

# Public Document Pack



## COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE

**Date: Thursday, 19 October 2023**

**Time: 6.00pm,**

**Location: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage**

**Contact: Abbie Hamilton (01438) 242587**

**committees@stevenage.gov.uk**

Members: Councillors: S Mead (Chair), A Farquharson (Vice-Chair), J Ashley-Wren, F Chowdhury, J Duncan, M Humberstone, W Kerby, C McGrath, E Plater and C Veres

---

### AGENDA

#### **PART 1**

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

**2. MINUTES - 19 SEPTEMBER 2023**

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the Community Select Committee held on Tuesday 19 September 2023.

Pages 3 – 8

**3. PRE-SCRUTINY POLICY DEVELOPMENT - HRA BUSINESS PLAN**

As a piece of pre-scrutiny policy development, Members are invited to receive and comment on a presentation on the emerging updated Housing Revenue Account Business Plan.

Pages 9 – 22

**4. REPAIRS REVIEW MAPPING DOCUMENT**

Members are invited to comment on the Repairs review mapping document which collates the issues that the review is addressing and, on the evidence, compiled and on any officer responses provided.

Pages 23 – 38

**5. URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

To consider any Part I business accepted by the Chair as urgent.

**6. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

To consider the following motions:

1. That under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the ground that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1 – 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as amended by Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.
2. That Members consider the reasons for the following reports being in Part II and determine whether or not maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

## **7. URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

To consider any Part II business accepted by the Chair as urgent.

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

## COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 19 September 2023

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

**Present:** Councillors: Sarah Mead (Chair) (Chair), Alex Farquharson (Vice-Chair) (Vice Chair), Julie Ashley-Wren, Forhad Chowdhury, Mason Humberstone, Wendy Kerby, Conor McGrath and Carolina Veres

**Start / End Time:** Start Time: 6.00pm  
End Time: 8.07pm

### 1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received by Councillors Ellie Plater and John Duncan.

There were no declarations of interest.

### 2 MINUTES - WEDNESDAY 26 JULY 2023

It was **RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 26 July 2023 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

### 3 CULTURAL STRATEGY

The Chair introduced Councillor Loraine Rosatti, Executive Portfolio Holder for Culture, Rob Gregory, Operations Director, Sam Daisley, Museum Cultural Development Officer, and Jo Ward, Museum Manager/Curator.

Cllr Loraine Rossati informed Members that there had been a lot of progress since the Cultural Strategy last came before the Community Select Committee. They were focusing on “people powered art” and “people powered culture” which aimed to lead culture, heritage and leisure for our area and our people. There was a lot of activity and creativity at the community level and there was more the Council could do to support this, but not lead. This also linked to the Councils ambitions to reduce health inequality and improve mental and physical health. Covid and the cost-of-living crisis has impacted mental health and the ability to take part in creative activities that local residents did before.

The Operations Director gave a presentation which included:

- An Arts & Culture Officer was appointed in 2018.
- They were focusing on the Stevenage story of the first new town.
- The Junction 7 Creatives were formed in 2018 to come together in an

organised way to fund creative activities.

- There had been successful funding bids in 2020 to the Arts Council and National Lottery Heritage Fund.
- The vision was to have flagship performing arts, museum and heritage facilities, creative industries spaces and hubs to attract talent, an iconic public realm arts programme, and support for wellbeing and skills development.
- The ambition was to grow the festival and event offer, protect the Gordon Craig Theatre offer to provide a good or better facility, a new museum, high quality music facilities like Old Town Live, recognising the sports heritage in Stevenage, and the Hertfordshire Cultural Education Partnership in schools.
- The priorities were to encourage more people to participate in culture, particularly looking at ways to engage people who wouldn't typically be involved.
- So far, they had mainstreamed the Cultural and Museum Officer role as they recognised the importance of the museum.
- Junction 7 Creatives had created the utilisation of Meanwhile space, so empty buildings can be used for culture, arts, and creative potential. These would eventually be commercial buildings but in the meantime can be used as a creative space.
- There had been some projects such as Battle of the Bands, New Town New Art, new bus station artwork, and adding to the Stevenage walk of fame.
- They were focusing on culture led regeneration and ensuring culture was linked within the Stevenage regeneration.

The Museum Cultural Development Officer informed the Committee that:

- They had been planning an art and heritage trail to create a safe and interesting route, both cycle and path to view points of interest. There would be different routes for different abilities/times and would be a reusable resource.
- They planned to improve cycleways, such as new murals in three underpasses near the Stevenage Football Club.
- They were using the meanwhile use policy to display artwork to encourage community pride.
- They had a working relationship with Junction 7 Creatives and had projects such as the Only Connect project which aimed to liven up the open reach and broadband cabinets and discourage tagging. Boxes on Grace Way and London Road were nominated for the pilot.
- They were using event island as a centralised venue for different events, which are important and can display diverse cultures.
- There was a central home for Stevenage Museum being designed by architects. There had been resident involvement on Stevenage Day, in person and through online surveys. This would display various art works of Stevenage history and there had been collection developments such as a long-term loan of a car driven by Lewis Hamilton.

