

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

24 March 2020

Subject: Wiltshire Council's Housing Board Annual Report

Cabinet Member: Cllr Richard Clewer Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Heritage, Arts, Tourism, Housing, Climate Change and Military-Civilian Integration

Key Decision: Non Key

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet regarding the activities of Wiltshire Council's Housing Board between December 2018 and November 2019 and comply with its Terms of Reference which requires an update to be provided to Cabinet.

Throughout this period, the Board has engaged in a range of activities to shape the service offered to residents and their families, further increase service quality via appropriate monitoring mechanisms, encourage resident engagement and protect the reputation of the council as a landlord by ensuring a robust Business Plan is implemented.

Areas focused on by the Board are detailed in the main body of the report, with the primary focus of the Housing Board being:

- Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan
- Asset Management Plan (AMP)

Key achievements of the Housing Board over the past 12 months are (additional details are provided in the main report):

- Revised Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan
- Maintained momentum toward delivering 1 thousand new homes in the future
- Small Improvements Bids were agreed to deliver works which had been specifically requested by HRA residents
- Introduction of 3 themed sub-committees to enable more involvement in policy development

The Board is regularly updated about the budget position of the HRA and the implications of welfare reform and policy amendments, including the rent reduction of 1% per annum for 4 years which is coming to an end. Members are also regularly updated about Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), with the targets for said indicators being decided between the service and a sub-group of the Board.

When considering the strategic direction of the service, and the main current and future strategic risks and actions, Board members act in such a way as to complement the council's corporate Business Plan and objectives.

There is engagement between the Housing Board and the Environment Select Committee (ESC), and the Board has a scrutiny group sitting below it comprised of volunteer residents – the Challenge and Change Group.

Reforms suggested by the Board and/or the scrutiny group, have been incorporated into our work. Members have been involved in shaping the services' Forward Work plan.

The Board's Annual General Meeting included an overview of the year, presented by the Chairman and an update on the budget position.

Board members operate in a fair and balanced manner, maintain their independence and make recommendations to Housing Services; the Board can also make recommendations to Cabinet; however, powers cannot and have not been conferred on the Board so as to enable it to make binding decisions, as outlined in the Paper passed by Cabinet on 22 January 2013.

The Housing Board is in its second cycle of 4 years, which is linked to the council's local electoral cycle.

Proposal(s)

For Cabinet to note this Annual Report.

Reason for Proposal(s)

Wiltshire Council's Housing Board's Terms of Reference require an Annual Report to be presented to Cabinet.

Alistair Cunningham
Chief Executive Officer – Place

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

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Key Decision: Non Key

Purpose of Report

1. To update Cabinet regarding the activities of Wiltshire Council's Housing Board between December 2018 and November 2019 and comply with its Terms of Reference which requires an update to be provided to Cabinet.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

2. As part of their Away-Day's and their regular meetings, the Board set future priorities, which are constructed to complement the Council's Business Plan. In respect of the Business Plan 2017-2027, the Board contributes toward creating strong communities in Wiltshire, protecting those who are most vulnerable and being innovative and effective. There is emphasis on sustainable development, safe communities, personal wellbeing, community involvement, commercialism, people, change, digital, performance and delivering together.

Overview and Scrutiny Engagement

3. This report is for noting by Cabinet and provides an update on the activities of Wiltshire Council's Housing Board. It does not require a decision to be made. The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Heritage, Arts, Tourism, Housing, Climate Change and Military-Civilian Integration presented this report to the Environment Select Committee (ESC) at their 4 March 2020 meeting.

Background

4. At its 22 January 2013 meeting, Cabinet resolved that it approved the setting up of a Management Board for the governance of council housing consisting of an equal number of Councillors, tenants and independents, with a recommendation that such a panel should be in place by April 2013.
5. Appointments to the Board were made in November 2013 and December 2013 and the Board held its inaugural meeting on 17 December 2013. In January 2014, the Board introduced 'Open Sessions' at the beginning of each

meeting where residents could attend and put questions to Board members. In October 2019, the Board introduced 3 sub-committees:

- a) Development and Investment ('Place') sub-committee
- b) Finance and Policy ('Pounds') sub-committee
- c) Performance and Risk ('People') sub-committee

6. Board meetings are approximately held on a bi-monthly basis:

- a) For the year 2019, meetings were scheduled and held in January, March, May, July, September (held in October) and November (held in December).

