

## **Report from the Cabinet Member for Housing Scrutiny Committee 12.10.2020**

### **Forward.**

The following report must be read recognising the effects on all aspects of service that the current pandemic is having for our customers and client base and within the authority as a whole.

I would personally like to publicly acknowledge the tremendous work that is being undertaken by all associated staff that each and every day affects and enhances the lives of those we are here to serve. Performed under conditions that no one has a manual that gives guidance or answers to. Their efforts should be recognised and acknowledge by all Members.

The Housing and Property Services portfolio encompasses a vast array of work streams and customer facing areas that deal with many challenges. This report can only give a broad view of all the work undertaken within the services.

### **Moving Forward**

I would like to draw Members attention to the forward planning of the service noted at the end of the report. This gives a general insight into the immediate and medium-term objectives already agreed within the first few weeks of my tenure that reflects the general ambitions of Members and our officers.

### **The Corporate Plan.**

*Deliver more affordable housing and greater numbers of social rented homes.*

*Work with Community Land Trusts and other organisations to deliver homes retained in perpetuity for local need.*

*Work with landlords to ensure the high quality of homes in the private rented sector.*

*Lobby to see the abolition of the 'Right-to-Buy' or the devolvement of discounting powers to individual local housing authorities*

*Promote the regeneration of our town centres by working with landlords and property developers to improve and increase the supply of quality housing.*

*Introduce zero carbon policies for new development.*

*Encourage retro-fitting of measures to reduce energy use in buildings*

*Encourage the piloting of Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) and self-build opportunities.*

*Use new development as opportunities to help communities to become increasingly sustainable and self-sustaining at neighbourhood level (district heating, energy use, recycling/re-use systems etc)*

*Work with local stakeholders to initiate delivery of the new garden village at Culm.*

*Support and grow active tenancy engagement.*

*Support the establishment of Community Land Trusts in partnership with parish councils and other local bodies.*

### **Housing Report.**

Many of the following headline reports can be found in greater detail within the homes PDG meeting reports.

	Target		Actual	
	2019/20	2020/21	Nos. August 2020	
<b>1. Repairs Performance</b>				
Routine Repairs Completed on Time	99.8	99.6	1394	
Urgent Repairs Completed on Time	99.9	100	555	
Emergency Repairs Completed on Time	100	100	226	
<b>2. Responsive Repairs Ratio</b>				
	2019/20	2020/21		
Routine	74.6	71.2		
Urgent	17.5	20.5		
Emergency	7.9	8.3		

The above ratio #2 shows the breakdown of repairs by Clarification #1 shows the success against actions against each section, I believe the figures speak for themselves.

### **3. Housing list**

Number of households in housing need (Bands A to D) as at 1st July 2020

	Band A		Band B		Band C		Band D		Total No	Band E	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%		No	%
Local Authority	1	0.14%	122	17.21%	25	35.68%	333	46.87%	709	848	54.46%
Mid Devon					3						

Bedroom need of applicants in housing need (Bands A to D) as at 1st July 2020

	1 Bed		2 Bed		3 Bed		4 Beds +		Total
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	
Mid Devon	386	54%	147	21%	119	17%	57	8%	709

Numbers on the register in Band A to D per Local Authority by quarter

	Jul 18	Oct 18	Jan 19	Apr 19	Jul 19	Oct 19	Jan 20	Apr 20	Jul 20
Mid Devon	908	960	988	875	690	602	632	617	709

As you will read from the moving forward part of my report, we have a plan of delivering increased number of affordable dwellings where we already own the land and to maximise value on our own estate.

The Council have a contract to complete on land at the new Braid Park housing site (Post Hill, Tiverton) and there is a joint Officer and Member working group set up to provide Cabinet options on delivery.

The Turner Rise development in Tiverton was a finalist for this year's LABC Excellence Awards in two categories – recognition and being on these national shortlists is an achievement- Best Social or Affordable New Housing Development and Best Small New Housing Development.

