



Scrutiny Committee
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Working with housing providers

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Portfolio: Supporting People

Ward(s) Affected: All

Purpose of the Report:

The purpose of the report is to update members on our work with housing providers to support tenants and those at risk of homelessness.

Recommendations:

1. The committee to note the report and recommend any actions to officers.

1. Summary

- 1.1 Good quality housing is a key requirement to support residents to live well. The Council no longer owns its own general needs housing stock, and works closely with Housing Providers within our District to run social housing.
- 1.2 We have a positive working relationship with our housing providers in general, there are areas where we can improve and the Council is looking to build on our existing relationship with our providers to improve the stock, and the support for tenants.

2. Background

- 2.1 Officers have met with our three biggest housing providers to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the current situation and identify any potential solutions deemed necessary to improve the lives of residents in South Norfolk.
- 2.2 We focus on our three biggest housing providers in the district, Clarion Housing Association, Saffron Housing Trust, and Flagship/Victory Homes. There are around 22 housing providers in the district but most only have relatively few properties or operate specialist housing.

3. Current positions/findings

- 3.1 We met several times to focus on different aspects of housing.
 - Overview of response time for repairs and issues and statutory duties of housing providers were met.
 - Overview of social housing in the district and service level agreements.
 - Meeting with senior managers from the three main housing providers.
 - Meeting with housing enabling team to review housing delivery
 - Consider repairs, complaints, and service level agreements in more details
- 3.2 It was clear that the speed in which repair and anti-social behaviour complaints were resolved needed improving, but this improvement pathway was not straight forward. The results are at appendix 1 of this report.
- 3.3 The number of aging properties is a significant contributing factor through the natural increase in repairs needed for older properties. Furthermore, older properties that have energy efficiency measure can then cause additional problems through damp and mould for example. These issues could be partly resolved through the right funding and interventions in place.
- 3.4 The increase in demand caused through Covid and cost-of-living meant that a larger proportion of housing is being provided to those in urgent need so there are fewer homes to allocate to those that need to move between properties when there is tension in the home or overcrowding for example.
- 3.5 The complexity of issues experienced by tenants is also increasing which is affecting the number of complaints and the time to resolve. This affects both

Housing Providers, the Council and other partners as issues are likely to require a multi-agency response to resolve. Housing associations and housing in general continues to be very much in the public and political eye resulting in robust guidance from the housing ombudsman. With people being encouraged to complain there has been a 323% increase in maladministration claims. This has resulted in increased scrutiny and therefore realignment of priorities.

- 3.6 We discussed that an additional Service Level Agreement (SLA) on anti-social behaviour and repairs would be a useful tool to help improve the quality of response and set expectations. It was clear that improvements were both the Council and Housing Providers responsibility, along with our partners, particularly the police but also County Council and health partners.
- 3.7 A new agreement would help to set the standard we wanted to reach in South Norfolk but set out clearly the responsibility and actions of each partner and identify gaps in service which are not currently resourced. Both officers and the Housing Providers were keen on such an agreement.
- 3.8 Whilst each Housing association takes each of these matters seriously they all measure the issue differently making it very hard to compare and share learning. However, performance measures are about to be introduced from central Government from the Regulator of Social Housing, as part of their tenant satisfaction measures. We have replied to the consultation relating to these measures in a favorable standing. These would form an excellent basis to measure overall performance. These measures can be found in the following [link](#).
- 3.9 An SLA would also need to record the performance measures that the Council agrees to, to ensure that all partners set out their clear commitments and be held to account.
- 3.10 During the discussions, it was advised that the Council could take the following actions to mitigate some issues faced by housing providers:
- To encourage a co-ordinated and strategic approach to the development of more affordable homes and facilitate planning applications.
 - Providing more nomination information at an earlier stage to allow housing providers plan more effectively where tenants would be housed.
 - Where support packages for high needs clients were in place they should be maintained after a tenancy had been secured, as often when support was withdrawn these tenants could fail to maintain their tenancy.
 - Greater collaborative working in respect of housing stock, such as working on adapted homes.
 - Providing a good mix of affordable housing, in terms of both size and tenure.
- 3.11 These actions could form part of the SLA described in 3.6 and strategy in 3.13.