Cllr Rossati added that they wanted to expand the opportunity for art in underpasses

and showcase photos of Stevenage taken by residents and visitors. She added that the Council was in consultation with local people to involve them in new facilities such as the museum and new sport and leisure facilities.

The Museum Manager informed Members they had received pricing for the fitting for the new museum which totalled a maximum of £2.3m. They were receiving £2m of town funding but needed to confirm how much was allocated to building costs. They were beginning to look at a fundraising strategy for this. She also added that they wanted to make the collection accessible online.

A Member agreed artwork in the underpasses was a good idea and asked whether this would be rolled out across the town. Cllr Rossati advised that this was done in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council, and they needed to contribute funding as well. They wanted to get a priority list of underpasses to work on and start funding through various means, such as grants, fundraisers, or local community budgets.

Another Member asked whether there could be work done on the skate park in Bedwell as the gates were closed. The Operations Director advised that the ownership sat with Herts County Council. They were looking at how to protect and make it accessible and there were opportunities with the new leisure centre. Cllr Rossati advised that she had met with a skateboarding advocate and was interested in looking at how we can have safe and modern facilities.

A Member asked whether there was a nomination system for designing telecom boxes. Cllr Rossati advised that this project was linked with the graffiti project with Councillor Simon Speller and the Stevenage Borough Council cleansing teams. Open Reach had been working with the Council to clear graffiti and were open to designing the boxes. They were starting small and trialling, and then would look for funding for community-based ones, such as near schools.

A Member asked whether the schemes and projects would be viewed as too town centric. Cllr Rossati advised that there had been a concentration of funds around the town centre. They were interested in people powered art across Stevenage and there were opportunities for everyone to change the town centre dynamic and be part of the solution.

Another Member highlighted the shared culture in Stevenage town and heritage and asked how the different communities would be interconnected. The Museum Manager advised that the museum often did projects and got funding to work with community groups at how stories were being told. There was an audience development plan, and the museum was reflective of the community in terms of users but there was room to do more work.

Councillor Jeanette Thomas highlighted the community involvement across the town, such as the Art in the Park, Music in the Park, Sport in the Park, and the teddy bear picnic in Pin Green.

The Chair suggested an annual photography competition of photos of Stevenage. The Chair also suggested that the promotion of STEM subjects in schools should be

extended to include the Arts as this was being overlooked, so the acronym could be STEAM subjects with the A representing the Arts. She recommended that Officers make links with A Level and Level 3 Extended Diploma Arts students about engaging them in local arts projects.

The Chair thanked the team for their presentation and for the excellent focus on cultural issues that were happening in Stevenage.

#### 4 **PRE-SCRUTINY OF THE REVISED HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY**

The Chair introduced Councillor Jeanette Thomas, Executive Portfolio Holder for Housing & Housing Development, Charlotte Carter, Housing Business Support, Lori Smith, Housing Supply Manager, Tracy Jackson, Operations Manager Providing Homes, and Rob Gregory, Operations Director.

Cllr Jeanette Thomas informed Members that they had been working with the community and the Committee to look at the housing allocations policy and reminded Members they had to be aware that more people wanted homes than they had homes available. Stevenage had a housing development team who also built homes to sell to build more social housing. They were also retrofitting and maintaining the existing homes as well as building more.

The Operations Manager gave a presentation on the housing allocations policy which the Council was required to have by law. The policy outlined the process for how the Council let social housing and made the best use of the stock as well as maximising access and choice for applicants. The team were looking at producing an easy-to-read guide so everyone can use it and understand the policy. The aim of the review was to respond to the increasing demand for not enough homes, ensuring the policy was clear and helping those in the greatest need.

The first proposed change was to only accept applicants onto the housing register if they had a specific housing need. This was applied to the new policy as a qualification rule. Some Members raised concerns on how this would be means tested and it was advised that this would be difficult. Another Member asked whether this would change who can access the housing register. The Committee were advised that 16-year-olds, or anyone with a suitable housing situation, would not be able to access the housing register. The Committee were aware that this would be an unpopular move for many local residents but was realistic given the reality of national policy on social housing and therefore reluctantly supported this policy change.

The second proposed change was to disqualify those with sufficient savings or incomes from applying for social housing. This was not applied to the new policy as it was resource heavy given that each application would have to be means tested if it had been applied and the question of what was 'affordable' has changed due to the cost-of-living crisis. A Member asked whether there would be a financial test once they had applied and it was advised that an affordability test was only done with affordable housing, not social. The Committee supported not applying this to the new policy as it would be unworkable without means testing each case.

