

REPORT

3. HOUSING SERVICES

3.1 Housing Services is a group of interrelated services which includes the Housing Options Service, Private Sector Housing, Shropshire HomePoint and Housing Support.

3.2 Housing Options & Homelessness Service

3.2.1 During 2018/19 there were 1,490 homelessness presentations in Shropshire, of which 1,023 households were assessed as being owed a duty. Further to this there were an additional 1000+ presentations for advice and assistance. The three main reasons for homelessness continue to be Friends / Family evictions, end of Assured Shorthold Tenancies and fleeing domestic abuse.

3.2.2 Numbers needing to be placed in temporary accommodation continues to rise, as shown below using the snapshot data at the end of each quarter.

	Apr-Jun	July-Sept	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar
	2018	2018	2018	2019
	108	134	138	162
(Total With children)	32	40	40	50

3.2.3 Funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government MHCLG (£25,000) has meant we are able to focus resources on reducing the use of B&B accommodation, which is an unsuitable and expensive option of temporary accommodation. Alongside colleagues in the Place Directorate, a number of projects are being explored in order to improve outcomes for clients and reduce costs for the Council.

3.2.4 Following successful funding (£178,000) from MHCLG from the Rough Sleeper Initiative, a dedicated team of 5 officers is in the process of being set up. The team will include a Coordinator and 4 Inreach/Outreach workers. Initially the money is only for 12 months with the aim of reducing the annual count figure of 21 (from 2018). Although the aim is to reduce the numbers of those sleeping rough the Inreach/Outreach workers will also improve the support ongoing when housing is sourced.

3.2.5 The team continue to work with STaR Housing on a pilot project and are hopeful other registered providers will come on board to expand the scheme which sees households placed into temporary housing for 3-6 months before being able to take on the tenancy as their own. The Families First initiative which helps families with a disabled child access suitable housing is also proving extremely successful.

- 3.2.6 Shropshire Council's Housing Services has developed a number of accommodation pathways aimed at supporting specific groups identified at high risk of becoming homeless or threatened with homelessness, e.g. young people leaving care, former members of the armed forces, ex-offenders, individuals with substance misuse issues and former rough sleepers.
- 3.2.7 The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is currently under review and there will be a full consultation process in the New Year, including briefings for Cabinet and Members.

3.3 Property Conditions

- 3.3.1 The service has continued to see significant reports of owner-occupied properties which are in serious disrepair and exhibit a high number of Category 1 hazards (Housing Health and Safety Rating System). Hoarding remains a challenge for the Local Authority as a whole and a dedicated taskforce has been set up to enable better multi-agency working throughout departments.

3.4 Energy Efficiency/Affordable Warmth

- 3.4.1 Shropshire faces many challenges in relation to the age and type of housing, the availability of mains gas, and the population profile. From an estimated 130,000 domestic dwellings in Shropshire, over 20% were built before 1919. Mains gas is available to only 60% of properties, compared to 87% nationally and 21% of properties in Shropshire have an energy SAP rating of below 55 (band E). A further review of existing Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) data indicates that there are 98,716 dwellings in Shropshire with an EPC. 11,516 of these dwellings are F & G rated.

3.5 Warm Homes Funding

- 3.5.1 Shropshire Council has been part of 2 successful Warm Homes Fund bids. Both bids were undertaken in partnership with Herefordshire Council. The aim of the fund is to provide First Time Central Heating for residents that do not have central heating. The only exception being for those that have a wet central heating system that runs on Solid Fuel, which would also qualify. The scheme blends Warm Homes Funding with ECO3 monies to provide a free central heating system to the resident.
- 3.5.2 The Round 2a bid secured both Category 1 urban and Category 2 rural funding. Category 1 provides connection to the gas mains and a fully funded wet central heating system for those classed as fuel poor and vulnerable to illness from living in cold, damp conditions.

- 3.5.3 Homes need to be within 23 metres of the gas main. If we come across a number of houses together that are not connected to the mains but could conceivably be then this can be looked at as a mini scheme as well.
- 3.5.4 Category 2 provides first time central heating for those dwellings over 2 kms from the gas main. For this reason, the funding covers systems powered by LPG or potentially a small number of Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP) or Biomass Systems. Both categories have funding levels that will cover 150 systems split between the 2 counties. In practise due to the potential running costs of LPG systems a great deal of care is taken to make sure potential recipients are fully aware of the implications of fitting such as system and that they are going to be able to afford it. The level of funding makes it unlikely that the renewable systems will be viable in all but a few situations. This scheme has been running for a few months now and is proving successful.
- 3.5.5 We are still awaiting an update on the Round 3 bid.

