

## MID SUFFOLK COUNCIL CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

<b>From: Councillor Jill Wilshaw Cabinet Member for Housing</b>	<b>Report Number: CMU 1</b>
<b>To: Council</b>	<b>Date of meeting: 23 November 2017</b>

### 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. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Council notes the report.

#### 3. Key Activities/Issues Over the Past Six 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 begun and is expected to be complete by February 2018. 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.
- 3.2 Work continues in developing our approach to 'compliance'. This follows an external review earlier this 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 have robust policies and procedures that deliver an exemplar service.
- 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 as a result of this along with a project to access hard to reach properties we have a 100% gas servicing record.

### *Tenant Services & Income Services*

- 3.6 Universal Credit – UC Full Service began in October in Sudbury and will begin in Stowmarket from February 2018. A project team has been working on an action plan to mitigate against the risks UC presents for tenants, including higher rent arrears levels.
- 3.7 Digital Sign-up – A trial is currently underway to introduce a digital sign up which allows a new tenant to complete all the relevant paperwork electronically before moving in to their home. If the trial is successful it will 'go live' in December. This is estimated to save more than 400 hours of officer time, per year, in the future; and be simpler, easier and quicker for tenants.
- 3.8 Housing Enforcers - Our officers Andrew Weavers and Ian Watson have recently been involved in the production and airing of the fourth consecutive series of 'Housing Enforcers' which follows the work of our Community Housing Officers.

### *Homelessness*

- 3.9 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, Scrutiny committee reviewed the performance of the team and its preparation for the HRA 2018 and a further review will be conducted six months following the implementation of the act.
- 3.10 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 lodgings offer.
- 3.11 Homeless Reduction Event – Home is where the start is. All Suffolk Councils jointly arranged a stakeholder event at The Apex in Bury St Edmunds to raise awareness and build relationships with partner organisations on 12th October. The event had many guest speakers including leading homeless charity Crisis, a homelessness expert, a Barrister from Arden Chambers in London and representatives from the Clinical Commissioning Group. This is the first time an event like this has been arranged and hosted by Suffolk Councils and shows the commitment the Councils have to working closely with Partners across the Suffolk System.

### *BMBS Babergh Mid Suffolk Building Services*

- 3.12 Following its inception in April this year, work is continuing to introduce and 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.

### *Resident Involvement*

- 3.13 Work has begun consulting residents on what and how would encourage them to become involved in the management of the landlord service. Updates on the progress of this project will be provided to the Housing Board, and the project will be completed by April 2018.

### *Home Ownership Review*

- 3.14 Following its inception in November last year, a project has just ended reviewing the work of the Home Ownership team (Right to Buy, Leasehold, Shared Ownership). This review focussed on increasing income, reducing cost, and delivering a more efficient level of customer service. As a direct result of this project, it is now forecast that the service will be cost neutral within the next three years.

### *Housing Delivery*

- 3.15 In the past six months we have acquired 5 properties and 8 new build (in Great Blakenham). Work is currently taking place to produce a development pipeline which provide wider visibility of planned acquisition's and developments

## **4. Future Key Activities**

### *Voids*

- 4.1 Following recent scrutiny of void performance, it has been agreed that we will embark on a review of void management to reduce the average void time by 10 days within six months. This project begins in December and will report progress on a monthly basis.

### *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 February/March 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 in the first six months 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 March/April 2018

## **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, Environment, Homelessness Reduction, Income, Measures and Controls, Regulatory, Savings & Efficiencies, Service Strategic Development. In due course a refreshed version of the projects and work streams that underpin these programmes will be published.