The third proposed change was to introduce a New Generation scheme which would give priority to 1 bed need adults to enable the downsizing of tenants. This was not applied to the new policy as the stock levels were not sufficient to support the New Generation scheme. The team would continue to review the impact of the new allocation policy. The Committee agreed that this policy option should not be included in the new policy.

The fourth proposed change was to reduce the number of bands that applicants can be placed into. This was applied to the new policy with the introduction of Band 1, 2, and 3. A Member asked whether specific bands were related to specific housing needs. The Committee were advised that the bands would vary in housing needs, and they were creating an easy-to-read guide on the bands and the eligibility for each. Members were also advised that people had the right to review if they did not agree with what band they were put into. The Committee agreed that this policy option should not be included in the new policy.

The fifth proposed change was to remove people who had not bid within 12 months. This was applied to the new policy and Officers would communicate with people on the register about their bidding. The Committee agreed with this policy option with the caveat that there would be some exceptions to the policy if no suitable sized property was available to bid on.

The sixth proposed change was to let homes based on housing need only, removing the sharing between bands and the quota. This was applied to the new policy, but some direct allocation was needed for aids and adaptations, temporary accommodation, or leaving home for an emergency. The Committee agreed with this policy option.

The seventh and final proposed change was to change the bedroom standard to allow more household members to share. Initially it was proposed to increase the age from 16 to 21. The bedroom standard was changed to 18 for same sex in the new policy, as well as not allowing those with a 2 bed need to bid on 3 bed properties. The Committee agreed with this policy option.

There were also other proposed changes which included:

- Care leavers were able to bid on 1-bed properties and had a high priority to increase their chances of securing a property.
- Homelessness Prevention Duty – priority was given to families who could stay with friends/family for additional time.
- Adults without children with no other housing need were unable to join the register.
- Statutory Homelessness Duty – discretion was applied, and they must qualify otherwise, such as residential local connection.
- Owed Relief Duty – they had the same priority as Main Duty which would reduce the strain on temporary accommodation.

It was **RESOLVED**: That the Committee agreed the Officers suggested housing allocations policy changes as detailed in the summaries above.

5 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

The Chair and Committee thanked Rob Gregory, Operations Director, who was leaving the Council, for his service and help to the Community Select Committee and wished him well for the future.

The Chair also invited Members to sign a book of farewell for Jim McManus, Director of Public Health for Hertfordshire, who was also leaving the Council.

6 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.

7 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

There was none.

**CHAIR**





# HRA Business Plan Review

COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE

19 OCTOBER 2023

# A reminder of what is impacting us...

- Last comprehensive review of HRA Business Plan in 2019/20
- The world has changed: social and financial impact of the pandemic; energy / materials and labour costs; Cost of Living; climate change
- Council responsibilities are growing – increased regulation through:
  - Social Housing Regulation Act
    - New Consumer Standards
    - New Decent Homes Standard
  - Building Safety Act
  - Fire Safety Act

# We have continued to deliver at significant breadth and pace...

---

Targets established in the 2019/20 plan have been met:

- 287 new homes provided since 2019
- Implementation of building safety legislation, electrical testing cycle and cyclical programme of planned maintenance
- Implementation and extension of Major Refurbishment Contract
- Implementation of Cooperative Neighbourhood Model
- Roll out of Customer Online Account
- Housing Older Persons Strategy; Allocation Policy; Under Occupation Policy; Local Lettings Policy



# Multiple Priorities in 2024/25 and beyond...

Meeting new regulatory requirements and full cost of regulation

New Consumer Standards with a focus on safety, transparency, engagement and fair allocation

Decarbonisation and energy efficiency

Page 12

Development of new homes and investment in existing stock to meet differing needs and growing demands

Maintenance, repairs and upkeep of existing stock

Fulfilling new Decent Homes requirements

Energy and Cost of Living Crisis

Greater resident involvement underpinned by clear governance and accountability structure

Recruitment, retention and growing talent

Maximising Income

Supporting residents in need

# Balancing the Budget

- Government social rent policy estimated to have reduced HRA rent income by £225 million over 30 years
- Tenant rent arrears remain historically high (26% increase in Tenant rent arrears between March and June 2023) as people struggle with increased food, energy and fuel bills
- Impact of Government welfare reform has hit the most vulnerable - tenants in receipt of Universal Credit and in rent arrears is 71% of the total overall arrears' cases



# Balancing the Budget

- Bridging revenue expenditure and investment in assets requires Council bids for grant funding:
  - £17.8 million for New Builds
  - £5.4 million decarbonisation
- In order to implement a viable 30 year plan a shift in HRA approach is needed so that significant regulatory, statutory and financial burdens are met
- Multiple risks to be mitigated over the lifetime of the plan
  - Rent policy uncertainty
  - New burdens funding
  - Inflationary pressures





