
To: Communities and Housing Policy Board

On: 16 January 2024

Report by: Director of Environment, Housing and Infrastructure

Heading: Service Update Report

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of key service activities, an operational performance update since the last Policy Board meeting on the services and key projects and updates on any other relevant changes to service areas covered within the remit of this Board.
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2. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Communities and Housing Policy Board

- 2.1 Note the contents of this report.
- 2.2 Authorise the Head of Housing Services to accept grant funding of £254,015 awarded from the Scottish Government's Social Housing Net Zero Heat Fund (SHNZHF) as detailed in section 3.8 of this report.
- 2.3 Note the Fixed Penalty Notice penalty for flytipping has increased from £200 to £500 in accordance with a Scottish Government amendment to the Environmental Protection Act.
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Updates for Communities and Housing Policy Board

3. Housing Services

3.1 Housing-Led Regeneration and Development

- 3.1.1 As reported to the Board at its meeting of 31 October 2023, good progress continues to be made on the acquisition of privately-owned homes in order to progress demolition in regeneration areas. To date 38 of 89 properties have been acquired. Table 1 below illustrates the situation as of 30 November 2023.

Table 1 Regeneration & Renewal Area	Council Demo Props	Props to be acquired	Props acquired to Date	Total for demo	Demo void end Nov 23	%age void
Auchentorlie	17	1	0	18	17	94%
Ferguslie/Broomlands	64	16	6	80	30	38%
Howard Street Area	55	11	6	66	35	53%
Howwood Road Area	163	15	7	178	35	20%
Springbank/Mossvale	118	36	14	154	66	43%
Thrushcraigs	90	6	2	96	35	36%
Waverley Road Area	68	4	3	72	59	82%
	575	89	38	664	277	42%

- 3.1.2 Good progress is also being made where re-housing of Council tenants is required to facilitate demolition. Table 1 above illustrates the situation as of 30 November 2023. Rehousing of tenants from properties approved for demolition in the Auchentorlie area is now complete. Priority for re-housing is currently being applied on a phased basis to applicants in Waverley Road, Springbank/Mossvale, Thrushcraigs and the Howard Street Area. It is envisaged that rehousing priority for the Howwood Road Area and Ferguslie/Broomlands will be applied on a phased basis as each phase of newbuild nears completion.
- 3.1.3 Applications for above benchmark grant finance for newbuild housing at Howwood Road Area Phase 1 (the former Cochrane Castle Primary School site) and Ferguslie/Broomlands Phase 1 (the former Carbrook Street Nursery site) are being reviewed by the Scottish Government. A report was approved by the Finance, Resources and Customer Service Policy Board to let Design-and-Build contracts for both sites, subject to the award of sufficient grant.
- 3.1.4 Officers continue to implement the Procurement Strategy, including ensuring that the Council obtains community benefits. The preferred bidder for the two new build projects has confirmed as a minimum, for each project, that it will provide two jobs for unemployed individuals from priority groups, two further jobs for unemployed individuals and one modern apprentice role. Further benefits will be offered such as work placement, training and business support.

3.2 Other New Build Development

- 3.2.1 An application for above benchmark grant finance for newbuild housing at Gallowhill has been made to the Scottish Government and a report was approved by the Finance, Resources and Customer Service Policy Board to let a Design-and-Build contract, subject to the award of sufficient grant.

3.3 Housing Services

3.3.1 Income Advice

Supporting tenants having trouble paying rent due is an ongoing priority. Joint work continues with the Council's Benefits and Advice service to ensure Council Tenants in need of assistance have access to specialist income advisors. Information from income advice interviews at the end of November confirms that over 1700 income advice cases involved households from Council Tenancies this financial year.

3.3.2 During these interviews staff assess any entitlements to assistance that are due and support people to access entitlement alongside giving advice on all money matters and budgeting. There are several sources of additional assistance accessed which can include universal credit / housing benefit, attendance and disability allowances, financial insecurity funds, food vouchers and many more.

3.3.3 The Tenant's Support fund has since October been part of the range of assistance considered, a prerequisite for the fund is for officers to check tenants are in receipt of all the benefits that they may be entitled to in the first instance. In addition to income maximisation assessments and budgeting advice, officers support tenants to meet their long-term rent payment responsibilities. Since commencement of the fund in October to the end of November, there have been 96 Tenants referred for Tenant Support Fund assessments, which will have the added value of full income assessment and advice provision.

