

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

FROM: Councillor Jan Osborne, Cabinet Member for Housing	REPORT NUMBER: CMU8
TO: COUNCIL	DATE OF MEETING: 24 September 2019

TO PROVIDE AN UPDATE FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING

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 That Council notes the report.

3. KEY ACTIVITIES/ISSUES OVER THE PAST 6 MONTHS April 2019 – September 2019

3.1 HOUSING STAFF AWAY DAY MAY 2019

On 30th April we organised an all housing staff Away Day at the Blackbourne Centre, Elmswell. The day was attended by approximately 150 members of staff and focussed on delivering our Housing vision.

3.2 STAR SURVEY

During June and July we conducted a STAR (Satisfaction of Tenants and Residents) survey of all our general needs and sheltered tenants and leaseholders.

In Babergh we achieved a response rate of 44% which gives a good level of statistical viability. The results of the survey were presented to the Tenant board, officers and portfolio holders on the 11th and 12th September.

A report will be presented to Cabinet, including an action plan for specific outcomes and recommendations from the results.

3.3 MHCLG FUNDING SUCCESS TO TACKLE ROUGH SLEEPING

The Councils have been awarded £209,000 from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) following a joint bid with West Suffolk.

There were a number of elements we could have bid for and we decided to bid for the Supported Lettings scheme. This will provide flexible support funding to help people with a history of rough sleeping to sustain their tenancies in homes made newly available across the housing sector.

We bid for a 1 x Professional Lead – Supported Lettings, 4 x Tenancy Sustainment Officers and 1 x Supported Lettings Project Co-ordinator. These posts are temporary and will be fixed term for 12 months. The post holders are employed by BMSDC and started in post in late August. They are hosted within our team but their workload will be split across BMSDC and West Suffolk.

3.4 MHCLG FEEDBACK ON OUR HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY

Following their recent visit, MHCLG advised us that they felt the recently published Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy was clear and concise with relevant and well worked actions.

They have also asked to use our Strategy “as an example of good practice”.

3.5 ROUGH SLEEPER OUTREACH WORKER

We have recently had some individuals rough sleeping in our Districts, some of which have arrived from other Local Authority areas. We have agreed with West Suffolk that one of their Rough Sleeper Outreach Workers will work across our Districts two days per week.

This started in mid-August and we have already seen a positive impact by sourcing accommodation for some of those rough sleeping.

3.6 PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR DEDICATED RESOURCE

We have recently recruited Stephanie Lloyd to the post of Lettings Negotiator. This is a new post, funded through the Flexible Homeless Support Grant funding we receive from MHCLG, for an initial two-year period.

Steph will be working with private landlords and letting agencies, encouraging them to work more closely with us. By providing high quality, suitable private rented accommodation within our districts. Enabling us to prevent homelessness, by supporting families to access the private rented sector.

3.7 INCOME MANAGEMENT POLICY

The new Income Management Policy and procedures have been developed in conjunction with the Income Team and we have consulted with both Sudbury and Stowmarket Citizen Advice, as well as the Tenant Board. The Tenant Services Professional Lead has also been working closely with Ipswich Borough Council to share and develop best practice.

The policy places a greater emphasis on assessing the ability of a tenant to pay before the tenancy starts and, where problems are identified, earlier intervention by the Income Officer or Financial Inclusion Officer is possible. This could then prevent debt accumulating.

A 'new tenant risk matrix' is in development which will help us to identify vulnerable tenants, or those at risk of tenancy failure, at a much earlier stage.

The policy has been approved by the Assistant Director of Housing and will be made available to Cabinet for their information at the meeting in October.

3.8 UNIVERSAL CREDIT

As of 1 July 2019, there were a total of **209** council tenants in receipt of Universal Credit across the two districts (up from 102 tenants in December 2018); **161** in Babergh and **129** in Mid Suffolk.

