

## BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

<b>TO: COUNCIL</b>	<b>REPORT NUMBER: CMU25</b>
<b>FROM: COUNCILLOR JAN OSBORNE CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING</b>	<b>DATE OF MEETING: 23 October 2018</b>

### TO PROVIDE AN UPDATE FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING DELIVERY

#### 1. OVERVIEW OF PORTFOLIO

- 1.1 The Housing Portfolio includes: Home Ownership, Sheltered Housing, Tenancy Management, Income Collection, Property Services, Building Services (BMBS), Private Sector Housing, Housing Development, Housing Solutions, Choice Based Lettings and HRA Finance. Our Vision is for residents to live in districts where people have access to affordable and high-quality homes that enable them to build settled, safe and healthy lives, within sustainable and thriving communities.

#### 2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 This report is for information.

#### 3. KEY ACTIVITIES/ISSUES OVER THE PAST THREE MONTHS

##### **First Joint Housing Strategy soon to be released for consultation**

Officers are making the final alterations to the Draft Joint Housing Strategy before it goes out for public consultation at the end of October.

The Strategy was initially developed by working with key housing market partners at consultation events, at which a wide range of representatives were invited to help shape and inform the priorities, based on what we think are our housing market challenges.

The Strategy helps us to deliver against our Vision for residents to live in districts where people have access to affordable and high-quality homes that enable them to build settled, safe and healthy lives, within sustainable and thriving communities.

Whilst developing this strategy and to broaden the consultation, we have sought the views from all Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councillors at different stages of the development process.

At the end of October, an eight-week consultation specifically targeted at partner agencies, Town and Parish Councils, communities and key stakeholders will take place.

The purpose of the consultation is to:

- Ensure people agree with our identification of the current most pressing housing market challenges, priorities for action
- Allow people to make comments and suggestions about the contents of the strategy

- Review the Priority areas which set out what we are going to do, and how we are going to do it, and what the outcome of that action will be.

Following the consultation period, Officers will finalise the Strategy ready to present to Full Council for adoption in early 2019.

### **Private Rented Sector (PRS) 'Offer' Project**

Officers are about to commence an exciting project to develop our Private Rented Sector 'offer' to maximise our opportunities to prevent homelessness. There is a significant shortage of social housing and therefore, to prevent accommodating everyone in a housing crisis into temporary accommodation, we need to maximise the opportunities to access housing through the Private Rented Sector.

There are significant issues with accessing the PRS currently and our current Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme does not meet the new obligations under the Homelessness Reduction Act. There are two main parts to the project, the first will be focussing on reviewing, re-designing and re-launching the Rent Deposit Scheme. The second is looking at the financial viability of developing an in-house leasing scheme. A leasing scheme would mean us, in effect, renting the property from a landlord for three-five years and then enabling a client a longer term housing solution than just an ordinary Assured Shorthold Tenancy. This project is significant and involves a lot of investigation and the development of comprehensive business cases before these will be presented to Members during 2019.

### **Homelessness Reduction Strategy (HRS)**

Our Homelessness Reduction Strategy 2018-2023 will go out to consultation in October for a period of six weeks.

The Strategy sets out how we want to grow and develop our Homelessness Provision over the next five years. The HRS can be found using the link below:

<https://babermidsuffolk.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s11679/Appendix%20A.pdf>

When we review the effectiveness of this Strategy in 2023, we want to have achieved the following: -

1. To have ended rough sleeping in our Districts
2. To have proactively working with clients at an early stage, prior to the 56 days we have to statutorily
3. To have significantly reduced the usage of Bed and Breakfast
4. To have successfully prevented homelessness in the Private Rented Sector
5. To have ensured everyone contacting the service receives in depth advice and assistance on their housing rights and housing options

To achieve this, we will need to work against the six key priorities:-

- Prevention of Homelessness
- Supporting Vulnerable Households to Secure and Maintain Accommodation
- Mitigating Against the Impact of Welfare Reforms
- Increasing Access to Suitable Accommodation
- Raise Aspirations of Positive Health and Wellbeing amongst Homeless People
- End Rough Sleeping

A comprehensive action plan detailing what work we need to be carrying out to meet our ambitious plans and get to where we want to be in 2023 is currently being developed. This will be finalised after the consultation process.

After the consultation period, a final Strategy will be presented to Council for approval before being published.

## **Performance – Housing Solutions**

The Housing Solutions Officers have been working very hard getting to grips with the new Homelessness Reduction Act, which came into effect in April this year. It has completely changed the way that they work and has had a significant impact on their workloads. They now have to do far more paperwork than they did previously and issue more decision letters than ever before. This is a huge task, which could easily detract from the prevention work that they should be focussing on.

Historically, we used to report *Prevention* and *Relief* figures quarterly through a system called the P1E. Since April, we are now expected to report outcomes through a new system called H-Clic. This system reports in a different way and as a result our statistical returns look very different.

Previously, under the P1E, not only would we include all the work carried out by Officers, but we were able to include successful Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) applications too. However, under the new system, that is no longer possible. The DHP figures used to account for a significant amount of positive outcomes and therefore, when we first started to look at our performance this year, it looked dramatically less.

Officers have looked at how much prevention and relief work was carried out each year for the past five years excluding the DHP data, and compared that to the work carried out so far this year.

