



**Report To:** Housing Portfolio Holder  
**Lead Officer:** Director of Housing

15 March 2017

---

## Affordable Homes Service Plan 2016/17 and 2017/18

### Purpose

1. To provide the Housing Portfolio Holder with an update on the progress of the 2016/17 Service Plan and approval of the 2017/18 Affordable Homes Service Plan.
2. This is not a key decision but has been brought before the Housing Portfolio Holder because it sets out the proposed key actions for the Affordable Homes Service for the forthcoming year.

### Recommendations

3. It is recommended that the Housing Portfolio Holder approves the Affordable Homes Service Plan for 2017/18 (Appendix 2) and notes the progress to date on existing projects within the 2016/17 Service Plan.

### Reasons for Recommendations

4. The draft Service Plan actions for 2017/18 set out in Appendix 2 have been developed taking into account the key aims and objectives of the Council, central government direction and the forthcoming priorities for the Affordable Homes Service.

### Background

5. Draft actions to be included in the service plan for 2017/18 were agreed at the Housing Portfolio Holder meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2016. These have now been incorporated into the Affordable Homes service plan template for monitoring throughout the year.

### Considerations

6. As part of this process, the current service plan for 2016/17 has been reviewed on its progress as outlined below:

<b>P1 – Housing Strategy 2016-2021</b>
To produce an interim statement for the Housing Strategy and work towards a new Housing Strategy for 2017.
Proposed government changes through the Housing & Planning Act 2016, awaited legislation following this and the White Paper published in January 2017, has meant that the interim statement has been delayed awaiting further information from the above legislative/policy changes. The interim statement will be considered by the Housing Portfolio Holder in March 2017. It has been agreed that the new full Housing Strategy will be developed jointly with Cambridge City Council, under the umbrella of the Combined Authority Housing Strategy.
<b>P2 – Wilford Furlong &amp; Brickhills, Willingham</b>
To implement second phase of the project to undertake works to improve the energy efficiency of properties at Wilford Furlong, Willingham as identified in the Housing Portfolio Holder Report of March 2016.
See attached report – Appendix 1

### **P3 – Tenant Profiling Project**

To obtain robust and up to date information on the profile of our tenants to enable us to understand the impact of welfare changes and help mitigate any negative impacts. In particular we need to understand who might fit within the over £30k household income category.

This project was originally conceived as a way of ensuring tenancy records were accurate and up to date with particular reference to historical tenancies where there had been very few requests for service or where the Council had little contact with the tenant. Collecting this information would ensure the Council are in a strong position to respond to any welfare reforms that maybe considered in the future.

The government then stated its intention to make high income earning tenants pay market rent – more commonly known as “pay to stay “. The focus of the project then shifted towards a need to collect income data. Late last year the government announced that it would not be enforcing this policy and the project has therefore returned to the original focus.

In October last year a pilot project was launched with the intention to test what we were seeking to do, learn from what had worked well and consider aspects that needed to be changed before moving ahead with the intention to visit every tenant and equity share leaseholder to complete a questionnaire.

The pilot was a success, visiting around 60 tenants before the end of the year. There were some clear indicators from the exercise that have informed and influenced how to move the project forward.

In the last few weeks a project team has been established to oversee and coordinate the process of ensuring all of our 5200 tenants and leaseholders are visited. It is anticipated that visits will be completed by the end of March 2018. This is a big commitment with the project relying on existing staff capacity to carry out the visits and complete the questionnaire.

Other drivers for completing the project include:

- Help the Council to deliver quality and timely services that are tailored to customer needs and ensure the best use of resources and value for money
- Check the overall condition of the Council’s properties
- Help identify any customer support needs and to refer them to specialist agencies
- Identify tenancy fraud and other breaches of tenancy

The **profiling** exercise of collecting, analysing and grouping information about our tenants will give the Council a detailed picture of their characteristics including demographics, needs and behaviours, attitudes, lifestyles and aspirations.