The Housing and Property Services team are also reviewing the provision of social housing as part of the review of maximising value from our estate.

#### **4. Finance rental**

Our Housing Finance and Performance team (HFPT) provide Officers with a Debt Analysis report on a monthly basis. This report provides detailed information about all housing-related debt and performance in relation to the recovery of this. The team also provides more detailed reports to Income Officers and their Manager regarding service charge and garage ground rent recovery.

<b>Current Arrears</b>	Actual
18/19	96292.98
19/20	116706.07

At the end of week 24 the total outstanding debts for current tenants in respect of dwellings and garages was £209,960.60 or 1.64% of the annual income. For former tenants the figure was £100,597.96

The current level of arrears is above that of previous years due to the impact of Covid and the moratorium on evictions. These figures are nonetheless the result of an excellent, new cooperative approach that is being undertaken by our housing teams to understand personal situations and work with our tenants to agree managed

plans for repayments, this approach has resulted in a far lower dept ratio than many other authority's and social landlords are experiencing – the current industry average is 3.0% for example.

## **5. DARS (Deposit & Rental advance)**

Loans given to assist deposits for accommodation in lieu of provision for housing

	Spend	Budget
17/18	53,820	45,000
18/19	61,429	48,600
19/20	50,499	60,000
20/21 As of 21/09/2020	17,713	60,000

Spend on temporary accommodation

Year	Spend	Budget	No of applicants
17/18	102k	106,000	101
18/19	169k	156,000	137
19/20	149,500	160,000	109
20/21 As of 21/09/2020	74,690	130,000	61

## **Rough Sleeper Update for September 2020**

MDDC has received 6 reports of [rough sleepers](#) for the current month, of which 2 have been verified by the outreach service. We have two rough sleepers accommodated in [Housing First](#) accommodation.

## **6. Voids**

	Target	Actual
18/19	14	15
19/20	14	15
20/21		68

## **7. Gas Servicing**

	Target	Actual
18/19	100	100
19/20	100	99.8
20/21	100	99.1

The target for properties with a valid gas certificate is 100% , the current figure sits at 98.9% representing a shortfall of around 1% year on year, however given access issues with tenants who have had to self-isolate Preventing engineers access to properties this figure represents a fantastic effort by our staff and shows we continue to prioritise certification at the earliest possible time.

Where reasonable access is denied without reasonable cause the appropriate actions are taken through the courts.

### **8. Right to Buy**

	Applications	Granted	Sales
19/20	29	32	29
20/21	17	15	4
To Date			

Part of the portfolios corporate plan objectives is to lobby central government to secure a greater reinvestment opportunity against Right to Buy scheme.

I have written to Neil Parish MP seeking a formal meeting and will be asking that a possible meeting with ministers be arranged in order that MDDC can put our case forward, this set against known LGA lobbying against the same issue.

### **9. Private Sector Housing**

*Corporate Plan: Work with landlords to ensure the high quality of homes in the private rented sector and encourage retro-fitting of measures to reduce energy use in buildings*

Update on those functions and services delivered by Public Health and Regulatory Services in relation to Private Sector Housing and the enforcement of the housing standards, empty homes, energy efficiency and fuel poverty and mandatory adaptations. Clearly the delivery of many services was significantly impacted in Q1 and Q2 of 2020/21 due to Covid, however the service has worked hard maintain essential service delivery and return to a new (Covid safe) normal.

#### Empty Homes

Working under a new Empty Homes plan, this has been an area of significant proactive effort and success in recent years as the following numbers of properties brought back into use shows:

17/18 – 128 properties

18/19 - 150 properties

19/20 – 138 properties

20/21 – 34 to date despite the challenging start, and on track to meet a new upper target for the year of 100

The Empty Homes Plan work by officers is recharged to the New Homes Bonus and with the cessation of that funding then proactive plan is due to end in March 2021 (subject to review – a proposal for a 12-month extension with a target of 72 homes is currently being considered through performance management work being put in place to underpin the delivery of the Corporate Plan.

