

## STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

AGENDA  
ITEM NO

## HOUSING COMMITTEE

11 JUNE 2019

**11**

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>ANNUAL REPORT TO COUNCIL</b>
<b>Purpose of Report</b>	The Annual Report summarises the activities of the Housing Committee during 2018/19 and sets out its plans for the next twelve months.
<b>Decisions</b>	<p><b>That the Housing Committee:</b></p> <p><b>a) RESOLVE to agree the Housing Committee Annual Report 2018/19; and</b></p> <p><b>b) RECOMMEND to Council the Annual report is approved.</b></p>
<b>Consultation and Feedback</b>	Members of Housing Committee Housing Services Managers
<b>Financial Implications and Risk Assessment</b>	There are no financial implications arising from this report.  Lucy Clothier, Principal Accountant Tel: 01453 754343 Email: <a href="mailto:lucy.clothier@stroud.gov.uk">lucy.clothier@stroud.gov.uk</a>
<b>Legal Implications</b>	There are no specific legal implications arising from this report.  Patrick Arran, Interim Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer Tel: 01453 754369 Email: <a href="mailto:patrick.arran@stroud.gov.uk">patrick.arran@stroud.gov.uk</a>
<b>Report Author</b>	Councillor Chas Townley Tel: 07969 275231 Email: <a href="mailto:cllr.chas.townley@stroud.gov.uk">cllr.chas.townley@stroud.gov.uk</a>
<b>Options</b>	Consideration has been given to not producing an Annual Report however this has been discounted because the Constitution expects the Chair of Committee to present the Committee's Annual Report to Council.
<b>Performance Management Follow Up</b>	Committee Agenda Planning and Performance Monitoring Meetings during the year.
<b>Background Papers / Appendices</b>	Reports, Agenda and Minutes of Housing Committee during the 2018/2019 Civic Year Corporate Delivery Report to Council 16 May 2019

## **1. Chairs Introduction**

- 1.1 Welcome to the first new style annual report of the Housing Committee to be submitted to the full District Council.
- 1.2 The Council's housing authority role is about facilitating access to housing for all, promoting healthy, safe and energy efficient homes in all tenures, supporting the delivery of affordable housing by registered providers as well as having responsibility for promoting community led housing opportunities.
- 1.3 The Committee also oversees the Council's work to tackle homelessness. For some years, a key focus of this work has been on homeless prevention and from 1 April 2018, this approach was placed on a statutory basis with new duties to prevent and relieve homelessness.
- 1.4 The Council are now the only council in Gloucestershire to own and manage its own housing stock. As well as delivering a large programme of repairs and maintenance to resident's homes, the Council has continued the building of new homes and with the Government 'lifting the cap'; we will be exploring options to deliver additional homes.
- 1.5 It has been an enormous privilege to lead the Housing Committee over the last year and in presenting this report to the Council, I wish to pay tribute to the work of staff at all levels who deliver on a day-to-day basis.

## **2. Housing Committee Responsibilities and Operational Arrangements**

- 2.1 The terms of reference of the Housing Committee set out in the Constitution are:-

"Since the 1st December 2016, the broad portfolio of the committee covers the following functions with the exception of those matters delegated to officers:

- Public and private housing issues affecting the Council's housing authority roles; and
- Housing Policy."

- 2.2 More generally the Constitution provides that:

"The terms of reference of committees need to be balanced with the delegations to officers. The expectation is that officers will be able to take decisions to further the objectives, policies and strategies set by committees.

With the exception of those matters delegated to officers and the Development Control Committee, which has a quasi-judicial role, all committees will have responsibility for the following as relevant to their functions:

All strategies and policies associated with their functions that are not reserved for Council;

- Over-viewing and scrutinising the outcomes of projects with reference to the effective delivery of the Council's Corporate Delivery Plan, including its Jobs and Growth Strategy (and / or other key corporate policies / strategies as may be adopted from time to time);
- Setting of fees and charges, monitoring budget and performance management;
- Engagement with the business, statutory, voluntary and community sectors; Establish ad hoc task and finish groups to consider matters and report to committee; Appointments to outside bodies pertinent to their other terms of reference”

2.3 In line with the current agreed programme of meetings there are five meetings of the committee in the civic year. Additionally, a Housing Review Panel was established in 2017 and presents reports of its meetings to the Housing Committee.

