

Housing & Property Services Portfolio Holder Update – 2015/16

Service Plan Performance

Housing & Property Services provides a diverse range of services to residents of Warwick district. This includes: managing and maintaining 5,600 tenants and 600 leaseholder's homes; maintaining the Council's corporate assets; delivering a housing advice and homeless service; improving housing standards in the private sector and providing aids and adaptations in residents homes.

The introduction of Tenancy Update Visits has proven to be a useful and insightful exercise which is allowing us to understand our tenant's needs and identify any concerns so that we can provide a better, more focussed service. Demand for affordable housing remains consistent and overall we are meeting targets that have been set for the length of time that: homeless households spend in temporary accommodation; it takes to make a homeless decision; and that applicants spend in Band 1 before being permanently rehoused.

The Housing Assessment Team pilot (HAT) is showing positive signs of improving performance which we anticipate will start to show in the total time it takes to complete a Disable Facilities Grant (DFG) adaptation over the coming months. Satisfaction with the service being delivered is very high (consistently at 100%). Customer Satisfaction for repairs was good with 81% of tenants satisfied with the way their social housing provider deals with repairs and maintenance (STAR Survey, 2015). The next survey will be undertaken in 2017.

Rent arrears have fallen from 3.49% at the start of the year to 3.28% by year end. It is worth noting the Warwick District Council is the only council in its West Midlands Benchmarking Group to collect more than 100% of the total income due (we collected 100.2%).

Risks

The largest and newest risk to Housing & Property Services is the Housing and Planning Act which intends to bring into force a number of issues that will affect the service.

The Welfare and Work Act 2016 has introduced the mandatory reduction of social rents by 1% per year for four years. This will reduce income over the next four years to the Council by £8m compared to the original Business Plan agreed in 2012. The extension of the Local Housing Allowance limits to social housing will restrict the help available to low income people.

Workforce Planning

Over the past year, there have been significant staffing challenges in the Housing Advice and Allocations Team, with recruitment proving to be challenging.

The repatriation of the calls from the customer service centre has seen the department add four new posts across the service to support us with answering enquiries from the public. All posts, with the exception of one, are now filled.

Budget

Housing & Property Services have achieved the 2.5% discretionary savings on the General Fund budget in 2015/16 and have identified a further 5% for 2016/17.

Work Streams and Projects

There were a significant volume of projects that were included in the service area plan for 2015/16. Many of these originated from the Housing Strategy, Homeless Strategy and the Housing & Property Services Health Check.

Change/Project	Progress Update
Effective use of IT to raise productivity, make customer access easier and have the management information readily available to improve services	We are now working on the digital transformation of our services to improve the customer experience and to make our services more efficient. We will now be sourcing our IT requirement beyond the in-house ITC department.
Implement a procurement review process that ensures the requirements of each service or product purchased is understood, aligned with the Corporate Procurement Strategy.	The team continue to work with clients and the Procurement team to develop suitable procurement strategies and ensure that each project/contract brief, tender documents and procurement processes are fit for purpose and compliant.
Review of Maintenance contracts and cost management models.	Review of the cost model for the Housing and Void Property Repairs Contract has been completed, the outcome of which was transition from the Open book model to Schedule of Rates (SOR) to afford the Council control of the type and cost of works it instructs.
Review management of leaseholder properties including consideration of revision to charges to reflect actual costs	Complete
Resident and Client Participation and Engagement - revised approach to focus on widening both scope of and opportunities for participation and contribution in developing services and standards	Complete - We have dissolved the former Tenants Panel and we are now working with tenants on a more informal basis.
Review and amend the information provided to tenants and applicants to make it clear, attractive and	Complete & Ongoing – we have reviewed all of the Home Choice documentation which have been given a Crystal Mark Accreditation by Plain English.

