

### Recovery Theme Plan: Housing

<b>Recovery Theme Title:</b> Housing
<b>Lead Officer:</b> Liz Grieve
<b>Lead Member:</b> Tony Thomas (Housing & Communities) Bobby Feeley (Homelessness)
<p><b>Summary of Recovery Theme:</b></p> <p>Housing is one of the Recovery Themes identified by the Chief Executive in the report shared with Cabinet in April.</p> <p>This report identifies the areas that merit particular attention with regard to Community Housing with regard to supporting Council tenants and others to recover from the period of lockdown and adapt to an environment where Covid and risks associated with it.</p>
<p><b>Key Objectives:</b></p> <p><b>1. Repairs &amp; Maintenance:</b></p> <p>1.1. Repairs to Council Housing stock have been limited to urgent repairs only. It will be necessary to design and implement a plan for catching up on planned maintenance work while still maintaining social distancing rules</p> <p>1.2. Tenants will need to be effectively engaged to enable this work to be completed safely</p> <p><b>2. Voids:</b></p> <p>2.1. No work has been undertaken during lockdown to ready empty properties for new tenants. This will need to be scheduled in line with social distancing rules.</p> <p><b>3. SARTH and Homelessness:</b></p> <p>3.1. During lockdown the SARTH process has been suspended, although people have been able to join the register. The number of people waiting for Housing now stands at c1,200</p>

- 3.2. Meanwhile there are currently c136 households who are in emergency or temporary accommodation who will need to find permanent homes
- 3.3. Agreement with the social housing providers in Denbighshire has been secured to address the homeless situation before returning to the SARTH process. The decision to suspend SARTH for approximately three months post-lockdown is likely to be a Lead Member delegated decision.
- 3.4. Work has been suspended in terms of supporting the establishment of a Social Lettings Agency in Denbighshire (in partnership with Cartrefi Conwy). This will need to be addressed to support the work of the homeless team going forward.

#### **4. Rents:**

- 4.1. While rent arrears have not grown exponentially over the period many tenants have registered for Universal Credit since lockdown.
- 4.2. It will be important to continue to engage positively with tenants whose income has been affected by Covid, for example by working closely with officers in Working Denbighshire to support tenants into new employment.
- 4.3. Rentsense (the Mobysoft product) will help housing officers to identify those at risk of falling behind on rent and this will need to be implemented.

#### **5. Tenant Support:**

- 5.1. During lockdown Housing Officers have been in touch with residents through the proactive calling. This work has reaped rewards and embedding this into new ways of working will be important in maintaining good tenant relationships.
- 5.2. Plans will need to be developed and implemented with regard to the use of community spaces within the schemes (in particular the Older People's schemes)
- 5.3. It may be appropriate to establish a 'good neighbour' role which supports tenants individually rather than supporting community groups

#### **6. Community Development:**

- 6.1. Building even more effective working relationships with community groups and the Third Sector has been a defining element of DCC's response to the crisis, and it is important to continue to build on these relationships within localities
- 6.2. Helping to build capacity for tenant associations.

6.3. Communities across Denbighshire will have been affected by the social distancing rules and lockdown and it will be important to support the re-establishment of mutually supportive communities to effect long term community resilience.

## **7. Capital Projects:**

7.1. The Corporate Plan ambition to create 170 new Council properties was behind schedule before lockdown and it will be necessary to review what is practicable now, given that costs and timescales will increase with the need to put preventative measures in place.

## **8. Housing Asset Strategy**

8.1. This strategy was being developed before lockdown and is now strategically important to inform the strategic direction of Housing development over the next 30 years.

8.2. The strategy will outline the requirements for Council Housing in Denbighshire, with regard to community demands, demographic change and the sustainability agenda, alongside rent policy, borrowing strategy and access to government capital funds.

### **Key Milestones (include any decision points e.g. Cabinet):**

- Gradual ramping up of reactive repairs, capital repairs & void works has already started (May)
- Suspension of SARTH for three months – Lead Member delegated decision (tbc)
- Resumption of Rentsense implementation (ICT-led project) end June
- Housing Asset Strategy – first draft ready by end June

### **Risks & Opportunities:**

1. Risk that there will be criticism of the suspension of SARTH
2. Risk that DCC will not achieve its Corporate Plan objectives with regard to new builds
3. Risk that the SARTH waiting list will become too long if properties are not available to let
4. Risk to tenants, DCC staff and contractors in terms of spreading Covid if preventative measures are not adhered to.

5. Risk that costs and timescales for works will increase as measures are put in place to reduce the risk of spread of Covid.
6. Opportunity to build on closer relationships built with vulnerable tenants during lockdown by developing new model of support
7. Opportunity to build on closer working relationships developed with Community Groups through Covid

**What does Success Look Like?**

- Council Houses in good repair
- New build programme in place, on schedule and on budget
- Council House tenants resilient and well connected to support in the Council and the Community
- Rent arrears reduced to minimum possible
- Homeless figures down to minimum possible