Homes not fit for purpose (properties subject to the Housing Act)

We have continued to respond to the most urgent cases during lockdown where possible and have proactively risk-assessed our approach to enable our normal investigative and inspections work to come back on line. Furthermore, in the year to date, despite the Covid restrictions, 96% of Public Health services requests were responded to within 5-working days (against a target of 95%) – testament to service adaptability during testing times.

#### Regeneration and wider district stock condition improvements

Private Sector Housing specialists in the community team are also working proactively to support wider regeneration initiative including the future delivery of key elements of the successful High Street Heritage Action Zones bid for Cullompton.

In addition to this, the Wessex Home Improvement Loans (HILs) scheme had its most successful year in 19/20 with x families supported with a total of x loans. This is due a review of processes to streamline working and work closely with the Wessex team – informally and directly through LA board representation – to undertake new marketing and delivery work. The Wessex Resolutions Community Interest Company (CIC) are currently refocussing further during these important times, where incomes and economic concerns mean ethical, low-cost lending for essential repair and improvements to homes will be more important than ever. As part of this, Wessex are currently rebranding into ‘Lendology CIC’ – for more information see <https://www.lendology.org.uk/>

Last year (19/20) we able to use County Better Care Funding underspend (see DFGs) to provide a further capital injection into this successful HIL initiative

#### Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)

Refer to narrative in Homes PDG report September 2020

Also, successful recent prosecution of unlicensed HMO in a dangerous condition in Cullompton with £18k fine + costs – see PR at <https://www.middevon.gov.uk/owner-fined-for-serious-safety-failings-in-hmo/>

#### Energy efficiency and fuel poverty

The service acts the gateway to the successful ECO Flex scheme which provides 100% funding for eligible properties (those with low income, lowest EPC ratings and/or with vulnerable occupants (young/old/disabled/specific medical conditions). More than 1000 properties have benefited from energy efficiency measure installations district wide since ECO Flex scheme started in with more than 600 in 19/20 and approaching 300 this year to date.

We also continue to support the LEAP energy and income guidance (Local Energy Assistance Project) with more information available

here <https://www.middevon.gov.uk/media/343212/project-leap-introduction.pdf>

#### Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants and discretionary stair lifts etc.

Delivery of DFGs and other related work was put on hold at the start of the year due to Covid and the challenges of safely surveying and contracting work inside properties often with the most vulnerable customers. This work has recommenced and delivery is increasing.

We are currently adequately funded for all delivery requirements under the funding provided by DCC through the Better Care Fund (BCF) with some underspend in against previous years budgets. These expenditures are shown below.

17/18 - £600k

18/19 - £700k

19/20 - £562k

The BCF budget provision for 20/21 is £780k and to date expenditure/commitments total circa £200k. New enquiries received between April 1st and 20th September 2020 are 29. This compares to same period in 71 for the same period in 2019. Shows impact Covid 19 has had on cases coming through the system

We continue to deliver (sometimes complex) DFGs effectively, demonstrated by taking on average 47 days to complete application from receipt against a target of 75 days during 19/20. We are currently operating at 55 days on average in 20/21, still well within target and upper quartile benchmark performance overall but reflective of some changes on working practices as a result of Covid.

#### Communal Fire Risk Assessments

Our work supporting the HRA by undertaking specialist communal risk assessment in our shared buildings continued. 100% of those required were undertaken in 19/20 and we on track for 100% completion this year, with the work focussed across Q3 and Q4 this year.

#### Working with Landlords

The autumn 2019 Landlord Networking Event have very positive feedback from attendees. The overall message was they found it an extremely valuable and worthwhile networking opportunity which is popular and well attended. It provides current and focussed details etc. for all attendees on topical matters.