Once the data is collected, a new project will be established that will focus on **Insight**. This is the subsequent use of information to develop comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the relevant aspects of tenants’ behaviours, beliefs, needs, desires and aspirations. This will inform how best to communicate with tenants and ensure that the services are designed and delivered to align with tenants’ needs and aspirations. Insight is therefore a trigger for action.

### **P4 – Tenure Models Review**

To ensure homes remain affordable for tenants and are not lost from the supply of affordable housing

This project was identified in light of ‘pay to stay’ proposals to look at alternative options for tenants who may be affected by the proposed policy change. It was announced in November 2016 that this policy would no longer be mandatory for council tenants. This project has therefore not progressed and has been closed.

Alternative tenure models for affordable housing more generally is being progressed through options such as the RentPlus scheme (rent to buy) and equity models. These will be further explored in 2017 as part of the Housing Strategy development.

### **P5 – Delivery Model Review**

To explore new and efficient ways of delivering core front line services.

The Response Repairs, Voids and Packaged Works contract with Mears has been reviewed. The

agreed way forward was to progress towards a new way of contract management and improved service delivery. A Supplemental Agreement has been drawn up to reflect this. The changes in summary include co-location of staff at Cottenham, changing the categories of repairs to emergency and appointable only, changing the charging mechanism to Price Per Property with agreed exclusions and additions, and Social Value through the employment and secondment of a dedicated Neighbourhood Support Officer to provide specialist debt advice to tenants with high rent arrears and assumed other debts.

The new way of working goes live in April 2017. As the onus is now on the contractor to deliver an efficient service the Council is expecting higher levels of repairs being completed at the first call. The performance monitoring will focus on this as well as appointments made and kept and tenant satisfaction.

On the back of the success of the Handyperson Service a cleaning service is being explored through providing chargeable domestic cleaning for residents who want it. An initial pilot is scheduled to run in April 2017.

A review of the role of sheltered housing and particularly communal rooms and how we support our older people will be taken forward following the Tenants Scrutiny Team review of communal rooms and the final CIH report on the role of sheltered housing today.

#### **P6 – HRA Service Review**

Full value for money review of the HRA to ensure maximum efficiency and identify any potential areas for cost savings to help meet the £1M savings required over the next four years of the HRA Business Plan.

Housemark undertook a desktop review of costs and performance trends over the last three years.

The emerging trends identified:

- SCDC remains a top quartile performer for rent collection, which is a significant achievement at a time of welfare reform and financial constraints
- SCDC remains a top quartile performer for relet times of vacant homes, which again is excellent for the overall business
- 12% of the housing stock no longer meets the Decent Homes standard. SCDC are fully aware of the components that no longer meet the standard and have a replacement programme in place.
- Overall performance has dipped, which is primarily a reflection of the continued reduction in customer satisfaction.

It is anticipated that with the changes to the responsive repairs contract for a 'right first time fix' and 'appointments kept' for repairs, this may lead to increased satisfaction. We will also explore further some of the recommendations put forward by Housemark and suggestions made as part of the staff/tenant focus group sessions.

Savings required for 2017/18 and 2018/19 have been identified as part of the HRA Business Plan.

#### **P7 – Self Build Project**

To comply with the new statutory requirement to promote self build and provide a self sustaining sub regional service, as well as maximising HRA assets where there is the potential for self build plots.

Business Case for self sustaining self & custom build service approved 2016. SCDC as a DCLG Right to Build vanguard now hold a self build applicant register of around 575 and are working on a land register to comply with the Housing & Planning Act 2016 and the Self & Custom Housebuilding Act 2015. 100 HRA owned plots identified for sale once outline planning and services in place. First plot achieved planning Jan 2017 with around 20 key plots coming through during 2017. Receipt from plot sales will be HRA funds used to support new council affordable housing new build schemes in the District. Self Build Regional Manager recruited. Self Build Project Officer to be recruited. Discussions underway with Abris to create software to support the roll out of a regional service to other LA's with SCDC acting as the self build "hub" for registers and events locally and regionally; for a fee. DCLG to announce 'burden grant' for each LA to support the legislative duties shortly.

#### **P8 – Stock holding Options**

Complete a feasibility study on the options to help mitigate the impacts from the potential sale of high value council properties.

