

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

From: Councillor Jill Wilshaw Cabinet Member for Housing	Report Number: CMU13
To: Council	Date of meeting: 26 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 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.
- 3.2 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 compliant and have robust policies and procedures that deliver an exemplar service. A planned review of this work will take place by our own Internal Audit team shortly to ensure the project has met its aims and objectives.
- 3.3 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

- 3.4 Universal Credit – UC Full Service began in October last year, in Sudbury, Babergh and will begin in Stowmarket, Mid Suffolk 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.

- 3.5 Officers are working hard to ensure rent collection levels at the end of the year meet targets set.

Homelessness

- 3.6 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, for which this work is now complete, and we have a number of new starters joining the organisation during March. 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.
- 3.7 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. We have received some positive radio coverage of this scheme, recently by Radio Suffolk who spoke to individuals that have participated in the scheme.
- 3.8 Cabinet will have decided at its meeting on the 5th March whether to enter negotiations on the potential purchase of seven dwellings in Stowmarket which would provide 17 additional rooms of temporary accommodation for those that are homelessness and need temporary accommodation.
- 3.9 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.

BMBS Babergh Mid Suffolk Building Services

- 3.10 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.
- 3.11 A revised Business plan has been written and this will be reviewed by both Overview/Scrutiny and Cabinet within the next two months.
- 3.12 During February and March tradespeople have been undertaking work to Creting Road Depot, Stowmarket to form new office space, new toilet and meeting room provision and the development of the site as a touchdown point.

Resident Involvement

- 3.13 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

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

Right to Buy Reinvestment Programme 2015 – 2018

- 39 Market Sale Homes purchased

Property Details	
Stowmarket	22
Great Blakenham	6
Needham Market	3
Gislingham	1
Elmswell	1
Haughley	2
Barham	1
Woolpit	1
Gt Bricett	1
Stowupland	1

On Friday 9th March a presentation will take place with the handover over of six new affordable homes at Noyes Avenue, Laxfield.

We have held two key meetings with our new development partner Icen 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.

We will also shortly be engaging with Icen 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.

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 January and will report progress on a monthly basis, to Overview & Scrutiny.

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.

It is intended that there will be a member briefing on the progress made with developing the strategy and gaining further member input.

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 considered 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.

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.