2.4 The Committee appoints two members to review performance on a quarterly basis; they also provide written reports to the Committee.

2.5 The Chair and Vice-Chair meet with senior managers on a regular basis during the year to assist in the management of the Committee's agenda and to keep abreast of developments within the service.

### **3. Corporate Delivery Plan**

3.1 To help the Council deliver its vision, “Leading a community that is making Stroud District a better place to live, work and visit for everyone”, the Council produces a 4-year rolling Corporate Delivery Plan (CDP), which is reviewed annually. The Corporate Delivery Plan Achievements of the Housing Service reported to Council on 16 May include:-

- We delivered 228 new homes in our first 5-year Council house building programme and are on track to deliver a further 16 homes at Southbank Woodchester and Tanners Piece in Nailsworth.
- In our ongoing endeavour to tackle fuel poverty we have invested £6.8m in new heating systems and boiler upgrades in 181 Council homes, with a further 35 receiving new external wall insulation.
- Our continued efforts to lobby government have resulted in the lifting of the debt cap on our Housing Revenue Account, allowing us to invest further in our housing stock.
- Through our ongoing Warm & Well partnership with other Gloucestershire Council's and South Gloucestershire Council delivered by Severn Wye Energy Agency to support households in fuel poverty, 111 properties in the District were improved by the installation of energy efficient measures; 21 properties have had first time central heating installed through the Warm Homes Fund and a further 29 have been approved. Energy efficiency advice was given to 510 households and 54 home visits made – 73% were to people with health conditions making them vulnerable to cold.

### 3.2 Key actions for 2019/20 agreed by Council are:-

- Contribute to our identified local housing need, by building new Council homes through:
  - a) submitting planning applications for 56 units on 6 sites
  - b) agreeing an approach to purchase more land
- Adopt the Housing Revenue Account 5-year delivery plan
- Commence improvements to the sheltered housing schemes in Nailsworth (Concord) and Minchinhampton (George Pearce House).
- Provide high quality, safe temporary accommodation for homeless single people and families within the District.
- Work to bring the reactive maintenance service in-house by 1 April 2020, providing better customer service and efficiencies.
- Adopt the housing strategy incorporating the delivery of community-led housing.
- Implement the first year's action plan of the Council's Older People's Housing Strategy.

## 4. Council Housing

4.1 The Council remains the largest landlord in the District and details of average rents and numbers of the 4975 tenanted homes at 31 March 2019 is shown in table 1.

Property Size	Bedsit/ 1 Bed		2 Beds		3 beds		4 or more beds	
	Weekly rent	Number	Weekly rent	Number	Weekly rent	Number	Weekly rent	Number
Social Rents	£70.92	1633	£82.06	1582	£89.97	1587	£101.69	75
Affordable Rents	£88.67	36	£119.86	44	£139.78	16	£169.05	2
Total	£71.30	1669	83.08	1626	£90.47	1603	£103.44	77

Table 1: Housing Revenue Account Rents and Tenanted Dwelling Numbers

4.2 During the year the Committee received budget monitoring reports at their June, September, December and April meetings and recommended the Budget, fees, and charges at their December meeting. This budget report whilst maintaining high levels of investment in the Council's stock also made provision for the future repayment of the HRA debt. Summary information on revenue and capital expenditure is provided in tables 2 and 3 below:-

<b>HRA Capital Summary</b>	2018/19 Revised Budget £k	2018/19 Outturn £k	19/20 Base Budget £k
Major Works	8,124	7,114	8,549
New Homes and Regeneration	1,710	1,182	5,590
Sheltered Housing Modernisation	319	298	614
<b>Total Capital Expenditure</b>	<b>10,153</b>	<b>8,594</b>	<b>14,753</b>

