

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	15 MARCH 2017	AGENDA ITEM:	11
TITLE:	PROGRAMME OF WORKS TO COUNCIL HOUSING STOCK 2017-18		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR DAVIES	PORTFOLIO:	HOUSING
SERVICE:	HOUSING AND NEIGHBOURHOODS	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Reading Borough Council's Housing Property Services manages the day to day repairs, planned maintenance and void repair works to approximately 5,600 Council properties which are let throughout the borough.
- 1.2 The report summarises the key elements for delivery next year and highlights achievements over the past financial year. Appendix 1 provides some illustrations of programmes of work and the impact that these have for our tenants and communities. Appendix 2 sets out the proposed work programme for 2017-18.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee approves the programme of planned work for Council Housing Stock for 2017-18 set out in Appendix 2, and that authority is given to the Head of Housing and Neighbourhood Services following consultation with the Lead Councillor to make minor amendments during the course of the year to the planned programme of works.

3. POLICY CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Council seeks to ensure that its housing stock is appropriately maintained in accordance with an agreed Reading Decent Homes Standard (agreed with tenants); that estates are well-managed; and that Council homes are healthy and safe places to live (free from Category 1 Housing Health and Safety Rating System hazards).

- 3.2 The Council has also actively pursued a programme to improve the thermal efficiency of its stock so that homes can be heated efficiently and cost effectively (reducing overall environmental impact and fuel poverty). Beyond bricks and mortar the Council works with tenants to improve the wider environment on our housing estates to meet the needs and aspirations of residents.
- 3.3. Reading must ensure that the requirements of the stock are affordable in the context of its Business Plan.
- 3.4 Repairs are delivered predominantly by an in-house workforce, with some works (to allow for fluctuations in volumes) and specialist services delivered externally.

Key Achievements In 2016-17

- 3.5 In addition to carrying out day to day to day repairs and a cyclical maintenance programme the Housing Property Services Team achieved the following in 2016-17:
 - Completed the refurbishment of 2-54 Bamburgh Close as part of the Hexham Road Refurbishment Project of five blocks of flats and environs.
 - Took on the responsibility for minor and major disabled adaptations work in the borough (excluding major private sector works) after Aster Living's contract came to an end. Since June 2016, the team have delivered 33 major and 193 minor adaptations to RBC's Housing stock and 574 minor adaptations to private dwellings.
 - Obtained Planning permission to build 28 units of temporary accommodation at Lowfield Road.
 - Awarded accreditation from Safecontractor for its commitment to achieving excellence in health and safety. Safecontractor is a leading third party accreditation scheme which recognises very high standards in health and safety management amongst UK contractors.

4. PROPOSAL: PROGRAMME OF WORK

- 4.1 The budget for the works programme for 2017-18 is £15,146,000. Key elements for delivery include:
 - Refurbishment of Kielder Court flats - the continuation of a flagship programme to greatly improve the four storey block properties at Hexham Road Estate. This affects 135 flats in total and each year work is carried out on a block of 27 flats. Following completion of works at Kielder Court, the remaining two of the five blocks will be refurbished over the following two years.
 - Installation of gas central heating as a replacement for storage heating at the 8 storey blocks at Granville Road;
 - Commencing work to replace the water mains at the Wensley Road high rise flats. The programme will take 3 years and will cost circa £1.8 million in total.
- 4.2 Work will continue with the kitchen and bathroom replacement programme with an extended colour range for kitchen doors and an enhanced specification for bathrooms which includes over bath showers.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 5.1 The Tenant Improvement Fund budget is used by RBC tenant groups to provide local improvements to our housing estates. This has been used to improve lighting, notice boards and mobility access, as well as to add security features, tarmac paths and improved signs. It has also been spent on new drying and bin areas for flats. This budget is marketed as “tenant choice” at the request of resident groups and managed by the Tenant Services team.
- 5.2 Schedules of refurbishment at a local level are shared with Ward councillors annually.

6. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 6.1 There is no requirement for an equality impact assessment associated with this report.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Decent Homes Standard is a government-set standard for council housing. The standard describes a decent home as one that is fit to live in, in a reasonable state of repair, has reasonably modern facilities and services, and is warm and weatherproof. The standard was updated in 2006 to take account of the Housing Act 2004, included the implementation of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS).

8. SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The approach to an energy strategy for Reading’s Council owned housing is to secure the maximum energy saving or return for the investment made. In effect this means placing a strong emphasis on providing high levels of insulation and modern efficient heating systems within homes. Consequently, Reading Borough Council has the highest energy rated stock within our benchmarking group (currently SAP 73.3 - Standard Assessment Procedure or SAP is an agreed scale to measure the energy of homes).
- 8.2 The Council also places importance on improving the poorest energy rated stock and have externally insulated all of our concrete built homes. There are now only a dozen homes with a rating of E or below (a SAP energy rating less than 55) and these are properties where tenants have refused improvements or heating.
- 8.3 Last year circa 500 homes benefited from the installation of solar panels. The Council additionally aims to insulate all lofts to a minimum of 200mm insulation within two years.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The budget for the works programme is £15,146,000 and is funded through the Housing Revenue Account. The budget is set as part of the Council's annual budget setting programme.
- 9.2 The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) deals with council housing finance. The main income is housing rent, and all expenditure related to council housing is charged to this account. The Housing Revenue Account is 'ring-fenced' (separate) from other Council activity (this is accounted for through the 'General Fund' account). In April 2012 council housing finance moved to a 'self-financing' regime nationally. Councils took on full responsibility for the long-term financial management of council housing. This means that councils keep their rental income and use it to manage and maintain their housing stock. At the point of self financing councils whose debt was lower than the value of their stock borrowed to pay the difference to the government.
- 9.3 Self-financing requires the Council to take a long-term planning approach - to ensure that practically all of the Council's housing stock continues to meet the 'decent homes standard', to repay the debt and to ensure the continued viability of the Housing Revenue Account.
- 9.4 Based on a range of assumptions, and taking into account the national requirement introduced from 2016/17 for rent in social housing to reduce by 1% per annum for four years, there are sufficient resources to manage, maintain and invest in the Council's existing housing homes and surroundings over the next 30 years. The rent reduction has curtailed the extent to which the authority can deliver wider improvements, for instance, to accelerate our programme of external insulation for hard to treat cross-wall properties, to extend and convert properties to optimise use of our stock, to increase our re-let standard and to improve the visual amenity and external decoration of some flatted blocks.

Budget Summary

Works to Council Housing Stock	16/17 Budget	16/17 Probable	17/18 Budget
	£'000	£'000	£'000
Responsive & Planned Repairs	5,518	5,650	5,865
Major Repairs	7,843	7,243	7,541
Hexham Road	1,400	1,400	1,400
Hexham Road c/f	-1,200	-1200	0
Emergency Provision	200	200	200
Total	13,761	13,293	15,006

- 9.5 The 2016/17 responsive and planned repairs expenditure is likely to be broadly on budget (the probable expenditure above contains a contingency of £200k). Major repairs expenditure will be underspent mainly due to a provisional £600k included in the budget for an updated heating system at Coley High Rise. This is not happening in 2016/17 and instead budget has been identified to replace the water mains at the high rise flats in 2017/18.

9.6 The 2017/18 budget is similar to the 2016/17 with the main difference being that there is no carried forward budget associated with Hexham Road. There is a net increase of £45k ignoring the Hexham Road budgets. The main changes are an increase of £150k to the roofs and structures budget and smaller increases in the communal lighting, flooring and insulation budgets. The gas servicing budget has been reduced by £200k as the 2016/17 budget containing funding for legionella checks which have been completed. The corresponding legionella works budget has also been reduced to reflect this.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 None

Appendix 1: Our Success to Date

Regeneration/Refurbishment

Dee Road

The Dee Park regeneration which is being delivered by the Dee Park Partnership is well underway and has seen 260 council units demolished. These units have been replaced by over 400 homes and this includes 177 general needs and 60 extra care flats.

Houses at Dee Park have also benefited from a Council programme of external insulation to cross-wall constructed properties as illustrated.



Before



After

Hexham Road

A scheme to completely regenerate 5 apartment blocks at the centre of the Hexham Road estate has begun to radically influence the ambience of the estate and improve the living conditions and wellbeing of residents in the blocks. The scheme includes new kitchens, bathrooms, improved insulation and external cladding as well as safety works.



Before



After

Roof Works

Reading has undertaken a number of flat to pitch roof conversions with the aim of eliminating maintenance issues.

Flat roofs often require costly maintenance and repair to resolve leaks. Conversion has reduced repairing requirements as well as enhancing the appearance of the property. Schemes have been completed at:

- Southcote Parade
- Granville Road
- Aveley Walk



Double Glazing and Composite Doors



The vast majority of the Reading housing stock now has double glazed windows. A very high proportion also benefit from reduced heat loss glazing. Reading have also been fitting trickle vents, restrictor stays and fire escape hinges prior to this being a regulatory requirement and many of our older installations have been upgraded through planned maintenance programmes. Reading will soon be embarking on replacement programmes for our early double glazed units.

Reading has been fitting high security and low maintenance composite front doors and shed doors for many years now. Front doors are supplied with shoot bolt locking which enhances security, safety chain, letter plate with draft excluder, thumb turn locking on the inside for ease of escape in fire. A range of styles and colours are available in wood grain effect.

Damp and Condensation

The biggest problem in social housing relates to damp and condensation primarily through life-style issues and a lack of adequate heating and ventilation.

We have invested in thermo hydrographs so we can monitor temperature and humidity readings in properties that have issues.

We have written a damp and condensation leaflet for tenants specifically about our stock to educate them on heating and ventilating their properties adequately to prevent problems arising.

We provide detailed advice to tenants and leave them with monitoring gauges that they can use to see where condensation levels are becoming problematic.