7. Sub-committee meetings are held on an ad-hoc basis:

- a) For the year 2019, the Development and Investment ('Place') and Performance and Risk ('People') sub-committees met in November.
- b) The Finance and Policy ('Pounds') sub-committee met in January.

8. The Board's Annual General Meeting was held on 5 December 2019.

Key Achievements of the Housing Board over the past 12 months

9. Revised Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan

- a) Board members worked with the service, including the specialist finance function, throughout the year to finalise the main priorities for the Business Plan. They focused on the need to invest in the HRA's current stock and build new dwellings for future needs.
- b) At the September 2019 away-day event held at County Hall, Trowbridge, Board members were presented with the HRA 30 Year Business Plan. This was discussed and agreed.
- c) Board members was satisfied that the correct balance had been struck between investing in current stock to better meet the needs, wants and desires of current residents and their families, and also building new council housing to assist the council with its focus on meeting the needs of the whole county, now and into the future.
- d) The Chairman of the Housing Board, and Deputy Leader of Wiltshire Council, presented the HRA 30 Year Business Plan to the council's Cabinet on 8 October 2019. The Cabinet minutes for 8 October 2019 note the following (emphasis as appeared):

"Cllr Richard Clewer, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member, introduced a report which presented a Housing Revenue Account Business Plan model and a Phase 3 Development Programme. It was noted the development was entirely funded through borrowing, grants and Right to Buy receipts.

The Leader expressed support for the building of council houses and a commitment to support this in the future.

It was noted the buildings would be designed to a high standard.

Resolved:

a) To agree the Housing revenue account business plan 2020/21-2050 as set out in Appendix 1

b) To agree to Council house, build programme phases 3.1 and 3.2 as set out in Appendix 1 at total cost of £18.717m and £18.754m

[...]"

10. Maintained momentum toward delivering 1 thousand new homes in the future

- a) As above, the council's Cabinet agreed the third phase of building new council houses. This has been publicly celebrated by the council in an article entitled '1,000 council homes over 10 years proposed by Wiltshire Council', published in the 'News' section of our website.

The salient points to note include:

- There has been development on Housing Revenue Account (HRA) land.
- Affordable housing has been procured from developers in lieu of affordable housing obligations (section 106).
- Properties sold under 'Right to Buy' have been purchased.

11. Small Improvements Bids were agreed to deliver works which had been specifically requested by HRA residents

- a) Throughout the year, Board members worked with the service to develop a budgeted scheme which would permit HRA residents, and local groups representing HRA groups, to bid for funding of specific external improvement and environmental works. Those bidding were asked to complete an application form, include evidence of community support (for example, a list of signatures) and provide a cost analysis.
- b) The purpose of the Small Improvements Bids was to foster even greater community relations between the council and its residents and their families, whilst at the same time ensuring that high quality works, funded by the HRA, were delivering on residents' actual priorities.

- c) Board members were presented with the application forms, a quote from a contractor used by the HRA (or in a limited number of cases, considered monies being paid directly to another entity) and listened to the applicants as they had been invited to attend a Board meeting and present their bids.
- d) Noting that initial costings suggested the works would exceed the allocated budget of £100 thousand (maximum £10 thousand per bid), the Housing Board minutes for 10 October 2019 note the following (emphasis as appeared):

“The Board thanked everyone for attending and agreed:

- **To approve all Small Improvement Bid(s), with a maximum spend of £10 thousand per bid and some mild flexibility around the total overall budget, subject to HRA officers approaching *idverde* and seeking a more accommodative arrangement.”**
- e) After further discussion the following amendments to bids were made:
 - i) 1 element of 1 bid was removed
 - ii) 2 bids were amended, with the same or similar outcomes being achieved but using slightly different materials or minor changes
 - iii) 1 bid was unable to be progressed as part of the Small Improvement Bids due to circumstances after the Housing Board meeting, however the service worked to ensure that the bid was still able to be delivered, albeit delayed slightly, and via a different funding source
- f) The service was able to deliver upon residents and their families’ expectations and received excellent positive feedback. The Housing Board minutes for 10 October 2019 note the following:

“Attendees noted the improved relationship between the service and residents, as a result of the scheme. Attendees being invited to speak directly to Board members, and Board members having listened to the attendees, was also greatly appreciated. The Resident Engagement department has provided excellent support throughout the process.”

