

Report to:	STOCKPORT HOMES MEMBER COMMITTEE		
Date of Meeting:	15 February 2021 Stockport Homes Member Committee		
Title of Report:	COVID-19: LATEST POSITION		
Report of:	ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE		
Confidentiality	Non Confidential		
Purpose of Report:	To update Members Committee on the latest position in relation to Covid-19.		
Type of Report	Information		
Recommendation(s):	Members Committee are asked to note the report, providing any further comments for consideration.		
Financial Implications of the recommendations	Forecasts are regularly updated and reported via monthly Management Accounts. Whilst there are some adverse impacts on various budget areas, SHG is still forecast to make an overall surplus for 2020/21.		
Value for Money Implications of the recommendations	There are no value for money implications from the recommendations.		
Risk Implications of the recommendations	Risk Number	Risk Description	Risk Mitigation
	New	SHG is not able to adequately recover from the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic, which affects service delivery to customers over the medium term.	SHG has provided effective leadership throughout the response to the pandemic and the implementation of government guidance.
Council Impact Assessment (CIA)	Does a CIA need to be completed? No	If so, has one been completed?	
Customer Impact	The impact on customers has been a significant consideration throughout SHG's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.		

Safeguarding Implications of the recommendations	Safeguarding has been considered as part of welfare calls to customers. Referrals continue to be made to Social Care in accordance with procedures and awareness raising for colleagues continues via in house and on line Safeguarding courses.	
Equality Impact Assessment	Does an EIA need to be completed? No	If so, has one been completed?
Equality & Diversity Implications of the recommendations	People from a BAME background are more severely affected by the Covid-19 virus and SHG have put additional measures in place to support staff who are from a BAME background.	
Environmental/ Sustainability Implications	There have been significant environmental benefits as a consequence of Covid-19 restrictions. SHG are undertaking a review of the impact on Covid-19 on its carbon footprint and this will be reported to Members Committee in due course.	
Content of Report signed-off by Director	Sandra Coleing 05/02/2021	
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1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Living with Covid-19 is now in its eleventh month and SHG continues to adapt and respond to the challenges that the company and customers have faced. The current restrictions aren't as severe as the first lockdown in March 2020 and the majority of SHG services continue to be delivered. This report provides Members Committee with an updated position on the impact of Covid.

2 IMPACT ON SERVICES

2.1 Repairs

The number of repairs and emergency repairs have continued to rise throughout the pandemic period. The number of repairs is now the same as this time last year and pre-Covid.

During this time customer satisfaction levels have remained extremely high as the team have put the safety of customers at the forefront of what they do, whilst maintaining the service levels required.

In more recent weeks, operatives and colleagues have been affected by testing positive and track and trace. The team continue to manage and maintain service levels i.e. week ending (w/e) 22/01/21, two days lost due to self-isolation and two to track and trace. The number of repairs completed rose from 564 w/e 15 January to 634 w/e 22 January and emergency repairs rose from 239 to 247 during the same period.

2.2 Assets Team

Services relating to the inspection and survey of responsive repairs, void repairs, fire damaged properties, disrepair claims, highway inspections and stock condition surveys continue to be undertaken.

The team adopted a new way of working for responsive repair inspections in March 2020, by way of customers emailing in photographs, surveyors having video calls with customers to view reported defects and this continues to be successful, maintaining the reduced the number of onsite inspections by 70%.

In June 2020, the surveying team facilitated the commencement of the MOT external maintenance programme at Cheadle Heath that includes repairing fencing, footpath repairs, replacing gully grids, repairs to rain water goods, brickwork and pointing repairs and painting metal fencing. The work continues to progress with over 50% of properties on the Swythamley Road estate having had a full external MOT check and repairs. Works are continuing and are expected to be fully complete in March 2021.

An external wall condition survey was completed at all of SHG's high rise buildings. The survey was carried out using a drone with delays being mainly due to inclement weather. The condition reports have been shared with senior managers and defects have been completed and none urgent repairs planned.

2.3 Home Improvement Agency

The Adaptation Service continues to operate for SHG properties and private residents having Disabled Facilities Grants carried out.

