
Meeting of the Housing and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee – 21st September 2022

Report of the Director of Housing and Communities

Housing and Communities Directorate report on Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to share with Scrutiny Committee Members an update on areas agreed within the 2022/23 Scrutiny Work Programme, approved by the Housing and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee on 13th June 2022. The report details information relating to the identified areas, along with progress to date, to provide Committee Members with the opportunity to ensure that plans are robust, meet customer needs, and deliver high quality, value for money services.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended:-
 - That the aspirations and commitments of the Social Housing White Paper and its impact upon DMBC are noted
 - That the Community Housing Vision and progress in its implementation is noted
 - That activity to improve void performance for empty homes and garages is noted.

Background

- 3.1 In accordance with its Terms of Reference, the Housing and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee agreed its Annual Scrutiny Programme on 13th June 2022. The agreed work programme has been shaped to enable Scrutiny Committee to focus on key areas within Housing, Communities and Public Realm which impact directly on residents.
- 3.2 The work programme identified the following areas from Housing and Communities for discussion at the Committee meeting in September 2022:
 - The Social Housing White Paper and what it means for DMBC

- Moving to a Community Housing Model
- Housing Improvement Plan – managing empty homes and garages

3.3 The aim of the work programme is to provide assurance on the direction of travel to ensure sustained improvements to key services are made and allow Scrutiny Committee to challenge the plans to ensure they are robust, meet customer needs, and deliver value for money, quality services.

The Social Housing White Paper and what it means for DMBC

3.4 In November 2020, the UK Government published “The charter for Social Housing Residents: social housing white paper”. The White Paper sets out new regulatory arrangements for social landlords including local authorities. The Regulator of Social Housing, which now regulates local authority housing provision, will be responsible for a more proactive consumer regulatory regime which will strengthen the formal standards against which the Council is regulated, requiring the Council to:

- Be transparent about their performance and decision-making – so that tenants and the regulator can hold the Council to account.
- Put things right when they go wrong.
- Listen to tenants through effective engagement.

3.5 The Charter has seven commitments to tenants against which the Council will be judged:

1. To be safe in your home.
2. To know how your landlord is performing, including on repairs, complaints and safety, and how it spends its money, so you can hold it to account.
3. To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly, with access to a strong ombudsman who will give you swift and fair redress when needed.
4. To be treated with respect, backed by a strong consumer regulator and improved consumer standards for tenants.
5. To have your voice heard by your landlord, for example through regular meetings, scrutiny panels or being on its Board. The government will provide help, if you want it, to give you the tools to ensure your landlord listens.
6. To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in, with your landlord keeping your home in good repair.
7. To be supported to take your first step to ownership, so it is a ladder to other opportunities, should your circumstances allow

3.6 The 2022 Scrutiny Committee work programme has been designed to provide assurance to Committee Members that the Council is putting in place appropriate services, standards and performance measures to ensure that we are delivering against the commitments set out within the Charter and that we can evidence the positive impact of this work.



Committee Meeting	Work Programme	Charter commitments
21 st September 2022	Moving to a Community Housing Model Housing Improvement Plan – managing empty homes and garages	To have your voice heard by your landlord To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly, To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in
27 th November 2022	Good quality homes and neighbourhoods – repairs, asset management and fuel poverty Providing assurance that all compliance measures meet legislative and regulatory requirements	To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in To be safe in your home.
26 th January 2023	Strategic Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership Managing neighbour disputes and anti-social behaviour	To be safe in your home. To be safe in your home.
29 th March 2023	Overview of Tenant Satisfaction Measures and consumer regulation Improving customer satisfaction and experience	To know how your landlord is performing To be treated with respect To have your voice heard by your landlord

In order to deliver the commitments within the Charter the Council will need to implement a number of services changes and improvements, starting with the introduction of the Community Housing Model detailed below.

3.7 Improvements will also be required in a number of other functions within the Housing and Communities Directorate, with progress being reported to the Scrutiny Committee in line with the 2022/23 work programme. These areas include, but are not limited to:

- Improving void performance to ensure homes are let in a timely manner and are of a good quality.
- Improving systems and processes for recording, responding to, and learning from complaints, Councillor and MP enquiries, customer surveys and compliments.
- Managing investment in our housing stock robustly to ensure we can meet the commitments within the Charter during a challenging financial period.
- Further developing our partnership approach to crime, anti-social behaviour and neighbour nuisance.

- Ensuring we have robust systems in place to capture and report on performance information that allows our customers to hold us to account.
- Reviewing and improving our customer engagement and involvement model to ensure we hear our customers voice in breadth and depth.

