

Housing Services Update
Planning, Housing and Economic Development PDS
November 2015

General Update

Recent Government Announcements

On the 13th November the Government published the “Housing & Planning Bill”. This Bill aims to put many of Governments recent housing announcements into statute. The key Housing sections of the Bill include:

- A general duty on councils to promote the supply of Starter Homes; these are homes sold directly by the developer at a 20% discount to the market to first time buyers under the age of 40 and cost less than £250k;
- The Bill requires Councils to treat Starter Homes as “affordable housing”. Ministers have a target of delivering 200k Starter Homes over the parliament (20% of all homes).
- Extension of Right to Buy for Housing Association tenants, via voluntary agreement with the Housing Association sector;
- Agreed financial compensation for housing associations to compensate for the discount and to allow it to keep the receipt to reinvest in building new homes;
- Right to Stay which requires households with earnings over £30k to pay higher rents on a taper up to full market rent;
- Range of regulatory measures to help deal with rogue landlords, including: database of rogue landlords and letting agents; banning orders for the most prolific and serious offenders; and applying a more stringent ‘fit and proper’ person test for landlords letting out licensed properties.

The Bill, which is currently at Committee Stage, relies significantly on secondary legislation and as such there is currently significant detail missing. A report will be forthcoming to panel in due course.

In addition the Government has recently published a consultation document on extending the scope of Mandatory Licensing of HMOs. The Government’s preferred option (removing the minimum storey requirement) is likely to increase the number of HMOs that fall into the Mandatory licensing regime by a minimum of 300. There are currently around 450 mandatory licensed properties and so would be a significant increase. There are also proposals to streamline the process.

Promoting Life Skills

Officers from Housing recently visited Norton Hill School as part of a ‘life skills’ week. Students who had been studying budgeting, housing and ‘real life’ careers listened to their presentation on housing options. The officers were complimented on their presentation through the Council’s compliments form and were told that; ‘they did a fantastic job. They were very well organised and had prepared a very interactive session. The students left well informed of housing options.’

Anchor - Fitzroy House

Following an internal asset review Anchor Housing announced their decision to close the sheltered housing scheme. They state that this is due to the significant costs of refurbishment required to meet current fire safety requirements and modern living standards. The scheme originally had around 40 apartments. Housing Services have been working in partnership with Anchor to ensure that all residents are fully enabled to secure alternative accommodation, including prioritisation on the Council’s Homeseach Scheme. At the time of writing there were currently 13 residents left in the scheme.

Fox Hill – Homesearch Information Day

Housing Services will be holding two information days for tenants living in Foxhill on the 26th November and the 25th of February. The events are to help people understand how Homesearch can enable them to move to new properties on Mulberry Park or elsewhere within Bath and North East Somerset. A special Local Lettings Plan has been created that supports the existing residents by providing choice and priority on the Homesearch Scheme.

Affordable Warmth

A Housing Services led partnership with Corporate Sustainability, Public Health, Sirona and the Centre for Sustainable Energy has been successful in securing £162,500 of NEA Warmer and Healthy Homes Programme funding for affordable warmth improvements. This is for residents at risk of fuel poverty and cold related illness and will be delivered through Energy at Home through referral links with health colleagues.

Key Projects Update

Carrswood Gypsy and Travellers Site

- Elim Housing Association, who are developing and managing the scheme, are now in the process of finalising completion of the development.
- All 8 permanent pitches are now occupied with Council nominated residents. Of these, 7 had a local connection to B&NES. Elim are now in the process of contacting Gypsy's & Travellers who have expressed an interest in the transit pitches.

Additional Licensing Scheme

- On 12th June 2013 Cabinet approval was received to introduce an additional licensing scheme for HMOs in the designated area for a period of 5 years commencing on the 1st January 2014. The designated area focuses on the wards of Oldfield Park, Westmoreland and parts of Widcombe.
- Housing Services received around 1,000 applications for licences. All the HMOs, identified through licensing, have now been inspected and the property specific licences have been issued.
- The priority for the scheme now is any necessary enforcement of the scheme and licence conditions. Indeed there are currently 6 cases that are with our legal advisors pending a decision to prosecute. These are for the non-licensing of properties.

Energy at Home

- Energy at Home is a Council led partnership initiative with the particular involvement of Housing Services and Corporate Sustainability that provides a full advice, grants and installation service. Energy efficiency measures are now being installed with 38 installations having been carried out to date and 96 in the pipeline. The new Energy at Home website provides advice and information backed up by the telephone advice line. The level of interest and conversion to sign up for measures is expected to continue to increase with 310 home energy assessments now having been completed.

- The current Energy at Home grant scheme provides up to £6,000 towards energy efficiency measures installed by the retrofit delivery provider and funded through a successful bid to DECC. The grant means that subject to a survey B&NES residents may be able to install solid wall and other insulation measures with no upfront installation costs. Additional grants including top up grants are available for low income and vulnerable households. Details of the scheme are available from Energy at Home on 0800 038 5680 or www.energyathome.org.uk.

