



## Report of the Cabinet Member for Homes, Energy & Transformation

Cabinet - 21 November 2019

### Housing Commissioning Review Findings

|                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Purpose:</b>                    | This report seeks approval to implement the Housing commissioning review findings and to undertake formal tenant consultation regarding the future model of the District Housing Office service.  |
| <b>Policy Framework:</b>           | Sustainable Swansea – Fit for the Future  |
| <b>Consultation:</b>               | Access to Services, Finance, Legal.   |
| <b>Recommendation(s):</b>          | It is recommended that:<br><br><ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The key findings of the review are approved for implementation.</li><li>2. The proposed change to the future model of the District Housing Office service is subject to a formal tenant consultation exercise and the results are reported back to Cabinet prior to implementation.</li></ol> |
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#### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report focuses on the findings of the Housing Commissioning review and seeks endorsement to implement the findings and approval to undertake a formal tenant consultation exercise on the proposed change to the future model of the District Housing Office service. Appendix A contains background information on the review process and data which underpins the findings such as service scope, cost, performance, customer, risks and external review feedback.
- 1.2 The aim of the Housing review has been to look at how the service can work differently to deliver efficient, modern services, which are sustainable, meet future needs and contribute to the Council's Transformation and Future Council development objective. The review acknowledges that much of the

structure of the service has been in place for a number of years and the way in which service users wish to communicate with organisations and businesses is changing whilst at the same time, demands on services continue to increase.

- 1.3 The review also looks at agile/mobile working and how that can positively influence the way the service is provided by ensuring staff have the right tools to carry out their role for service users. The long term sustainability of District Housing Offices has also been examined.

## **2.0 Service Background**

- 2.1 The service is based within the Place Directorate and provides a wide range of statutory and preventative functions across two divisions, i.e. Landlord Services and Strategic Housing.

- 2.2 Landlord Services provides a comprehensive housing management service to 13,525 Council properties. The service is primarily delivered through 9 District Housing Offices. It also provides housing advice, homelessness prevention and tenancy support via the Housing Options service. Strategic Housing provides a range of strategic/service planning and direct operational functions including a leasehold management function for 637 leaseholders. A detailed list of those services subject to review are attached at Appendix A, reference point 1.

- 2.3 The Housing service's overall purpose is to manage and invest in Council housing stock, support individuals and sustain communities. Good quality housing plays a significant role in helping meet the Council's vision for Swansea.

- 2.4 The service provides a diverse range of functions with some distinct characteristics as follows;
- The service is complex, high profile and one of the largest social housing providers in Wales.
  - It is funded differently to other Council services as the majority of housing services are funded by the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).
  - 89% of the total HRA expenditure is realised via rental income which can only be spent on Council housing.
  - The majority of the services are frontline, provide support, are provided at the homes of tenants and residents, are preventative in nature and have a direct impact on individuals and communities.
  - Getting things wrong could have an impact on the reputation of the Council and there could be serious consequences on individuals if services fail as our service users are often the most vulnerable in society.
  - Investment in housing has a big economic impact locally, for example, the service will have delivered £498m of improvements to achieve the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) by December 2020. This will result in direct benefits to individuals in relation to safety, security, reduced heating costs and a positive impact on health. In addition improving existing Council housing and building new Council homes provides considerable benefits to the wider community in terms of employment, investment in the local

economy and help to supply more affordable housing to meet the known need.

- 2.5 To maintain a focus on sustainability and continuous improvement the service must adapt the way it responds to increasing demands and the significant challenge of Universal Credit. This is impacting on tenants and the amount of HRA income available to run services. In addition, there are a number of key challenges and pressures facing the service. These include an ageing population, new statutory homelessness duties, building new Council houses, ongoing investment and regeneration of estates, the impact of austerity and the implementation of new legislative requirements such as the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016.

### **3.0 Service Improvements**

- 3.1 The review has highlighted that the way service users access housing services is changing with more transactions being undertaken over the phone and online. In response, the service needs to significantly invest in new technology and introduce agile/mobile working for staff. This will have a positive impact on the way services run, how service users can access them and generate efficiencies by reducing reliance on paper based processes.
- 3.2 The key findings of the review are categorised under the headings of maximising income, improving service user access, improving operational systems and processes, service specific issues and the future model of the District Housing Office service.

It is recommended that the following key findings are implemented;

#### **a. Maximising income**

- Increase resources in the Rents team in order to offer early support to tenants and minimise the impact of arrears on tenants themselves and the HRA business plan.
- Explore the introduction of charges for some functions not currently charged for, subject to stakeholder consultation.
- Review the annual leasehold management charge.
- Review the capacity of the Furniture Store.
- Consider phasing out paying for TV licences for new Sheltered tenants and review the scheme for existing tenants, subject to tenant consultation.
- Develop a HRA Asset Management Plan.

#### **b. Improving service user access**

- Upgrade outdated telephony systems.
- Implement a digital solution to improve the way service users can make online transactions such as rent payments.

#### **c. Improving operational systems/processes**

##### **Back office systems**

- Implement the corporate electronic document management system.

### **Software solutions/new systems**

- Procure new software solutions for key business critical areas, i.e. Homelessness, leasehold service charges, asset management/WHQS, Renewal & Adaptation database and the Tenancy Support case management system.

### **d. Service specific improvements**

Some services/functions are facing more significant challenges and need to consider how they can address the issues and/or overhaul systems with IT improvements, etc, as follows;

#### **Housing application, assessment and waiting list**

- Modernise the housing application, assessment and waiting list process utilising new technology to improve the service user experience and facilitate access to Housing.

#### **Empty properties/Voids/lettings**

- Maintain the focus on minimising the time taken to let a property as it has a big impact on the availability of housing and on loss of income. Improvements will include extending early viewings while a property is in repair and continuing to promote Home Swapper to encourage tenants to swap their homes.

#### **Prospective tenants**

- Help prepare new tenants, particular vulnerable households to be 'tenancy ready'.

#### **Furnished tenancy scheme**

- Implement a computerised inventory system to replace the manual system of coding furniture.
- Consider the implementation of a points based choice system to examine how the scheme could be more financially viable to those not in receipt of benefit.
- Explore expansion of the scheme to other social landlords to increase income.
- Carry out a pilot to charge a £20 re-delivery fee when a prearranged delivery is missed unless its due to exceptional circumstances.

#### **Sheltered service**

- Continue the ongoing review of this service to support people to remain in their homes for longer. This includes working with Social Services to explore how the extra care provision model could be incorporated into the existing sheltered housing provision and the introduction of assistive technology.
- Other improvements include reviewing the use of guest bedrooms and communal areas and introducing a handyman service to assist tenants with minor jobs such as putting up curtain rails and changing light bulbs.

#### **Anti-social behaviour (ASB)**

- Increase resources in the ASB Support Team to effectively deal with high level ASB.
- Procure a noise "app" to help complainants provide evidence of noise

problems and help reduce ASB incidents.

### **Neighbourhood Support Unit**

- Implement the findings of a pilot to not alarm voids in some areas. This is taking place to help inform future alarm/service provision.

### **Estate management/gardening scheme**

- Implement changes to the eligibility criteria for the “Tend and Mend” service to help manage demand.
- Explore a garden tool hire scheme and work with the Local Area Coordinators (LAC) to identify any opportunities for community run initiatives and commercial opportunities.
- Continue to work with the Tenants Panel to update the Estate Management strategy to ensure resources are targeted effectively to meet tenants priorities to maintain safe and attractive estates.

## **3.3 Future Model of the District Housing Office Service**

3.4 Information from a range of sources has been used to assess the long term sustainability of District Housing Offices.

- This information suggests that the DHO footprint should be reduced from 9 to 6. The proposals being considered include closing Penlan, Eastside and West Cross offices. To effectively manage the reduction in DHOs, housing services would continue to be provided from the nearest housing offices and Neighbourhood officers would make more home and estate visits.
- Housing advice/rent surgeries are proposed for local community buildings for tenants who may not want a home visit. Feedback will be sought from tenants, Ward Members and staff to identify potential community space venues for surgeries should the proposals go ahead. This could include local schools as an approach has been made from one to offer use of their community space. The service is taking this opportunity to trial a surgery in the school which started in September 2019.
- Tenants would still be able to pay their rent in local post offices, shops displaying the payzone sign, online, over the phone and by direct debit, or by calling into other District Housing Offices or the Civic Centre. Recycling bags can be picked up from local libraries, some shops, post offices, ordered online/over the phone or by putting request tags out with recycling bags.
- A project is taking place to co-locate the District Housing office with the Library service in Gorseinon in 2020.
- The implementation of a digital solution/customer portal will improve the way service users can access more housing services and make online transactions via a computer, mobile or tablet device.

