

BABERGH COUNCIL CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

From: Councillor Jan Osborne Cabinet Member for Housing	Report Number: CMU6
To: Council	Date of meeting: 24 April 2018

TO PROVIDE AN UPDATE FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING

1. Overview of Portfolio

- 1.1 The Housing Portfolio covers several distinct areas of both Housing Management and Housing Delivery. The world of housing has naturally been extremely busy for our officers during the past few months, this snapshot is a summary of recent work streams as well as looking forward to forthcoming work.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 This report is for information.

3. Key Activities/Issues Over the Past Few Months

Property Services

- 3.1 Following the tragic events of Grenfell in June 2017, whilst we do not have any high-rise tower blocks within districts, our team have been working on reviewing fire safety in all accommodation that has communal areas or are blocks of flats. This has been a significant piece of work but now ensures we have robust fire risk assessments for every site, and where necessary remedial action has already taken place.
- 3.2 A stock condition survey of 20% of our housing stock has been taking place and it is expected to be complete later this month. The introduction of a freephone number and a letter of explanation to tenants which applies the theory of 'nudge' has resulted in a higher response rate than similar historic surveys. The outcomes of the stock condition survey will be provided to members in due course.
- 3.3 Work is nearing its completion in relation to 'compliance'. This follows an external review last year. The project which is due to be complete by March 2018 focuses on our approach to managing areas of work such as Legionella, Asbestos and Gas Servicing with the aim of ensuring we are complaint and have robust policies and procedures that deliver an exemplar service.
- 3.4 Within the past six months we have moved from a 12 to 10-month gas servicing cycle which ensures that we will always have a 2-month window to service properties that do not comply. Currently because of this along with a project to access hard to reach properties we have maintained a 100% gas servicing record.

Tenant Services & Income Services

- 3.5 Universal Credit – UC Full Service began in October last year, in Sudbury and will begin in Stowmarket from May, this year. A project team has been working on an action plan to mitigate against the risks UC presents for tenants, including higher rent arrears levels.
- 3.6 Digital Sign-up – Following a successful trial we have introduced a digital sign up which allows a new tenant to complete all the relevant paperwork electronically before moving in to their home. This is estimated it will save more than 400 hours of officer time, per year, in the future; and be simpler, easier and quicker for tenants.
- 3.7 Housing Enforcers - Our officers were recently involved in the production and airing of the fourth consecutive series of 'Housing Enforcers' which follows the work of our Community Housing Officers.

Homelessness

- 3.8 Work has continued in preparation of the Homeless Reduction Act 2018 (HRA) which places a greater responsibility on the Councils to prevent homelessness. This has most recently involved restructuring the existing team, training and the development of new ways of working. In November, last year, Scrutiny committee reviewed the performance of the team and its preparation for the HRA 2018 and a further review will be conducted by Joint Overview and Scrutiny, six months following the implementation of the act in approximately October/November this year.
- 3.9 In preparation for the HRA, we have just launched a new Lodgings scheme, with a local charity, called Solo Housing who have been established for many years and successfully prevented homelessness for single people in a high number of cases. The scheme is a very simple and successful model. Solo provides practical help and advice to anyone who has a spare room in their house that they would like to rent out. At the same time Solo use assessment criteria to match suitable people to available rooms, providing advice and support to single people who may like to take up a lodging offer.
- 3.10 During a recent period of extreme weather the Homelessness team provided Severe Weather and Extended Winter Provision SWEP. Publicity promoted that any rough sleeper would be given accommodation overnight whilst the temperatures were below zero for an extended period.
- 3.11 As a result of the Homeless Reduction Act both Babergh and Mid Suffolk are considering their provision of Temporary accommodation and during the next few months will review if this accommodation is suitable in respect to its location, cost, and quality, as part of this process we will consider opportunities to purchase or dispose of such accommodation accordingly.

BMBS Babergh Mid Suffolk Building Services

- 3.12 Following its inception last year, work has continued to develop the Building Services team. Currently the team is focussed on developing policies and procedures, and increasing the overall volume of work it undertakes to generate additional revenues.

- 3.13 A revised Business plan has been written and this will be reviewed by both Overview/Scrutiny and Cabinet within the next two months.

Resident Involvement

- 3.14 Work has been ongoing recently to consult residents on what and how would encourage them to become involved in the management of the landlord service. The outcomes of the project and a proposal for future Customer Engagement is expected to be completed by April 2018.