# New Build Delivery

- Fulfilling 5 Star Quality Pledge
- Funding through RTB Receipts; Homes England; Capital Receipts
- New regulations requiring 30% less carbon emissions since 2022
- Resident 'buy-in' to new energy performance initiatives
- 529 new homes between 2024 and 2029
- 2,237 new homes over 30 years

Page 15



**Five Star Quality Programme** HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

- 1 Sustainable development
- 2 Genuinely affordable rents
- 3 Tenure blind design
- 4 Makes best use of land
- 5 Community led consultation



**Stevenage**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL



# New Build Delivery – a proud record!

- Measures to increase revenue income, support greater delivery and improve payback of capital projects:
  - Increase in affordable rented properties capped to LHA
  - Exploring Shared Ownership as a Tenure option for those that do not require full rented subsidy and have some aspirations for home ownership
  - Continue to leverage external grant funding opportunities

Page 16





# Asset Management

- Revised Asset Management Strategy focusing on:
  - Safe environments for tenants
  - Excellent customer experience through effective engagement
  - Investing in climate change solutions to reduce energy cost and carbon footprint
  - Compliance with future Decent Homes Standard; Building Safety; Fire Safety
  - Energy Performance Certificate target
  - Damp and Mould regulations



# Asset Management

---

- Implementation of improvements identified through the Ridge Review of the repairs and voids pathway
- Focus on clearing the backlog of empty properties (voids) in 2023/24 and transition from external contractor led works to in-house service by April 2025 (£550,000)
- Focus on tackling fencing repairs in 2024/25 (£850,000)

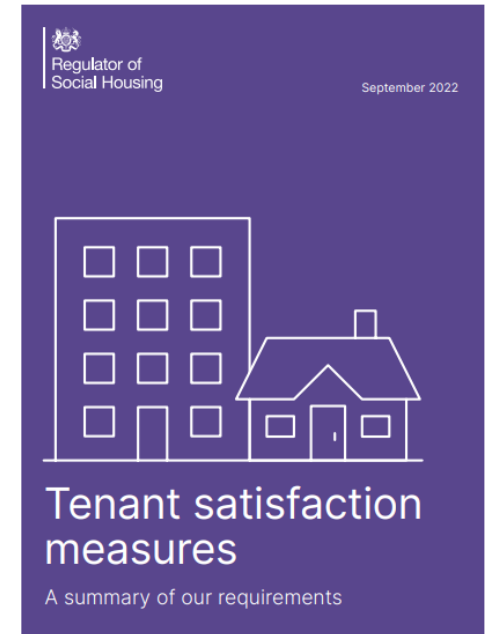
Page 18



# Housing Services

- Need for greater capacity in response to new Consumer Regulations
- Introduce Tenant Engagement Framework
- Housing Qualification requirement for all Housing Managers
- Implement Tenancy Audits
- Alignment of Housing and Neighbourhood Services to better serve customers

Page 19



# Housing Services

- Increased support for vulnerable residents
- Digital investment in income collection
- Review of Rent Arrears Action Plan

Page 20



# Timeline

---

27 October	HRA Review Report to Informal <b>Executive</b> Meeting
15 November	HRA Review Report to <b>Executive</b>
13 December	HRA Draft Budget and Rent Setting to <b>Executive</b>
27 January	HRA Final Budget and Rent Setting 2024/25 to <b>Executive</b>
24 January	HRA Final Budget and Rent Setting 2024/25 to <b>Full Council</b>

Page 21

This page is intentionally left blank



## Mapping exercise for Community Select Committee – Housing Repairs Scrutiny Review

Issue	Who identified to address this/provide data and interview? (whether they are internal SBC or external partner)	What evidence / data can they provide? (Where possible response and links will be provided in this column)	Meeting interview/ evidence received date, & how the information is gathered: (Link to Committee meeting where evidence/interview was undertaken)	Action & date required  If complete sign off in table:
Agree Scope for the review	S Weaver, Scrutiny Officer, Denise Lewis, AD Building Safety & Housing Property Services.	N/A	Draft scope for the review was agreed at 26 July 2023 meeting	
Interview the Executive Portfolio Holder, Housing & Housing Development	Cllr Jeannette Thomas Executive Portfolio Holder, Housing & Housing Development	Invite Cllr Jeannette Thomas to the 14 November meeting.	Interview at CSC 14 Nov 2023  Spoken evidence at meeting.	
Interview Denise Lewis, SBC AD Building Safety & Housing Property Services	SBC AD Building Safety & Housing Property Services	AD Building Safety & Housing Prop. Services Denise Lewis to talk CSC Members through the Mapping document for the review, working through the responses to the issues and questions raised in the scope and this document. CSC meeting 19 October 2023.	Spoken evidence at meeting.	