## **3.5 Service user/Stakeholder Feedback on Proposals**

Four internal stakeholder workshops took place with colleagues from services across the Council such as Social Services, Employability, Welfare Rights, Planning, Parks, Union, Local Area Coordinators, etc. The responses were very positive, with further ideas identified to improve how services continue to work together. A consultation exercise took place with Local Ward Members which was undertaken by the Area Housing Managers.

- 3.6 In June, all tenants and leaseholders were invited to provide responses on the proposals to reduce the number of District Housing offices via written feedback slips, online or by attending events in the local District Housing Offices. The number of responses totalled just under 150. The feedback highlighted the value tenants place on the housing services provided in communities and concern over staffing and any job losses.
- 3.7 It is envisaged that any changes will not create compulsory job losses and a seamless transition of services will be maintained with no impact on the established tenant/staff relationships. Another key concern raised was that any improvements to IT systems should not replace the face to face service being delivered but should enhance it as a mechanism for those who choose to contact the service in this way. A further formal tenant consultation process on the future model of the District Housing office service will take place in early 2020. A copy of the consultation letter is attached at Appendix C.

### 3.8 **Summary and Conclusion**

- The review has illustrated the vast majority of functions delivered are statutory, frontline and/or provide a significant preventive and supporting role which have a direct impact on individuals and communities.
- Investment in housing also has a big economic impact locally with £498m being invested in meeting the WHQS by December 2020.
- The majority of the total HRA expenditure is funded via rental income.
- The extensive range of services provided make a significant contribution to Corporate priorities. They also contribute to the wider national and local agenda of health, well-being, public service improvement and play an important direct and indirect preventative role.
- The service needs to respond to and progress a number of high profile issues over the next few years. Some examples of these include achieving WHQS, developing post 2020 improvement schemes, the new Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016, delivering the More Homes strategy and Homelessness Strategy.
- There is a need to invest to save and provide greater service efficiencies via a significant number of IT improvements. This will improve service user access, streamline back office processes, give staff better tools to deliver services and allow more time spent to support service users.
- The findings suggest that the DHO footprint should be reduced from 9 to 6 which will help make local services more sustainable for the future. An implementation plan will be drafted subject to the proposals and formal consultation process being approved. This will be the subject of a future report to Cabinet.
- Demand and expectation from the public continues to increase whilst performance continues to be maintained/ improved and satisfaction levels are positive.
- The review has identified potential service improvements across many areas in Housing. Service users will continue to be encouraged to become actively involved as part of the Tenant Participation Strategy to ensure Housing services are efficient and responsive.

## **4.0 Equality and Engagement Implications**

4.1 The Council is subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty (Wales) and must, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

4.2 The Equality Impact Assessment process ensures that we have paid due regard to the above. An EIA screening form was completed in July 2019 and is attached at Appendix B. It identified that a full EIA will be required as part of the formal tenant consultation process. The EIA screening indicated that the proposed service improvements in the Housing service will have no negative impact.

4.3 Feedback on services has been sought from Tenants and Leaseholders as part of the review process and the Council's Tenant Participation Strategy. A further formal consultation exercise is planned for early 2020.

## **5.0 Legal implications**

5.1 A formal consultation process will be undertaken in accordance with Section 105 of the Housing Act 1985 to inform and consider any representations made by secure tenants on the proposed changes to the future model of the District Housing Office service.

## **6.0 Financial Implications**

6.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report. Any investment requirements will be met from existing budgets.

**Background papers:** Progress report to Scrutiny Programme Committee 1<sup>st</sup> August 2019

<https://democracy.swansea.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=188&MId=8749&Ver=4&LLL=0>

### **Appendices:**

Appendix A: Background information on review process and data to support findings

Appendix B: EIA screening form

Appendix C: Copy of tenant consultation letter

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## 1. Service Scope

The Housing Service is structured across two divisions, i.e. Landlord Services and Strategic Housing and a summary of what is delivered is included below.

| <b>Landlord Services</b>  |
|---|
| <p>Landlord Services provides a comprehensive council housing management service to 13,525 council owned properties. It also provides services such as the provision of housing advice, homeless prevention, tenancy support and a furnished tenancy scheme. The service is delivered to council tenants primarily through 9 District Housing Offices and includes tenancy, estate, lettings, rent and empty property management and the sheltered housing service.</p> <p>Housing Options provides general housing advice and information, homeless prevention, money advice and assessment services, council tenant transfers and the management of council temporary accommodation and housing related support to residents across all tenures.</p>  |
| <b>Strategic Housing</b>  |
| <p>Strategic Housing provides a range of service planning/direct functions. It co-ordinates the investment and improvement to council housing stock and liaison role with tenants. It enables the provision of new affordable housing via the allocation of Welsh Government funding and co-ordinates the development of new build council housing. It determines the annual Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan, manages the rent setting/accounting function and leaseholder services, is responsible for delivering the Local Housing Strategy, identifying local housing need and the statutory requirements for Tenant consultation and communication.</p> <p>It is also responsible for the delivery of private sector grants, council house adaptations, delivering improvements in renewal areas and coordinating energy efficiency improvements across all housing tenures and improvement of housing standards in the private sector.</p> |

The key areas covered by the review are the core business and frontline service user functions that manage homes and estates. These functions focus on delivery of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) business plan, making sure properties are let, ensuring the rent is paid, preventing anti-social behaviour, sustaining tenancies, estate management activities, etc. The core property functions focus on the investment in and delivery of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) (excluding the repairs service as this has been subject to review by Building Services). Other core support functions, some of which generate income/and or receive funding such as furnished tenancies and sheltered services, have also been reviewed to ensure they are shaped to support the overall housing corporate priorities and are effective in the services they provide. Finally, some indirect support functions, which assist frontline delivery such as policy development, training and tenant consultation and communication, have been reviewed.

A full list of the functions are detailed below.

|   |  |   |  |
|---|--|---|--|
| <b>Core Business and Service user Functions which maximise income/deliver HRA Business Plan</b> | <b>Rent Management and Leasehold Management<br/>Financial &amp; Orchard Management</b> | <b>Lettings/ void property management</b> | <b>Tenancy/estate management for existing tenants (DHOs)</b><br>Sustaining tenancies, tenancy agreements/property upkeep, gardens, tenancy enforcement, allocations, inspections, ASB, transfers, referrals, etc.<br><b>Housing advice</b> Applications and tenant transfers |
|---|--|---|--|

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <b>Core Property Functions - to maintain housing stock, support service provision</b> | <b>Improvements to housing stock/repairs policy/liaison role with tenants/technical strategy/assessment for work programme and management of repair process.</b> | <b>Sustainability of office assets/agile working</b> |
|---|--|--|

|   |   |   |  |  |  |  |  |
|---|---|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Core support &amp; other functions</b> | <b>Adaptations</b><br>Delivery of private sector grants, including renovation grants, mandatory DFGs and council house adaptations. | <b>Furnished Tenancies</b><br>For new tenants to rent.<br><br>Affordable assistance to help with the set up of their home | <b>Neighbourhood Support Service</b><br>Providing void property security and to enhance estate/tenancy management services by providing a 24 hour landlord response. | <b>Estate Caretaking Service</b><br>All aspects of council housing estates including management of open spaces, safety issues, caretaking and routine inspections of estates | <b>Sheltered Service</b><br>Provision of a warden service at 31 complexes across the city, including regular visits and support to tenants to enable them to lead an independent life. | <b>Tenancy Support</b><br>Provision of free advice and support to all residents across all tenures. Support clients to sustain their tenancies, address anti-social behaviour issues and manage new tenancies. Provide help with applying for benefits, managing debt, coping with mental or physical illness, overcoming alcohol or drug abuse etc. | <b>Homelessness Assistance</b><br>Homelessness prevention/ assessment services, manage Council temporary accommodation/ money advice services.<br><br>Coordinate the nomination agreement with RSLs, coordinate and develop partnerships with voluntary sector organisations, utilise the Adapt register to source suitable properties to meet individuals specific needs, development/ delivery of the Homelessness Strategy. |
|---|---|---|--|--|--|--|--|

|                                   |  |                      |                             |
|-----------------------------------|--|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>Indirect Support Functions</b> | <b>Policy/Performance/Service Development/Training/Tenant participation/communications</b> | <b>Enabling role</b> | <b>More Homes Programme</b> |
|-----------------------------------|--|----------------------|-----------------------------|

|             |
|-------------|
| <b>Code</b> |
| <b>GF</b>   |
| <b>HRA</b>  |

## 2. Vision

The 'vision' for the Housing and Public Health service is that '*We will provide good quality homes and services which support communities and help to safeguard and protect both people and the environment of Swansea*'.