Table 2: HRA Capital Summary

<b>HRA Revenue Summary</b>	2018/19 Revised Budget £k	2018/19 Outturn £k	19/20 Base Budget £k
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>(22,689)</b>	<b>(22,788)</b>	<b>(22,326)</b>
Supervision and Management	3,892	3,863	4,203
Repairs and Maintenance	3,652	3,906	3,733
Sheltered Housing Service	1,015	902	1,083
Other Expenditure	459	529	459
Sheltered Housing Modernisation	401	401	470
<b>Total Operational Expenditure</b>	<b>9,419</b>	<b>9,601</b>	<b>9,948</b>
<b>Total Other Costs and Income</b> (Interest costs, Capital Funding, Repaying Debt etc.)	<b>11,233</b>	<b>11,286</b>	<b>12,501</b>
<b>Total Housing Revenue Account</b> (Net transfers to reserves)	<b>(2,037)</b>	<b>(1,901)</b>	<b>123</b>

Table 3: HRA Revenue Summary

- 4.5 For the last two years the Housing Committee has benefited from having two tenant representatives sitting on the Housing Committee. A recruitment process was undertaken to appoint two new tenants with Leticia Gardiner and Juliette Smith being appointed by Council at its meeting on 28 March 2019. The Committee wishes to place on record its thanks and appreciation to Ian Allen and Sadie Tazwell for their work over the last two years.
- 4.6 During the year, the Committee undertook a review of resident involvement and at the December meeting adopted a new tenant involvement and empowerment strategy. A key feature of this has been the development of a refreshed approach with the Council seeking to recruit tenants to act as Neighbourhood Ambassadors, Voids and Repairs Inspectors and to provide challenge and scrutiny to the services we provide. We know that tenant involvement is most successful when it is planned around the lives and interests of tenants and we will keep this area of work under review.

- 4.7 Over the last few years, the Council has undertaken a major review of the accommodation offered for older tenants. During the year, improvement work at Sherborne House was completed resulting in a significant improvement in this scheme. Work is now planned to take place at Concord in Nailsworth and George Pearce House in Minchinhampton. An Older Persons Strategy task and finish group was appointed at the September meeting and its final report was agreed at the April meeting with the overarching vision “To provide good quality older people’s housing which meets a variety of current and future needs – where people want to live”. This builds on the modernisation programme and adopts a new model, which enables the development of three levels of independent living.
- 4.8 The Decant Policy has also been reviewed during the year to make it more flexible and person centred in the housing options available when the Council needs to sensitively move a resident to other accommodation to support redevelopment proposals. The Committee also received an update report on the Service Charge Review and further work with a report to a future Committee has been agreed.
- 4.9 Given the need to increase the supply of affordable homes in the District the Council bid for £6.3 million additional HRA borrowing to finance 8 housing developments. Subsequently the Prime Minister announced the removal of the HRA “Cap” at the Conservative Party Conference and future investment decisions will be for individual Councils to make. This has been a major campaign by local government and the housing sector. In practical terms, the ability for Stroud District to build a new generation of Council housing at scale is limited by the availability of development sites and the viability of schemes within the agreed debt repayment period of 30 years for new developments. Budget provision has been made for acquisition of sites and decisions will be made later in the year how sites will be identified.
- 4.10 Table 4 below provides statistical information on the rent collection, arrears and work on tenancy fraud, Anti-Social Behaviour and the number of evictions which have been carried out during the year.

Performance Area	Target (Annual)	Outcome
Current Income Collection	98.80%, target achieved	£22.267 Million
Universal Credit	No target given, roll out is still continuing	540 tenants in receipt of this benefit
Current Rent Arrears Collection	No target given but a reduction of £17,176	£299,353
Tenancy Fraud	No target given, 20 cases investigated	No legal prosecution but there has been a termination of two Right to Buy Applications
ASB	No target given, 128 cases	14 ongoing cases and 9 new cases to date.
Evictions	No target given, 19 cases	18 due to non payment of rent and 1 due to ASB

Table 4: Statistical Information relating to Council Housing

- 4.11 The Right to Buy (RTB) scheme allows eligible council tenants to buy their home with a discount. In 18/19 the Council received 89 enquiries, 47 applications were made and 26 sales completed. 9 of these sales were flats (compared to only 3 flats in 17/18) and the remainder were 2 and 3 bedroom houses. The maximum discount increases each year in April in line with the consumer price index and is currently £82,500.
- 4.12 A number of fraudulent cases have been uncovered this year, mainly by tenants who were living elsewhere and subletting their property. After detailed investigations which involved interviews under caution the applications were withdrawn and the properties returned to the Council resulting in 2 Council dwellings being retained on our register for social tenants. All RTB applications are thoroughly checked to ensure tenants are eligible, using the resources of the Counter Fraud Unit where necessary.

