

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

**Committee:** Cabinet  
**Date:** March 2024  
**Subject:** Housing and Communities 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. Assets**

#### **a) Energy Efficiency Retrofit**

Works to improve the energy efficiency at 16 properties are in progress. This is the first batch of the 132 homes we will be improving as a part of EFDC's first significant retrofit project. The work is being delivered by E.ON and is part funded by the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF). The project is due to complete by April 2025.

More broadly, our ambition is to improve the energy efficiency of all our housing properties so they will be ready for net zero by 2050 and, we are working on plans to help us achieve this.

#### **b) Major Works at The Broadway, Debden**

Major works at The Broadway are planned to start later this year. This will include works to make the buildings watertight, external redecorations and other ancillary works and repairs. A consultation event was held with the commercial leaseholders on the 14<sup>th</sup> March and with residents on 21<sup>st</sup> March. The Notice of Intention was sent to residential leaseholders on 18<sup>th</sup> March in accordance with the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985.

We expect to put the contract out to tender by the end of April. Liaising with residents and commercial leaseholders along with delivering quality customer service will also be key considerations in the selection of the contractor.

#### **c) Major Works at Limes Farm Estate**

Practical Completion of the major works scheme at Limes Farm Estate is planned for 12<sup>th</sup> April. On this day, the contractor, Equans, will offer 'handover' of the works to EFDC. We will accept handover if we are satisfied the works have been completed to the specified standard. Following Practical Completion, there will be a 12-month defect liability period during which Equans will be responsible for rectifying any defects in their work that arise.

#### **d) Stock Condition Survey**

During 2023, Ridge and Partners surveyed 51% of the dwellings in our housing stock and 87% of the blocks. During 2024, Ridge and Partners have been commissioned to survey the remaining stock. They will start this second phase of surveys in April. Access permitting, we aim to have surveyed all our housing properties during 2024/25.

This will strengthen the existing data we hold and, support us in identifying and carrying out works to properties to ensure we continue to meet the Decent Homes Standard. It will also ensure we are aware of all cases of damp and mould and arrange remedial works as necessary.

The surveys will provide us with up-to-date estimates of the remaining lives of building components (kitchens, windows, roofs etc.). This will enable us to develop a cost-effective planned replacement programme.

e) Landlord Compliance (at 18 March)

Over the 'Big Six' areas of landlord compliance we are at 100% for asbestos, water hygiene, lift safety and fire risk assessments.

We are at 99.97% compliance for gas safety with safety checks overdue on just two properties for which steps are being taken to gain access. We are at 99.69% compliance for CO detectors with 18 properties still requiring a detector, again steps are being taken to work with tenants to ensure installation.

## 2. Housing

a) Homelessness

We continue to see an increase in the number of people presenting to the Homelessness team as homeless. Approaches from people due to domestic abuse in particular has increased during the course of the year. The team are prioritising those most vulnerable and ensuring we meet legislative timescales for dealing with cases.

We have made best use of the dispersal funding from the Home Office, using it to bolster resources in our Integrated Support Services (ISS) team. The ISS work in both our refugee sites, supporting people with next steps, finding employment with accommodation attached and, working with people in relation to their homelessness applications. Our two interim posts include a temporary homelessness officer working several days each week directly in the hotel housing refugees. The second interim officer resource is focussed on sourcing private sector accommodation for those who might otherwise struggle to obtain this kind of accommodation without support.

b) EHOH Housing Management Sub-Group Discussions

Key discussions in this forum have included:

- The move away from fixed term tenancies back to lifetime tenancies
- The Government plan to create a smoke free generation by 2030
- Tenants Satisfaction performance with average performance across Essex being between 65% and 80% satisfaction
- Professionalisation of the Social Housing sector

c) Digital Switchover Independent Living

Contracts were awarded for both, equipment works and monitoring to Appello. Work is due to start in June of this year.

**3. Housing Strategy**

a) Consultations

Recently Completed:

- *Awaab's Law*: Consultation on timescales for repairs in the social rented sector

Underway:

- *The Future Homes and Buildings Standards: 2023 consultation* – DLUHC is seeking views on requirements for energy efficiency and heating in new homes and non-domestic buildings. Development colleagues are reviewing to see if a response is required. Assets have reviewed and no response form them is appropriate just now.
- *Consultation on reforms to social housing allocations* - The consultation proposes a series of changes to the allocations system and looks to prioritise those who have a strong connection to the UK. It aims to introduce measures to address anti-social behaviour or terrorism offences.
- *Competence and Conduct Standard for social housing* - aims to introduce a national framework for promoting high standards and professionalism new measures on professionalisation.

b) Key Documents

- Annual Report to Tenants 2023 - published
- Strategies for Home Ownership and Older People – published
- Decant policy – drafted and being considered by Service Managers
- Housing Strategy Delivery Plan & Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Delivery Plan – update underway.
- Disposals Policy – draft prepared and out for comment with relevant managers
- Annual Report to Tenants 2024 – outline draft to be prepared.

c) Other key Items for Noting

- The next round of *TSMs* will be finished by 22 March
- *Housemark* benchmarking is live. The Strategy Team are uploading the monthly data
- *Key performance indicators* – a new suite for Housing & Property for 2024/25 is being developed
- *LAHS* – the portal for amendments on 2022/23 data was opened and some amendments agreed and uploaded. LAHS 2024 will be required by mid-July 2024
- *Consultation on the consumer standards* – we're now working on the implications of the new consumer standards in terms of data and other evidence
- We are supporting a review of *tenancy agreements* and the *tenancy handbook*.

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