Issue	Who identified to address this/provide data and interview? (whether they are internal SBC or external partner)	What evidence / data can they provide? (Where possible response and links will be provided in this column)	Meeting interview/ evidence received date, & how the information is gathered: (Link to Committee meeting where evidence/interview was undertaken)	Action & date required  If complete sign off in table:
<p><b>Issue for review to cover – Responses to information requests from the repairs team</b></p> <p>Page 24</p>		<p>At the site visit on 29 August 2023, a number of questions were raised by Members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How much does the Council receive in re-charging tenants if they are liable for vandalism etc? <a href="#">I have requested this information from FTA Recharges.</a></li> <li>• Re satisfaction surveys via text messages to tenants following completed repairs, please can you share the data you have re responses received, and do you have numbers regarding wrong numbers recorded/not updated by the tenants where its not possible to get a post repair text response? <a href="#">Officers can provide a sample for CSC.</a></li> <li>• Can you provide a brief overview of the schedule of rates for repairs to share with Members? <a href="#">The Schedule of Rates</a> takes repair tasks and breaks them down into individual jobs that have a description, a code a timescale and a price. This book of codes can be used to tender work with contractors as they can submit their price as up or down in percentage terms of the base code price. It allows SBC to collect repair data as codes that can be analysed, this is preference to random descriptions that don't have an ability to be grouped.</li> <li>• Can you provide some anonymised top 20 bottom 20 examples you were referring to? <a href="#">Top and bottom 20 repairs</a> are something that we want to aspire to analysing. We are not in a position to do this at the moment due to the volume of changes already being</li> </ul>		



Issue	Who identified to address this/provide data and interview? (whether they are internal SBC or external partner)	What evidence / data can they provide? (Where possible response and links will be provided in this column)	Meeting interview/ evidence received date, & how the information is gathered: (Link to Committee meeting where evidence/interview was undertaken)	Action & date required  If complete sign off in table:
Page 25		<p>worked. The idea is that meetings are arranged monthly with Repairs, Investment and housing to understand why the top 20 properties have gained that position of high spend. The bottom 20 should also be analysed to understand why we don't hear from these properties. This type of work can help inform the properties that may benefit from tenancy inspections.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Members were keen to hear about the improved access to repair parts with the Gibbs and Dandy SBC depot in Stevenage, however previously Members were told that the siting of a depot for the previous contact with Travis Perkins at Cavendish was an improvement on what had gone before. What should give Members confidence that the current arrangement with Gibbs and Dandy will be more of a success than the last iteration? Gibbs and Dandy provide us with a scale of material availability that is impossible to match with a small supply arrangement at Cavendish. We have a dedicated shop area at Gibbs and Dandy. This supplier is one of the largest specialists in the area. I would be happy to show members this arrangement in person, only in person can the scale of the operation be realised.</li> <li>When can the annual gas safety visits incorporate a stock condition survey? The investment team (M&amp;E) compliance run this contract. The Repairs team continue to feed into investment for a wish list for future contracts.</li> </ul>		

Issue	Who identified to address this/provide data and interview? (whether they are internal SBC or external partner)	What evidence / data can they provide? (Where possible response and links will be provided in this column)	Meeting interview/ evidence received date, & how the information is gathered: (Link to Committee meeting where evidence/interview was undertaken)	Action & date required  If complete sign off in table:
Page 26		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you share any procedures you have for abandoned houses? The Repairs team only flag suspected information into the Resident and Estates team.</li> <li>• Please can you arrange a further site visit with one of the repair team operatives when they go out on a repair for Cllr Mason Humberstone and Cllr Conor McGrath? Please could you let me know the availability for Cllr Humberstone and Cllr McGrath and I will be able to accommodate. Also, if any Cllr wants to see the Gibbs and Dandy set up I am happy to make this happen.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Issue for review to cover - <u>Look at the current repairs standards</u> – consider the policy on ‘emergency’, ‘urgent’ and ‘routine’ repair works, and the scope of works currently undertaken, (e.g. fencing and other renewals) which Housing consultant Ridge are currently reviewing for the Council.</b></p>		<p>The review would like a sample of the ‘emergency’, ‘urgent’ and ‘routine’ repair works, to determine if there is a clearly definable current standard and policy in this area, and if not see what is in the Ridge report.</p> <p><u>Officer response:</u></p> <p>There is no current policy or standard and therefore needs to be picked up as part of the suite of policy, procedures and processes we need to put in place as part of the Repairs service improvement plan.</p>		