## **5. Homeseeker Plus**

- 5.1 In partnership with the other five Gloucestershire Districts, West Oxfordshire District Council and many social landlords in the area, the Councils provide a housing register for affordable housing applicants in the area. This is a choice based lettings service so that interested households can express an interest in properties when they are advertised with preference being given to the person in the highest banded need for the longest period. Depending on the level of demand for a particular property there can be as many as over a hundred applicants or in the case of specialist housing as few as one applicant.
- 5.2 Consultation on the Homeseeker Plus Policy is due to take place during the summer with a report to the September Housing Committee to agree the policy to be applied across the seven housing authority areas.

## **6. Homelessness Prevention and Support for Homeless Households**

- 6.1 The Council's Housing Advice Team provides advice and practical support to households whether or not the Council has a full homelessness duty to them to help prevent homelessness and in 2017/18 was one of the best performing Councils in the South West.
- 6.2 Whilst the Council in comparison with other authorities makes limited use of temporary accommodation for homeless households, most of this is outside of the District. As a consequence, the Committee considered the need for the provision of temporary accommodation in the District and this was approved at the Council meeting in April.
- 6.3 The Housing Review Panel reviewed the work of P3 who provide an assertive outreach project for rough sleepers in the County in addition to a county wide commissioned service. ActionGlos. This service is aimed at those who have 'fallen between the gaps' previously or may have a history of using homelessness services without having their needs fully met. An identified problem within Stroud has been the availability of private rented accommodation within the Stroud District. Housing Committee subsequently agreed to support the use of two one bedroom properties within the Council's

housing stock.

## **7. Support for Affordable Housing**

- 7.1 The Council's Housing Strategy is the overarching document, which draws together the wide spectrum of housing interventions that the Council takes part in. This ranges from the Council's role as a landlord of housing. To housing advice and homelessness services, through Housing Benefit assessment and payment, improving conditions in private sector properties, supporting health and wellbeing, to the Council's role in enabling new affordable homes through the development and implementation of policies to deliver new affordable homes through the planning system.
- 7.2 A new Housing Strategy for 2019 to 2024 is currently in the post-consultation phase, with adoption anticipated later this year.
- 7.3 The Council has a strong record of accomplishment of working in partnership with our Housing Association and community partners and together we have brought forward an average of 120 new affordable homes each year over the last five years. There are 168 affordable homes currently under construction and an estimated 260 affordable homes with planning permission that should come forward over the next 3 years.
- 7.4 The current Local Plan review gives us an opportunity to retain affordable housing policies that are working well, and examine options to deliver more affordable homes through the planning system. For example, we will assess whether a 'single plot exceptions policy' to allow single, affordable self-build plots on the edge of rural settlements would be feasible. We will also look at the opportunities to maximise affordable housing delivery through the Government's new 'entry-level exception site' policy which is aimed at first time buyers.
- 7.5 The Gloucestershire Rural Housing Partnership is a consortium of the rural District Councils of Gloucestershire, Gloucestershire Rural Community Council and Registered Providers (housing associations). Together we fund a Rural Housing Enabler to work with Parish Councils on examining local housing need and bringing forward rural exception sites to meet that need.
- 7.6 In 2017 we were awarded funds from DCLG's 'Community Housing Fund', which we have used to support the employment of a Community Housing Enabler by Gloucestershire Rural Community Council. The Community Housing Enabler provides dedicated support to community groups looking to explore options to deliver community-led housing in their local area.
- 7.7 A presentation was made to the Housing Review Panel by Eastington CLT and by the Housing Enabler. Nailsworth CLT also completed their scheme on a former garage site at Lawnside and are now looking for new opportunities in Nailsworth.