3.6 Disabled Adaptations

- 3.6.1 In the financial year 2018/19 there were 350 Occupational Therapy referrals to the Private Sector Housing Team for property adaptations. The most common adaptations are Stairlifts.
- 3.6.2 In September 2018, the Mears contract was bought in-house, allowing savings in the service and for the team to work together rather than as two separate organisations. Processes are still being refined but the move has shown cases are being dealt with much quicker now.
- 3.6.3 Due to an increase in Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) funding and the team now being able to utilise the funding for discretionary as well as mandatory works, the Assistance Policy is being reviewed and will be out for consultation in the New Year.

3.7 Shropshire HomePoint

- 3.7.1 Shropshire HomePoint, the county's choice-based lettings scheme provides a one-stop customer focused solution to meet the increasing needs and aspirations of the people of Shropshire.
- 3.7.2 The current number of applications on the Housing Register is 5,471 (as of 1st November 2019) In 2018/19 there were 1,166 successful property lettings via the scheme. The team manages approximately 200 contacts from the public every day through telephone calls, emails and post.
- 3.7.3 The team are currently reviewing the Shropshire HomePoint Allocations Policy and hope to have the new document out for consultation in the New Year.

3.8 Housing Support & Contracts

- 3.8.1 Providing a roof is not enough and so alongside the physical rehousing of households, the service also manages, commissions, monitors and reviews a number of contracts with external organisations. Broadly they can be divided into accommodation-based support and floating support.
- 3.8.2 Current arrangements to prepare or sustain clients for independent living include, the Sustain Contract (floating support), a number of accommodation-based projects, the SHIP Project for Care Leavers, and the Independent Living Partnership Contract.
- 3.8.3 'Housing' continues to work closely with other Service Areas, such as Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Public Health to ensure best outcomes for those in housing need.

3.9 Step Down Beds

- 3.9.1 Housing and Adult Social Care have set up 6 beds within Extra Care Facilities in Shrewsbury and Ludlow to operate as Step-Down Beds to reduce Delayed Transfer of Care from hospital. The scheme looks to accommodate vulnerable adults for a maximum of 4 weeks who are ready for discharge from hospital but unable to return (i.e. they need an adaptation or waiting for their care package to be confirmed). This project has proved highly successful in relieving the need for unnecessary and expensive residential care placements for 42 individuals so far (June 2019).

3.10 Syrian Refugee Assistance

- 3.10.1 The civil war in Syria began in 2011, with over half the Syrian population leaving their homes to escape the conflict. In January 2014, the UK government established the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme in response to the Syrian refugee crisis.
- 3.10.2 Over 100 local authorities volunteered to resettle refugees. Shropshire is proud to have been able to help and has successfully rehoused 23 families. The majority of the families are settling well in Shropshire, although 2 have left to move closer to family elsewhere in the UK. The families have a dedicated employment worker via Enable who has successfully set up a number of placements and secured paid work for individuals.

3.11 Technology-Based Projects

- 3.11.1 The Service has begun a number of innovative projects to maximise the benefits from advances in technology, to encourage the development of smart homes, and where possible utilise mainstream consumer technology.

3.12 Broseley

3.12.1 Starting in 2017 in response to newly released consumer health technology, the Broseley project worked to harness the latest innovations in AI assistance, IOT wearables and smart devices to tackle community challenges such as social isolation and home monitoring even in remote areas of Shropshire. Using devices like the Fitbit the research was able to demonstrate how readily available technology could detect if someone had fallen in their home and even automatically raise an alert even if a person is unconscious. Making the national papers was the fact that using predictive analytics on the data from these devices meant we could now predict if someone was likely to fall days or weeks before it happens allowing services to use preventative measures to avoid a nasty accident resulting in a stay at hospitals.

3.12.2 The University of Chester is currently reviewing their research on the project before they publish the result in the next few months and the project has delivered some surprising and unexpected results. There have been a number of instances which we wouldn't have expected to see such as how the technology has acted as a draw for younger members of our volunteers families leading to more visits from their family. In one of our cases it was reported how the sleep tracking data from one volunteer's device alerted us to an undiagnosed sleep apnoea condition, later traced back to a recent change in medication. Following a conversation with the GP our volunteers condition has now improved.