3.3.4 Housing Advice

We have recently extended customer choice in ways to join the housing waiting list. An online housing application was introduced during November 2023 which will be available alongside existing ways to apply, such as telephone, video conferencing (Near Me), email and in person as requested. Housing staff are still available to assist in completing on-line forms and all applicants will still have the opportunity for housing options advice, to assist those making a housing enquiry to gain a realistic understanding of the choices available to suit their circumstances. Fifteen applications had been received online by the end of November.

3.3.5 Estate Management

Preparatory work is ongoing to progress with the aim of piloting the use of an online Anti-social behaviour (ASB) reporting system – the 'ASB App'. Existing alongside the other reporting methods, telephone, email, in writing and in person, the App will extend the ways tenants impacted by ASB can make reports and log incidents. If following the necessary system checks, the 'App' can be integrated to the Council's system and devices, it will be piloted in one of the housing neighbourhood teams prior to evaluation and roll-out.

3.4 Homelessness and Housing Support

3.4.1 There continues to be increased demand for Homelessness and Housing Support Services as would be expected at a time of a cost-of-living crisis and growth in homelessness applications. A separate report to this Policy Board covering these service areas provide full details on the current impact on homeless and housing support services.

3.5 Sheltered Housing

3.5.1 The strong focus on tackling loneliness continues and a range of festive activities, parties and trips to Panto's were organised throughout December, as well as Christmas dinners arranged for those tenants who were going to be on their own on Christmas Day.

- 3.5.2 There have been several planned internal improvements to the developments to enhance their appearance, and talks provided by Community Wardens, Police Scotland, and Scottish Fire & Rescue Services across all complexes.

3.6 Refugee Resettlement

- 3.6.1 As well as supporting those Syrian and Afghan families who have resettled in Renfrewshire, our Welcome Hub at hotels near Glasgow Airport continues to support those displaced from Ukraine and who are awaiting settled accommodation either in Renfrewshire or other local authority areas.
- 3.6.2 The team are also supporting 146 Ukrainian households who have already been helped to resettle in social rented tenancies in communities across Renfrewshire, as well as the 24 other Ukrainian households who are staying with 'hosts'. Variety of events have been held to help support integration and enhance access to activities, classes etc.

3.7 Housing Asset and Investment

- 3.7.1 Site inspections of selected HRA properties for Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) are now fully complete and no RAAC was identified. External validation of the initial desktop study and the site inspections was sought, with Balfour Engineering Consultancy selected to carry out the checks. Balfour Engineering Consultancy completed their checks in early December, validating the methodology used for the desktop study and confirming that no RAAC was identified in sites inspected. The Housing Investment team continue to monitor the situation with RAAC, emerging Information from other Local Authorities and Housing Associations that have identified RAAC in their stock, is cross checked with Renfrewshire Council's stock, to determine if further inspections will be required.
- 3.7.2 A.C. Whyte were appointed in July 2023 to carry out repairs to the external wall insulation panels at Speirsfield Court and Camphill Court, which saw scaffolding erected around the lower levels of both buildings as a safety precaution. All repairs are complete using mast climbers and the buildings have been repainted improving their appearance. Residents are reported to be pleased that the scaffold which has been in place for some time has been removed and that works are now complete.
- 3.7.3 We continue to work with external consultant Savills to carry out an end-to-end review of void processes. The Housing Regeneration and Development Manager has been seconded for a period of 6 months to develop and implement an action plan for improvement in conjunction with colleagues from all teams involved in the void process. Savills' recommendations include (in addition to the secondment of the Single Voids Manager, reporting to the Head of Housing Services):
- The establishment of a Single Voids Team bringing together key personnel from Housing Services and Building Services;
 - The secondment of housing management staff to that team in order to ensure that pre-termination inspections of void properties are carried out whenever possible;

- Expediting the procurement of a Preferred Utility Provider;
- The greater use of hand-held devices rather than manual methods in scoping void works;
- A review of key performance indicators for stages of the voids process and void types;
- A review of the management of external contractors used in voids where significant work is required to bring the property to the Scottish Housing Quality Standard;
- A review of the prioritisation of void repairs – for example, doing voids which require little work first, rather than operating on a strict “first come, first served” basis – in order to drive down the average re-let time;
- Establishing a procedure for the carrying-out of value-for-money assessments in respect of very expensive voids;
- Building confidence in projected void completion dates so that new tenants can be selected in advance; and
- Examining the potential use of proprietary systems to create “fly-through” videos in order to enable remote viewing of voids by possible new tenants.