12. Introduction of 3 themed sub-committees to enable more involvement in policy development

- a) Development and Investment (‘Place’) sub-committee

Areas of responsibility:

- i) Investment Programme
- ii) Asset Management Plan

- iii) Design guide (including climate change)
- iv) Garage Strategy
- v) Sheltered Housing Strategy
- vi) Development Programme
- vii) Audit
- viii) Regeneration Strategy (including better use of stock)
- ix) Local Plan Policies as consultee (including Neighbourhood Development Plans)

b) Finance and Policy ('Pounds') sub-committee

Areas of Responsibility:

- i) Business Plan
- ii) Income (including bad debt)
- iii) Rents and service charges
- iv) Budgets
- v) Efficiency
- vi) Audit

c) Performance and Risk ('People') sub-committee

- i) Operational policies
- ii) Key Performance Indicator(s) (including benchmarking)
- iii) Challenge and Change Group (scrutiny) reports
- iv) Risk Register
- v) Community and Resident Engagement
- vi) Regulatory Framework
- vii) Customer satisfaction
- viii) Service development (for example, voids process and specification)
- ix) Audit
- x) Annual Report
- xi) TPAS (Tenant Participation Advisory Service)

d) Whilst all members are able to attend any or all of the sub-committees, membership of the sub-committees is as follows:

Housing Board member	Development and Investment ('Place')	Finance and Policy ('Pounds')	Performance and Risk ('People')
Rachael Arnott	✗	✗	✓
Angela Britten	✓	✗	✗
Robert Chapman	✓	✓	✗

Councillor Richard Clewer	✓	✓	✓
Cindy Creasy	✗	✓	✗
Councillor Brian Dalton	✓	✓	✗
Jacqui Evans	✓	✗	✓
Lorraine Le-Gate	✓	✓	✓
Councillor Fred Westmoreland	✓	✗	✓

Overview (December 2018 – November 2019)

13. The Board did not have a meeting scheduled for December 2018.

14. Between January 2019 and March 2019, the Board hosted the National Consultancy Manager from the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) who presented a plaque to recognise that the service had achieved TPAS Pro Accreditation for its resident engagement opportunities. The Board also considered the strategic direction of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) with particular emphasis on financial and budgetary matters, including:

- a) The rent reduction of 1% per annum.
- b) Savings that had been attributed to repairs and maintenance.
- c) Expansion of the DLO.
- e) If currently approved programmes for planned and cyclical maintenance and Council House Build Programme are completed, forecast reserves at 31 March 2019 would likely be £11.948 million (revenue) and £Nil (capital).
- f) Provision for £100 thousand to be made available for the Small Improvement Bid (SIB) scheme.

15. Furthermore, between January 2019 and March 2019, the Board contributed toward creating, reviewing and refining the HRA Business Plan and new HRA model, in the context of the main current and future strategic risks. Short, medium and long-term priorities served to strategically link the service with corporate objectives.

16. Also, between January 2019 and March 2019, the Board received Budget Updates, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) data, maintained the risk register and contributed toward the Garages and Sheltered Housing Review. The Challenge and Change Group (C&CG) is the Housing Board's scrutiny group which ensures we are compliant with the Regulatory Standards which require

scrutiny. The C&CG is comprised of volunteer residents who conduct scrutiny exercises; the Board received:

- a) An update on the Housing Board Chairman's annual meeting with the C&CG's Chair in order to inform the formal evaluation of the Group.
- b) A general update paper, including agreeing to refine and update the C&CG's Terms of Reference, the shared Roles and Relationships Protocol, the Housing Board's Terms of Reference, and the C&CG's work-plan.
- c) An additional Management Update Report in respect of the C&CG's 'Planned Maintenance: Key Performance Indicator' project, along with information around general satisfaction levels for planned maintenance.

17. Participants also considered and made recommendations, between January 2019 and March 2019, on parking matters that were raised by public attendees and information around sewerage works, including monies available, works undertaken or planned. Rent and arrears information was also presented amid concerns around the impact of Universal Credit. A leaseholders' briefing paper was presented to the Board and members were informed of the services' intention to review its HRA Aids and Adaptations Plan to ensure that the council makes the best use of HRA adapted properties.

18. In April 2019, a small number of Board members met for the annual sub-group to set targets for the services' Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the year 2019/20. Attendees were presented with an End of Year Performance Report alongside the proposed targets; 3 targets were amended by the sub-group; some targets were contingent on resource allocation levels.