The Health and safety assessments for the team and contractors have been updated and modified. Guidance documents are regularly reviewed in line with Government guidance, with the aim of assuring works can be carried out safely.

Working with Adult Social Care Service at Stockport Council, processes to contact all customers prior to any inspection or works now takes place. This confirms that they are able to have the visit carried out and they are not shielding or wishing to delay the adaptation works. There has only been a small number of customers who have refused the works due to shielding.

2.4 Three Sixty

The team have continued to deliver projects through the pandemic and are incredibly busy in the final quarter, maximising turnover through to the year end. The pandemic has however impacted on overall turnover for the year, with little work being delivered in Q1 and ongoing issues through the second and third lockdowns. As such, forecasts have reduced, but an out-turn surplus is still expected which in itself is an achievement based on the challenges faced this year.

In addition, the team are seeing an increase in bidding/tendering activity and were able to secure a Fire Door project with Rochdale Council with more enquiries in the pipeline. The BM Trada¹ accreditation is now also beginning to open up future opportunities.

2.5 Void Management

Works to void properties continue, whilst adhering to social distancing and safe systems of work. These new ways of working are well embedded within void management and turnaround times have continued to improve during the last quarter bringing the target for 2020/21 closer than it has been in any previous quarter.

There is a 16% decrease in the number of new voids when compared to the same period last year (year to date), however Q3² has seen the exact same number of new voids occurring as in Q3 in the previous year (174 new voids). The number of direct lets being achieved in Q3 were 36, three more than in the same period in the previous year (33).

2.6 Customer Safety

All statutory compliance servicing regimes continue to be delivered and performance continues to be high. Between April 20 and January 21 approx. 8,300 gas safety checks were completed and over 1,800 electrical tests. At the end of January compliance in both areas was 100%.

¹ BM TRADA is an industry recognised accreditation for the installation certified fire door sets and repairs

² Up to December 2020

In response to the latest restrictions, access procedures, guidance documents and customer marketing material were reviewed and updated Covid risk assessments were requested from contractors. Contractors have also been instructed to wear face coverings at all times, whilst in customer homes. All contractors have confirmed they will continue to delivery essential servicing.

Adherence to service schedules continue to be monitored closely, however the most recent restrictions appear to be having a manageable impact on servicing regimes and it is foreseen there will be a minimal number of gas safety checks and electrical tests falling overdue in the coming months.

2.7 Development

Development is on the whole operating on a business as usual basis with all sites open and operating successfully under Covid restrictions. Construction sites are also not subject to closure.

The most current high profile scheme is the Tatton Cinema new build, a refurbishment project in Gatley. This scheme has involved the retention and restoration of the original 1930's art deco façade and the construction of seven apartments for shared ownership behind the façade. This apartment complex is now called Tatton Place and is proving very popular.

At the rear of the old cinema on the site of the auditorium 26, Affordable Rent, apartments for people over the age of 55 have been constructed. This new building on the site of the auditorium is called Picture House and can be accessed from a new side street called Matinee Road. The scheme handed over on 30th November 2020 and all but 4 units are now occupied in the Picture House. Due to Covid restrictions the usual type of scheme opening was not possible, instead a virtual tour video of the scheme was made and emailed to the relevant stakeholders.

2.8 Carecall

The Carecall Service launched its Universal Offer in partnership with the Council in January 2020 and the first year of this new model has proven successful. The service has achieved a net growth in self-funding client numbers for the first time in several years and is on track to achieve year two targets that formed the basis of the model.

The service has experienced dips in new client referrals which correlate to months where full lockdowns have been imposed, but overall the service still out-performed it's original target by nearly 100 extra clients in 2020.

In respect of performance, Carecall handled just short of 200,000 emergency alarm calls last year and attended over 4500 emergency home visits, offering vital support for Stockport's most vulnerable residents. In addition to this the service made thousands of welfare calls and delivered hundreds of activity packs to customers who were unable to get out.

The service is entering 2021 in a strong position to keep growing and delivering support services to Stockport's most vulnerable residents. The team have been able to access vaccinations via the Social Care pathway, meaning greater protection has been achieved for both the Carecall team and its customers.

2.9 Customer Access

Customers are being advised to contact Stockport Homes via the telephone or online services and they will then be offered appropriate support. For emergency situations such as customers who are homeless, face to face appointments are available.