## 3. Service Priorities

Good quality housing plays a significant role in helping meet the Council's vision for Swansea. The review has captured the headline priorities that apply across all services that support the delivery of key Corporate priorities, in particular safeguarding people from harm, tackling poverty, transforming our economy and infrastructure and maintaining and enhancing Swansea's natural resources and biodiversity. In addition, the extensive range of housing services contribute to the wider national and local agenda of health, well-being, poverty, public service improvement and plays a direct and indirect preventative role.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 requires public bodies to carry out their functions in a sustainable way, which improves economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being. Safe and secure housing is fundamental to the wellbeing of individuals, the wider community, and an essential element in achieving the well-being of future generations. Without a secure, affordable home, it is difficult for people to progress in other areas of their lives including employment, education, training, health and family life. The review has been undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Act.

Poverty and low income prevents people from accessing the full range of housing choices and can make housing costs hard to sustain. The Housing Service is a key contributor to the Council's anti-poverty agenda through a wide range of activities. These include the provision of Council housing as a safe, secure and affordable option for households, support with financial matters, homelessness prevention, working with the private rented sector to improve conditions and security for tenants, provision of tenancy support to enable people to live independently and through the development of additional affordable housing to meet needs.

Key service priorities are as follows;

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fulfil statutory duties.</li> <li>• Maximise income to the HRA and deliver a viable rolling 30 year business plan.</li> <li>• Meet statutory consultation requirements</li> <li>• Prevent homelessness.</li> <li>• Maximise people's independence and the ability to live in their homes for longer.</li> <li>• Help tenants to sustain tenancies.</li> <li>• Tackle ASB and help tenants affected by anti-social behaviour and support community cohesion across estates and improve the wider environment.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve housing conditions in the private sector.</li> <li>• Deliver WHQS by December 2020 and maintain it thereafter.</li> <li>• Deliver the More Homes strategy to increase the supply of affordable housing/new build Council housing.</li> <li>• Co-ordinate delivery of the Social Housing Grant programme, increase the supply of affordable homes.</li> </ul> |
|--|---|

#### 4. Service characteristics

The service area is large with some distinct characteristics and challenges.

The distinct characteristics are as follows;

- The service is complex, high profile and one of the largest social housing providers in Wales.
- It is funded differently to other Council services. The majority of housing services are funded by the HRA with resources mainly generated by rental income which can only be spent on Council housing.
- The HRA has a net annual turnover of £81m and includes a Capital programme spend in excess of £43m per year. The net cost of the Housing General Fund (HGF) service is £2.2m and it has a capital programme of £7m per year. (Appendix A reference point 1 highlights which services are funded from the HRA or HGF).
- The service co-ordinates a Social Housing Grant and Housing Finance Grant Programme working in partnership with Registered Social Landlords and developers to deliver more affordable housing (this totalled £13m in 18/19).
- There is a national ambition to provide/build more homes. The Council has developed a More Homes strategy to respond to this challenge.

- Many of the services are frontline, provide support, are preventative in nature and have a direct impact on individuals and communities.
- Much of the service is provided at the homes of tenants and residents and this is enhanced by a local 24/7 Neighbourhood Support Unit.
- Getting things wrong could have an impact on the reputation of the Council and there could be serious consequences on individuals if services fail as our service users are often the most vulnerable in society.
- Investment in housing has a big economic impact locally, for example the service will have delivered £498m of improvements to achieve the WHQS by December 2020. This will result in direct benefits to individuals in relation to safety, security, reduced heating costs and a positive impact on health. In addition improving existing Council housing and building new Council homes provides considerable benefits to the wider community in terms of employment, investment in the local economy and help to supply more affordable housing to meet the known need.
- It provides a significant response to tackling homelessness along with partners and agencies.
- Work in partnership with other service providers/agencies to support individuals and families who maybe in crisis.

## 5. External review of key service areas

Over the last few years, a number of services within Housing have been subject to review due to budget pressures, legislation changes and external review/funding. These include Adaptations and Renewals, Homelessness, Tenancy Support and the Sheltered Housing service. In addition, the work undertaken to invest and improve the housing stock up to the WHQS has recently been scrutinised by the Wales Audit Office (WAO) together with a national WAO study on Homelessness and Adaptations.

### Service issues from external review

Two high profile services have recently been subject to scrutiny by the Wales Audit Office and one has recently undergone an in-depth exercise with partners as a result of new Welsh Government legislation to review outcomes for service users.

- **Improvements to Housing stock/WHQS** – In 2018, the Wales Audit Office undertook a review to look at whether the Council has effective arrangements in place to meet the WHQS by 2020. Overall, the findings identified that tenants are satisfied with the improvement works and the Council has a sound approach to meeting the WHQS by December 2020. The WAO made a number of recommendations for improvements in its final report. These have been included in an action plan which was considered by the Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel in March 2019.
- **Adaptation services** - The WAO have undertaken a review of adaptation services across all local authorities in Wales in order to consider improvements for service users. The service's response to the findings and an action plan on the recommendations have been considered by the Adult Services Scrutiny Performance Panel in June 2019.
- **Homelessness** – This service has recently been subject to review as part of the work it has undertaken with a significant number of stakeholders to develop the Homelessness Strategy and action plan. The findings from the Scrutiny Homelessness Working Group held in June 2018 fed into the development of the strategy. Scrutiny Programme Committee considered the final draft of the strategy in October 2018 and in November 2018 prior to Cabinet approval. Delivery of the

action plan in collaboration with partners will result in improved access to services for service users.

- The review and some research carried out by Shelter's Take Notice Project identified the need to consider minimal cost improvements to Housing Options reception area to enhance the physical environment for service users. Work is being carried out with Facilities and the Ministry of Furniture on what improvements can be made to this frontline service.

## **6. Statutory requirements and responsibilities**

Swansea is one of 11 Local Welsh Authorities who have retained their housing stock and landlord role. In delivering this role, the Authority must comply with a number of statutory functions and responsibilities. These include operating a Housing Revenue Account, housing advice, allocations scheme, maintenance of the stock and estates, delivering the Welsh Housing Quality Standard, dealing with antisocial behaviour and evaluating the local housing and accommodation needs of Swansea residents.

There are a range of statutory functions in relation to vulnerable people. This includes the requirement to provide DFGs to people with a disability and to assess the needs of people presenting themselves as homeless and to provide them with accommodation if they are considered as vulnerable under the legislation.

## **7. How services are provided elsewhere**

Research has been undertaken to see how the other Welsh Local Authorities deliver services but comparison is difficult as many are split across different portfolios, structured differently, have different demand issues, don't operate a 24/7 landlord presence etc. However, the majority do deliver their housing activities in a similar way to Swansea through specialist teams for homelessness, rents, liaison work for WHQS, neighbourhood teams and most have area/estate based offices.

## **8. Working with partners to deliver services**

Successful internal and external partnership working is critical to the performance and delivery of services and the right outcomes to service users. As the service is so diverse the number of partnerships are vast and include legal, social services, police, fire, probation, local health services, universities, Supporting People, Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements, Women's aid, RSLs to name just a few.