3.7.4 The backlog of adaptations to tenanted properties has reduced and the numbers in progress are back to pre-pandemic levels. The number of adaptations completed by the end of November 2023 was 254 with an average timescale for completion of 54 days. This compares to total completions in 2022/23 of 261 with an average completion time of 96 days.

3.8 Housing Services Awards of Grant Funding

3.8.1 SHNZHF Funding

The Scottish Government’s Social Housing Net Zero Heat Fund (SHNZHF), was introduced to support delivering net zero heating solutions to social housing. Renfrewshire Council successfully applied for funding to 8 terraced homes at Houston Place, Elderslie and were awarded £254,015. The project will deliver energy efficiency measures and low emission heating and will allow the Council to assess whether this is something which can feasibly be rolled out to the wider housing stock.

3.8.2 To achieve a sufficient reduction in heat loss and heat demand, designs using passive house principles will be produced and then the homes will be retrofitted with a package of energy efficiency improvements which will include External Wall Insulation, loft insulation, roof replacement with integrated Solar PV arrays, new energy efficient windows and doors and other related works such as MVHR ventilation systems. Individual Air Source Heat Pumps will then be installed to replace existing Gas Combination Boilers.

3.8.3 Site works are expected to start in March 2024 and completed within the financial year 2024/2025. Monitoring will be undertaken pre, post and during the works to assess the success of the project.

4. Public Protection

4.1 Trading Standards

Fireworks supply – storage registration

- 4.1.1 There are now 19 premises registered to store fireworks in the Renfrewshire area, down from 20 premises. Tesco plc made the decision this year to cease selling fireworks in Scotland, following Sainsburys' decision to do the same in 2021. A storage registration permit allows the holder to retail fireworks throughout the annual permitted periods i.e. 15 October – 10 November inclusive, 26 – 31 December inclusive and the 3 days up to and including Diwali and Chinese New Year. Sales of fireworks are only permitted between 7am and 6pm on those dates (or year round, in the case of a supply licence; none of which we have in Renfrewshire) and the maximum permitted amount for retail purchase is 5kg net explosive content at any time.
- 4.1.2 The times of use of fireworks are slightly restricted in Scotland in that they may not be let off before 6pm, or after 11pm daily all year. That restriction is expanded to midnight on Guy Fawkes, or 1am on the other celebration dates previously specified.
- 4.1.3 Each premises is inspected during periods of supply, and no issues were found during October/November. In addition, test purchase attempts were made at 6 premises to ensure that the 6pm and 5kg restrictions were being adhered to. No failures were obtained.

4.2 Environmental Health

- 4.2.1 Environmental Health are in the process of filling current vacancies within the Service and are in the process of recruiting three Senior Environmental Health Officer posts and three Environmental Health Officer posts. The Public Health Team have successfully recruited an invest trainee as a pest control assistant and are the process of recruiting two more invest trainees across the Business Regulation and Public Health Teams.

Health & Safety Interventions

- 4.2.2 As part of their health & Safety intervention programme, the Environmental Health Business Regulation Team carried out interventions at soft play centres and in December they visited local pubs to carry out a cellar safety intervention.
- 4.2.3 Business operators must comply with their general duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and the associated regulations. They must make a suitable and sufficient assessment of the health and safety risks to members of the public and to those in their employment.
- 4.2.4 The soft play centre intervention focussed on maintenance of the soft play, control of exits, staff training, cleaning and supervision.

- 4.2.5 The cellar safety intervention concentrated on safe cellar access, gas safety, working in an enclosed environment and beer line cleaning. The team also ensured they had the relevant health and safety documentation and associated staff training.
- 4.2.6 Interventions within One Ren premises have been concluded and officers are currently discussing the results with relevant managers within the business. As an arm's length organisation, One Ren now comes under the enforcement jurisdiction of the Council, this previously lay with HSE.
- 4.2.7 The main themes of the swimming pool intervention concentrated on pool safety and included: Supervision, training, documentation, plant, COSHH, operational control, and management.

