

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee		
DATE:	5 <sup>th</sup> July 2016	AGENDA ITEM:	11
TITLE:	Housing Annual Report		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	Councillor Richard Davies	PORTFOLIO:	Housing
SERVICE:	Housing	WARDS:	All
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#### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This reports sets out the work, achievements and performance of the Housing Service over the last financial year and key areas of work for the next 12 months.

#### 2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That members note the achievements, performance and planned work programme for the Housing Service.

#### 3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Housing Service broadly consists of Housing Needs, Tenant Services, Sheltered Housing and Housing Property Services (repairs and maintenance).

##### 3.2 Housing Needs

The Housing Needs Service provides housing advice and access to affordable housing for those in acute need including those who are homeless, threatened with homelessness or in need of assistance with landlord and tenant issues. The service is also responsible for administering the homeless pathway (which provides access to supported housing through to independent accommodation for single homeless people), the Housing Register and the Rent Guarantee Scheme.

##### 3.3 Tenant Services

Tenant Services manages the Council's 5,675 non PFI stock of properties. This involves tenancy and estate management, collecting rental income, providing support to vulnerable tenants to enable them to sustain their tenancies, and providing a debt advice service. The service is also responsible for administering right to buy applications and the Council's leasehold portfolio.

##### 3.4 Sheltered Housing

This team manages the Council's Sheltered Accommodation properties and the Extra Care Housing Scheme at Cedar Court, providing housing management and intensive housing support to older tenants over the age of 60. The service also works with tenants to put in place appropriate activities that improve the well-being of those that live there.

##### 3.5 Housing Property Services

Housing Property Services are responsible for providing the day to day repairs to the housing stock, delivering a planned programme of improvement works and cyclical repairs and carrying out the necessary void repair work when properties become empty. In addition the service provides a day to day repairs service for Wokingham Borough Council.

#### **4. KEY CHALLENGES**

4.1 Detailed below are some of the key challenges which the service has faced over the past year and how the service has responded to these.

##### **4.2 Increase in Homelessness**

Homelessness continued to rise throughout 2015/2016 culminating in 309 households being accepted as statutorily homeless by the Local Authority. Many of these households were placed into B&B accommodation on an emergency basis with an average of 120 households in B&B in any one week. B&B is unsuitable for long periods of time but the service has had little choice in placing people due to a lack of supply of alternative accommodation. In order to minimise the use of bed and breakfast as much as possible the following action was taken:

- At Wensley Road a former homeless hostel with shared facilities, which was no longer in use, was totally refurbished creating 17 self-contained temporary accommodation flats.
- 40 units of accommodation at Dee Park ear marked for demolition as part of the regeneration scheme were refurbished and brought back into use for temporary accommodation (the regeneration will still continue and the flats will be brought back out of use when the land is required).
- The Rent Guarantee Scheme was launched in order to encourage private sector landlords to rent their properties through the Council. The offer to landlords includes guaranteed rent; a deposit guarantee; reference checks; support and advice to landlords; a video inventory; and ongoing support for tenants when needed. The service also enables tenants to save up for their own deposit over a period of time.
- A triage system was put in place for people approaching Housing Advice in order to see people at the earliest point that they are threatened with homelessness in order to give officers the best chance of preventing homelessness.
- Plans were developed to increase the supply of affordable temporary and permanent homes (see below: the year ahead).

The Housing Service will continue to strive to minimise the use of B&B in the coming year. However, continued high demand for housing in the area, coupled with the lack of supply of affordable housing and impending welfare reform changes, means that tackling homelessness will continue to present a significant challenge for the Council.

##### **4.3 Welfare Reform**

In 2015 /2016 the Government continued with its programme of Welfare Reform with the introduction of Universal Credit. The Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 received Royal Assent on 16<sup>th</sup> March this year and introduced a range of new reforms, including a reduction in the Benefit Cap from £26,000 a year to £20,000 a year (outside of London). In order to manage the changes and prevent homelessness the service has put in place a welfare reform action plan to protect households at risk from the changes including:

- Moving management of the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) budget from the Housing Benefit Service to Housing. DHP can be used to assist people in receipt of Housing Benefit who have a short term need for assistance with rent or deposits.
- Introducing conditionality on DHP allocations whilst providing support for tenants to move into smaller accommodation where they are affected by the Spare Room Subsidy or providing time limited support whilst they seek employment.
- Providing personal budgeting support.
- Recruiting an additional Debt Adviser to maximise tenants' incomes and reduce their debt.
- Putting Universal Credit training in place for officers in Housing with the DWP.
- Working with the Troubled Families Team to identify lead officers in Childrens Social Care to work with households specifically affected by the Benefit Cap and support them into employment.