## **9. Stakeholder engagement**

The review commenced in August 2018 and the following framework was put in place for the review process;

- A Review Programme Board and 11 Staff focus groups were established
- SWOT sessions were undertaken with all staff and regular team briefings held
- Head of Service video messages cascaded to staff
- A number of service user surveys and tenant events took place
- A consultation exercise took place with Local Ward Members which was undertaken by the Area Housing Managers.
- Meetings held with Union representatives
- Internal stakeholder workshops were attended by a wide range of colleagues from other services across the Council such as Social Services, Employability, Welfare Rights, Planning, Parks, Union, Local Area Coordinators, etc.
- Liaison with other external stakeholders took place via a number of mechanisms including questionnaires/ongoing partnership meetings etc to address service improvements. These included the Department of Work & Pensions, local housing

associations, Tenancy Support Unit providers, The Wallich, Police, Community Safety, SWP Domestic Abuse Unit, Supporting People, Emerging Role of Sheltered Housing regional group and Western Bay Care and Repair.

- Some service areas have recently been subject to extensive partner consultation such as homelessness when developing the homelessness strategy with other agencies such as CRISIS, Shelter, etc and others subject to scrutiny via WAO reviews, i.e. WHQS and adaptations.
- Feedback from the WAO reviews has been incorporated into the review process.

## **10. Service user Demand**

Service user demand remains high across services, examples from 2018/19 include;

- 2511 homeless applications,
- 2091 referrals to the Tenancy Support Unit,
- A total of 1257 private sector and Council house adaptations,
- Removal of 1,116 tonnes of rubbish,
- 1499 end of tenancies and 1423 properties were let,
- Visits and support to 1068 sheltered tenants,
- Management of 2465 furnished tenancy packs compared to 50 in 1996 when a pilot started,
- 4352 incidents reported to the Neighbourhood Support Unit,
- Around 1600 enquiries to District Housing offices in a one week period.

Whilst demand remains high, it is encouraging that service user satisfaction across services is positive. Examples of these include;

- A comprehensive tenant's survey was sent out to around 13,500 tenants in 2017/18 and a total of 2807 responses were received. A subsequent WAO telephone survey with 680 respondents was carried out in 2018. Findings indicated 80% of respondents were satisfied with the condition of their home, 82% satisfied with their neighbourhood, 88% satisfied with responses to enquiries, 80% satisfied with the housing service and 83% were satisfied they are kept informed. Findings of the survey and areas for improvement were published in Open House magazine which is sent to each tenant. This information highlighted some areas of dissatisfaction, in particular 17% of tenants were not satisfied with the information they receive about their home. An article was included with the survey findings to advise tenants that officers had met with a tenant's panel to discuss what improvements can be made to the way tenants access information. Information in this Open House edition also included how tenants can find out when their bathroom and kitchen improvements are due to take place.
- Service user surveys in 2017/18 for the adaptations service indicate that 98% are satisfied with the delivery of housing adaptations/repairs to their properties and 100% of service users were satisfied regarding repair loans.
- The Tenancy Support Unit undertook a small user questionnaire in 17/18. Results indicate that overall, service users feel better about managing new accommodation, relationships and money. They also said they feel better mentally and physically after receiving support. Almost 100% said that support was available when they need it and it had helped them to achieve the things they wanted and that they could live more independently.
- A new Homelessness Strategy has been implemented for 2018-22. Its development involved detailed consultation with service users and partner

organisations to ensure that they had the opportunity to influence the content of the strategy and action plan.

- A number of tenant groups meet with senior managers on a regular basis to discuss service issues, i.e. Building & repairs group, Estate management & Caretaking group, Sheltered Repts panel and Highrise group. In addition, two Tenants consultative panel meetings were held during the review process to discuss service priorities, what services they value, etc. Feedback included the value of face to face contact, services provided by the NSU, support to tenants on Universal Credit claims, improvements suggested for Furnished Tenancy Scheme, Tend and Mend Service, environmental improvements/pathways, clearer information for services e.g TSU, NSU, the role of neighbourhood officers, works carried out on homes, costs for furnished tenancy.

The majority of housing services routinely aim to collect and analyse service user satisfaction to identify any trends of dissatisfaction etc in order to make improvements. However, these surveys are paper based which can be off putting for a service user to complete, return by post etc and this impacts on response rates. Paper survey methods are also resource intensive and have cost issues re postage/printing etc, so further work will be undertaken to identify IT solutions and best practice to increase service user feedback. Staff having the IT tools out on site and in homes will improve the way data can be directly collated from individuals.

Whilst some services set targets for improving satisfaction rates, e.g. % of tenants satisfied with outcome of their ASB case 77.8% against a target of no less than 60% and % of people successfully able to manage their money following TSU support 82% against a target of no less than 70% this is not applicable across all Housing services. Individual service areas need to look at what improvements can be put in place to address this when considering better mechanisms to capture data.

In addition, the Welsh Government requested all Local authorities undertake an annual STAR survey in 2019 which Registered Social Landlords have completed for some time. In August, the Housing service sent out this survey to all its tenants and responses are currently being analysed. The STAR survey is a core set of 7 questions which allow the Welsh Government to compare year on year like-for-like comparisons amongst social housing providers. However the STAR framework is currently subject to review and consultation with housing providers on potential changes is taking place.

## **11. Service user complaints**

Whilst Housing services experience high volumes of service user demand, the overall number of complaints remain fairly static. In 2018/19, 174 stage 1 complaints were received. However only 35 of these were justified and 48 were part justified. 84 were not justified. Complaints are analysed at the end of each financial year to establish whether there are any common themes identified. The complaints cover the range of diverse service functions provided by Housing and the relevant manager will review the findings to ensure any related service improvements are considered.

## **12. Performance information**

The service collects a significant amount of performance information to demonstrate how its performing and to identify areas for service improvements. These include National Indicators set by the Welsh Government which are collected

annually, together with Corporate and local indicators, the majority of which are measured on a quarterly basis.

National indicators - Whilst demand on services continues to be high, performance in a number of areas remains positive, e.g. in 17/18 national performance indicators for the delivery of Disabled Facilities grants and homelessness prevention were in the second quartile of local Welsh authorities which is encouraging as the volume of cases/demand dealt with were among the highest. Performance in both these areas has continued to improve since 2017/18. Results for 18/19 for homeless prevention (result – 75.4% against a target of 67%) and the average number of calendar days taken to deliver a Disabled Facilities Grant (result - 235 days against a target of 265 days).

Four new indicators being collected for 2019/20 include the number of additional affordable housing units delivered per 10,000 households, average number of days to complete repairs, percentage of homes that meet the WHQS and rent lost due to properties being empty.

Corporate Performance Plan indicator - There is only one indicator for Housing in the Corporate Plan, i.e. the average number of days all homeless families with children spent in Bed & Breakfast accommodation (result for 18/19 was 1.5 days against a target of 6 days).

Local indicators - There are a number of local indicators which are used to gauge performance in different service areas. Key ones include those that focus on maximising income and outcomes for tenants. The following information looks at which performance indicators achieved target and those that missed in 18/19.

| <b>Target achieved 2018/19</b>  | <b>Target missed 2018/19</b>   |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Void loss £1,501,025 against a target £1,569,947.</li> <li>• Number of void properties was 196 against a target of 230.</li> <li>• % of rent collected as a % due was 97.75% against a target of 97.5%.</li> <li>• % of tenants satisfied with outcome of their ASB case 77.8% against a target of no less than 60%.</li> <li>• % of people successfully able to manage their money following TSU support 82% against a target of no less than 70%.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amount of current tenant arrears were £2,116,555 against a target of £1,450,000.</li> <li>• Average number of calendar days taken to re-let a void property was 90 days against a target of 75 days.</li> </ul> |

There are ongoing challenges to performance in two key areas, i.e. rent arrears and how quickly properties are let. The challenge of Universal Credit is having an impact on arrears and a number of service improvements have been identified to tackle this. In relation to how long it takes to let a property, the WHQS programme is currently having an impact on the turnaround time of a void property. This was acknowledged by the 2018 Welsh Audit Office (WAO) review as a number of voids are undergoing major improvements, i.e. kitchen and bathroom renewal. A number of service improvements are being put in place to reduce the time taken to let a property. It is also hoped that the turnover of around 1450 tenancies ending and



being let each year will slow down as the current investment and significant kitchen and bathroom programme will help tenants want to settle longer.

