities for service standards and detailed approach for replacing components, which is shown at Appendix 1.
- 3.10 The Asset Management Strategy (AMS) was developed with the support of tenants from Housing Property Forum. It has also been consulted with Leaseholder Link and representatives of Swindon Tenants Voice (STV), Tenants Association for Sheltered Housing (TASH) and Tenant Scrutiny Panel (TSP). The TSP were supportive of the strategy and reported that it was a good base position.
- 3.11 The SCS results from April 2016 identified an investment need of £168 million over the next 5 years (both revenue and capital), which included just under £37 million for structural repairs and thermal improvements to the non-traditional housing stock. It is anticipated that there will be a budget of £127 million available over the same period, therefore, investment programmes have been developed with the priority to ensure that homes continue to meet the DHS. The programme is currently focused on replacing components, which means that the majority of structural repairs and thermal improvements work will need to be carried out over a longer period of time. An ongoing assessment will need to be made of the structural condition of the non-traditional housing stock to make sure that its long-term viability is not put at risk.
- 3.12 Pennington Choices Ltd compiled a 5-year investment programme for replacement and renewal work and a rolling programme of structural repairs and thermal improvement works to the non-traditional housing stock. The current refurbishment programme completes work to the steel framed (BISF) properties in Pinehurst and starts an extensive programme for the next priority to refurbish the 'Reema' concrete framed properties in Meadowcroft.
- 3.13 At present, a detailed programme of work is developed within the available resources with the support of tenants and agreed with the Housing Advisory

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Forum CMAG on an annual basis. A recent options appraisal of two of the six 10-storey block of flats identified refurbishment is the most viable option for these blocks of flats, which will make these a priority to be included on future programmes of work.

- 3.14 In addition, although the Council, in consultation with tenants and the Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service, already has a thorough programme to ensure tenants' safety, further fire safety work is likely to be a higher priority following the Grenfell Tower fire on 14th June 2017. A report on the initial additional work to augment fire safety is scheduled to be considered at Cabinet on 18th October 2017. It recommendations, if approved, would cost £1,066,380, which would be funded from existing capital reserves.
- 3.15 An extensive number of contracts have been let to external contractors to deliver replacement and renewal works and vacant property repairs, but contractors have had difficulty in resourcing trade resources in the Swindon area to deliver programmes of work and repairs, as necessary. Officers are working with contractors to help resolve this issue, but wider options may be needed to deliver future programmes of work.
- 3.16 Performance with delivery of the repairs service and programmes of work are reported to a Local Performance Action Review (LPAR) meeting on a monthly and quarterly basis.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 There is an option to consider external arrangements for the management of repairs and improvements, but this is an integral part of the overall housing service. It is also likely to be more expensive and benchmarking shows that most housing providers are reverting back to setting up an in-house service for repairs.

5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 Approval for the budget for repairs and improvements is currently set on annual basis, as part of the rent setting process. It includes details on the costs for the repairs service and a high level 4-year capital programme of work.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.2 The Homes and Community Agency sets out a regulatory framework for local authorities and registered providers that own and manage social housing for rent in England, which places a duty on the Council to comply with all relevant legislation.

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5.3 There is a specific duty under the Home Standard to meet all applicable statutory requirements that includes:

5.3.1 Ensuring that all homes meet the Decent Homes Standard

5.3.2 Providing a cost-effective repairs and maintenance service to homes and communal areas that responds to the needs of, and offers choices to, tenants, and has an objective of completing repairs and improvements right first time

5.3.3 Meeting all applicable statutory requirements that provide for the health and safety of occupants in their home

5.3.4 A prudent and planned approach to repairs and maintenance of homes and communal areas, which demonstrates an appropriate balance of planned and responsive repairs, and value for money.

5.3.5 An adaptations service that meets tenants' needs

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

5.4 There are no staffing implications within this report.

Diversity Impact Assessment

5.5 As this is not a decision-making body a Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA) is not required.

Risk Management

5.6 Extensive risks are identified with repairs and improvements works and currently managed through the Property Maintenance risk register.

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 Appendix 1 - Housing Revenue Account Asset Management Strategy 2017.