3.13 ActivAge

3.13.1 Following on from the learning of the Broseley project, Shropshire Council was approached by Samsung to become part of the ActivAge project. The £22m project has 9 sites across Europe including Shropshire and aims to conduct a pilot similar to the Broseley project on a much larger scale.

3.14 TechSevern

3.14.1 'Housing Services' also recently held the 3rd TechSevern. The event, as per previous years, was well attended and promoted the Four Centres of Excellence in, Assistive Technology, Digi-Health Technology, Eco-Technology, and Modern Methods of Construction (MMC).

4. STRATEGIC PLANNING

4.1 Local Plan

4.1.1 The review of the Local Plan will provide an up to date Development Plan which will help to support growth and maintain local management over planning decisions during the period to 2036. The review started in January 2017 and has now been subject to four major stages of pre-submission consultation: In January 2017 with 'Issues and Strategic Options'; in October 2017 with 'Preferred Scale and Distribution of Development'; in November 2018 with 'Preferred Sites'; and in July 2019 with the 'Strategic Sites' document. The Policy Team are now focussed on preparing a full draft of the Local Plan for Cabinet in spring 2020 for further statutory consultation. It is then the intention to submit the Local Plan to Government for independent examination by the Planning Inspectorate in summer 2020.

4.1.2 The timetable for the Local Plan Review was updated in May 2019 to reflect the ongoing scale of the work required to assemble an appropriate evidence base for the Plan. It continues to be anticipated that the draft version of the Local Plan will progress to Cabinet in spring 2020, and this timeframe will ensure the Plan has sufficient opportunity to properly reflect the outcomes of evidence and emerging council strategies, in particular the emerging Climate Change and Housing Strategies.

4.2 Housing Completions

4.2.1 In 2018/19 there were 1,843 housing completions in Shropshire, maintaining the County's recent trend since 2017 of delivering above defined housing requirement levels. These high completion rates, along with a continued significant supply of committed sites has proven particularly positive for the Council's housing land supply position. The Council's up-to-date Five Year Housing Supply statement will be published this month and is likely to show in excess of 6 year's housing supply.

4.3 Community Infrastructure Levy

4.3.1 During the last 12 months, revenue from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) has increased by £8.3 million, reflecting higher levels of house building, with a total of £33.4 million CIL paid to date and a further £12.5m due. A member-led task and finish group has examined how CIL is collected and allocated to projects across Shropshire and a report to Cabinet will be considered in due course.

4.4 Housing Enabling & Development

- 4.4.1 The Council's policy requirement to secure affordable housing contributions (AHC) has accumulated a capital pot of £8.69m as at 31st March 2019 with £2.44m being received throughout the financial year. We are currently working on revised policies regarding the thresholds from which we can secure affordable housing (either on site or a financial contribution) which will be included in the Local Plan Review and revisions to supplementary guidance. These changes will provide an opportunity to reassess the position regarding when we can secure affordable housing contributions. Both Affordable Housing starts on sites and completions for affordable homes were down in 18/19 mainly due to the thresholds introduced by the ministerial statement with 223 starts and 260 completions. New ways to bring sites forward which will increase delivery are being worked on.
- 4.4.2 The Council continues to fund the development of additional affordable housing. During 2018/19 the Council spent £1.40m of it's S106 monies on 166 new dwellings. Shropshire Council was successful in attracting a grant of £0.107m from Homes England to help deliver Community-led schemes, this will fund members of staff who will work in partnership with communities to provide new local affordable housing and they are currently helping to initiate and develop several community-led schemes. Work has started on the 14th Community-led scheme which will add to the 206 community-led homes completed to date. In 18/19 12 new homes were funded utilising £156k the MHCLG funds we secured in previous years.
- 4.4.3 Since the launch of the Right Home Right Place initiative, 23 parish housing needs surveys have been completed, with a further 5 underway. Over 2600 responses are on the system so far. The first 2 community-led schemes which have come from the survey results are now being worked up.
- 4.4.4 Other work has included working with other departments to provide adapted and specialised accommodation for families in need and utilised S106 grants to provide affordable homes that meet the specific specialised accommodation requirements.

5. CORNOVII DEVELOPMENTS LIMITED (CDL)

5.1 Cornovii Developments Limited was established as a legal entity in July 2019 following resolution of Shropshire Council to establish a wholly owned Local Housing Company in February 2019. The rationale for the establishment was to meet housing need, recognising that “need” takes a variety of different forms. Accordingly, the CDL Business Plan is not limited by tenure and covers the needs of the whole county. Going forward, Cornovii will refine it’s approach to private rented sector homes and intermediate forms of housing such as shared ownership and rent-to-buy whilst initially delivering predominantly homes for sale at the first two sites.