### **13. Service cost**

#### **Housing Revenue Account (HRA)**

The HRA operates as a ring fenced account whereby income from rents can only be used to pay for HRA services.

For 2018/19 the net annual income for the HRA = £80.64m

Monies from rents/other income/Welsh Gov MRA (£9.2m) = £71.5m

Monies from borrowing = £5.3m

Monies used from reserves = £0.6m

89% of the total HRA expenditure is realised via rental income and the remaining amount comes from borrowing/reserves.

#### **Current Spend**

In terms of spend, over £54m is spent on the maintenance/improvement of the housing stock, £0.9m on the More Homes development programme and just under £10m is used to repay borrowing costs. The cost of running the Housing Management service is just over £15m which covers the majority of services in scope (excluding homelessness, tenancy support, and adaptations services which are resourced by a mix of general fund/Welsh Government and Supporting People funding).

#### **General fund housing services**

For 18/19 the total expenditure for General Fund housing services =£4,579,500

A number of the services generate income = £-2,247,200, so total net budget for 2018/19 = £2,332,300.

#### **Number of staff delivering the service**

Across all the services in Housing, there are 362 FTEs (295.09 funded by the HRA, 68.31 from the GF).

#### **Housing Management cost comparison**

Research has been undertaken to see how the other Welsh Local Authorities deliver services but comparison is difficult as many are split across different portfolios, structured differently, have different demand issues, don't operate a 24/7 landlord presence etc. However, the majority do deliver their housing activities in a similar way to Swansea through specialist teams for homelessness, rents, liaison work for WHQS, neighbourhood teams and most have area/estate based offices.

Some cost data is available for the 11 stock holding local authorities for 18/19 HRA spend on management costs per property. These costs range from £622 to just over £1,800 however, a detailed breakdown of who provides what services for these costs is not available. Out of the 11 authorities, Swansea is in the mid-range with an average cost per property of £1,146. Approximately 63% of this relates to employee costs with the remainder made up of premises 11%, transport 2%, supplies and services 11% and support services e.g. legal/IT/procurement services etc is 13%.

#### **14. Service Achievements and Good Practice**

Improvements have been made across a number of services with recognition for some as best practice as follows;

- Track record of implementing projects, e.g. Housing Futures & More Homes.
- 1<sup>st</sup> pilot scheme of 18 new Council properties in Colliers Way was completed on target. 2 further schemes started in 2019 and were awarded Innovative Housing Programme funding.
- Retrofit scheme commenced to transform 6 resiform bungalows to include renewable technology, such as PV and battery storage to make them more energy efficient.
- Facilitated full spend of £10.5m Social Housing Grant and £2.5m Housing Finance Grant allocation for 18/19.
- Introduced a Leaseholder loan scheme to help those leaseholders facing major service charge invoices.
- Leasehold practices appeared in Best practice guide for major works by Welsh Government.
- The Housing Service provides extensive support to Universal Credit claimants. This has included the successful provision of Universal Support (US); as previously contracted by the DWP, Personal Budgeting Support (PBS) and Assisted Digital Support (ADS) was provided for Council tenants by the Rents Team and by Tenancy Support for private rented and Housing Association tenants.
- New relationships built with the DWP, particularly at a local level, including shadowing between Job Centre Staff and Housing staff, presentations to Job Centre staff in relation to rent and rent arrears, close links built and regular liaison with relevant DWP representatives; Partnership Manager, Work Coaches, Homelessness Work Coach.
- Introduction of Rents Surgeries to provide intensive face-to-face support to tenants.
- The ASB service has been recognised as good practice by partner agencies and officers have received awards from the police.
- Achieved the Wales Housing Management Standard for tackling ASB and increased service user satisfaction with the outcome of their case.
- A streamlined, more responsive estate caretaking service ensures rubbish on estates and in blocks of flats is cleared quickly. There is more emphasis on prevention with a successful rubbish amnesty undertaken.
- Commissioning of a Regional Housing Market Assessment for Mid and West Wales (6 local authorities and 2 national parks) is underway.
- Production of an ambitious four year Homelessness Strategy and a well-established focus on successful homelessness prevention work.
- Establishment of the Homelessness Prevention Fund.
- Significant reduction in use of bed and breakfast through the development of alternative forms of temporary accommodation.
- Development of Cross-Borders regional provision to provide temporary supported accommodation for women with complex needs.
- Increased the number of adapted temporary accommodation units to make them fully accessible.
- Development of the holistic, BAYS+ Service for young people incorporating a range of services, alongside homelessness advice and assistance.
- Successful Move-On Strategy, which ensures that individuals can effectively transition from supported accommodation into a permanent home.

- Improved access to the private rented sector by embedding the Private Rented Sector Access Team within Housing Options, in partnership with the Wallich.
- Development of provision for rough sleepers including establishment of a Rough Sleeping Intervention Team and extension of the support offered to a 7 day service.
- Working with Swansea Hope and partners to resource Swansea Night Shelter to provide temporary accommodation and re-settlement support to rough sleepers during the coldest months.
- Collaborative approach with the voluntary sector and Health Service (i.e. Homelessness Nurse and Mental Health Outreach Nurse) that provides advice and support to rough sleepers.
- The WAO reported Swansea has robust, comprehensive and wide-ranging plans in place to support the Council's ambition to meet the WHQS by December 2020.
- Homes Preparation unit recycles household goods and furniture left in empty properties to reduce landfill/tipping costs.
- Mobile wardens have been introduced for adults 60 years + in the community.
- A pilot at a sheltered housing complex has proved a success in bringing together older people and children. Working with XL Wales, an educational charity, older people at the complex and children from the nearby Gendros primary school worked together on a number of hands-on skills and activities. XL Wales want to expand the scheme across the city.
- Tenant Participation Advisory service recognised Swansea for the way it handled its communication to tenants post Grenfell.
- A number of WAO adaptation report recommendations reference activities adopted in Swansea.
- The ADAPT scheme provides a register of adapted homes for disabled residents which is a partnership between local RSLs and the Council.
- Partnership with Western Bay Care and Repair handyman scheme to provide Minor Adaptations and Comfort, Safety Security assistance to elderly and disabled residents quickly.
- The service has enabled much needed additional accommodation to be brought back into use and empty properties converted through the Welsh Government Houses into Homes/Landlord Loans scheme and Grants For Nominations assistance.
- Track record of delivering the £8-10m annual Housing Adaptations and Improvement capital programme assisting elderly and disabled residents to remain living independently at home with over 1800 households assisted each year.

## 15. Service Improvement findings

The headline emerging issues of the review fall into the categories below and are detailed in the following tables:

- Maximising income
- Improving service user access
- Improving operational systems and processes
- Service specific issues

| <b>a. Maximising income</b>  |
|--|
| The vast majority of funding for the HRA comes from the collection of rent. The introduction of Universal Credit (UC) has meant that the Rents Team is facing significant challenges to maximise income. As a result there is a need to increase resources in this team in order to offer early support and minimise the impact on |

tenants themselves and on the HRA business plan.

The Rents Team has over the last 18 months, experienced an unprecedented increase in demand in terms of volume, complexity of work and support required by tenants. The team continue to implement numerous strategies and support measures to mitigate the impact of Welfare Reform on tenants and rent arrears. These measures include; awareness campaigns, targeted preventative work, dedicated training for officers, enhancing the working relationship with Welfare Rights/Employability, increased partnership working with other support services, the introduction of weekly Rents Surgeries at DHOs, restructure of the Rents Team to incorporate Rents Officers and specialised UC Rents Officers. These are in addition to changes to all processes, procedures and working practices within the Rents team which are ongoing.

It has been identified as part of the review that the Rents Team should be located together in one office, that further development should be considered in respect of how the Rents Team is structured and reinforcing the Rents Team with Officers focussed on early targeted support, including specific provision in respect of welfare benefits.

Staff focus groups identified a number of opportunities that should be explored further to maximise income which include:

Exploring the introduction of charges for some functions not currently charged for, e.g. lift maintenance/window cleaning/ NSU/lost alarm pendants (Sheltered) subject to stakeholder consultation.

- A working group of senior officers has been set up to examine the feasibility of additional service charges.