During the discussion it was clear that the Council was enjoying very high levels of affordable housing delivery. However, much of this was likely to be pent up

delivery, due to the pandemic, and it was anticipated that the constraints caused by nutrient neutrality would cause this level of delivery to fall off in the future.

- 3.12 There is opportunity to explore future strategic housing delivery in the district, which was welcomed from both Providers and officers. Setting out our strategic ambition for the future would help ensure we have the right number of homes, in the right place to meet our resident's needs.

4. Proposed action

- 4.1 In consideration of all the issues Officers are making the following recommendations which are presented below to the Scrutiny Committee.
- That an anti-social behaviour and repairs Service Level Agreements with housing providers be introduced to provide a more coordinated approach to dealing with these issues. These would include performance measures that would hold both the Council and Housing Providers to account for the services they provide.
 - That the Council and Housing providers and other relevant providers* should work together to share appropriate information and resource. This will provide more information pre-tenancy to help plan more effectively where tenants would be housed, as well as support high needs tenants post tenancy placement. The aim will be to ensure appropriate resource is put in place, to reduce complaints, anti-social behaviour, evictions and to support tenants.
 - That the Council should develop a housing strategy to improve long term housing availability and stock to meet our future housing needs.

* such as Police, Childrens Services, Adult Social Care, Norfolk and Suffolk Foundation Trust (mental health), Supported Housing Providers.

5. Other options

- 5.1 N/A

6. Issues and risks

- 6.1 **Resource Implications** – the recommendations to develop an SLA can be met within existing resources. A separate business case would need to be agreed to look at increasing resources to develop a housing strategy.
- 6.2 **Legal Implications** – None
- 6.3 **Equality Implications** – Equalities are already covered within impact statements in housing, and environmental services.
- 6.4 **Environmental Impact** – Any future housing strategy would take note of the overall ambitions around net zero emissions.

6.5 **Crime and Disorder** – housing is a key pathway into, and out of offending behaviour. A more coordinated approach will help to make South Norfolk an even safe place to live.

6.6 **Risks** – None

7. Conclusion

Housing is a key focus for the Council. Setting out clear expectations through an SLA will assist in further strengthening the working relationships between the Council and Housing Providers. A new housing strategy will provide a focus to enable the right homes in the right place.

Background papers

None

Appendix 1

Number of anti-social behaviour (ASB) and repair complaints for each of the top three housing providers in the district.

Victory

	ASB March 23	Repairs
Current caseload	64 live cases (excludes DA)	3,470 currently
Average first contact	1 WD high Risk 3 WD med/standard risk	28 days YTD average
Average time to resolve	YTD average 64 days	55 days YTD average
Caseload over the last 3 years	837 cases	54,982

Clarion

	ASB March 23	Repairs
	NB this is for stock managed by Norwich team = approx 6,000 units	Data for part of east region which is approx 6,000 units.
Current caseload	15 open cases. NB we had 22 new cases in March.	WIP (work in progress) 963

Average first contact	We don't have a measure for this. We do have a target to keep cases below 90 days and currently have 0 cases older than 90 days old.	We don't measure this. We do measure First time fix = 97% Customer satisfaction = 87% We also monitor against service standards. but we have new iT system so can't get this at the moment.
Average time to resolve		

Saffron

	ASB March 23
Current caseload	We had 38 new cases in March. Across all housing stock. This figure include DA
Average first contact	All cases were compliant.
Average time to resolve	Cat 1 contact within 1 day Cat 2 within 5 days Cat 3 within 5 days We do not measure average time to resolve. We aim to resolve cases before 90 days unless legal action has started. In March we had 6 cases open over 90 days
Caseload over the last 3 years	1405 across all housing stock and LA areas we can only report back to 22 nd June 2020