Housing Delivery

- 3.15 This financial year we have acquired the following properties using right to buy receipts (up to 30.11.17):

Cedar Walk, Acton, CO10 0UP	£210,000	3 bed terr	12/04/2017
Devlin Road, Ipswich	£78,528	2 bed terr	20/06/2017
Maldon Court, Great Cornard, CO10 0LX	£205,000	3 Bed end terr	11/09/2017
Larman Court, Brantham, CO11 1RG	£175,000	2 bed terr	27/09/2017
Larman Court, Brantham, CO11 1RG	£177,500	2 bed end terr	20/10/2017
Jubilee Way, Acton, co10 0xe	£215,000	3 bed end terr	27/11/2017
Essex Avenue, Sudbury, CO10 1YZ	£170,000	2 Bed Terr	30/11/2017

We recently exchanged contracts to buy 27 new build units at Holbrook, this includes 15 affordable rented units and 12 shared ownership units. This is being funded through right to buy receipts and HRA capital. They will be delivered between March 18 and February 19 as part of a bigger Taylor Wimpey development.

New residents will shortly move in to fifteen new units at Schoolfields, Glemsford

We have held two key meetings with our new development partner Iceni Homes. The contract for this development partner comes with advantages in that we procured all the major consultants as part of a wider team, so we have Ingelton Wood working on architectural and planning services and Richard Utting Associates working on the costings/employer's agent role.

Our property team have re-written the Councils development brief to accommodate changes in specification since it was last written for the Havebury contract.

Iceni have been given 4 sites in Babergh to date, Angel Court and 3 further HRA owned redevelopment sites in Brantham and Shotley. Planners are carrying out a stage 2 pre-app for us on a range of other sites, the first stage was a high level yes/no exercise with a very large number of sites. Once that work is completed we can see which other sites could be used to deliver more affordable housing and will pass these to Iceni and team for their feasibility work.

We will also shortly be engaging with Iceni and the HCA to decide how and what grant funding opportunities are available to us.

A timeline for those schemes is being developed and will be shared in the near future.

Following on from the Community Housing Workshops, Lavenham Parish Council have expressed an interest in working in partnership with Babergh District Council to bid for any new planning gain affordable dwellings.

4. Current Key Activities

Voids

- 4.1 Following recent scrutiny of void performance, we have embarked on a review of void management to reduce the average void time by a minimum of 10 days within six months. This project began in December and will report progress on a monthly basis, to Overview and Scrutiny. The total number of voids across Babergh & Mid Suffolk has reduced by 28 since the start of the project, and within Babergh the standard void time has reduced by five days.

Sheltered Housing

- 4.2 Currently we are reviewing the outcomes of last years Sheltered Housing Review. We will be presenting a report early in 2018 that considers residents opinions, on what impact the changes to Sheltered Housing have had on them.

Housing Revenue Account Business Plans

- 4.3 Currently work is taking place to further review our HRA Business plans to ensure that they remain robust and fit for purpose. This work includes scenario testing a range of variables to ensure the Councils optimise revenues and mitigate against risk. A report will be prepared for Cabinet in April/May 2018 to present the outcomes of scenario testing and to begin exploring how to make best use of the HRA Account in the future to deliver the Councils' our strategic priorities.

Homelessness/Housing Strategy

- 4.4 Work is beginning on the development of both a Homelessness and over-arching Housing strategy, both will be developed by the end of 2018 and will involve wide engagement with tenants and Councillors.

Asset Management Strategy

- 4.5 Further to the completion of the stock condition survey, work will begin early in 2018 on the development and production of a refreshed Asset Management Strategy that provides an overarching strategy that supports the strategic priority of managing assets most effectively.

Housing Allocations Policy

- 4.6 Currently there is an ongoing review of the sub regional Housing Allocations Policy. It is anticipated that a report will be consider by Cabinet in April/May 2018

Changes to Housing Management Team

- 4.7 March and April will see changes to the Housing Staffing structure with development of a smaller Corporate Management team, whilst creating a larger number of Professional lead roles.

It is intended these changes will further support officers on the front line, whilst creating greater capacity amongst Corporate Managers to undertake transformational change of their service areas.

4.8 Introduction of the BIG 20 Fund

The Assistant Director of Housing has developed a £200k pot of monies that are to be made available for Housing staff to directly bid for. The aim of this initiative is to support officers to develop ideas that they will either generate income, reduce cost or improve the customer experience. There will be an application process with funds of up to £10,000 being offered to support the development of individual projects.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Currently the Housing Directorate is managing a significant number of projects. Work is currently taking place to rationalise the projects and develop the Councils' approach to program management. The following key themes are being developed:

Digital Shift, Continuous Improvement and Efficiencies, Housing Solutions, Asset Management. In due course a refreshed version of the projects and work streams that underpin these programmes will be published.