Change/Project	Progress Update
accessible	
Roll out Annual Tenancy Visit to help develop and improve council-tenant relationships	Complete and on-going, information has been gathered for the Lillington re-generation project.
Develop effective ways to inform and advise private landlords and tenants of their rights and obligations.	Complete - We have a range of initiatives to engage including are running Landlord Steering Groups, Landlord Forums, regular e-newsletters, attendance at Warwick University Open Days etc.
Develop formal reporting process to complement existing working relationships and informal working updates for corporate repairs clients	The Asset Maintenance Group has been established and currently meets on a monthly basis to monitor and plan corporate property maintenance matters. The group is led by Housing and Property Services.
Reviewing and updating our strategy for bringing empty homes back into use.	Partially Complete – we have been carrying out annual surveys of all empty properties.
Refreshing our approach to the provision of rural housing	Complete – A new contract is now in place to provide Rural Housing Needs Surveys and support parish councils in delivering affordable housing. Rural Local Lettings Policy is in place.
Investigating the best way of financing the development of homes by the Council	We have continued to investigate the option of forming a wholly owned Council Development Company but this work has been delayed by the introduction of the Housing & Planning Act
Reviewing the Housing Allocations Policy.	Complete – The new policy was approved by Council in August 2015 and goes live on 1 st June 2016.
Review of services to sheltered and designated dwellings for tenants over 60 years of age	Final proposals will be published autumn 2016 for formal consultation process, report to go to Exec January 2017
Implement necessary changes to Sheltered Housing Services	Will be implemented following proposals being agreed by Exec in January 2017
Review of Lifeline Services	Started and on-going, will also feed into review detailed above.
Implement necessary changes to Lifeline Services	Will be completed once agreed by Exec in January 2017
Working with Warwickshire County Council as it identifies its priorities for housing-related support services	Complete – We have been involved in the evaluation of tenders for the new Housing Related Support contracts and will continue to engage with providers.
Working with our partners across all sectors to support people in financial difficulties.	Complete and on-going, the Breathing Space continues where we work alongside other housing providers to deliver financial inclusion services to anyone across the District. Financial Inclusion Project Officer now in place

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Continuing to provide grants/loans to help low-income owner-occupiers with essential repairs or to rectify dangerous conditions.	Complete – we provide discretionary grants to assist owner-occupiers with no other means of assisting themselves where they are living in dangerous situations.
Working with partners to raise awareness and educate residents on energy efficiency issues particularly in the private rented sector.	Complete and Ongoing - The Private Sector Housing Team to have a key role in regard to EPCs and minimum ratings required under the Energy Act. In addition H&PS refers customers to Act on Energy.
Building on our working relationship with the University of Warwick and other agencies letting/managing student housing in the district.	Complete – We have regular liaison with the university and take part in the annual induction of new students to the district to support them in their new homes.
Completing a pilot scheme remodelling housing aids and adaptations services on a cross-tenure basis across southern Warwickshire and evaluating the results.	Ongoing – The HAT pilot has been extended for a further 12 months to allow development of the options, including a proposal for a county wide service. The revised completion date is April 2017.
Complete the re-procurement of disabled adaptations contracts for WDC Stock and DFG funded adaptations.	Complete – A new contract is now in place for WDC housing stock.
Contribute to/facilitate Corporate Assets Review (CAR). Use PPM and CAR to produce Housing & Property led elements of the Corporate Asset Management Strategy and Plan	Asset Strategy development is led by Assets Steering Group, Housing and Property services is a member of the group, the Asset Manager and Head of Service attend to property advice and information at meetings. The team continue to increase the coverage of stock condition data. A survey of surface car parks has been completed and a survey of corporate open spaces assets is in progress.
Improved Cleaning and Estate Management Support Service	Improved monitoring of the cleaning contract has delivered high levels of customer satisfaction.
Asset Management Team re-design – Resources, Tools, Systems & Processes	The re-design of the Asset Management Team was implemented in the first quarter of 2015-16. All positions are now filled and the team continue to work to refine and improve the working systems and processes.
Review housing repairs process to ensure that WDC have control of quality and cost of housing repairs	The review of the process is complete and resulted in the Council resuming responsibility for repairs pre-inspections.
Invest in a robust stock	Some delays have been experienced in the

Change/Project	Progress Update
condition database and the collection and collation of accurate stock condition data	software development so the stock condition survey programme has been adjusted for the refreshed stock condition information to inform housing improvement plans from April 2017.
Reviewing the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan	Complete – The Housing Revenue Account Business Plan has been reviewed and was approved. A further review will take place in 2016/17 which will allow us to consider the impact of the Stock Condition Survey and the Housing & Planning Act.
Review and redesign of Estate Services	Redesign of service agreed by Employment Committee but project stalled as we had difficulty recruiting to the manager’s post. Post filled in April 2016, and project now progressing.

Any Changes Required to Service Area Plan

A new service area plan form 2016/17 has been prepared.