Issue	Who identified to address this/provide data and interview? (whether they are internal SBC or external partner)	What evidence / data can they provide? (Where possible response and links will be provided in this column)	Meeting interview/ evidence received date, & how the information is gathered: (Link to Committee meeting where evidence/interview was undertaken)	Action & date required  If complete sign off in table:
<p><b>Issue for review to cover - Contractor focus</b> - Provide a presentation from the SBC housing contractor focusing on some key stats including the breakdown on the volumes of works e.g. emergency, urgent etc, % of first time fix, staffing overview, some examples of what's working well and where the challenges are.</p>	<p>Covered by PowerPoint presentation to the CSC on 26 July 2023 &amp; Site visit 29 August 2023.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Repairs look after 8,500 tenanted properties.</li> <li>• During 2022/23 carried out over 2,000 emergency repairs, nearly 5,000 urgent repairs and over 14,000 routine repairs.</li> <li>• 95% of repairs are fixed first time.</li> </ul>	<p>Will be covered at meetings on 26 July 2023.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 Carpenters</li> <li>• 4 Electricians</li> <li>• 7 Plumbers</li> <li>• 6 Maintenance Operatives</li> <li>• 3 Plasterers</li> <li>• 2 Driver/Labourer</li> <li>• a Floor Layer, Bricklayer &amp; a Decorator</li> <li>• Work overseen by 3 trade Supervisors &amp; 3 Schedulers, and supported by 2 Maintenance Surveyors</li> </ul>	<p>To be agreed.</p>

Issue	Who identified to address this/provide data and interview? (whether they are internal SBC or external partner)	What evidence / data can they provide? (Where possible response and links will be provided in this column)	Meeting interview/ evidence received date, & how the information is gathered: (Link to Committee meeting where evidence/interview was undertaken)	Action & date required  If complete sign off in table:
<p><b>Issue for review to cover -</b>  <u>Client focus</u> - Provide insight from the Council's housing consultant with an overview from the 'client' in terms of the work of Ridge, how the refreshed asset strategy will hopefully increase the proactive / planned maintenance programmes and also look at the need to review the Stevenage Standard i.e. the fencing policy.</p>	<p>Will be covered by session with the AD Building Safety &amp; Housing Property Services – 14 11 23</p>	<p>The content of the Ridge review should be available to share with CSC Members at the 14<sup>th</sup> November meeting.</p>	<p>Will be covered at meetings on 14 11 23. Written documentation and verbal update.</p>	<p>To be agreed.</p>
<p><b>Issue for review to cover -</b> <u>Look at the current process officers use regarding receiving, logging and carry out repairs to see if it is fit for purpose</u> as Members are “concerned that the current processes do not appear to be straightforward or be running well”</p>		<p><u>Officer response:</u>  During the site visit 29 08 23, Members saw the current IT software system for logging and allocating repair works. This system coupled with a proactive workforce enabled jobs to be logged and allocated in a logical way, so this has largely been dealt with now.</p>		

Issue	Who identified to address this/provide data and interview? (whether they are internal SBC or external partner)	What evidence / data can they provide? (Where possible response and links will be provided in this column)	Meeting interview/ evidence received date, & how the information is gathered: (Link to Committee meeting where evidence/interview was undertaken)	Action & date required  If complete sign off in table:
<p><b>Issue for review to cover -</b>  <u>Identify ways to improve the current service including, where possible, streamlining the process to have one point of contact for tenants from the point they register a repair request</u> this would help to co-ordinate all repairs in the property, especially important in cases where there are multiple repairs needed in the same property.</p>		<p><u>Officer response:</u></p> <p>Officers have agreed to bring a draft improvement plan to the November meeting as by then the Council will have received the Ridge final report, which will enable Officers to collate a response.</p> <p>A single point of contact for tenants sounds attractive but could make matters worse. Within the Repairs service this isn't practicable, it's better that all staff have access to up-to-date information on repairs, so that anyone can deal with any queries. Not one person in the service manages the whole process. Initial reports come in via CSC (or increasingly will be on-line). Officers agree communications with customers' (and internally) needs to improve and this is a theme emerging from the Ridge review so</p>		

Issue	Who identified to address this/provide data and interview? (whether they are internal SBC or external partner)	What evidence / data can they provide? (Where possible response and links will be provided in this column)	Meeting interview/ evidence received date, & how the information is gathered: (Link to Committee meeting where evidence/interview was undertaken)	Action & date required  If complete sign off in table:
		improvements will need to have a heavy focus on this area.		
<p><b>Issue for review to cover - <u>Improve Communications</u></b> (The context is to avoid cases where “the current process requires too many steps with too many operatives and subcontractors to get a repair resolved”) Members are concerned that “Tenants are being told a repair will happen, then it doesn't and there doesn't appear to be any process for letting the tenant know what is going on and why,” “Communication about repairs is poor or non-existent leading to anger and frustration for tenants”</p>		<p><u>Officer response:</u></p> <p>As per the response above, communications (internal and external) will be a theme in the improvement plan – some of this is about policies, processes/procedures which will ensure clarity on roles and responsibilities, including coms with customers, but some of it is about culture and there will be an element of performance management in there too.</p>		
<p><b>Issue for review to cover - <u>Early identification of cases that could be described as in the “too difficult box”</u></b> – (The context is a</p>		<p><u>Officer response:</u></p> <p>Again, if we have good processes and procedures this will pick up complex</p>		