Over the next 12 months the service will need to prepare for further Government changes which include:

- A 1% reduction in rent across most of the Council's general needs housing stock for the next 4 years.
- The payment of a levy based on an estimate of 'higher value' Council homes becoming vacant through the year, to fund the Right to Buy discounts for Housing Associations.
- Pay to Stay - charging higher rents for tenants who have a household income over a threshold - proposed as £31,000 (outside London).
- The introduction of fixed term tenancies.
- The Government will need to introduce further guidance and secondary legislation before many of the changes are implemented.

## 5.0 KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

5.1 2015/16 was a year of high demand on Housing Services through a time of unprecedented change. However, the service was able to deliver a number of key achievements including:

- Drafting and completing a new Homelessness Strategy
- Procurement of a new Floating Support Contract to provide tenancy sustainment support to people at risk of homelessness, which was awarded to Launchpad.
- Launch of the Rent Guarantee Scheme (RGS) in September 2015 to attract more landlords and properties for homeless households and to retain landlords already on the Deposit Guarantee Scheme who had concerns about the impact of Universal Credit and would have otherwise left the scheme. By the end of 2015/16, 102 households had been signed up into RGS properties.

- Delivering an action plan which reduced the void turnaround time from 37.97 days at the start of the year to 32.23 at the end of the financial year - above the average performance for our comparator group.
- Maintaining 100% gas servicing within the gas servicing due dates - key to ensuring the safety of our tenants.
- Developing the design and planning for the delivery of new build temporary accommodation at Lowfield Road and applying for Planning permission.
- Beginning refurbishment work on a second block of flats at Hexham Road to improve the energy efficiency, safety and the appearance of the blocks.
- Completing the installation of solar panels on 457 Council homes.
- Contributed £68,000 for Your Community Your Cash community projects and received £10,000 from Catalyst Housing in addition. Some of the projects included the making of a Dee Park intergenerational video, Southcote Mobile school holiday activities, a well-being bid for healthy living for 13-16 year olds, and language courses to better integrate sheltered housing tenants into the community.
- Prevented homelessness for approximately 300 households.
- Developed a new specification for bathrooms which included over bath showers, responding to tenant feedback and changing expectations.
- Completed a major refurbishment of 'crosswall' homes on Dee Park which included new cladding on front and rear walls and new insulation to improve energy efficiency.
- Continued to successfully deliver the contract for Wokingham Council on a day to day repairs service.
- Maintained top quartile performance on rent collection and arrears - maximising income.

## 5.2 Profile on Debt Advice

The Debt Advice Service has been instrumental in keeping rent arrears to a minimum, writing off debt and enabling people to remain in their homes and manage their finances more efficiently. The team consists of 3 officers and an apprentice who provide personal budgeting support, debt advice, allocation of Discretionary Housing Payments, application for debt relief orders and welfare benefit and money advice. The work of the team is vital both in preparation for and managing through welfare reform. Detailed below is the amount of income the team have managed to claim for customers and the amount of private debt they have managed to get written off in 2015/16

	Total 15/16
Rent Arrears Arrangements	£16,319
Council Tax Arrears Arrangements	£35,968
Housing Benefit Overpayment Arrangements	£23,808

Back Dated Benefits (All including DHPs)	£32,981
Money Written Off (due to insolvency)	£248,486
Money Written Off (without insolvency)	£31,795
Housing Benefit Awarded	£22,269
Council Tax Support Awarded	£6217

## 6.0 PERFORMANCE

- 6.1 The Service monitors a number of key performance indicators to measure how well the service is performing. The service has performed well this year improving performance in all 6 key areas of the service. Despite this improvement the service will be focused on all of the key performance indicators and on what changes can be made to move towards top quartile performance in all areas.