Affordable Housing Programme

- Housing Services is working hard to maintain delivery of affordable housing on s106 sites in the face of the -1% rent reduction for affordable rented homes which has had a significant impact on the Business Plans of our RP partners and consequently a reduction in the ability or appetite of Partners to deliver key s106 sites. We consider the options for delivery on a site by site basis, taking into account the scale of delivery, affordability, evidence of housing need, opportunities to change tenure and provider.
 - We have secured approval for £470,000 capital funding from the 2015/16 Affordable Housing Budget to enable the delivery of 18 rural affordable homes at Farmborough (13) and Bathampton (5).
 - Welcomed Selwood Housing Association into the local HomesWest partnership, which will be delivering the affordable housing units secured through s106 at Knobsbury Lane, Writhlington. Selwood are a Wiltshire-based provider who is happy to work across B&NES on large and small-scale sites, including rural delivery.
 - Merlin Housing Society have stepped in to replace two RPs on large s106 sites in the city who are no longer able to meet their contract terms with the developers. These will be Merlin's first units in B&NES.
 - Officers are exploring opportunities for non-RP led affordable housing delivery including discounted market sale and affordable private renting, with both Institutional investors and small developers with rental portfolios.
- 75 new affordable homes were completed in Q2, giving us a total of 86 new homes delivered in the first half of the year:
 - Old Bakery, Radstock = 13 units
 - Bath Riverside = 28 units
 - Staunton Lane, Whitchurch = 6 units
 - Cappards Farm, Bishop Sutton = 12 units
 - Norton Radstock Regeneration = 16 units
- A further 18 rented and shared ownership homes are due for completion by the end of Q3.
- Older persons housing specialist, Hanover Housing Association, have now bid for £2.5m of HCA funding to deliver the 72 home, mixed tenure, extra care scheme secured as part of the MOD Ensleigh North planning consent. If successful, Hanover will be submitting a reserved matter application early in the New Year. It is a condition of funding that the homes will be complete by 31 March 2018.

Q2 Performance

What we have done well...

100% of homelessness decisions were made within 33 days.

100% of Equalities Impact Assessments are in place.

98% of customers are satisfied with our services and we have exceeded the 90% customer satisfaction target. Putting the customer first and having high standards for the quality and timeliness of services is very important to us.

40% of advice and prevention approaches were successful in preventing or relieving homelessness compared to the target of 33%.

86 new affordable homes were delivered in the first six months of this year. We are working with delivery partners to keep on track with delivering new homes for residents.

How we will improve...

45 weeks average time to complete adaptations for disabled facilities compared with a target of 35 weeks. This is a joint service provided by the Council's Occupational Therapy (OT) service and Housing Services. Unfortunately resourcing issues have resulted in significant delays by the OTs in completing client assessments and we have also been dealing with a large number of cases that are potentially exceeding the £30k financial cap. These are complex and take significantly more time to process.

26 households in temporary accommodation at the end of September 2015. The number of households approaching the service threatened with homelessness increased by nearly 20% in the second quarter, which combined with some key staff vacancies, has led to a higher number being placed in TA. We hope to fill these vacancies by the end of Q3.

71% of complaints dealt with within corporate timescales, compared with a target of 87%. Two complaints breached the 3-week timescale in the second quarter. Both complaints were complex and took time to resolve and in both cases the complainant was kept fully informed.

22 empty properties were brought back into use, compared with a target of 25. The changes in Council tax means there is no longer an incentive for empty home owners to notify the Council. This means that it is harder to identify empty properties. Housing Services will be using National Empty Homes Week to run a campaign that encourages residents to report likely empty homes and help boost the number that are identified.

<u>1. Customer</u>	<u>1st Qtr 15/16</u>	<u>2nd Qtr 15/16</u>	<u>Target</u>
Customer Complaints (responded within corporate timescales)	100 %	71.4 %	87%
Customer Satisfaction	97.9 %	97.8 %	90 %
Staff Sickness	2.8 %	3%	5%
Telephone response (responded within corporate timescales)	88.4 %	85.7 %	90 %
Equalities Impact Assessment	100 %	100%	100%
Invoices paid 30 days	97.6 %	92.9 %	93%
<u>1.1 Customer Service Standards</u>			
Customer Satisfaction	97.9 %	97.8 %	90%
Customer satisfaction with improvements made to their home	100%	98.5 %	90%
Customers treated fairly	97.9 %	97.8 %	100%
Homelessness decisions	100 %	100 %	90%
Performance information published	Completed	Completed	Completed
<u>2. Finding and Keeping Housing</u>			
Homelessness cases prevented	38.1 %	40%	33%
Homelessness decisions	100%	100%	90%
Temporary Accommodation	18	26	24

	<u>1St Qtr 15/16</u>	<u>2nd Qtr 15/16</u>	<u>Target</u>
<u>3. Improved Homes</u>			
Total time to complete adaptations - Average time from initial enquiry to completion in weeks	36 ●	45 ● ↓	35
Additional HMO Licences issued	98.4% ●	98.5% ● ↑	80%
Customer satisfaction with improvements made to their home	100% ●	98.5% ● ↓	90%
Initial HMO Licence inspections	100% ●	100% ● →	100%
<u>4. More Homes</u>			
Empty properties brought back in to use	8 ●	22 ● ↑	25
Deliver 480 new affordable homes over a 3 year period 2015-2018 comprising both intermediate housing & social homes for rent (cumulative)	2.3% ●	17.9% ● ↑	16%
Percentage of permanent Gypsy and Traveller pitches occupied	100% ●	100% ● →	70%