## **8. Private Sector Housing**

- 8.1 During the year, the Committee agreed an updated Private Sector Housing Strategy to cover the period up to 2023. This covers the Council's approach to not only the regulation of the private rented sector but also the support that the Council provides to other households living in the private sector.
- 8.2 The Council will continue to assist vulnerable occupiers where the condition of their property is affecting their health with a range of grants and loans:
- Disabled Facilities Grants to enable adaptations to be made to a disabled persons home to enable them to continue living there independently such as; installing stair lifts and replacing baths with wet floor showers.
  - Healthy Homes Loans are interest free and offered to owner-occupiers on low incomes to enable them to carry out essential repairs to remove Category 1 hazards, which pose a risk to their health, such as penetrating damp, defective electrical wiring and risk of falls.
  - Empty Homes Loans are interest free and offered to owners of empty properties to bring them back into use for private renting at affordable rent levels.

## **9. Extension of Mandatory HMO Licensing**

- 9.1 Houses in Multiple Occupation represent the biggest risk to the occupants and are often occupied by the most vulnerable. Until 1 October 2018, mandatory licensing only applied to properties that consisted of three storeys or more. Under the old scheme, only 19 properties met the licensing criteria, it is estimated based on local knowledge that up to 200 may need to be licensed under the new criteria. However, the biggest challenge will be in actually identifying where these properties are. With the resources available to the Council and the significant increase in the number requiring licensing the license period has been increased to the maximum of 5 years and the fee charged reviewed so as to adequately reflect the Councils costs at £830.
- 9.2 The policy was revised to reflect changes introduced by Central Government in the 5 years since the previous policy was adopted such as;

### Retaliatory Eviction

The landlord cannot use the "no fault" possession procedure for 6 months after a genuine complaint about the condition of the dwelling has been made.

### Civil Penalties

An alternative to prosecution where a landlord has failed to meet their legal obligations with regard to housing conditions whereby the LA can apply a fixed penalty fine of up to £30,000.

### Agents Redress Scheme

A requirement for letting agents to join a government sanctioned redress scheme to ensure tenants and prospective tenants are dealt with fairly and to give them a clear means of seeking assistance if they are unhappy.

Smoke and Carbon Monoxide

A requirement for adequate detection to be in place.

Minimum Energy Efficiency

From 1 October 2018, landlords must ensure that their property has an Energy Performance Certificate Rating of F or G before it is let to a new tenant. From the 1 October 2020, it will apply to all rented property.

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>
Enquiries received and investigated	104	111
Category 1 HHSRS Hazards removed in the private rented sector	7	11
Healthy Homes Loans approved	1	3
Empty Homes brought back into use	0	22
Licensed HMO's	19	20

Table 5: Private Sector Housing Activity Statistics

9.3 Summary table of activity including number of HMOs and inspection and other enforcement activity is shown in Table 5 above.

**10. Performance Monitoring**

10.1 During the year Cllr Catherine Braun and Cllr Miranda Clifton met with officers on four occasions to review performance and provide a report to Committee. The quality of the reports to Committee have been of an extremely high standard and have provided a comprehensive and focused assessment of progress.

10.2 They also reviewed information on complaints made to the department. Generally, these are resolved at an early stage, however, during the year six complaints were referred to the Housing Ombudsman, at the end of the year 3 had not been upheld, 2 were still under consideration and in 1 case the Council's decision had not been upheld.

10.3 A Council wide review of complaints processes is expected to be undertaken during 2019/20.

## 11. Committee Members

11.1 The Committee has twelve Councillors and two non voting tenant representatives. Members of the Committee are appointed by Council in line with the preferences of the political groups represented on the Council with the Chair and Vice Chair being appointed by Council for the Civic Year.

<b><u>Councillor</u></b>	<b><u>Councillors Party</u></b>
Chas Townley Chair	Labour & Cooperative
Jenny Miles Vice Chair	Labour
Colin Fryer	Labour
Gary Powell Served for part of the year and has now re-joined at AGM	Labour & Cooperative
Catherine Braun	Green
Norman Kay	Green
Jim Dewey	Green
Chas Fellows	Conservative
Deborah Jane Young	Conservative
Julie Job	Conservative
Lindsey Green	Conservative
Phil McAsey	Conservative
Miranda Clifton served on the Committee during 2018/19 but left the Committee at the Annual Meeting	Labour
<b>Non Voting Members from 28 March 2019</b>	
Leticia Gardiner	Tenant Representative
Juliette Smith	Tenant Representative