

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

FROM: Councillor Julie Flatman Cabinet Member for Housing Councillor Gerard Brewster Cabinet Member for Housing Delivery	REPORT NUMBER: CMU17
TO: Council	DATE OF MEETING: 23 January 2020

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 3 MONTHS October 2019 – January 2020

3.1 HOUSING SERVICE RESTRUCTURE

During the past three months the whole Housing Service has been consulting a group of staff on changes to existing job roles. The aim is to ensure the Housing service meets its future priorities and responds to the changing needs of its residents and tenants.

Key changes include the creation of a Neighbourhoods team focussed on estate management, the quality of grounds maintenance, and the safety of communal areas. There will also be a greater focus on Compliance management, and changes to the team that administers the Housing register.

3.2 DEVELOPMENT OF A BUSINESS CASE FOR A JOINT VENTURE FOR THE FUTURE DELIVERY OF BUILDING SERVICES

In October 2019 Cabinet approved the development of a business case, which explores the opportunities for developing a Joint Venture between Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils and Flagship Group.

The Business case will consider a Joint Venture that will deliver Housing Repairs, Maintenance and Planned Improvements to the Councils 6,800 Housing Revenue Account homes.

Full details of the proposal can be found on the Connect pages for the October Cabinet meeting.

3.3 LAUNCH OF A GUARANTEED RENT SCHEME – CENTRAL SUFFOLK LETTINGS

In April, we will be launching a Guaranteed Rent Scheme to increase the number of people being successfully placed into private rented accommodation. This will hopefully reduce the dependency on Temporary Accommodation and provide a more settled move for residents from one accommodation to another.

The Guaranteed Rent Scheme will be marketed under the umbrella of 'Central Suffolk Lettings' (CSL), which will aim to target private landlords and work collaboratively with agents, showing we are a commercially minded team focussed on providing a good service to both tenants and landlords.

3.4 REGULATORY REFORM ORDER POLICY

A Housing Assistance Policy has recently been approved, which has been developed under the Regulatory Reform Order to provide the Councils with more discretion over how they spend the money allocated for Disabled Facilities Grants. The Policy will be closely monitored and feedback on the success will be provided in late 2020.

3.5 TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION POLICY

A Temporary Accommodation (TA) Policy has recently been approved, which sets out what accommodation the Councils will use to provide TA under their accommodation duties to those who are homeless. It also sets out how allocation to those units will be prioritised and how they will prioritise those placed out of the area for vacancies that arise within the District.

3.6 ROUGH SLEEPER FUNDING – Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)

The Councils were awarded funding to develop a 12 month Supported Lettings Scheme to support those who have formerly been a rough sleeper in either Babergh, Mid Suffolk or West Suffolk's area. The Scheme has been in operation since September and MHCLG have now invited the Councils to bid for further funding, so the scheme can be extended until 31st March 2021.

West Suffolk Council have also submitted a bid, which will extend their current Rough Sleeper Outreach Service into the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Districts.

We will know the outcome of the bids before the end of March 2020.

3.7 COLD WEATHER FUNDING - MHCLG

The Councils have been successful in securing £5,000 (£2,500 per Council) funding through the Cold Weather Fund. This will enable the Council to work with those Rough Sleeping and provide accommodation for up to 28 days, whilst we work with them under a Relief Duty (under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017) to try and secure alternative housing.

3.8 PROPERTY LEASED TO SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL (SCC) FOR STAYING CLOSE PROJECT

SCC approached the Housing Solutions team for help finding a 2 to 3 bedroom property to lease to young people being accommodated under their Corporate Parenting responsibilities, as part of the Staying Close Project.

We quickly identified a 2 bedroom flat in Stowmarket and prioritised the void repair works so that it was available as soon as possible as they were working with very tight timescales.

The Assets and Investments Team agreed to let the property under a licence while the full lease terms are signed, avoiding any delay to the young people having access to the property.

This is a really positive example of the pro-active and positive approach Babergh and Mid Suffolk are taking to working with colleagues, such as SCC and also whilst meeting our Corporate Parenting responsibilities.