The One Number team have continued to provide a full service during the pandemic with staff being able to fully work from home. The team have taken over 11,000 in the first three weeks of January which is similar to last year. Over the past few months the team have implemented webchat through the SHG website and this is increasing in use and creating a further 75 interactions per week.

2.10 Housing Management

Housing Management are continuing to carry out a wide variety of tenancy and estate management functions including block and estate inspections, walkabouts, tenancy visits and property inspections to facilitate mutual exchanges and transfers, always adopting safe working practises.

During December and January Officers have delivered 43 socially distanced clean-ups with customers in order to proactively manage waste disposal and minimise fly tipping, giving residents an opportunity to responsibly dispose of unwanted bulky items. Officers also are continuing to undertake a large volume of tenancy calls and dealing with a wide range of customer enquires over the phone.

Despite the restrictions the team are working to deliver on some valuable projects, such as working with Public Health to promote a Smoking Cessation and Healthy Eating project which is being piloted on Lancashire Hill, providing a 12 week programme and can offer up to 400 free vapes as well as online support to quit smoking. If successful, this will be rolled out into other priority areas.

The Vison 20-20 Block management approach currently in place at Lancashire Hill and Mottram Street, which offers a focussed approach to tackle a wide range of issues has continued during the pandemic. The approach will be replicated across the Brinnington multi-story properties from mid-February.

2.11 Environmental Services

Caretaking services are operating normally and are continuing to focus on cleaning schedules in high footfall and touch areas across all locations. The working day continues to start at 6.00am, which has enabled cleaning tasks to be scheduled to be complete in high footfall locations earlier in the day and so minimise direct contact with customers.

There has been an increase in waste disposal and fly tipping at locations and work is being carried out with customers to raise awareness of appropriate disposal and recycling facilities. Where evidence is found regarding fly tipping, appropriate action is being taken. To support increasing recycling, improvements are due to take place across the Borough to rationalise and improve facilities across locations in partnership with the Council.

The winter grounds maintenance schedule and tree maintenance programmes are being delivered as normal in partnership with contractors.

2.12 Independent Living Services

Staff are on-site at sheltered schemes for approximately 50% of the time with additional modified services and staff presence via a small number of safe activities and awareness raising in relation to partner service initiatives.

Regular welfare calls continue for customers who live in sheltered and properties for those over 60. In addition, 174 customers have been identified as older, in general needs accommodation and who need additional support.

Winter Welfare Visits for 443 older, vulnerable customers have been modified this year with telephone calls replacing the usual visit for the majority of customers. Home visiting will however be undertaken for those customers identified as needing one.

The Housing Support team are largely delivering support via telephone with home visiting being undertaken as required. Increased use of phone contact has led to an increase in capacity for the team, with approximately 100 more customers being supported than pre-lockdown.

2.13 Homelessness

The initial significant increase in numbers of rough sleepers seen at the start of the pandemic has declined, and during the most recent set of national Covid restrictions the same pattern has not materialised. An extensive focus on street homelessness, through the national Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI), has funded outreach workers, leading to the numbers in Stockport falling to around seven. These represent the more entrenched individuals with complex needs who have been homeless for some time, all of whom have been reoffered accommodation during January.

To engage with this cohort of people, a new role has been established, using money from the RSI to work intensively with this small number of people. Starting at the end of November, their objective is to co-ordinate wider services to support individuals as well as building positive relationships and motivating people towards making life changes. This funding is also due to continue for at least an additional 12 months.

The ongoing delivery of the Greater Manchester 'Housing First' scheme has been key to achieving the reduction in rough sleepers, with five long term homeless people accommodated during 2020/21. SHG is one of the delivery partners for this scheme which offers intensive support to people rehoused directly from the streets to their own tenancy, and outcomes so far have been very positive despite the challenging environment.

The Temporary Accommodation schemes have maintained measures to minimise infection risks and working in conjunction with Public Health all residents can access Covid testing without having to display symptoms. This is particularly emphasised upon people entering the schemes, and where someone is being discharged from hospital same day tests are required.