4.3 Swimming Pool Interventions

- 4.3.1 Environmental Health Business Regulation Team have been carrying out interventions at swimming pools within Renfrewshire.
- 4.3.2 Swimming pool operators must comply with their general duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and the associated regulations. They must make a suitable and sufficient assessment of the health and safety risks to people using the pool and to those in their employment.
- 4.3.3 Interventions within One Ren premises have been concluded and officers are currently discussing the results with relevant managers within the business. As an arm's length organisation, One Ren now comes under the enforcement jurisdiction of the Council, this previously lay with HSE.
- 4.3.4 The main themes of the intervention concentrated on pool safety but included: Supervision, training, documentation, plant, COSHH, operational control, and management.

4.4 Community Safety

- 4.4.1 Keep Scotland Beautiful carried out training for our Community Safety Team. The training covered issues such as litter, fly -tipping, abandoned vehicles, dog fouling and commercial waste.

5. Community Development

5.1 Team Up to clean Up

- 5.1.1 Team Up to Clean Up has reached a significant milestone of 5,000 online group members, this equates to 4% of Renfrewshire's entire over 25 population. Facebook Analytics reveals the largest cohort of group members are aged 35-44 (31%), followed by 24% aged 45-54.
- 5.1.2 The Team Up Team has adapted the programme of secondary school presentations, delivering to smaller groups within PSE setting (Personal Social Education) as opposed to full year assemblies. This creates more opportunity an interactive experience more likely to resonate. 18 presentations have been delivered so far to 3 schools.

- 5.1.3 Team Up to Clean Up funding (ringfenced from Green Spaces funding) is supporting a clean up of Hawkhead Cemetery by the newly constituted “Friends of” group which will take place during January 2024. Wheelbarrows, hoes, rakes, brushes, shovels and gardening gloves were procured to ensure the group will be able to clear fallen branches and vegetation debris from the cemetery.
- 5.1.4 The Winter Warriors Campaign has gifted 24 community salt spreaders and snow shovels over the past 3 years. A further 12 salt spreaders and snow shovels are being offered to communities this year, together with a limited supply of salt. Interested individuals agree to use the equipment for the benefit of their local community, clearing vulnerable neighbour’s garden paths and gritting nearby, well used footpaths where possible. Volunteers further agree to offer others in their community use of the equipment on request.

5.2 Environmental Taskforce

- 5.2.1 The Environmental Taskforce continues to deliver intervention to reduce instances of flytipping. Key statistics for the most recent period are:

Action	1/12/21 – 30/11/22	1/12/22 – 30/11/23
Proactive visits to identified hotspot areas	1,733	2,258
Number of reports investigated		1,321
Tonnes of flytipping removed	n/a	436
Number of sites secured to prevent further flytipping	n/a	11
Letters to private landowners re flytipping	36	85
Visits to businesses to ensure Waste Disposal Arrangements in place	71	126
Fixed Penalty Notices Issued	40	93

- 5.2.2 The Scottish Government has announced from 1 January 2024 the Fixed Penalty Notice fine for flytipping offences, under the Environmental Protection Act, will increase from £200 to £500. This update to legislation was made in response to the Litter & Flytipping consultation submitted earlier in the year.

6. Justice Social Work

- 6.1.1 Staff have recently been employed within the fieldwork service, the women’s justice service and recently advertised for Whole Systems, to ensure that these services can be developed. Bail supervision is planned to commence in January 2024, in line with East Renfrewshire Council, so that similar services are available to the court for all areas covered. (Paisley Sheriff Court is the court that covers East Renfrewshire).

- 6.1.2 At the end of November 2023, the three justice fieldwork teams, part of the unpaid work service (Officer posts) and justice business support staff moved from Abbey House to Renfrewshire House. The relocation of staff has been positive. This move means there has been a significant increase in service users in attendance at Renfrewshire House.”
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Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – Any financial elements referenced in this report will be progressed through the Council’s financial & budget planning process.
 2. **HR & Organisational Development** – None
 3. **Community/Council Planning** – The report details a range of activities which reflect local community and council planning themes.
 4. **Legal** – None
 5. **Property/Assets** – None
 6. **Information Technology** –None
 7. **Equality & Human Rights** - The recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals’ human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council’s website.
 8. **Health & Safety** – None
 9. **Procurement** – None
 10. **Risk** – None
 11. **Privacy Impact** – None
 12. **COSLA Policy Position** – None
 13. **Climate Change** – there are a range of actions and activities throughout the Service Update Report which support the Council’s Plan for Net Zero,
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List of Background Papers: None

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