

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet
Date: January 2024
Subject: Housing and Communities Portfolio
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Holly Whitbread

Recommending:

That the report of the Housing and Communities Portfolio Holder be noted.

Assets

RAAC latest / position for EFDC

We have assessed Council buildings for risks associated with RAAC considering the date of build and information we hold on its construction. Where we identified a building that we cannot eliminate the use of RAAC through desktop study, we have undertaken a site investigation.

This exercise is now complete. None of the buildings in our operational and residential portfolio used RAAC in their construction.

Damp & Mould Policy

We have drafted a condensation, damp and mould policy. We have consulted the Tenants' and Lessees' Panel and, presented the draft policy to Scrutiny Committee in January 24. The policy will be presented to the next Cabinet meeting for approval.

The policy will demonstrate our commitment to be proactive in seeking all instances of condensation, damp and mould that could have an adverse effect on the wellbeing of our tenants. This will include running campaigns encouraging tenants to report problems and advice on controlling condensation. We will carry out works to deal with the cause of the problem and monitor its effectiveness until we are confident the problem is resolved.

We are working Qualis to fully implement the policy.

Asset Management Strategy - update

Ark Consultancy are close to completing their research. This has included:

- A tour of a sample of EFDC stock
- Workshops with Asset Management team staff, our internal customers and Qualis
- One-to-one meetings with key individuals about specific areas of asset management
- A survey of tenants on their priorities
- Benchmarking of the services we provide

Ark will present a draft Position Statement early February 24 for discussion. We expect to receive the full position statement, summary of challenges and proposed strategy framework around the middle of February. The draft strategy is expected by mid-March.

Landlord Compliance

Our position on the Big Six compliance areas continues to improve. In some areas (asbestos reinspection's, water hygiene risk assessments, lift inspections and fire risk assessments) we are 100% compliant. In other areas we are close to full compliance. Our focus is to improve our position on electrical testing.

Energy Efficiency Retrofit

Our first retrofit project to improve the energy performance of 103 homes is expected to start on site in February. The project is part funded by the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF). The properties were selected as they are some of our worst performing in terms of their energy efficiency. Many of the properties included in the project are not on the gas grid. The retrofit works will bring all the properties to a minimum standard of EPC (Energy Performance Certificate) band C.

Most of the homes included in the project have now had a retrofit assessment to identify what measures are needed to achieve EPC band C. The assessments have found that a number of the properties are not as poorly performing as we previously believed, so the cost to meet the target standard will be less than we assumed. We are therefore seeking approval from the department administering SHDF funding to increase the overall number of properties. If agreed, we will increase the number in our project to 132, securing the original grant allocation.

Housing

Housing Strategy Team

Government Consultations responded:

The Regulator of Social Housing: tenant rights and complaints –

- DLUHC is proposing directions requiring the Regulator of Social Housing to introduce standards on:
 - Tenants' rights regarding their homes
 - How tenants can complain against their landlord
 - Relevant regulatory requirements concerning homes, facilities, and services

Once finalised, the standards will become mandatory for all registered housing providers. This represents a significant change - tenants will have clearly defined rights and complaint processes.

EFDC were one of only 14 local authority social landlords that responded, along with 52 individuals and 70 organisations in total.

Government Consultations In-consideration:

- The Future Homes and Buildings Standards: 2023 consultation
- Awaab's Law: Consultation on timescales for repairs in the social rented sector
- We are also expecting a consultation from Government on how British citizens can be given faster access to social housing. It is unclear at present if DHLUC will go ahead with a consultation on this proposed policy.

Housing Policies - Update

Further to a sector-wide Ombudsman amendment in respect of wording for exceptions to the residency criteria within Housing Allocations Schemes, we have amended the EFDC

Housing Allocations scheme (eppingforestdc.gov.uk), section 3.11.2. to remain compliant with the amendment.

The aim was to make the residency criteria clearer. The purpose of section 3.11.2 has not changed. The Ombudsman required the clarification of the wording to be done within a few days.

The simpler wording is:

“Households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
Households who are owed a main homelessness duty by the Council under S193 of the Housing Act 1996 as amended.

Please note that applicants who may be experiencing homelessness, but to whom the Council has **not** accepted a full homelessness duty will still be required to meet the seven years’ residency criteria in order to join the housing register.”

Housing Policies currently in consideration/being drafted include:

- Disposals
- Decants
- Temporary Accommodation Placements policy
- Annual Report to Tenants 2022/23
- A review of our tenancy agreement and handbook.

Housing Team

Final works are being carried out at the Oakwood Hill community centre, with a re-launch planned for March 2024. Multiple organisations are involved, and consultation starts in February with residents, to gain views and comments of what service they would like to see being delivered from the centre.

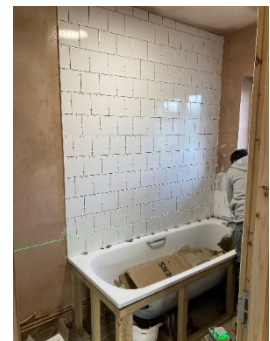
Independent Living – the return of our Independent Living Officers to our older people schemes a couple of day per week has been well received by residents. Through working with our residents and listening to their views, this was a key change we were pleased to implement.

Housing Development

Pentlow Way, Buckhurst Hill - 7 units; 6 x 1B2P Flats, 1 x 2B4P flat

The roof at Pentlow is now complete with the building now watertight. Internals are well underway, with fire protection ongoing to stud walls, plastering, 1st fixes on M & E and further works ongoing.

We have experienced some delays with the fire access road and contractors (experiencing supply chain issues). Recent meetings with our contractors indicate a revised handover date for the whole scheme of June 2024. We will however press ahead with the scheme opening event in March and we look forward to sharing the scheme with members and the wider teams involved.



Woollard Street, Waltham Abbey - 8 units; 7 x 1B2P & 1 x 2B4P

The internal works continue to make progress, all plastering is now complete, 2nd fix plumbing and radiators installed, tiling is ongoing. Further works to drainage ongoing, with

works expected to go ahead with UKPN and MWA works. Handover is expected the end of March 24 with a scheme opening early March.

Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) Project

We are soon to complete 3 of our properties for the LAHF project, with a further 3 to be completed over the coming months. We will be arranging a visit with our portfolio holder to see the good work that has gone on throughout this project so far. We have worked with local contractors and suppliers to complete the works. We have had some challenges to work through within the properties but, are now close to completion as below.

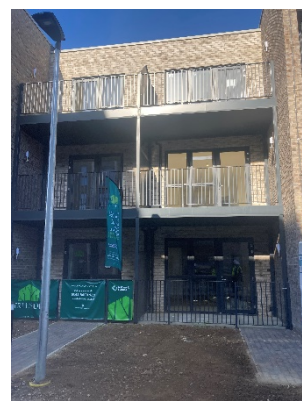


Planning

Ongoing communication with our planning colleagues is underway regarding our phase 4.4 schemes for Chequers B and Ladyfields. We aim to make further progress on these by year end.

Strategic partnership

Sovereign Network Homes (Previously known as Network Homes) have completed on their site A development in Borders Lane, Loughton with the team and our portfolio holder recently attending an open event. These homes have housed a total of 22 people of which half are children. Well done everyone involved.





Site B continues to make progress and we periodically attend site to monitor progress. We look forward to these completing to this level of quality.