Reviewing the annual leasehold management charge and options to charge solicitors for work relating to the resale of leasehold properties.

- As part of the annual leasehold service charge bill a management charge of £50 is included. This contributes to the cost of providing the leasehold management service, which is funded by the HRA. An analysis has identified that an inflationary increase should be applied as the cost of this service is no longer fully recovered by the charge. Work is currently underway to ensure that any legal requirements set out in the leases would be met.
- Information is currently supplied to solicitors as part of the conveyancing process when leasehold properties are sold. An analysis is currently being undertaken with other local authorities to identify potential charging options and prices.

Reviewing the capacity/floor space of the Furniture Store to store furniture items we have a statutory duty to store in order to reduce costs rather than paying contractors for storage.

- There is a statutory duty for the Council to protect a households belongings if they are at risk where they may be homeless and have a priority need. Costs for storage have risen significantly to £16,108 in 2018/19. Whilst there is no available space within the Furniture store building, there is a possibility of hiring a container outside. An analysis is being undertaken on legal and logistical issues to see if this will result in savings. At the same time the policy and procedure are being reviewed to ensure belongings are protected for the minimum period only.

Considering phasing out paying for TV licences for new Sheltered tenants and review the scheme for existing tenants subject to tenant consultation.

- This currently costs around £12,000 per year. The impact of the recent announcement to withdraw free TV licences for the over 75's and the current uncertainty over the future of concessionary schemes could have a significant impact on costs if the HRA were to continue these payments.

In addition:

- A HRA Asset Management Plan is being developed which will include key actions to explore opportunities to generate additional income from HRA garages, leases and car parks.
- The service will continue to seek capital funding income streams including WG Arbed Ambyth and Enable programmes to support provision of energy efficiency schemes.

### **b. Improving service user access**

The way service users access services is changing, with significantly more transactions being undertaken over the phone and online.

- A key priority is the upgrade of the different telephony systems across satellite offices which are out dated and do not work efficiently to enable direct service user access to the relevant officer/team. Work is underway to replace these systems and link the offices to the Council's Unified Comms system. This will improve service user access and allow calls to be routed to relevant services more efficiently.
- Improvements are required to online transactions, e.g. rent payments, housing applications, grant applications, report repairs, fly tipping, incidents of anti-social behaviour online, etc. Officers are exploring digital solutions which will allow service users to access more housing services online via a computer, mobile phone or tablet device.
- An upgrade of the Council's online payments system is due to be implemented which will improve the way service users can make rent payments via a mobile phone/tablet.

The service needs to invest to save in new technology as IT will have a significant positive impact on the way services run, how service users can access them, cost reduction, officer time and inefficiencies in paper based and back office processes.

### **c. Improving operational systems/processes**

#### **Agile mobile working WiFi & communication**

- Historically, access to IT systems for staff has been provided via fixed desktop computers. In order to facilitate a more agile/mobile approach to working a number of improvements to hardware devices and network infrastructure are being implemented. Desktop machines have been replaced with laptops as part of a corporate programme and the service will install staff WiFi into offices to allow offices to be used in a more 'agile' way. Frontline staff have also been issued with smart phones to allow access to emails on site and enable service users to contact them directly.
- Officers are also exploring mobile solutions which would allow officers to input information whilst on site and in service users' homes.

### **Back office systems**

- Many processes and records across all services are currently paper based which causes significant inefficiencies both for physical storage and access to information.
- An electronic document management system is required to facilitate the introduction of more modern ways of working. A Corporate project is examining these issues for all services and Housing is currently piloting this. Improvements to back office systems will simplify and reduce time spent on a number of transactional processes.

### **Software solutions/new systems**

- A number of services are currently reliant on unsupported bespoke databases, i.e. homelessness, leasehold service charges, asset management/ WHQS, Renewal & Adaptation service and the Tenancy Support case management system. These systems were developed as short term solutions and pose significant risk around long term resilience. Officers are currently exploring replacements and costings for these systems to ensure that more robust solutions are introduced for these key business areas.

### **Service specific issues**

Some services/functions are facing more significant challenges and need to consider how they can address the issues and/or overhaul systems with IT improvements, etc, including:

#### **d. Service specific issues**

**Housing application, assessment and waiting list** –There is a need to modernise the housing application, assessment and waiting list process as well as improving the way the service user can access this service and information on properties and estates online. This will help manage service user expectation of realistic housing options/likely waiting times, minimise the time a property remains empty, reduce an officer's time spent making abortive offers due to no contacts and the service user not really wanting the area they originally chose.

Housing Options are currently working in partnership with Shelter who are carrying out research into the Council's Waiting list process/Allocations Policy in conjunction with RSL's across the city. The project will include research from a service user perspective for those who have gone through the waiting list process or are currently on the waiting list and also look at each organisations processes to help identify best practice, etc.

The findings from this will feed into Swansea's review of its Allocations Policy and aim to improve the service user experience for anyone applying for accommodation.

Options for new technology are being explored to improve the service user journey of applying for housing. This will include providing more detailed information on property types and areas to ensure service users' expectations can be better managed and an interactive website to advertise properties which are readily available. In addition, improving back office processes, removing paper applications and files will free up staff time to support the service user to manage their housing need/expectations.

**Empty properties/Voids/lettings** – The void and lettings processes have previously been subject to a systems thinking review and continue to be scrutinised as they have a big impact on loss of income when a property is empty. Current void levels are around 200 which is a significant reduction from when they stood at over a 1000 in 2002.

A number of service improvements are being considered to reduce the time taken to let a property. These include; promoting alternatives to transfers via HomeSwapper to encourage tenants to swap their homes, extending early viewings while the property is in repair, making changes to how waiting lists are updated with the aim of reducing abortive offers and in liaison with Building Services monitoring the void process stages to minimise rent loss and turnaround times. It is hoped that the turnover of around 1500 tenancies ending and being let each year will slow down as the current WHQS investment and significant kitchen and bathroom programme should help tenants be happier in their homes and want to settle in them longer.

**Prospective tenants** - The service also needs to consider what mechanisms it could put in place to prepare new tenants for successfully managing a tenancy.

Housing Options and the Tenancy Support Unit are currently looking at ways to ensure that new tenants, particular vulnerable households, are tenancy 'ready' at the point of signing for a property. In addition to looking at moving to a more support-on-demand service, it is also looking at developing a pre-tenancy support officer and recruitment to this is underway.

**Furnished tenancy scheme** – There is an opportunity to consider implementing a points based choice system to examine how the scheme could be made more financially viable to those people not in receipt of benefit. The scheme could also explore its expansion to other social landlords to increase income.

The manual system of coding furniture needs to be replaced with a computerised inventory system which is being considered corporately as part of a wider solution for other services.

In addition, the service has been looking at how it can recoup resources for missed furniture pack deliveries. This is due to a high number of aborted deliveries as the tenant does not turn up at the allocated slot. This has a big impact on the number of deliveries completed in a day and staff time.

A pilot will be carried out to charge a £20 re-delivery fee when the prearranged delivery is missed unless its due to exceptional circumstances. The aim is to offset some of the lost resource (ie staffing and vehicle costs) as well as encouraging new service users to respect terms and conditions from the outset. New service users will be informed of an am/pm delivery slot verbally at the time of signing for the furnished tenancy, in writing on the addendum to their tenancy agreement, and by way of text message the day before.

**Supporting individuals/tenancy enforcement** - The service deals with an increasing proportion of service users who present with complex needs requiring high levels of support. These include safeguarding, drug/alcohol misuse, a range of mental health and well-being issues. Taking a holistic approach and working with a range of professional partner agencies to deliver the support needed to help sustain tenancies is pivotal to this. As an example, a Neighbourhood Officer dealing with a case of hoarding will work intensively with a range of partners such

as Community Mental Health, Fire Service, Pollution Control, Local Area Co-ordinators and Social Services to help support a tenant. Frequently there will also be complaints of ASB. The introduction of agile working and a mobile solution will assist officers to spend more time on tenancy support in tenants homes and on estates.

