

## ***Report to the Council***

**Committee:** Cabinet  
**Date:** November 2023  
**Subject:** Housing and Strategic Health Partnerships Portfolio  
**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Holly Whitbread

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### **Recommending:**

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

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### **1. Housing & Property – cross cutting themes**

#### **a) Civica Cx – Housing and Asset Management System – Phase 1 - Go-Live**

The Housing and Property Teams went 'live' with Phase 1 of the new system on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2023. This is a key milestone and great achievement for a project that initially started some years ago. The Civica Cx system replaces the NEC OHMs system that teams had used for many years.

Civica Cx is a more modern alternative to OHMs, it is a cloud-based solution that users will access via a web browser. It provides functionality to manage all aspects of housing and asset functions, as well as the ability to log and track customer cases and enhanced reporting capabilities, all of which allow colleagues to be more self-sufficient in getting data out of the system.

#### Phase 1 includes

- Properties, People and Tenancies
- Income Management
- Allocations / Re-housing
- Tenancy Case Management
- Right to Buy
- Repairs – non-Qualis (Qualis will retain their current processes but, with greater integration moving forward)
- Must Have Reports for team

Moving forward to the autumn/winter of 2024 will be Phase 2 of the Civica Cx system. This will bring on board a range of modules including:

- Compliance
- Service Charges
- Repairs full implementation, including Qualis repair processes
- Asset Management / Planned Maintenance
- Finance Integration
- Improvements we were unable to implement in Phase 1
- Customer Portal

b) Housemark

EFDC has commenced an annual membership with Housemark. Housemark is the leading data and insight company for the UK housing sector, jointly owned by the National Housing Federation and the Chartered Institute of Housing. Its members include over 350 social housing providers from across the UK - representing 3.8million homes.

Housemark provides insight, analysis and services that will help us to benchmark and compare how we are performing and, help us to shape and improve our services. This approach will also inform our decision-making giving, us greater confidence to make decisions that make a difference for our customers, our people and our Council.

As a member of Housemark, we will benefit from a range of products and services including sector analysis, tailored comparisons, and forecasting.

We will use this membership and approach for both EFDC and Qualis to strengthen service alignment, improve data integrity and offer internal challenge.

c) Government Consultations responded to, and in consideration

Responses issued:

- Consultation on the consumer standards
  - We're now working on the potential implications of the new consumer standards in terms of data and other evidence
- Consultation on fees from RSH
  - The Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) is considering implementation of new charges/fees which if implemented as proposed, could result in an annual fee of c£50k. The RSH already charges housing associations but is now considering charges to local authorities too.
- Complaint Handling Code
  - The Code is to be statutory from April 2024 and is now shared with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. Significant implications and the Corporate policy will need to be reviewed and training rolled out.
- Homes England; Partner Perception

In-consideration:

- Regulator of Social Housing: tenant rights and complaints
- Statutory guidance under s215 of the HRA 2008 – sets out how the Regulator will use their powers.
- Modern leasehold: restricting ground rent for existing leases
- HMG consultation on a cap on entrants using Safe and Legal routes to the UK

## 2. Housing

a) Tenant and Leaseholder Panel

The Tenant & Leaseholder Panel continue to work closely with our teams to inform services and offer critical challenge. Key areas of activity include:

- They are working towards a small focus group to enable feedback and input relating to block/street representatives and what their remit will be
- The panel are providing feedback on the Older Persons Strategy and, the Home Ownership Strategy. The panel meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> of December 2023 has a key focus on these items

- Wyn (Chair of Panel) has been working with Keith Bowman, Strategy Manager to provide feedback and input into the government consultation on the consumer standards
- Wyn has also been cited on the new complaints handling code from the ombudsman and provided comments/feedback

### **3. Housing Development**

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

The roof at Pentlow has made a great deal of progress, although still slower than expected. The building is not yet watertight; however, we expect this be watertight ahead of the Christmas break. This will make way for the internals to start taking shape ahead of our revised handover of March 2024. We will begin making a start on planning the scheme opening in the new year.

#### **Key progress includes:**

- Roof carpentry ongoing
- Front dormer complete ready for soakers/ zinc and tiling
- Rear gable end barge, soffit and fascia completed
- Rear valleys completed
- Zinc work to soffit and fascia's ongoing
- Handrails installed to stair well area
- Brickwork progressing across development
- Roof covering – felt and battening ongoing
- Gas membrane preparation ongoing – floors cleaned and scraped
- 1st fix plumbing ongoing





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

The internal works continue to make progress at a reasonable pace, we expect to receive handover of the scheme in February 2024.