19. In May 2019, members continued a focus on risk management and Key Performance Indicators, which included more in-depth information around complaints and compliments, alongside the 2017/18 End of Year report and the sub-group reporting back, which included agreed targets for the year 2019/20 which were constructed to complement the Board's priorities. Environment Works Survey results were presented and utilised to refine the HRA Business Plan. Members also received budget updates, a business case for bringing the sewerage works' contract in-house, and agreed to develop the idea of introducing 3 new sub-committees to allow more granular involvement in making recommendations:

- a) Finance sub-committee
- b) Development and Investment sub-committee
- c) Performance sub-committee

20. The May 2019 meeting also included the end of year 3 progress report in respect of the Asset Management Plan (AMP):

- a) 45 Action Items (2 were later removed by agreement with the Board)
- b) Yet to Start – 0
- c) Underway – 16

d) Completed – 27

21. At its July 2019 meeting, the Board investigated Key Performance Indicators performance and received its 2019/20 Q1 budget update. Board members agreed that they needed to be provided more clear explanations for any variance and for the Capital Budget's budget lines to be agreed by element, what is programmed, what is committed, what should be committed and actual spend each quarter, along with rectifying actions, where appropriate.
22. Also, at the July 2019 meeting, members were provided with the SWAP Audit Report on Rents, case studies for mental health support workers, and a detailed report on rent arrears actions; this was to address concerns around the impact of Universal Credit. The structure and content of a letter used by the service to raise rent arrear concerns with residents was passed to the C&CG to comment on. Additional resource for the Housing Income department was supported. The Annual Report for Tenants and Leaseholders 2018/19 was supported, subject to certain changes. Sheltered housing refurbishment information was also provided, along with a new approach to electrical safety and smoke alarm checks. Broad topic areas for each of the proposed 3 sub-committees were covered, with further information to be decided at an away-day event to be held at County Hall, Trowbridge.
23. The Boards' scheduled September 2019 meeting was delayed until October 2019, so that the away-day event could be held. The HRA 30 Year Business Plan was presented, discussed and agreed; it was later presented to Cabinet. Members determined the sub-committee remits, agreed the level of service from each member and also amended the names of the 3 sub-committees to:
- a) Development and Investment (alternatively the 'Place' sub-committee)
 - b) Finance and Policy (alternatively the 'Pounds' sub-committee)
 - c) Performance and Risk (alternatively the 'People' sub-committee)
24. At the Boards' October 2019 meeting (originally September), members welcomed members of the public to present their Small Improvement Bids (SIBs) which were then duly considered for funding. The Board also reconsidered a new approach to electrical safety and smoke alarm checks, formally agreed the introduction of 3 sub-committees and their remits, updated their own Terms of Reference, and received a presentation on the HRA 30 Year Business Plan and council house build programme.
25. The Board's October 2019 meeting also updates around:
- a) Tenancy Visits.
 - b) Proposed New PIs.
 - c) Needham House.
26. In November 2019, the Board held their first sub-committee sessions for the:
- a) Development and Investment (alternatively the 'Place' sub-committee)
 - b) Performance and Risk (alternatively the 'People' sub-committee)

27. Arrangements were made for the third sub-committee, Finance and Policy (alternatively the 'Pounds' sub-committee), to be held in January 2020.
28. In December 2019 (originally scheduled for November 2019), the Board held its sixth Annual General Meeting, which included a Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Finance Update and the Chairman's overview of the year. Opportunities were provided for questions to be put to the Chairman. There were no public attendees beyond the members of the Challenge and Change Group.
29. Immediately following the AGM meeting, the Board held its regular meeting, which was dedicated to 4 significant priority items (with some having been considered in more detail at the sub-committees and now requiring formal agreement of the Housing Board to the sub-committee recommendations):
- i) Agreeing funding for a request that had previously been submitted as a Small Improvement Bid.
 - ii) KPIs for 2019/20 Q2.
 - iii) Expanded DLO Operations (6 months review).
 - iv) An HRA Grounds Maintenance Business Plan.
30. The Challenge and Change Group works with the Housing Board. For the applicable period, the group has produced a number of reports:
- (a) **Project #10 – 'Planned Maintenance: Key Performance Indicator' (September 2018).**
The report and management response were presented at the Board meeting held on 26 November 2018. A management response update was not required and thus not timetabled. Board members later opted to receive a management response update, which was presented at the Board meeting held on 25 March 2019.
 - (b) **Project #11 – 'Communication in Responsive Repairs' (February 2019).**
The report was presented to the service on 13 February 2019.
 - (c) **Project #12 – 'Aids and Adaptations' (September 2019).**
This report was presented to the service on 10 September 2019.
 - (d) **Project #13 – 'Sheltered Housing Service Charges' (date n/a).**
This report is nearing completion and will likely be presented to the applicable sub-committee, which Board members deemed the scrutiny groups' work to fall under.