	<b>13/14</b>	<b>14/15</b>	<b>15/16</b>	<b>16/17</b>	<b>17/18</b>	<b>Apr 18- Aug 18</b>
<b>Preventions</b>	15	31	20	25	44	73
<b>Reliefs</b>	98	105	88	73	64	35
<b>Total</b>	113	136	108	98	108	108

As you can see from the table above, in the first five months of this year (2018/19), Officers have managed to achieve the same performance that they did in the whole of the last financial year.

## **Tenant Board**

The newly established Tenant Board has been meeting over the last few months to build their training and knowledge about the Housing Service and the wider Housing world. They recently heard from Jenny Osborne, Chief Executive from TPAS (Tenant Participation Advisory Service) who spoke about the Green Paper and the importance of groups such as the Tenant Board to really work alongside the landlord to drive forward the change needed to Social Housing.

There are now five tenants signed up to the Board and officers are continually looking to recruit other tenants to join the Board.

Officers are also about to launch the first Tenant Sounding Board around Fire Safety. This will involve tenants helping us to look at how we communicate with fellow tenants about fire safety in the home.

Proposals for a Member Sounding Board are currently being worked on by Officers with further information to follow in the near future.

## **Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licensing**

From October 1<sup>st</sup>, all HMO's require a license from the local authority. The fee for a license within Babergh and Mid Suffolk has been agreed at £551. Property Services will be inspecting these properties to ensure they are in good repair and meet all the fire safety requirements. A programme of inspections is currently underway.

## **BMBS update**

In the past three months, Officers have achieved:

- A total rollout of Total Mobile across the whole Repairs team resulting in Officers using the technology to access their work whilst on the go. This has had positive impacts on the back office arrangements and for the team using the technology too. The technology is now being rolled out to the VOIDS team.
- All work vans have now been branded to create more visibility within the Districts and to support the cultural development of the team. Tenants are now able to identify when a van arrives at their property or within their estate.

More recently, the revised Business Plan for BMBS has been reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committee. On the back of the O&S recommendations, internal audit have also reviewed the report and made some suggestions to incorporate. This report will be presented to Cabinet shortly and O&S at the point of the six-monthly review in December.

## **Additional Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Headroom Borrowing**

In the Summer, the Government announced the regulations on bidding for additional HRA borrowing, which includes the opportunity to use additional borrowing along with Homes England Grant or Right to Buy Receipts. Babergh and Mid Suffolk both qualified to bid for the additional borrowing, which supports our ambitious plans to build new Council homes. Officers worked incredibly hard to put together the information necessary to bid for the headroom required to deliver the 214 homes across Babergh (£4.794m) and 200 homes across Mid Suffolk (£16.865m).

Since the deadline, Theresa May announced at the Conservative Party Conference that the Government were scrapping the debt cap. Further details have not yet been released but Officers are monitoring to see how this will develop and support our plans to build new homes.

## **Social Housing Green Paper**

In August, the Government published their Social Housing Green Paper: A new deal for Council Housing.

The paper is a consultation document that seeks views on the Government's proposal for the future of Social Housing. It contains 48 consultation questions around five key principles:

- Ensuring a safe and decent home
- Improving and speeding up how complaints are resolved
- Empowering residents and strengthening regulator
- Tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities
- Building new social homes and supporting home ownership

The paper can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/social-housing-green-paper-a-new-deal-for-social-housing>

Deadline for responses is 6<sup>th</sup> November and Housing Management Team are in the process of reviewing the consultation to consider what response Babergh and Mid Suffolk may wish to make.

### **Void Performance**

Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee heard in September the detail in relation to the improved void re-let times over the past eight months. They heard how the teams involved had undergone changes to procedures and processes, re-allocation of resources, co-working and culture changes to deliver the improved performance. Void times have already reduced significantly through the work officers had undertaken.

There is now a confidence that both Councils are well positioned to ensure that the housing stock would continue to be ready to be re-let to tenants with-in our agreed 21 day target.

### **Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's)**

BDC/MSDC and the Suffolk partners continue to work with Orbit Home Improvement Agency to ensure DFG's are administered in a timely manner.

Alongside this contract, Property Services are currently working on proposals which will enable our residents to access the help they need without the need to navigate their way through complicated, confusing and time consuming application procedures.

Any proposals will require Cabinet approval before we proceed. This work will compliment the Orbit contract.

### **Community Land Trust update**

In Babergh we have two Community Land Trusts established to date.

Lavenham Community Land Trust are working in partnership with Hastoe Housing Association to deliver 18 affordable, local needs, rented dwellings that will be held in perpetuity for the community forever. This is on the former SCC depot site at Harwood Place, off Melford Road, in Lavenham. This is an amazing scheme and something that Babergh are extremely proud to be involved in. The dwellings will be completed and occupied by tenants with a local connection to Lavenham, and their families, in 2019. For full details and photographs see the Lavenham CLT Website.

Babergh are also working in partnership with East Bergholt Community Land trust to deliver affordable, local needs housing in East Bergholt. We are regularly meeting and communicating to help them to achieve this aspiration. See also their website for more information.

We are in conversation with Parishes all across Babergh regarding Community-Led housing schemes with interest increasing month on month. Community Housing Fund money remains available for any parish interested in delivering a local needs, affordable housing schemes that delivered in a Community-Led way. Contact Elizabeth Ling for more details at [elizabeth.ling@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk](mailto:elizabeth.ling@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk)

### **Update of Housing Delivery Programme**

To date, we have had 64 completions in Babergh – 14 in 18/19. The proposed Babergh pipeline 2018/19 to 2021/22 includes 214 new homes of which 143 will be new build by the Council.

Members can monitor progress of the programme through the quarterly performance reports.