Unfortunately, due to Covid we are unable to run a face to face Landlords Event this year. Options were explored around a virtual, online event however feedback from previous customers was this wouldn't provide the sector networking opportunities so valued at previous events. Consequently, the event will (hopefully) be reconvened in 21/22. In meantime, the team have been working with partners to deliver free webinars for landlords, the first of which was a Legal Briefing on Covid compliance and new safety regulations delivered by Ashfords, attendance to which was high and feedback very positive. The informative MDDC landlord e-newsletter has also been refocussed and offers a highly effective means of engaging with private sector housing providers and agents.

“Support and grow active tenant engagement”

#### **Analyse results of tenant census (to be completed by end of November 2020)**

Identify trends

Discuss key priorities with Cabinet Member, Building Service and tenant focus group

Identify budget for any potential service improvements

Formulate action plan

#### **Identify alternative ways in which to communicate with tenants in light of the pandemic and the difficulties associated with ensuring meetings are safe (by end of December 2020)**

Undertake research with regard to the options available

Engage with tenant focus group and those who have liked our MDDC Housing Facebook page

Review different options in terms of ICT solutions and apps

Review tenant engagement strategy taking findings into account & the outcome of the tenant census

**Review offer relating to opportunities for scrutiny** (by end of January 2021)

Undertake research with regard to the options available

Engage with tenant focus group and those who have liked our MDDC Housing Facebook page

Review different options available to ensure safe engagement with regard to this activity

Identify a small project suitable for offering as a pilot

Advertise for engaged tenants to get involved

**Understand the needs of our tenants** (by end of February 2021)

Review data held on diversity of tenants

Identify cohorts to facilitate the growth of specific strategies for communicating with each

Reach out to specific tenants in each cohort to commence discussion of their needs

Work up tailored communication plans for each cohort

**Assess which residents are likely to be impacted by forthcoming changes and create tailor made opportunities for meaningful consultation and feedback** (by end of March 2021)

Review diversity data and identified cohorts

Review potential development plans

Agree a targeted communication and consultation strategy relating to those who will be impacted

Formulate action plan

**10. Community Land Trusts** (moving to Forward Planning Team)

I can confirm there are four in Mid Devon; those at Hemyock and Cheriton Bishop have already developed homes. Chawleigh is trying to get a scheme off the ground and the one at Sampford Peverill is in the early stages of trying to organise a scheme. This area of work is now led by Tristan Peat, in the Forward Planning Team, as the Housing Service is no longer responsible for enabling work.

**11. Zero Carbon Declaration. Zero carbon policies**

Around 80% of our emissions as an authority inevitably come through our HRA activities as a major landlord and stock owner. Work is in hand to fund (from existing budgets) a Climate Officer to take forward our HRA initiatives (and have capacity to bid into grant schemes etc). Working alongside the wider Corporate Management Team. We are already a very proactive HRA in terms of energy efficiency schemes.

In market properties/developments, the drivers will be a combination of local carbon reduction planning policy/Local Plan/Neighbourhood plans and national policy.

## **12. Property Services Report**

The following is a VERY brief overview of our property service department which I notice hasn't been detailed in last portfolio holders' annual reports and yet is a vital part of the service we offer.

I have included the audit findings (from July 2020) that show we are operating at a high standard of direction of travel.

## **13 Asset Management Plan**

Following an internal audit earlier this year the service was found to have a high standard of direction for asset management and that the attached asset management plan continues to provide an established framework for our Councils assets. This plan is currently under review and will be brought to Cabinet at the start of the new calendar year.

The service has been key to bringing forward the Climate Change work with a draft strategy and action plan going to Cabinet in October.

As stated above the Business plan will require updating, this is separate to the Leisure Service that is now also under the service remit.

Finally, the Capital Strategy Asset Management Plan 2016-2020 is also now under review and will be updated in the coming weeks and sent to cabinet for comments and observations.

## **Market Walk**

I am pleased to announce that we have recently welcomed two new businesses into the Tiverton Market Walk area comprising of a homeware shop and a restaurant/professional cake baking shop. Both having received local positive social media coverage. Despite known issues we are receiving positive feedback on footfall and now only have one void property and we continue to work on all future options for this property.