Indicator description	2014/15	March 2016	Housemark Top Quartile 2014/15	Housemark Median 2014/15	Housemark Lower Quartile 2014/15
<b>Property Services</b>					
Average number of calendar days taken to complete responsive repairs	8.37	8.64	8.11	10.02	11.99
Percentage of responsive repairs completed at the first visit	87.64%	91.83%	96.84%	92.59%	87.77%
Appointments kept as a percentage of appointments made	87.64%	95.49%	98.87%	97.66%	91.41%
Percentage of properties with a gas servicing certificate (% of gas servicing jobs within last 12 months of service)	99.98%	100%	99.98%	99.93%	99.70%
<b>Voids</b>					

Average relet time for vacant properties (void to start of tenancy - days) Standard voids	37.78	32.30	25.75	35.14	41.12
<b>Rent collection</b>					
Rent collected from current tenants as % of rent due (excluding arrears b/f)	99.72%	99.93%	99.40%	99.10%	98.90%

## 7.0 TENANT SATISFACTION

- 7.1 How well the service performs is assessed not only on performance indicators but also the feedback it receives from tenants. A tenant satisfaction survey was carried out in 2015 by an independent company on behalf of the Housing Service. The results were very encouraging with satisfaction levels up across the board from the previous year. Further surveys will be conducted in 2016.

TENANTS FAIRLY/VERY SATISFIED WITH:	2014	2015
Overall Housing Service	79.5	86.6
Overall Quality of Home	77.4	83.3
Neighbourhood as a Place to Live	80.4%	84.3%
Rent Provides Value for Money	78.2%	88.5%
The Way the Service Deals with Repairs and Maintenance	75.3%	79%
Listens to Views and Acts on Them	54.5%	75.5%

## 7.2 Building Cleaning Survey

In summer 2015 we carried out a survey of all tenants who live in blocks of flats and who receive our cleaning service. The survey revealed that since we last surveyed tenants in 2009, satisfaction levels had gone down; there was a lack of awareness of how to complain about the standards of cleaning and a large number of tenants told us that they were not satisfied with the outcome of the complaints they had made.

The survey also showed that the most serious problems were litter, dumped rubbish and the cleanliness of the bin rooms and lifts which were rated as being in need of improvement. Some of the tenants who completed the survey told us they were interested in getting involved to help us to improve things, so in October we hosted a tenant forum to ask tenants for their ideas. As a result of the feedback we put together an action plan, and a group of tenants has joined a steering group to put that plan in to action.

The tenant group has started by looking at how to publicise the service and help tenants to understand the level of service to expect; helping tenants to understand how to complain about the service; and by carrying out joint block inspections with the cleaning team and the Block Maintenance Officer. The tenant group attends regular meetings with the building cleaning team managers. The tenant group is also keen to make sure that all tenants are aware of their responsibility to help to keep their blocks clean and tidy and to ensure that items are not left in communal areas to present a fire hazard.

### **7.3 Anti- Social Behaviour**

The Anti-Social Behaviour Team deals with tackling anti-social behaviour to help tenants feel safe, secure and happy in their homes. When a case is closed the victim/witness is asked to give feedback on how the service was delivered, what works well and also look for areas where improvements can be made by completing a 'closed case survey'. In 2015/16 of those who completed the survey 89.5% were very or fairly satisfied with how their case was dealt with. This is a 4.5% increase from previous results. In addition 88.9% were very or fairly satisfied with the outcome of their case. This is a slight decrease of 0.1% but the satisfaction levels are still high and the service will continue to listen to victims/witnesses to inform service development.

### **7.4 Tenant Participation**

At our Housing Consultation day in August 2015, Housing Services recognised the work that many tenants had done on the tenant panels within the formal tenant participation structures, with the presentation of certificates. Some of those tenants then asked if they could then plan and hold their own event to acknowledge the work that tenants do, not just on the formal tenant involvement panels but also within their neighbourhoods and estates. The event was set up and an evening of celebration took place with tenants celebrating the work of other tenants and awards presented by the Mayor and the Lead Councillor for Housing. Tenants thoroughly enjoyed the event and another event is planned for this year with a wider nominations process involving all tenants across our estates whether they are formally involved in tenant participation or not.