3.9 ROUGH SLEEPER COUNT

In November, the Councils conducted their Rough Sleeper Count. Due to the geographical nature of the Districts and the numbers of Rough Sleepers we are currently engaging with, we carried out an 'estimate', in conjunction with a number of agencies locally who also engage with Rough Sleepers. On the night, we carried out the estimate, we counted 2 Rough Sleepers in each District. These figures have been verified by Homeless Link who conduct the count nationally and the figures will be published in 2020.

3.10 STAR SURVEY

Officers in Housing and Business Improvement are continuing to analyse the results of the STAR survey to identify the priority actions. These priorities have been shared with SLT and the Housing Management Team and they are being incorporated into the Housing service plans for 2020/21.

The results will be presented to members in early 2019/20, including an action plan for specific outcomes and recommendations from the results.

3.11 INCOME MANAGEMENT POLICY

Following the recent implementation of the new Income Management Policy, Income Officers are now contacting all new tenants within 4 weeks of the start of their tenancy. This enables earlier intervention by the Income Officer or Financial Inclusion Officer to help prevent debt accumulating.

3.12 UNIVERSAL CREDIT

As of 1 December 2019, there were a total of **328** council tenants in receipt of Universal Credit across the two districts (up from 290 tenants in July 2019), **181** in Babergh and **147** in Mid Suffolk.

	Mid Suffolk			Babergh		
	<i>Dec 2019</i>	<i>Jul 2019</i>	<i>Dec 2018</i>	<i>Dec 2019</i>	<i>Jul 2019</i>	<i>Dec 2018</i>
<i>No of UC claimants</i>	147	129	48	181	161	54
<i>No. of Alternative Payment Arrangements APAs</i>	107	76	46	125	93	66

Of those, there were **107** tenants in Mid Suffolk and **125** in Babergh 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:

- Mid Suffolk – 28.91% of the total dwelling arrears (down from 29.96% in Q1 of 2019/20). This equates to £117,628.89 with the average arrear per UC claimant being £800.19.
- Babergh – 28.05% of the total dwelling arrears (down from 34.57% in Q1 of 2019/20). This equates to £143,635.63 with the average arrear per UC claimant being £793.56.

3.13 MOBILITY SCOOTER STORAGE AT SHELTERED SCHEMES

Part of the new Mobility Scooter Policy is to ensure that all scooters are appropriately stored. Tenant and Building Services are reviewing current storage at all schemes and considering options to provide additional or more suitable storage where required.

3.14 TENANT BOARD UPDATE

The Tenant Board completed its first scrutiny project looking at the scheduling of repairs at the end of September. The final report makes 10 recommendations concerning improvements to the repairs booking system and overall communication with tenants about repairs. The report was shared with Housing Management Team and will be used to inform the review of Building Services.

3.15 MEMBERS SOUNDING BOARD

We will be holding an initial Member's Sounding Board meeting in early February to review the work of the Tenant Board, consider the outcomes of tenant engagement activities over the past year, and agree priorities for the coming year

It is hoped that a dedicated Tenant Engagement Coordinator will be in post early in 2020, and they will be able to support the Member's Sounding Board going forward as well as our tenant involvement work.

3.16 VOID PERFORMANCE

Voids performance continues to be maintained, with performance from April – November averaging for standard voids at 16 days in Babergh and 18 days in Mid Suffolk. This is a huge achievement and Officers are working incredibly hard to maintain this figure and to try and improve on it further.

3.17 SOCIAL HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AND ACQUISITION

In Q3 of 2019/20, 4 units were acquired on the open market in Mid Suffolk.

No new build affordable housing units are scheduled to be completed in Babergh or Mid Suffolk in 2019/20, but starts on site are currently programmed in May 2020 for Needham Middle School (41 units) and June 2020 for Stowmarket Middle School (38 units).

The planning application for the Mendlesham Old Engine site was submitted in December 2019 and solicitors are currently working on the sale contract and Development Agreement. The planning officer is working with all three parties to finalise the S106 and agree the affordable housing and its specification.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 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.