**Sheltered service** – This service is subject to continual review as it faces many challenges to support people to remain in their homes for longer. These challenges include the future of Supporting People funding, an ageing population, increases in dementia/other related illnesses and new technology. As a result, the service needs to review its cleaning and weekend service, 24hr analogue alarm system, its use of guest bedrooms and the level of future investment required for furnishings, lifts and ramps in some complexes. It is also exploring the feasibility of introducing a handyperson service to assist tenants with minor jobs, e.g. changing light bulbs, putting up curtain rails, minor repairs of furniture etc, which could help them stay in their homes for longer. Further investment will also be required longer term with the likely introduction of new assistive technology such as movement sensors. The service is also working with Social Services to explore how the extra care provision model could be incorporated into the existing sheltered housing provision.

**Anti-social behaviour (ASB)** - ASB related activities are currently delivered through 9 District Housing Offices, who are in turn supported by a small ASB Support Team of 3 officers. Any type of enforcement action linked to ASB, has to be proportionate and tailored to the individual as it is carried out within a restrictive legal framework based on evidence and proof. A larger ASB Support Team dealing with high level ASB, would lead to a more consistent, measured and timely approach to effectively deal with ASB. The service also needs to explore the procurement of a noise “app” which would help complainants to provide evidence of noise problems as a significant amount of ASB incidents are low level noise issues.

**Neighbourhood Support Unit** – The unit was set up in 1997 with the main role to provide a 24/7 landlord presence on Council estates to support District Housing Offices, prevent ASB and provide security to empty Council properties. However, the existing empty property alarms are becoming obsolete and need replacing which will require significant investment and there are low levels of breaches occurring in the alarmed voids. Research has shown that other organisations do not generally alarm empty properties so it is opportune to review this provision. The service is piloting not alarming voids in some areas to help inform the analysis.

**Estate management/gardening scheme** – When Housing first adopted the “Tend and Mend” service in 2015, the intention was to provide 3 cuts per year to gardens covered by the scheme. However, it has only been able to achieve one cut per year due to significant increases in demand and this is likely to continue due to an ageing population and the lack of verification required to demonstrate disability. Whilst the service is available to those aged 65 and over or disabled, changes are being made to alter this criteria to those aged over 70 or with a qualifying disability. This should ensure the garden cutting scheme can continue to provide a valued service to those that need it whilst redirecting demand from those tenants who are able to carry out the work themselves or who may have family who can provide assistance.

Alternatives to direct delivery of garden cutting are also being explored, including a garden tool hire scheme, and working with the Local Area Co-ordinators to identify



any opportunities for community run initiatives. Detailed analysis is taking place to look at how this could operate and in relation to some specific issues around delivery/collection of garden tools, maintenance, PAT testing, insurance, risk management etc. In addition, exploration of a pilot to issue a strimmer to new tenants as an incentive to take responsibility for their own gardens is being considered.

A grant bid to fund a corporate Community Catalyst resource whose remit would be to help start and develop social enterprises is also being explored to work alongside the LAC team.

The service is also working with the Estate Management Tenant Panel to update its Estate Management strategy to ensure resources are targeted effectively and that the service continues to meet tenants priorities to keep estates safe and attractive.

The service will also focus on how it addresses significant garden issues, i.e extensive/difficult to maintain plots as part of the regeneration investment schemes needed post 2020.

### **Future Model of the District Housing Office service**

The review acknowledges that much of the structure of the service has been in place for a number of years and the way in which service users wish to communicate with organisations and businesses is changing whilst demands on services continue to increase.

Information from a range of sources has been used to assess the long term sustainability of District Housing Offices. These include building surveys, analysis of patterns of changes in service user access, preference towards more contact over the phone/online and falling numbers of face to face callers. In conjunction with looking at new ways of working for staff, this information suggests that the DHO footprint should be reduced from 9 to 6. The proposals being considered include closing Penlan, Eastside and West Cross offices.

To effectively manage the reduction in DHOs, housing services would continue to be provided from the nearest housing offices and Neighbourhood officers would make more home and estate visits. Housing advice/rent surgeries are proposed for local community buildings for tenants who may not want a home visit. Feedback will be sought from tenants, Ward Members and staff to identify community space venues for surgeries should the proposals go ahead. This could include local schools as an approach has been made from one to offer use of their community space. The service is taking this opportunity to trial a surgery in the school starting in September 2019.

Tenants would still be able to pay their rent in local post offices, shops displaying the payzone sign, online, over the phone and by direct debit, or by calling into other District Housing Offices or the Civic Centre. Recycling bags can be picked up from local libraries, some shops, post offices, ordered online, by phone or putting request tags out with recycling bags.

The implementation of a digital solution/customer portal will improve the way service users can access more housing services and make online transactions via a

computer, mobile or tablet device.

There is a project taking place to co-locate the District Housing office with the Library service in Gorseinon in 2020.

## 16. Future Key Challenges

The service is facing significant challenges over the next few years. A number of high level policy, strategy and audit/review findings that need to be progressed are as follows;

- Deliver achievement of the WHQS by December 2020.
- Deliver More Homes strategy.
- Implement the outcome of the Welsh Government Affordable Housing Supply & Rents Policy review which could impact on the HRA business plan.
- Co-ordinate impact/delivery of the Decarbonisation agenda.
- Coordinate delivery of Welsh Government Social Housing Grant funding.
- Development/introduction of WAO Adaptations report recommendations and proposed WG Adaptation service standards.
- Implement WAO WHQS findings.
- Update Repairs policy.
- Develop asset management plan.
- Review WHQS compliance policy and report to Council.
- Implement the project/requirements of the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 through the issuing of new occupation contracts (replacing current tenancy agreements) to all Council tenants.
- Introductory tenancies—consider future of these in light of the implications of the Renting Homes Act.
- Develop rents strategy.
- Review Allocations policy by 2020.
- Development of post 2020 regeneration investment schemes.
- Review outcome of energy efficiency pilot in sheltered and consider wider implementation.
- Deliver the Homelessness Strategy and action plan.
- Deliver Tenant Participation strategy and action plan.
- Contribute to the development of the West Glamorgan Regional Partnership Health and Housing strategy.
- Deliver the Private Sector Housing policy to provide assistance/annual capital programme.
- Completion of local housing market assessment.

Please ensure that you refer to the Screening Form Guidance while completing this form. If you would like further guidance please contact the Access to Services team (see guidance for details).

|  |
|--|
| <b>Section 1</b>                                 |
| Which service area and directorate are you from? |
| Service Area: Housing                            |
| Directorate:Place                                |

**Q1(a) WHAT ARE YOU SCREENING FOR RELEVANCE?**

|                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                                     |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Service/<br>Function     | Policy/<br>Procedure     | Project                  | Strategy                 | Plan                     | Proposal                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

**(b) Please name and describe here:**

Emerging findings from the commissioning review highlight proposals to consider reducing the number of District Housing Offices from 9 to 6. The commissioning review has also identified a number of service improvements that will help to modernise the service to help meet increasing customer demand i.e. IT improvements, customer surgeries etc.

**Q2(a) WHAT DOES Q1a RELATE TO?**

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| Direct front line<br>service delivery   | Indirect front line<br>service delivery | Indirect back room<br>service delivery |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> (H) | <input type="checkbox"/> (M)            | <input type="checkbox"/> (L)           |

**(b) DO YOUR CUSTOMERS/CLIENTS ACCESS THIS...?**

|   |                              |   |                                       |
|---|------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| Because they<br>need to                 | Because they<br>want to      | Because it is<br>automatically provided to<br>everyone in Swansea | On an internal<br>basis<br>i.e. Staff |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> (H) | <input type="checkbox"/> (M) | <input type="checkbox"/> (M)                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> (L)          |

**Q3 WHAT IS THE POTENTIAL IMPACT ON THE FOLLOWING...**

|                                | High Impact<br>(H)       | Medium Impact<br>(M)                | Low Impact<br>(L)                   | Don't know<br>(H)        |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Children/young people (0-18) → | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Older people (50+) →           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Any other age group →          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Disability →                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Race (including refugees) →    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Asylum seekers →               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Gypsies & travellers →         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Religion or (non-)belief →     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sex →                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sexual Orientation →           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Gender reassignment →          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Welsh Language →               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

|                              |   |                          |                          |                                     |                          |
|------------------------------|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Poverty/social exclusion     | → | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Carers (inc. young carers)   | → | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Community cohesion           | → | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Marriage & civil partnership | → | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Pregnancy and maternity      | → | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**Q4 WHAT ENGAGEMENT / CONSULTATION / CO-PRODUCTIVE APPROACHES WILL YOU UNDERTAKE?**

Please provide details below – either of your planned activities or your reasons for not undertaking engagement

Face to face Surveys were undertaken at all of the DHO's in 2018 in order to establish the volume of customer demand on the each of the offices and the way in which customers access the service and this has informed the proposals. We also have data from our major tenants survey in 2017 which tells us about customer contact preferences.