	Babergh		Mid Suffolk	
	<i>Jul 2019</i>	<i>Dec 2018</i>	<i>Jul 2019</i>	<i>Dec 2018</i>
<i>No of UC claimants</i>	161	54	129	48
<i>No. of Alternative Payment Arrangements APAs</i>	93	66	76	46

Of those, there were **93** tenants in Babergh and **76** in Mid Suffolk with Alternative Payment Arrangements (APAs) in place. APAs are requested by us as the landlord and allow the housing element of Universal credit to be paid directly to us in order to clear arrears on a claimant's rent account.

In Q1, 2019/20, the Universal Credit arrears were as follows:

- Babergh - 34.57% of the total dwelling arrears (up from 31.37% in Q4 of 2018/19). This equates to £122,210 with the average arrear per UC claimant being £759.07.
- Mid Suffolk - 29.96% of the total dwelling arrears (up from 29.37% in Q4 of 2018/19). This equates to £127,905 with the average arrear per UC claimant being £991.52.

3.9 RENT LETTERS SOUNDING BOARD

On 26th June we held a sounding board with 4 tenants (2 Babergh, 2 Mid Suffolk) to discuss how we can improve our rent letters.

The meeting was really productive and highlighted a number of ways the current letters could be improved. We are continuing work to change the letters and plan to meet with the sounding board again to review the proposed new letters once they have been drafted.

3.10 SHELTERED SCHEME RESIDENT MEETINGS

Our regular resident meetings at the sheltered housing schemes are progressing well. So far we have visited 3 schemes in Babergh.

The main topic of conversation from our point of view remains fire safety and the latest fire risk assessments but residents have raised a wide range of issues. These have included property repairs, the mobility scooter policy, community-building opportunities, concerns about some neighbours, and the keeping of pets.

3.11 MOBILITY SCOOTER POLICY CONSULTATION

From the 26 June until the 26 July we ran a consultation exercise with our sheltered housing residents on the proposed new mobility scooter policy.

The consultation went well with some really good feedback received. Our intention now is to bring this information together in a 'you said, we did' style document so we can respond to the points raised by tenants. The Policy has been approved by the Assistant Director of Housing and a copy will be made available to Cabinet for their information at the meeting in October.

3.12 TENANT BOARD UPDATE

The Tenant Board now has 8 permanent members so is quorate and able to undertake official duties. Portfolio Holders recently met board members at an evening meeting on 12th August 2019 at the Energy from Waste plant at Great Blakenham.

The Board continues to meet monthly and is currently undertaking its first scrutiny exercise, looking at the scheduling and prioritising of repairs. The final scrutiny report is due to be delivered at the end of September.

3.13 NEW DFG POLICY

We have now adopted a new way of utilising the DFG budget that allows more flexibility to access the DFG budget process more quickly and opens it up to more conditions, such as helping those with mental health conditions.

This includes offering Minor Adaptations Grants (MAG's) up to £5,000, which are not means tested. We have been promoting this with local organisations, on our website and through our social media pages.

As well as offering this new scheme, our Councils are linking up with local hospitals to help get residents out of hospital and closer to home and family. The Councils are now providing an adapted half-way home in which a resident can stay for a short period of time while their own property is being adapted.

3.14 VOID PERFORMANCE

At the end of Quarter 1, the cumulative voids figure for all standard voids was an average of 13 days at Babergh and 18 days at Mid Suffolk. This is a further improvement on the success achieved in the last financial year.

Performance for Standard Void Re-let Time in Days

	Babergh	Mid Suffolk
April 2018 – March 2019 (Full Year)	21	25
April 2019 – June 2019 (Quarter 1)	13	18

3.15 BUILDING SERVICES LOCALITY BASED WORKING

The operational teams within BMBS have been reconfigured to enable a more effective patch based working arrangement; dividing the two districts into 3 patches.

Each patch is covered by one team leader and one Quality Assurance surveyor enabling greater control and consistency in managing the workforce in each area.