3.8 It is essential that the Council ensures that housing services meet the aspirations of the White Paper, and that robust arrangements are in place to capture and report upon the impact of these. The Housing Ombudsman's responsibilities and the Ombudsman Code have been strengthened, and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has started to highlight poor practice by landlords, including published findings by the Housing Ombudsman of severe maladministration and judgements of the Regulator of Social Housing that consumer standards have been breached.

Moving to a Community Housing Model

3.9 The Community Housing Model will help to support the aspirations of the White Paper and will improve efficiency and customer experience. The aim of the model is to create stronger community neighbourhood housing services which ensure:

- A strengthening of our approach to neighbourhood management through an increased presence, with greater visibility of Housing staff with more influence and impact in neighbourhoods.
- Clean, safe, well managed communities where people want to live and where the community has a sense of pride and identity.
- Communities which are supported to engage with the Council, becoming actively involved in monitoring service quality and challenging and holding us to account.
- Services where we routinely seek and listen to the views of the residents, respond to areas for improvement and shape our service to customer feedback and priorities.

3.10 To deliver the Community Housing Model staffing teams are being restructured to ensure appropriate roles and skills are in place. A proposed structure has been developed and initial consultations with the Unions have not raised any specific concerns. Consultation with staff on the proposed structure will take place during September and early October with a view to the model being implemented by the end of October 2022.

3.11 The impact of the new model will be measured in a number of ways, including performance on lettings, repairs, management of anti-social behaviour and customer satisfaction. Our Customer Involvement and Engagement Strategy will be co-produced with involved customers, partners and Members and will provide a robust framework for listening and responding to feedback from our customers to continuously improve the Community Housing model and service delivery more generally.

Housing Improvement Plan – managing empty homes and garages

3.12 Ineffective management of void homes and garages has a detrimental effect on performance, customer satisfaction and income. The time taken to re-let Council homes



is currently much longer than it should be and despite void turnaround targets being quite generous they are not currently being achieved.

3.13 Accordingly a full review of voids has commenced, being led by the Director of Housing and Communities with involvement from all teams in the Directorate. The aim of the review is to reduce void turnaround times, and associated void loss, and to improve customer satisfaction with the void process.

3.14 The review includes, but is not limited to, the following activities:

- Reviewing the end to end process to identify blockers and actions we can take to speed up the process. Issues identified so far include refining the process for the return and handover of keys and improving the timescales for void clearances through performance management of contractors.
- Holding weekly Director-led cross team void meetings to action plan and report against progress on current voids.
- Reviewing of the disposals process to speed up decision making.
- Reviewing performance indicators and monitoring to develop a suite of PIs that enable us to drill down into the detail and identify specific issues by property type etc.

3.15 At the time of writing the review is in its third week and has identified several actions which are considered to be “quick wins”. The impact of all actions to date, progress and further work required will be presented to the September Scrutiny Committee meeting.

Finance

4. The financial costs of the restructure associated with the Community Housing model have already been approved and included within 2022/23 budgets. The restructure will create many of the roles and skills needed to drive forward the service improvements detailed in section 3.7 of this report. As we continue to develop services to respond to the White Paper commitments we may need to consider additional or alternative resources and systems. As we scope these we will identify what resource is required and any costs will be managed within existing Directorate budgets where possible.

Law

5. The actions set out within this report will help ensure the Council’s compliance with Regulator of Social Housing’s regulatory standards and the Housing Ombudsman Code.

Risk Management

6. This is a major programme of change and there is a risk that there will be insufficient resources to deliver the programme given the urgency of securing some of these changes. This risk will be managed by the Directorate Management Team which will review the resources and prioritisation of the programme.

Equality Impact

7. There are no specific equality implications.

There are no specific implications of this report in relation to children and young people and they have not been consulted or involved in developing the proposals.

Human Resources/Organisational Development

8. There are significant Human Resources and Organisational Development implications in this programme of change which will involve some restructuring and changes in roles and responsibilities as well as a programme of culture change and staff training. The Human Resources and Organisational Development team have been, and will continue to be, involved at each stage as the programme is developed and implemented.

Commercial/Procurement

9. The actions identified within this report should result in a significant improvement in our relationship with customers. Some of the improvements we make as we continue to reshape and improve our services may require changes to our procurement arrangements and contracts as these are renewed.

Council Priorities and Projects

10. Developing Community Housing services which meet the regulatory standards and the aspirations of the White Paper also support the delivery of all four priorities in the Dudley Council Plan 2022 - 25:
- Dudley the borough of opportunity
 - Dudley the safe and healthy borough
 - Dudley the borough of ambition and enterprise
 - Dudley borough as the destination of choice

K. Jones

Director of Housing and Communities

Report Author: Kathy Jones
Telephone: 01384 815420
Email: kathryn.jones@dudley.gov.uk

