

		Update August 2020
1	Repairs & Maintenance	
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>During lock-down a backlog of non-urgent repairs built up. In order to alleviate this, operatives have begun to work through the backlog during August while only new emergency calls are being attended to prior to returning to a phased approach to business as usual commencing in September. This will allow the backlog to be reduced prior to the Call Centre reverting to allocating all categories of calls received in line with the phased approach.</p> <p>The phased approach comprises of 3-4 stages of service delivery ranging from lock-down to business as usual. No dates are being applied but messages will be communicated to advise at which stage the service is at. This will manage expectations and allow regression to a lower level of service as national and/or local circumstances dictate. In all cases Covid 19 specific risk assessments are in place and social distancing measures will be applied.</p> <p>Larger planned & capital schemes will continue to be tendered and let with specific communications packages targeted at affected tenants with appropriate measures implemented to ensure tenants can leave their property while work is undertaken should they wish (day time vacation only).</p> <p>No major works which would require overnight or prolonged voluntary day time vacation (2 consecutive days) of a property will be scheduled for 2020/21.</p>

1.2	Tenants will need to be effectively engaged to enable this work to be completed safely	Communications have been sent to tenants in respect of risk assessments, new procedures and social distancing expectations. Further general updates will be posted on social media outlining the phased increase in activities with a link to the previously circulated procedural changes.
2	Voids	
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.	Works have been progressing with voids with minimal disruption (after the initial 2 weeks of lock-down in March). Revised risk assessments and procedures have been developed and implemented in line with Government advice limiting the number of operatives present on site and for specific tasks which prevent social distancing.
3	SARTH and Homelessness	
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	The number of applications registered on the SARTH Common Housing Register have increased significantly to 1,650 Lettings are now able to continue although we have been adhering to a strict process for house viewings and tenancy signings to protect staff and customers.
3.2	Meanwhile there are currently c136 households who are in emergency or temporary accommodation who will need to find permanent homes	There has been an increase in households in emergency accommodation up to 180. During lockdown only essential moves could take place. Lettings have therefore predominantly been from the Council's Homelessness temporary accommodation. To date 34 households have been matched to accommodation with the following landlords - Denbighshire Housing – 22 Clwyd Alyn Housing Association – 6

		Wales & West Housing Association – 2 Grŵp Cynefin – 4
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	A proposal to temporarily amend the SARTH Housing Allocations policy for three months was approved by Delegated Decision by the Lead Member for Housing and is operational from 20th July 2020 until the review date on 20th October 2020. This allows for some direct lets, by the Council and RSL partners, to households in emergency accommodation due to the unprecedented situation caused by lockdown. All members were consulted as part of the delegated decision process.
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 prevention team going forward.	Work continues in partnership with Cartrefi Conwy and Conwy CBC on establishing a Private Rented Leasing Scheme. (Note: There is a separate Recovery plan which includes more detail in response to addressing Homelessness in the county)
4	Rents	
4.1	While rent arrears have not grown exponentially over the period many tenants have registered for Universal Credit since lockdown	Rent Arrears continue to increase, as was forecast due to the ongoing increase in tenants moving to Universal Credit (UC) and changes in how this is paid. The increase in households moving to UC has increased during lockdown above previous predictions. Tenants on UC have risen from 544 in March 2020 to 659 in July. Arrears have increased from £501k in March to £632k in July 2020 which is £90k more than forecast. North Wales social landlords have formed a Rent Management forum to share

		experiences and statistical information. All landlords report relatively similar increases in arrears during the lockdown period
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.	In April to June 2020, the “Key to Advice” partnership with Citizens Advice Denbighshire has seen 186 tenants of the council given advice with 162 income gains totalling and £633k with £1.5m personal debt advice given.
4.3	Rentsense (the Mobyssoft product) will help housing officers to identify those at risk of falling behind on rent and this will need to be implemented.	The implementation of the Rentsense predictive analytics software is ongoing and proceeding well. Training for staff is programmed and go live for the system is on target for September 2020.
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.	<p>During lockdown, Housing Officers carried out over 3,000 supports calls to tenants who have been identified as being vulnerable, as part of the Council’s proactive calling project.</p> <p>In addition, the service has continued to operate our business as usual service through telephone support and have experienced significant increased volumes of issues within communities primarily due to neighbours spending more time at home during lockdown.</p>
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)	WG announced that “Community Centres” could reopen in July which led to a number of enquiries about the facilities at Housing’s older people’s schemes. A more applicable term would be to refer to these facilities as “communal lounges” for this purpose. Restrictions on different households meeting in doors is still in place.

		<p>Whilst we are very aware of the negative impact lockdown is having on older people through isolation we are aware that this issue also involves the most vulnerable and high risk group with regards to Covid-19. We have completed a full risk assessment and we are working with the Tenants Federation on this. It is anticipated that a pilot session will take place at the end of August to ascertain if events can be held safely but also provide meaningful opportunity for interaction with social distancing and other safety measures in place.</p>
5.3	<p>It may be appropriate to establish a 'good neighbour' role which supports tenants individually rather than supporting community groups</p>	<p>A review of Denbighshire Housing's older people's stock, linked to the Asset Management strategy and the identified longer term needs of older people is underway and an action plan will be developed during Autumn 2020.</p>
6	Community Development	
6.1	<p>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</p>	<p>We have continued to support our resident associations during lockdown although their ability to meet and engage has been limited.</p> <p>The group on Bruton Park gained some national media coverage for hosting social distancing bingo and we have thanked them for the positive message this has sent out about the estate and Rhyl.</p>
6.2	<p>Helping to build capacity for tenant associations</p>	<p>We continue to support Friends of Pengwern in Llangollen and are working on a joint lottery bid to secure Project Officer support from South Denbighshire Community Partnership.</p>
6.3	<p>Communities across Denbighshire will have been affected by the social distancing rules and lockdown and it will be important to support the re-</p>	<p>We have maintained a continual flow of information to our communities via social media such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to ensure we can keep engaged with our tenants. Subjects have included support</p>

	<p>establishment of mutually supportive communities to effect long term community resilience</p>	<p>with finances and rent, messages to promote respect within communities and also physical and mental wellbeing activities.</p> <p>Usually, during the Spring and Summer months, we host a significant number of road shows on housing estates to enable our communities to engage with our staff whilst also providing opportunities for families through fun and educational activities. This work has been positively received in recent years and will have been missed this year so we will develop a plan to engage at a local level with communities through the autumn winter months.</p> <p>We are also preparing a comprehensive newsletter to be sent to all tenants homes in October and are due to include our bi-annual (STAR) survey of tenants. This will inform our on-going priorities and give us feedback on how we have been doing.</p>
<p>7</p>	<p>Capital Projects</p>	
<p>7.1</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>The project remains on course. There has been minimal impact on projects in the design and tender stages and commencement on multiple sites is anticipated 2020/21. Together with ongoing acquisitions it is anticipated that the overall target will be met within the original timeframe.</p> <p>Some increases in contract duration due to social distancing rules are anticipated, but associated increased costs might be mitigated by the construction sector being more competitive after lock-down and during the recovery period.</p> <p>The true impact will become apparent in the next 3 – 6 months.</p>
<p>8</p>	<p>Housing Asset Strategy</p>	

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.	A first draft will be ready by the end of August.
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.	The strategy will document the rationale and policies for new development, acquisitions, disposals and targeted investment in the existing stock.