Priorities

31. The Board has previously recommended to the service that the following strategic matters be prioritised, as noted in the minutes of their meeting held on 23 May 2016:

a) “That the main 2 priorities, in respect of the Housing Revenue Account, be:

- Asset Management [Plan].
- Housing Revenue Account Business Plan.

Furthermore, in respect of the 2 priorities, above:

- The Board endorses the service having the flexibility to utilise additional resource, as and when required, within the overall finances of the Housing Revenue Account.
- That when the first version of the Asset Management [Plan] is presented, it will include proposals for resident consultation, and the full Asset Management [Plan] is to be delivered over the coming 12 to 18 months.”

32. Board members operate in a fair and balanced manner, maintain their independence and make recommendations to Housing Services; the Board can also make recommendations to Cabinet; however, powers cannot and have not been conferred on the Board so as to enable it to make binding decisions, as outlined in the Paper passed by Cabinet on 22 January 2013.

Membership and Attendance Record (December 2018 – November 2019)

33. Attendance relates to Board meetings only (that is, the figures exclude Away-Days, sub-committees, etcetera).

34. Of the 6 meetings held in 2019 (Councillor Ashley O’Neill attended on 25 March 2019; after a change of duties, there is no further involvement), attendance was:

WCHB Member	28/01	25/03	20/05	15/07	10/10	05/12	Total
Councillor Richard Clewer	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6 (100%)
Rachael Arnott (Tenant Member)	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	4 (66.6%)
Angela Britten (Tenant Member)	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	3 (50%)
Robert Chapman (Independent Member)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6 (100%)
Cindy Creasy (Independent Member)	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	3 (50%)
Councillor Brian Dalton	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6 (100%)
Jacqui Evans (Independent Member)	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	4 (66.6%)

Lorraine Le-Gate (Tenant Member)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	5 (83.3%)
Councillor Fred Westmoreland	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	4 (66.6%)

Safeguarding Implications

35. There are no significant safeguarding implications associated with this report.

Public Health Implications

36. There are no significant public health implications associated with this report.

Procurement Implications

37. There are no significant corporate procurement implications associated with this report; although should the Board make recommendations regarding procurement of services to be delivered to residents, then this will become a consideration.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

38. All Board members operate in and treat all residents in a fair and balanced manner, maintain their independence and make recommendations to Housing Management. Board members do not represent a particular area; they represent all council residents in the county of Wiltshire and make recommendations in the best interests of all council residents in Wiltshire.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

39. There are no significant environmental or climate change implications associated with this report.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken

40. Wiltshire Council's Housing Board would fail to meet the requirements of its Terms of Reference, namely to provide an Annual Report to Cabinet and potential deterioration of or missed opportunity to improve services if the Board were not to focus their efforts on the identified priorities. This paper is only for noting.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks

41. Wiltshire Council's Housing Board may fail to make recommendations which improve services for residents and their families, missing an opportunity for improvement, or make recommendations which leads to a deterioration of service quality. This paper is only for noting.

42. Powers cannot and have not been conferred on the Board so as to enable it to make binding decisions, as outlined in the Paper passed by Cabinet on 22

January 2013. The Board makes recommendations to Housing Management and can make recommendations to Cabinet.

Financial Implications

43. There are no significant financial implications associated with this report.

Legal Implications

44. There are no significant legal implications associated with this report.

Options Considered

45. A formal report to Cabinet is required. No alternative options were considered.

Conclusions

46. There is increasing evidence that Wiltshire Council's Housing Board is having a positive impact on the quality of service provision to residents and their families, has itself created an additional opportunity for residents to engage with the service and shaped further engagement opportunities.

Proposal

47. For Cabinet to note this Annual Report.

Reason for Proposal

48. Wiltshire Council's Housing Board's Terms of Reference require an Annual Report to be presented to Cabinet.

Simon Hendey (Director - Housing and Commercial)

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7 January 2020

Appendices

None.

Background Papers

The following documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report:

None.