Independent consultants commissioned to undertake a market assessment analysis and look at potential options for selling on Council properties. Government announced that the proposed scheme to sell high value council properties would not be implemented for 2017/18 and further details for implementation are awaited before the project can progress further.

#### **P9 – New Build and Housing Development Agency (H DA)**

Work with Cambridge City to launch new Housing Development Agency to increase delivery of

housing.
Greater Cambridgeshire Housing Development Agency is now reporting to a Management Board and Member Reference Group with close links into the City Deal Board. The team is working across City and SCDC on HRA funded schemes and on expanding the pipeline through to 2019/20; including investigating and sourcing possible new funding streams. Branding, website and a social media presence being formed. Discussions underway between HDA partners and the governing body to assess the merits of the H DA becoming a separate company limited by guarantee or a formalised shared service. HDA has concluded a Cambridge Investment Partnership with Hill Investment (approved Jan 2017) to bring forward mainly general fund held resources within the City Council assets. The Agency has achieved completion of 100 homes across South Cambridgeshire and the City.
<b>P10 – Modular Housing Review</b>
Complete a feasibility study to explore the potential for system build and other modular homes to be able to maximise provision of homes, reduce construction costs and provide homes that are affordable.
We are working on a Modular Construction pilot project. Stage 1 to explore the designers and suppliers of modular systems in eastern region with research with Adapt and UEA. Second 2 to run OJEU procurement exercise to get a modular framework and build out a pilot site. 2017/2018 project. Framework can be shared with self build applicants.
<b>P11 – Local Employer Survey</b>
To understand the type/cost of housing needed to maintain the workforce of local employers in South Cambs and the City Council
A small survey was completed to employers in Milton to ascertain housing needs of workers, in particular those working on the science park. This survey did not produce any robust data due to the lack of response.
Cambridge Ahead are working on a similar project to assess housing needs for local employers covering a larger area and it was therefore agreed that this project should be closed to avoid duplication of work. Information will be shared and will support the development of the Housing Strategy.
Savills have also been commissioned by Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire to undertake detailed affordability analysis. The report is expected to be published by March 2017.
<b>P12 – Homelessness Risk Mitigation</b>
To ensure the Council understands and monitors the risks presented to homelessness following policy changes in welfare reform, the spending review and the Housing & Planning Bill.
The Chartered Institute of Housing are undertaking a review of homelessness in the district, which included an on-site visit in November. A final report is expected shortly, which will help to inform our new Homeless Strategy.
The Council has also started work on developing a new Private Sector Leasing scheme to replace the arrangements previously in place with King Street Housing, as this will be more cost effective for the Council.
The impact of the welfare reforms have been monitored, including close working with the Benefits team in relation to families affected by the Benefit Cap. The unaffordability of the private rented sector in the area is apparent as the highest cause of homelessness and highlights further the need to be able to access affordable accommodation through this sector through schemes such as the Private Sector Leasing scheme.
<b>P12 – Procurement of Housing IT System</b>
To undertake a procurement exercise for a fully integrated housing IT system
Project management to be undertaken by 3C Shared Services.
Requirement to undertake full EEC procurement process
Specification to be prepared by 3C Shared Services following completion of specialist workshops throughout January, February and March 2017.
Board meetings held every month to monitor progress and provide direction overall.

## **Options**

7. The Portfolio Holder is requested to approve the key actions identified for the 2017/18 Service Plan and to suggest changes or additions where required.

## **Implications**

8. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk management, equality and diversity, climate change, community safety and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered: -

There are no significant implications arising since the draft actions for the service plan 2017/18 were agreed by the Housing Portfolio Holder on 19 October 2016.

## **Consultation responses (including from the Youth Council)**

9. The Tenant Participation Group have been kept informed of the key challenges and priorities facing the housing service in the coming year.

## **Effect on Strategic Aims**

10. The Affordable Homes service plan is important for all four of the Council's main strategic aims.

## **Background Papers**

None.

**Report Author:** Julie Fletcher – Head of Housing Strategy  
Telephone: (01954) 713352