Issue	Who identified to address this/provide data and interview? (whether they are internal SBC or external partner)	What evidence / data can they provide? (Where possible response and links will be provided in this column)	Meeting interview/ evidence received date, & how the information is gathered: (Link to Committee meeting where evidence/interview was undertaken)	Action & date required  If complete sign off in table:
<p>Member quoted a case where “there has been a flooding issue that has been going on for multiple years, and it appears that no one can get to the root cause of the problem, so it falls into the ‘too difficult box’”</p>		<p>cases/issues. Sometimes these arise because it is not clear if these are ‘repairs’ or ‘major works’ and responsibility can be blurred at present because there isn’t currently a process for how teams manage these between them. Also, within Housing there is a need to build relationships between teams to support better collaborative working.</p>		
<p><b>Issue for review to cover - <u>Make better use of technology</u></b> – (For instance, tenants can send a photo of the problem, such as a blown down fence, that perhaps doesn’t need an officer to inspect before materials are ordered and repair booked etc. if the photo shows the extent of the repair)</p>		<p><u>Officer response:</u></p> <p>We already have the ability for tenants to send in photos to help with repairs diagnosis – Officers could look at how much this is used already in CSC and if we can promote this more with tenants. But again, need to manage expectations of tenants as it will not avoid inspections in all cases.</p> <p>The Ridge review suggests we have appropriate technology to support the</p>		

Issue	Who identified to address this/provide data and interview? (whether they are internal SBC or external partner)	What evidence / data can they provide? (Where possible response and links will be provided in this column)	Meeting interview/ evidence received date, & how the information is gathered: (Link to Committee meeting where evidence/interview was undertaken)	Action & date required  If complete sign off in table:
Page 32		<p>service but need to make better use of this, so again that will be a theme in the improvement plan. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using data on types of repairs to understand what drives demand on service and how we can reduce this through cyclical and planned works.</li> <li>• Investigate remote diagnostic tools such as Switchee and Aico but more likely to be viable for a targeted % of stock as installation across the stock would take a long time and also be very expensive in terms of both initial capital outlay and ongoing revenue requirements in terms of data monitoring and reporting but could look at business case but not until 2024/25 at earliest given other service priorities.</li> </ul>		



Issue	Who identified to address this/provide data and interview? (whether they are internal SBC or external partner)	What evidence / data can they provide? (Where possible response and links will be provided in this column)	Meeting interview/ evidence received date, & how the information is gathered: (Link to Committee meeting where evidence/interview was undertaken)	Action & date required  If complete sign off in table:
<b>Issue for review to cover - Site visit to repairs team</b>		Site visit completed and written response from two Councillors who accompanied repairs team operatives into tenants' homes are appended to this document.	Site visit 29 August agreed and completed.	Completed ✓
<b>Issue for review to cover – Climate Change Impact</b>	Interview the SBC Climate Change Officer & SBC Head of Climate Change. Veronica Chan, SBC Climate Change Officer & Fabian Oyarzun SBC Head of Climate Change, AD Planning and Regulation, Zayd Al-Jawed.	Ask the SBC Head of Climate Change, Fabian Oyarzun, what the impact is of this area? Future ways of working that can improve things.	To be agreed.	
<b>Issue for review to cover - Equalities &amp; Diversity Issues</b>	Various witnesses.  The review could reach out to disabled umbrella group to canvass opinions.	The review should consider what equality and diversity issues there are for Housing Repairs? This could encompass such issues as impact of major repairs (or planned maintenance) on disabled tenants, any language barriers, digital poverty?	To be arranged.	To be agreed.



## Notes of Site Visit to Housing Repairs Team on Tuesday 29 August 2023

Present:

Cllrs: Chair Sarah Mead: Conor McGrath; Julie Ashley-Wren; Mason Humberstone and Forhad Chowdhury.

Officers: Dean Stevens Service Delivery Manager, Housing Repairs and Stephen Weaver, Scrutiny Officer

Members met all of the Repairs Team and spoke to them about their work. Members were shown by Housing Repairs Team Officers how the online repairs booking system worked looking at live cases as they were received from the Customer Service Centre or directly via email, telephone or text messages from Tenants.

Issues that were established during the site visit included:

- Demand on repairs was in a large part driven by past decisions regarding the level of planned routine maintenance
- Two Councillors, Cllr Forhad Chowdhury and Cllr Julie Ashley-Wren accompanied repairs team members as they undertook a repair visit to a tenant and will report back on these visits to the Committee
- There was a policy discussion regarding whether or not the authority should continue to offer replacement fences following storm damage as this costs the authority circa £2M or whether there could be a form of insurance cover to provide a fund for tenants to replace at cost.
- There continued to be pressure on the repairs team and with contractors regarding their recruitment and retention of staff

Questions and data requests from Members following the site visit:

- How much does the Council receive in re-charging tenants if they are liable for vandalism etc?
- Re satisfaction surveys via text messages to tenants following completed repairs, please can you share the data you have re responses received, and do you have numbers regarding wrong numbers recorded/not updated by the tenants where it's not possible to get a post repair text response?
- Can the repairs team please provide a brief overview of the schedule of rates for repairs to share with Members?
- Can the repairs team provide some anonymised top 20 bottom 20 examples you were referring to?
- Members were keen to hear about the improved access to repair parts with the Gibbs and Dandy SBC depot in Stevenage, however previously Members were told that the siting of a depot for the previous contact with Travis Perkins at Cavendish was an improvement on what had gone before. What should give Member's confidence that the current arrangement with Gibbs and Dandy will be more of a success than the last iteration?
- When can the annual gas safety visits incorporate a stock condition survey, as was previously recommended and agreed upon?
- Can the repairs team share any procedures you have for abandoned houses?

- Please can the repairs team arrange a further site visit with one of the repair team operatives when they go out on a repair for Cllr Mason Humberstone and Cllr Conor McGrath?

**Feedback from Councillor Julie Asley-Wren site visit with repairs team electrician**

**Property 1**

The job code was for an extractor fan.

The property was already under the mould and damp team. The tenant had been waiting for 6 months for this visit. She was very welcoming and the operative was very respectful during the visit.

Unfortunately, the job was not as simple as replacing an extractor fan. The bathroom had a concrete air brick that on further inspection it was clear that this did actually connect to the outside.

The tenant informed us that the job was logged as an electrician and a bricklayer attending. But the electrician informed her that the only bricklayer in the team was on holiday.

There seem to be a number of issues with this job;

1. The work previously identified was not accurately communicated either to the repair team or within the team.
2. If the job required a bricklayer the timetabling of the work did not take into account the availability of appropriate staff.
3. This lack of clarity meant that it has failed to be completed and another appointment with the tenant will need to be made.
4. General inspections would have shown up this issue, from outside it is clear that this property is the only one in the neighbourhood that does not have an outside vent adjacent to the bathroom window.

**Property 2**

The code for this job was for an outside light and an internal light fitting. This appeared to a fairly simple job that would not require much time.

Once again, the operative was very pleasant and respectful of the tenant. Following a discussion, the tenant explained that the work was required to support a child with specific visual needs. This work would be paid for from a different budget related to the child accessibility needs. The specific issues were;

- 1) The job required an additional light to be fitted to the exterior wall rather than replacing an existing light. This meant that it would take longer as cables would need to be fitted and taken to the junction box.
- 2) As this work is to meet this child's needs, I wonder if expert knowledge about the best position for the light would have ensured that it best addresses their needs.
- 3) The other light fitting was due to be fitted within a porch (that would have previously been simply a covered area). There was not a light fitting in this area so once again additional cabling would be required. Unfortunately, this was not factored in to planning the job. The ceiling in this area had recently been newly plastered, this should surely have been done after the light was installed.

4) Due to the fact that the job was not as expected the electrician had to call the office to explain that he would need to be at the property for longer than expected. This would have a knock-on affect to other job that were already allocated to him.

This is why some level of time needs to be blocked out for such unexpected developments.

The electrician went to collect the required fittings and planned to return that afternoon.

I do not believe that my experiences are typical and that many if not most jobs are completed according to timetabling. Unfortunately, these two cases do throw up some of the challenges that still need to be addressed by the team.

Thank you for this opportunity to accompany the electrician and visit the office to meet the team to get an insight into the planning and computer system for repairs.

### **Feedback from Councillor Forhad Chowdhury site visit with repairs team plumber**

I have a couple of notes from the two site visits.

#### **Property 1**

Whilst visiting a flat in Symonds Green, which had a job description stating that the resident's basin had come out of the wall. However, upon myself and Mark's visit to their flat, it was clear that the tenants only had a problem with blockage. Fortunately, Mark had a plunger with him in the car, so he managed to deal with it straight away. These residents had previously had a problem with their bath and basin and had a negative experience whilst sorting their bathroom issues, Mark is also aware of their situation. They had been waiting a long time to deal with this and were not happy with the amount of time that the council took to repair all their bathroom's issues. I made note of this job as it shows one of the problems that can occur in a situation like this. Perhaps there is a delay or miscommunication happening between the housing officers and the repair teams. I mention this as the resident told me that she passed her issue onto a housing officer.

#### **Property 2**

My next visit was to Ripon Road dealing with an ongoing pump issue with the resident's shower. Mark advised the resident that it needs a multi skilled plumber who has electrical knowledge. Mark was telling me that this shower system would have been installed by a contractor, which only lasted for just over a year and then it started causing problems, and this problem has been ongoing for a while which doesn't seem to have a permanent solution. Despite this, this resident was very happy as she was receiving help from the council and was pleased with the fact that the repair team can not only take her issue down but send someone to her property. Overall, this resident was most pleased with the responsiveness of the system and how it works.

This page is intentionally left blank