## **8.0 SERVICE PLAN 2016/2017**

8.1 In the coming year a number of key strands of work will be delivered by the service to continue to improve services to and outcomes for our customers, these include:

- The delivery of 28 units of new temporary accommodation at Lowfield Road for homeless families (subject to Planning approval)
- Continuing to promote the Council's under-occupation scheme to free up larger homes for those in need and encouraging partner housing providers to adopt similar schemes.
- Developing a new housing company 'Homes for Reading Ltd' wholly owned by the local authority to acquire a portfolio of properties, and make a proportion of these available at Local Housing Allowance rent levels for homeless households.
- Increasing the efficiency of adaptations and improvements to homes for frail and disabled residents a through the in-house replacement for the Home Improvement Agency (HIA)
- Reviewing the Homeless Pathway which provides accommodation for single homeless people and re-tendering these contracts.
- Continuing our response to Welfare Reform to assist those in most need.

- Working with adult and children's social services to help to plan for future housing needs for their service users.

## 8.2 Areas of performance which we are focused on for the year ahead are:

- Percentage a. of repairs that are quality checked (inspected post completion)
- Further improving turnaround times on empty homes (voids) as this increases income and makes best use of stock, including on homes in the PFI area.
- Maintaining rental income in the context of the impacts of welfare reform.
- Improving customer service and communications especially in respect of repairs.
- Improving customer satisfaction with cleaning services.
- Continuing to develop homelessness prevention practice.

## 8.3 Profile on Works to Council Stock

This coming year the service will spend £15 million on a planned programme of works to Council homes and the day to day repairs service. The planned programme covers improvements to homes across the borough. Carrying out work in a planned cyclical way enables the service to spend less overall on day to day repairs. This year's programme will include:

- Over 300 new kitchens.
- Over 250 new bathrooms.
- External repairs and decoration.
- Installation of gas central heating to Granville Road flats.
- A Window replacement programme in Elizabeth House Flats.
- The continued refurbishment of the Hexham Road flats.

## 9 CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 9.1 The work of the Housing service contributes to safeguarding and protecting those that are most vulnerable and providing homes for those most in need. In addition the service promotes equality, social inclusion and a safe and healthy environment for all.

## 10 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 10.1 The service has a strong link with tenants through its tenant participation structures which include quality panels, a scrutiny panel and a consultation committee. In addition the service holds a tenant consultation day once a year which is well attended.

## 11 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 11.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not relevant for this report.

## 12 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 There are no legal implications for this report. As noted above, a raft of Government legislative change is impacting on the social housing sector currently including



provisions within the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 and the Housing and Planning Act 2016. Further guidance, regulation and secondary legislation is anticipated which will enable a fuller appraisal of the impacts of these changes.

### **13 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 13.1 The approved Housing Revenue Account budget for this year is 40 million pounds which includes day to day repairs, planned works and improvements, tenant services, PFI as well as capital financing costs.

### **14. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 14.1 None

**READING BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**REPORT TEMPLATE**

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The financial implications arising from the proposals set out in this report are set out below:-

**1. Revenue Implications**

Use this Table in the report or as an Appendix to set out the revenue implications:

	2015/16 £000	2016/17 £000	2017/18 £000
Employee costs (see note1)			
Other running costs			
Capital financings costs			
<b>Expenditure</b>			
Income from:			
Fees and charges (see note2)			
Grant funding (specify)			
Other income			
<b>Total Income</b>			
Net Cost(+)/saving (-)			

The net cost of the proposal can be funded from (specify service and approved cost centre budget).

**Note 1:** Specifying any one off early retirement and redundancy costs. With regard to early retirement costs set out capitalised pension cost and pay back period in a separate paragraph.

**Note 2:** In a separate table/appendix set out detailed fees and charges proposals and sensitivity analysis.

**2. Capital Implications**

Capital Programme reference from budget book: page line	2015/16 £000	2016/17 £000	2017/18 £000
Proposed Capital Expenditure			
Funded by			
Grant (specify)			
Section 106 (specify)			
Other services			
Capital Receipts/Borrowing			
<b>Total Funding</b>			

**Note:** where more than one option /proposal is being made it may be easier to set out the above information in an Appendix.

**3. Value for Money (VFM)**

Given the continuing need to demonstrate VFM please include evidence that the proposal offers VFM (e.g benchmarking data)

**4. Risk Assessment.**

Include relevant comments around any key financial risks associated with the proposal(s)