## **Moving Forward**

We are investigating utilising our in-house teams to both modernise and expand our estate within the known fiscal restraints for the service. Broadly looking at all opportunities to both modernise and expand the estate.

In reality this will be in small numbers at first recognising the need to move away from the current stagnation in a planned and realistic way.

To look at new and innovative ideas that offer the best value and opportunities applying zero carbon options as well as exceptional value for money.

It is recognised that the HRA 30-year plan and specific business plans need to be updated to reflect the needs of our clients and reflect corporate priorities ie the Zero Carbon aims of Members and the, as yet, unknown post Covid effects and the anticipation of increased demand that will be placed on the service.

The challenge is to use the best of what we have also recognising that Members ambition must be matched by available funding.

A planned approach to unite both the housing and building services in order that they share common mission and goals; policies and become a one stop shop for our tenants is being considered to present to Members in the near future.

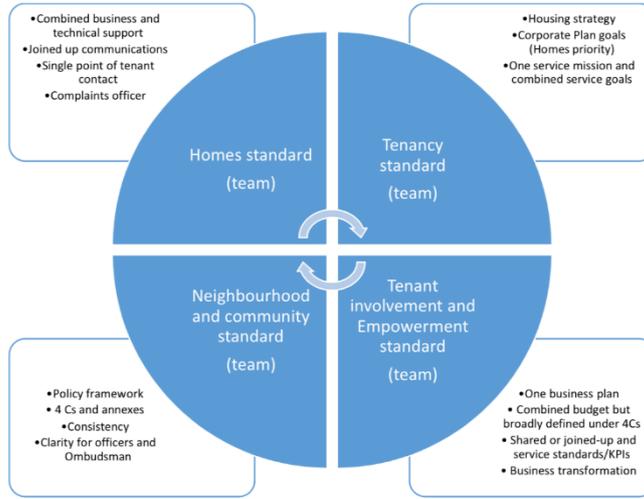
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### Mid Devon HRA – future look?

- ✔ **Principles (what)**
  - **Combined HRA** – bringing together Housing and Building Services – “One Housing”
  - **Sustainable entity** – future proof and critical housing mass
  - **Regulatory compliance** assured – 4 consumers standards (4CS) - Regulator of Social Housing requirements
  - **Single point of tenant contact** – tenancy, rents and repairs/maintenance
  - **Business transformation** – built in; digital self-serve, process reviews and efficiencies, customer experience and engagement, agile working/flexible workforce. Address SWOTs identified by 20/21 review + C-19 learning
  - **Shared policy framework** – consistency, clarity, PDG engagement - Housing Ombudsman
  - **Common mission, goals** and joined up **service standards/performance metrics**
- ⚙️ **Delivery (how)**
  - **Combined structure** – based around tenants needs and meeting 4CS
  - **Aligned establishment** – ‘family’ or consistent job groups/grades, core competencies, team leads – combined restructure and management group.
  - **Single business plan and budget**
  - **Shared HR and Finance support** (in place)
  - **Single director/CMT oversight** (partly in place – direction of travel)
  - **Relaunch** and light touch ‘rebrand’ of service – fresh start, bringing workforce together, common purpose
- 🕒 **Timeline (when)**
  - **Short-term 20/21 groundwork** – immediate compliance points, essential VAFs only, informal joint working
  - **21/22** – combined project and business plan/transition year – clear direction of travel and comms with teams
  - **21/22** – develop one HRA business transformation strategy
  - **22/23** – launch “One Housing” service. Ongoing transformation. Physical location?

### One Housing



#### Further points to consider:

- Continue to develop non-HRA income streams (especially in Building Services)
- Build links across new business units and existing services – less HRA v GF, especially around Corporate Plan and Housing Strategy delivery
- Housing Needs/Homelessness team (GF) combine with Private-Sector Housing Standards function in Public Health and develop working SLA with HRA
- Review positioning of HRA assets management in corporate structure/align better with HRA?

Bob Evans

Cabinet Member for Housing and Property Services

30<sup>th</sup> September 2020