Key Progress includes;

- First fix M & E to ground floor and first floor complete
- Ductwork to G/F & F/F complete
- Fire stopping protection to services to G/F & F/F complete
- Windowsills installed
- Glass balcony balustrading complete
- Pipe lagging complete
- M & E 1st fix inspected
- Ground floor walls and ceilings closed up





#### c) Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) Project

We are soon to complete on our first LAHF project home, originally expected to complete in September. Challenges with the gas mains connection and delays with our window and door supplier had impacted completion timescales. We expect to complete our first unit before Christmas. We are also steadily making progress with the other properties in this programme with completions expected in the new year.

#### d) Planning

Our key focus here is to work to get the Ladyfields development proposal and, Chequers B substation works through planning and then, get these into contract and on site. We are working with our planning team to progress this.

#### e) Strategic partnership

B3 Living recently completed their development scheme and we attended an opening event to celebrate the collaboration between Epping and B3 living. It is a fantastic development, and we look forward to working with B3 Living on further projects.

Sovereign Network Homes (Previously known as Network Homes) will deliver from two Sites – A & B (below) a total of 107 affordable housing units from November 2023 up to April 2026. It is possible that completion may be achieved before 2026.

**Site A** at Boarder Lane, Loughton, now known as Treeside will deliver 22 units (8 A/R and 14 S/O) and handover is anticipated to be at the end of November 2023. An official opening event is being arranged for January 2024.

Significant progress has been made on the sale of the shared-ownership units; to date 9 units have been reserved for applicants in the District and the intention is that all units will be sold in the District.

Further, Sovereign Network homes is currently working with our housing team to ensure allocation of the affordable rented units.

**Site B**, again at Boarder Lane, Loughton will deliver 85 units (57AR and 28S/O) and it is anticipated that handover may begin in April 2024 to April 2026, although firm dates are to be confirmed.

These two sites are at the edge of an ancient woodland in Epping Forest, provide easy access to London and continue to provide much needed housing. We are confident that they will make an immensely positive contribution to community.

#### f) Partnerships

Our partners continue to engage actively with developers and, there are positive signs that new contracts for delivery will present in the coming years. The adoption of the local plan was critically important for our partnership; we therefore expect more affordable housing delivery from our partnerships.

We are also seeking to extend the number of partners from 7 to 9; English Rural, a provider with extensive experience and skill in delivering rural affordable housing and Clarion Housing Group, one of the largest housing association in the UK. This increases the ability to have more affordable housing and also the flexibility to have different sized organisations thus enhancing the delivery of more homes. Both of which approached EFDC with a view to working with us.

### **4. Assets**

#### a) 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 commissioned a site investigation.

We have eliminated all buildings in our operational and residential portfolio except two, almost identical, residential buildings. The likelihood of RAAC in these two buildings is low. We will carry out intrusive tests that will involve drilling into the roof slab to check the material used in its construction. We have put a flag on our system to notify us of any top floor flat that becomes void. When an empty flat becomes available, we will carry out the test. The risk from RAAC in housing is very low because it was not widely used in housing construction and, the spans of beams are much shorter than in schools and many public buildings. This means such concrete beams are under less stress.

#### b) Damp & Mould Policy

We have drafted a condensation, damp and mould policy. We plan to present this to the Tenants' and Lessees' Panel and the Scrutiny Committee in due course. We aim to take the policy to Cabinet in March for approval to adopt the policy.

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.

#### c) Asset Management Strategy - update

Following a procurement process, we have appointed Ark Consultancy to help us develop our Housing Asset Management Strategy. Work has started in gathering the information needed to establish the current position.

We have given Ark a tour of our stock so they can better understand type of accommodation we provide, its condition and the asset management issues we face.

Ark will be facilitating workshops with the Asset Management team, Qualis and our internal customers on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> December.

During December, we will be running a survey of our tenants and leaseholders to help us understand their priorities. This will be important for setting the direction of the strategy.

We expect the first draft of the Asset Management Strategy around February 24 and aim to present the Strategy to Cabinet in March 24.

**Surjit Balu**  
**Interim Director of Housing and Property**