

HOMES & COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE
24 JANUARY 2022

STRATEGIC APPROACH TO SOCIAL HOUSING ASSET MANAGEMENT

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide members of the Homes & Communities Committee with an overview of the Council's approach to managing HRA social housing assets and to explain how we expect our strategic approach to managing social housing assets is expected to develop.

2.0 Background Information

2.1 The Council owns 5,576 homes, of which 2,604 are designated for older people. This includes our housing with care schemes at Gladstone House, Vale View and Broadleaves.

2.2 In addition, the Council is responsible for 39 temporary homes (which are occupied by homeless households) and it has 182 leaseholders. There are also 32 community centres located amongst Council homes.

2.3 The Council is legally required to ensure that tenants' homes are well maintained and meet, as a minimum, the Decent Homes Standard (DHS).

2.4 Following the return of the management of social housing back into the Council, we have begun to review the strategic way in which our social housing assets are managed. This is to ensure that the long term investment requirements of the homes is known and accommodated within the HRA Business Plan and to ensure that accompanying planned investment programmes are arranged in a way which provides value for money and good customer outcomes.

3.0 Developing the HRA asset management strategy

3.1 Originally it was envisaged that a stand-alone asset management strategy would be presented to the Committee in order to provide assurance of our approach and this would have also been consulted on with tenants before being considered by the Committee.

3.2 However, having discussed the approach with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee, we have agreed an alternative approach, the reasons for which are explained in the following paragraphs. Instead, this report and the appended document provide an overview of our current approach to asset management, our priorities and shares our thinking about the way in which a more robust asset management strategy can be developed.

3.3 To ensure the Council's strategic focus and priorities are aligned to the Community Plan, an overarching strategy hierarchy has been agreed. The primary document relating to the Council's social housing activities is the Landlord Strategy. This sets out our vision for the next five years, including for asset management, and it will be expressed (in financial terms) in the HRA Business Plan. The Landlord Strategy has been drafted and is due to be considered by this Committee on this agenda.

- 3.4 The Landlord Strategy will be supported by an HRA asset management strategy which will be developed over the next year. One of the key pieces of work is a new externally-conducted stock condition survey of 50% of the housing portfolio. This has been procured and is being undertaken in 2022. Further in-house surveys will take place over the following four years to achieve 100% stock condition information by 2026. We will use this information to reformulate the HRA Business Plan and to reconfigure our programmes of investment in tenants' homes.
- 3.5 Using this data, we will develop our approach to strategic asset management so that it enables the Council to better respond to the changing operating environment (for example, the climate emergency and revisions to the DHS) and customer needs and expectations for their homes, including continuing to reduce incidences of fuel poverty.

4.0 Priorities for 2021/22 and indicative priorities for 2022/23

- 4.1 To enable the Committee to gain assurance of how we continue to invest in our social housing, our priorities for 2021/22 are to:
- Deliver planned programmes of investment in existing homes including kitchen, bathrooms, roofing, windows and doors, estate improvements and re-wiring.
 - Implement new asset management software to replace a legacy system which is no longer supported and to ensure that investment and servicing programmes are no longer managed on spreadsheets. This is an important project which also enables us to gain greater control of property and servicing data, both of which are critical elements in being able to provide assurance of our legal and regulatory compliance and the suitability of the investment in tenants' homes.
 - Obtain funding from regional and national scheme for pilot schemes to decarbonise our social homes.
 - Deliver an improved lettings standard for empty homes
- 4.2 Overall we have made good progress in delivering these objectives with spending 58% of this year's investment programme; implementation of Apex software under way; obtained nearly £2m in decarbonisation and fuel poverty government funding and introduced a new lettings standard for our empty homes.
- 4.3 Our priorities for 2022/23 are expected to continue many of the priorities for 2021/22 in relation to delivering planned investment programmes, taking opportunities to decarbonise tenants' homes and delivering an improved lettings standard.
- 4.4 The externally conducted stock condition survey (mentioned above) and further investigation of our tenants' priorities, needs and expectations will be important deliverables in 2022/23. Both of these are important foundations for the re-cast HRA Business Plan and will enable the Council to consider more effectively how it will meet some of the strategic challenges and opportunities, such as achieving net zero carbon for all homes and developing new social housing in the district.

5.0 Equalities Implications

5.1 There are no equalities implications directly arising from this report. The equalities implications of the emerging HRA asset management strategy will need to be assessed to provide assurance of the impact of the Council's investment in social housing in the coming years.

6.0 Digital Implications

6.1 There are no digital implications directly arising from this report.

7.0 Financial Implications (FIN21-22/8563)

7.1 There are no direct financial implications which result from either this report or the landlord strategy to which this report is supplementary. Further details regarding the council's approach towards the financial implications of proposals to implement elements of the landlord strategy can be found in the preceding report of this Committee's agenda.

8.0 Community Plan – Alignment to Objectives

8.1 This report contributes towards achieving the following Community Plan objectives:

- Creating vibrant and self-sufficient local communities where residents look out for each other and actively contribute to their local area
- Creating more and better quality homes through our roles as landlord, developer and planning authority
- Continuing to maintain the high standard of cleanliness and appearance of the local environment
- Reducing crime and anti-social behaviour and increasing feelings of safety in our communities
- Improving the health and wellbeing of local residents

9.0 Comments of Director(s)

9.1 This report is intended to provide members of the Homes & Communities Committee with a briefing of our existing approach to asset management and to explain the steps that are being taken to ensure that the Council makes sensible, long term provision for the maintenance and repair of tenants' homes, including addressing associated strategic priorities.

9.2 The Housing Advisory Group that met on 6th January 2022 and were happy with the approach set out in the appendix. They also welcomed the stock condition survey and annual visits to help keep the Council up to date with the condition of homes and ensuring they are fit.

10.0 RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is invited to note the contents of this report.

Reason for Recommendation(s)

No decisions are required. This report is for information and assurance.

Background Papers

The details of any background papers you have used in writing the report (note these would then become public documents available for inspection) or if none used write "Nil".

For further information please contact Caroline Wagstaff on Ext 5637

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