Feedback on these proposals are currently being sought from 13,500 tenants and 600 leaseholders as part of the review process, prior to any recommendations being reported to Cabinet later this year and a formal consultation with tenants. All tenants and leaseholders have received a letter outlining the proposals and the opportunity to attend a consultation event in a DHO, they have also been offered the opportunity to provide written feedback. In addition, 4 internal stakeholder workshops have been held with colleagues from services across the Council.

**Q5(a) HOW VISIBLE IS THIS INITIATIVE TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC?**

High visibility  
 (H)

Medium visibility  
 (M)

Low visibility  
 (L)

**(b) WHAT IS THE POTENTIAL RISK TO THE COUNCIL'S REPUTATION? (Consider the following impacts – legal, financial, political, media, public perception etc...)**

High risk  
 (H)

Medium risk  
 (M)

Low risk  
 (L)

**Q6 Will this initiative have an impact (however minor) on any other Council service?**

Yes

No

If yes, please provide details below

**Q7 HOW DID YOU SCORE?**

Please tick the relevant box

MOSTLY H and/or M → HIGH PRIORITY →  EIA to be completed

Please go to Section 2

MOSTLY L → LOW PRIORITY / NOT RELEVANT →  Do not complete EIA

Please go to Q8 followed by Section 2

**Q8 If you determine that this initiative is not relevant for an EIA report, you must provide a full explanation here. Please ensure that you cover all of the relevant protected groups.**

Findings from the analysis of the long term sustainability of District Housing Offices including building surveys, changes in customer access, more contact done over the phone/online, falling numbers of

face to face callers together with looking at new ways of working for staff suggests that the DHO footprint should be reduced from 9 to 6 initially.

Our intention is to mitigate this as services would continue to be provided from the nearest housing offices and there would be no reduction of staff resources in terms of meeting customer demand and no impact on staff from these proposals.

Neighbourhood officers would continue to make home and estate visits where requested in order to meet the needs of the community including elderly residents or those with disabilities. Housing advice/rent surgeries will be held in local community buildings if tenants didn't want a home visit.

Tenants would still be able to pay their rent in local post offices, shops displaying the payzone sign, online, over the phone and by direct debit, or by calling into other District Housing Offices or the Civic Centre. Recycling bags can be picked up from local libraries, some shops, post offices, online, by putting request tags out with recycling bags.

These proposals are not expected to have any impact on the Welsh language

We are still going through a period of consultation in terms of our proposals so the EIA process will be engaged further at the earliest opportunity when the recommendations for the full Cabinet report are being considered.

## Section 2

NB: Please email this completed form to the Access to Services Team for agreement before obtaining approval from your Head of Service. Head of Service approval is only required via email – no electronic signatures or paper copies are needed.

|   |
|---|
| Screening completed by:   |
| Name: Lynda Grove   |
| Job title: Strategic Housing Customer and Service Development Manager |
| Date: 25 <sup>th</sup> June 2019                                      |
| Approval by Head of Service:  |
| Name: Mark Wade   |
| Position: Head of Housing   |
| Date: 28 <sup>th</sup> June 2019                                      |

Please return the completed form to [accesstoservices@swansea.gov.uk](mailto:accesstoservices@swansea.gov.uk)

If you require this information in alternative format e.g. Large print, please contact 07197 63xxx or email xxxxxx

Dear xxxxxx

### **District Housing Office Service and your views on proposed changes**

We want you to have your say on our proposal to change the way we deliver the District Housing Office service. This letter is a follow up to the letter you should have received back in June 2019. We received 150 responses and feedback highlighted how much tenants value the housing service. The main concern was that any improvements to IT systems should not replace the face to face service being delivered. Under Section 105 of the Housing Act 1985, we have a duty to inform and consult with you on any changes on 'matters of housing management'.

### **Why are we proposing to make changes?**

The Housing Service has undertaken a review to look at how it can modernise the way it delivers the service. We also need to make sure the service has the right level of resources in place to address the increasing priorities and demands it's facing in relation to supporting tenants, the impact of Universal Credit, preventing homelessness, meeting housing need, improving Council houses and investing in building new homes to name but a few examples.

### **What changes are we proposing?**

We are consulting on proposals to reduce the number of District Housing Offices. The reason we are proposing these changes is that the way tenants are contacting us is changing – far more are contacting the service by phone and online. This means the numbers calling into some local Housing Offices has fallen.

We looked at:

- How many people use the DHO's
- The way tenants access our services (face-to-face or phone/online)
- The condition and investment needed to the building

The proposals are to close 3 offices which include West Cross, Penlan and Eastside. Services will still be provided from the nearest housing offices and Neighbourhood officers will continue to make home and estate visits. They will also hold Housing advice/rent surgeries in local community buildings if tenants don't want a home visit. Tenants will still be able to pay their rent in local post offices, shops displaying the payzone sign, online, over the phone and by direct debit, or by calling into other housing offices or the civic centre. Recycling bags can be picked up from local libraries, some shops, post offices, ordered online, over the phone or by putting request tags out with recycling bags. A project is also taking place to co-locate the District Housing office with the Library service in Gorseinon in 2020.

Our priority is to continue to deliver a frontline face to face housing service that tenants value but to improve the way we do it. We are looking to increase the amount of time staff spend on home and estate visits using new mobile technology, i.e. tablet, upgrade our telephone systems and reduce the amount of form filling that tenants have to complete by modernising our back office processes. We will also improve the way tenants can make online transactions and access housing services via a computer, tablet or mobile phone.

We would welcome your views on the following;

**Our proposal: Closure of 3 District Housing offices, i.e. Penlan, Eastside and West Cross. Services will still be provided from the nearest housing offices; along with Neighbourhood Officers continuing to make home and estate visits and local surgeries being held in community buildings.**

Strongly Agree      Tend to Agree      Tend to Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**Please explain your answer below.**

**Do you agree or disagree with the following:**

**Closure of Penlan DHO**

Strongly Agree      Tend to Agree      Tend to Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**Please explain your answer below.**

**Closure of Eastside DHO**

Strongly Agree      Tend to Agree      Tend to Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**Please explain your answer below.**

**Closure of West Cross DHO**

Strongly Agree      Tend to Agree      Tend to Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**Please explain your answer below.**

**Do you agree or disagree that staff should spend more time on home and estate visits with the use of new mobile technology?**

Strongly Agree      Tend to Agree      Tend to Disagree      Strongly Disagree

Please explain your answer below

**Do you agree or disagree that improvements should be made to the way tenants can make online transactions and access housing services via a computer, tablet or mobile phone.**

Strongly Agree      Tend to Agree      Tend to Disagree      Strongly Disagree

Please explain your answer below

**Are there any other options you feel the Council should consider to improve the delivery of the frontline face to face housing service?**

Please give your answer below

**Which District Housing Office is your 'local' office?**

Penlan DHO  
Blaenymaes DHO  
Eastside DHO

Towncentre DHO  
Townhill DHO  
Gorseinon DHO

West Cross DHO  
Morrison DHO  
Sketty DHO

We would like you to let us know your views by (*date to be added*). You can do this by:

- Completing the enclosed comments form and returning it to us using the FREEPOST envelope OR completing it online at (on line web address/link to be included).
- Calling into any District Housing Office to speak to a member of staff or to hand in your completed comments form
- E-mailing your comments to the housing inbox [housing@swansea.gov.uk](mailto:housing@swansea.gov.uk)
- Calling the housing team to discuss on (*contact number to be identified*)
- Attending one of the drop in sessions (*dates and venues to be scheduled*)

The consultation begins xxxxx 2020 and will finish on xxxxx 2020. Before making a final decision on this matter the Council will consider all representations made in response to this consultation exercise.