5.2 Overton Road and Frith Close Developments

5.2.1 It is proposed that up to 57, 2, 3, and 4 bed homes are constructed at Overton Road with up to 29, 2, 3, and 4 bed homes constructed on the Frith Close site. It should be noted that more 2 bed homes are proposed on both sites than normally seen on new developments as there is a shortage of 2 bed houses in the County. It is intended that the development of homes will meet the Nationally Described Space Standard (NDSS).

5.2.2 This together with other key quality standards, will enable Cornovii to develop a range of standard house types to be used on most developments going forward. Through the Procurement Hub, Cornovii are contracting with Willmott Dixon. It is expected that Willmott Dixon will shortly be in contract for pre-construction works. It is during the pre-construction stage that detailed designs for both schemes will be developed. Cornovii have also made a number of other key appointments, which includes sales and marketing services and legal services to support these two development projects.

6. SHROPSHIRE TOWNS & RURAL HOUSING LIMITED

6.1 Shropshire Towns and Rural Housing (STAR Housing) is a Shropshire Council owned housing company. Established in 2013, STAR Housing manages the Council’s 4,100 Council homes in the Oswestry and Bridgnorth areas. It also provides support services as part of the SUSTAIN Consortium. It has established itself as one of the country’s best landlords delivering services greatly valued by it’s customers and the community.

6.2 Customer Survey 2019 Results

6.2.1 There have been big improvements in how tenants rate STAR Housing services since the Company was set up. A tenant survey was carried out in 2019. In the survey the Company was rated by tenants in the top 25% of the country's landlords for satisfaction with:

1. Overall service provided.
2. Value for money.
3. Neighbourhood.
4. Quality of homes.
5. Repairs and maintenance.
6. Listening to views and acting on them.
7. Recommending STAR Housing as a landlord.

6.3 Service Improvements

6.3.1 Among the improvements in the last year are:

1. Introduction of mobile working for the Neighbourhoods Teams (to add to mobile working in the planned repairs, responsive repairs and Supported Housing Teams).
2. Improved IT support by switching to Business World for key back office functions.
3. Introduced tenant portal online services and revamped website.
4. 2 x Tenant Liaison Officers to assist tenants to maintain their tenancy.
5. £40,000 allocated to various Neighbourhood Projects.
6. Funded 14 defibrillators for public locations in the Oswestry and Bridgnorth areas.

6.4 Performance

6.4.1 Key performance indicators are monitored to ensure that the Company meets the requirements of the Council contract and to achieve Company objectives. Of the 24 indicators for 2018/19, STAR Housing met or exceeded target on 18, within tolerance on 2 and missed 4. Key achievements are maintaining top quarter performance of Housing Company landlords in collection of rent and preventing evictions, ensuring 100% of homes maintain the Decent Homes Standard and ensuring that 100% of all homes have Gas Safe Certificates.

6.4.2 During the year STAR Housing were shortlisted for the awards 'Housing Repairs and Maintenance Team of the Year' and UK Housing Awards 'Innovation of the Year' for work with the SUSTAIN Consortium. The Company won the Resolve Award for 'Best Project' for work towards tackling County Lines drug dealing.

6.5 Future Plans

6.5.1 The Council Housing Options Appraisal process concluded in July 2019. The Council determined that the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and STAR Housing could with the dropping of the Government cap on HRA borrowing, build more affordable Council homes and contribute significantly to the Council's plans for meeting unmet housing need. Shropshire Council will retain the county's council housing stock, and STAR Housing will continue to manage it.

6.5.2 STAR Housing have a target to build 25 properties per year. Two small schemes in Albrighton and Shifnal are due for completion by the end of the month. They are now exploring with the Council the potential for a number of Council-owned sites to be developed for residential accommodation.

7. KEY PRIORITIES

7.1 The key priorities for the year ahead include:

- Submission of Local Plan Review for inspection.
- Production of new Housing Strategy.
- Delivery of more housing which more directly meets need in the county.
- Focus on work that delivers more people with a suitable home and the right home in the right place.
- Work with internal and external partners to ensure the benefits of the work across the services within the Portfolio are maximised in the county.

Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

None

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

Cllr. Robert Macey

Local Member

All Members

Appendices

None