The operational teams are scheduled work within the patch closest to their home location thereby further reducing their travel and increasing output within those areas.

3.16 AFFORDABLE HOUSING UPDATE

A total of 37 affordable homes were delivered in 2018/19. This includes both new builds and acquisitions.

In Q1 of 2018/19, 6 new affordable housing units were completed in Babergh and a further 10 are expected to have completed by the end of September.

No new affordable housing units were scheduled to be completed in Mid Suffolk in the first two quarters of 2019/20.

3.17 SOCIAL HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AND ACQUISITION

In June the Babergh District Council entered into a legal agreement to acquire 29 social housing units at Wolsey Grange from Taylor Wimpey. These units will help to meet the increasing need for social housing within our districts and we hope that this agreement will lead to further partnering with Taylor Wimpey on further phases at Wolsey Grange and other sites within our district. A further 8 affordable units have been contractually committed to in Raydon and offers made on for several other units within the district.

The scheme to deliver 21 new social and affordable rent properties at Angel Court in Hadleigh has been tendered. Bids have been received and are currently being reviewed. Homes England are providing funding for this scheme and the first payment has been received for this development. A start on site is expected later this year.

Planning consent has also been obtained for 1-3 Queensland, Shotley (5 affordable units) with resolutions to grant consent for 3 affordable units at 16 Queensland, Shotley and 9 affordable units in Brantham.

Needham Market Middle School has a resolution to grant planning consent for the development of 41 units for social/affordable rent and shared ownership on site. Negotiations are nearing completion in respect of the S106 agreement. This scheme will be tendered imminently.

A planning application has been submitted for Stowmarket Middle School to provide 38 units for social/affordable rent and shared ownership on site. This application will be heard by planning committee on 18th September.

A planning application will be submitted for the adjacent site known as the Community Education Centre soon which will enable both sites to be brought forward together.

Discussions have been on-going with local stakeholders in respect of the future redevelopment of Paddock House in Eye. The principles of this development have now been agreed and a detailed scheme is being prepared to enable a planning application to be submitted before the end of the year.

Offers have been submitted to acquire 139 social housing units across Bramford, Stowmarket and Thurston. Terms have also been agreed with a developer in respect of the development of 10 affordable units in Mendlesham, solicitors have been instructed to prepare a development documentation.

4. FUTURE KEY ACTIVITIES

4.1 SHELTERED SCHEME MEETINGS

The programme of scheme meetings continues until the end of the year and we have the following schemes booked in for the coming months:

Babergh:

- Tenterpiece, Lavenham – Oct 2019
- Parkers Way, Nayland – Dec 2019

Mid Suffolk

- Jubilee Court, Stowupland – September
- Hartismere House, Laxfield - October
- St Peters Court, Claydon - October
- Weston Court, Stowmarket – November

4.2 SOCIAL HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AND ACQUISITION

Tenders will be sent out for Brantham and Shotley with a view to starting on site early in the New Year. Angel Court tender will be awarded and works to start on site before the end of the year.

Monitor and manage the acquisitions including the handover of completed units in Hintlesham, Lavenham, Raydon and Sproughton.

Tenders will be sent out for Needham Market Middle School by the end of the year, with a view to starting on site in the New Year.

Planning applications will be submitted for Community Education Centre (adjacent to Stowmarket Middle School) and Paddock House in Eye by the end of the year. Subject to planning consent being granted for Stowmarket Middle School, work will commence to prepare the site for start on site including completing any S106 agreement.

Complete the development agreement in respect of the units at Mendlesham to enable start on site as soon as possible and progress acquisitions in Bramford, Stowmarket and Thurston (subject to Mid Suffolk Council being successful in bidding for these units) whilst identifying any further opportunities for the acquisition of affordable units.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 This report summarises a range of diverse activity across the Housing Directorate, there is a significant amount of work taking place currently within the service that will be presented to you in future Cabinet Member Reports.