2.14 Customer Finance

New Universal Credit (UC) claims from customers have remained consistent and at pre-pandemic levels since the last update, with an average of 25 new claims being made weekly. It is hoped that the continuation of the furlough scheme until the end of April 2021 will continue to safeguard jobs while national restrictions remain in place.

Possession action for rent arrears is mainly limited to court hearings. Since the last update restrictions on bailiffs carrying out evictions were extended beyond the Christmas holiday 'truce' period until 21st February. One of the exceptions to the current ban on evictions is now stated to be where the Court is satisfied that a case involves substantial rent arrears. 'Substantial rent arrears' are defined as unpaid rent arrears equivalent to 6 months' rent.

Overall performance on rent collection remains positive. Collection levels remain well within tolerances set at the start of the year, pre-Covid events. At the end of January 2021 there were around 100 fewer accounts in arrears on average compared to 12 months ago despite the pandemic and increasing UC claimants (1,089 more claimants).

2.15 ASB

During November to January 2021, reports of ASB have increased dramatically by 105 per cent, compared to the same period in 2019/20 (536 new cases from 261). Domestic gatherings and house parties that breach lockdown restrictions were the highest type of ASB reports equating to 46 per cent (248 cases out of 536) with noise related ASB second at 30 per cent (162 cases) and verbal harassment being the third most reported case type at 25 per cent of total reports (136 cases).

Domestic abuse in November to January 2021 was 31 per cent more compared to the same period in 2019/20 (38 cases compared to 29) As before this increase in domestic abuse cases coincides with some additional restrictions being imposed towards the end of December around the hospitality sector and then full lockdown in early January.

In dealing with Covid cases in line with the GM wide approach, the ASB Service is initially sending out a standard stage one warning letter before referring cases to further action if repeated breaches occur. In most cases these initial warnings have been successful with only 16 repeat offenders then requiring a stage two visit by the ASB Officer and with one case now requiring legal action in the form of an injunction to prevent further gatherings and ASB taking place. The ASB Team Leaders are continuing to undertake case reviews and close cases wherever possible to keep live caseloads at a manageable level and three new ASB Officers (two permanent replacing previous staff and one new temporary post) have been recruited which will further help to relieve pressure currently being faced by the service. SHG continues to work as a key partner of the "Pandemic Response Team" along with the Council, GMP and Public Health.

2.16 Your Local Pantry

All five pantries are open with appropriate safety measures in place, offering members a choice of either queueing to select their ten items or collecting a pre-packed bag. The family bags trialled last year are now offered every week, offering larger households double the number of food items for only £5, compared to the usual price of £3.50.

The pantries are currently offering additional free lunch packs for families which contain items to make weekly lunches for children whilst schools are closed. They are also working in partnership with Life Leisure to provide weekly packed lunches for young people predominantly in Adswood and Bridgehall who would otherwise receive a free school meal.

The pantry team also recently recruited a KickStart job placement, lasting six months, which will further support capacity. With this in mind, discussions are currently still in progress for the possibility of a new pantry in Offerton Community Centre.

2.17 Environmental & Energy Team

The Energy Advice Service has continued to offer support to customers while adhering to Covid 19 guidelines. Only essential visits are continuing to take place, in most circumstances these have been shortened to only collect necessary information or carry out a demonstration follow a heating upgrade which is then followed with an in-depth call. The service is consistently receiving over 100 referrals per month as the Energy Advisors are continuing to offer a service to customers via phone, email and text and video calls to help with face to face explanations.

3 IMPACT ON STAFF

- 3.1 With the introduction of Test and Trace and the prevalence of Covid within Stockport, there has been an increase in those self-isolating and with symptoms. There are currently three people off work with Covid symptoms, two who are too unwell to work who are in Three Sixty and Independent Living.
- 3.2 There are six people self-isolating, this includes three people who are unable to work from home, two who work in Repair 1st and one in Neighbourhoods. Managers continue to explore alternative work they could be allocated and are looking at training that needs to be completed that can be done via a tablet. The six people self-isolating work in Repair 1st, Neighbourhoods and Assets and Development.
- 3.3 There are five people currently shielding, this figure had dropped to zero before the latest lockdown. Of these five people, two who work in Repair 1st and Caretaking are unable to work from home. The total number of people who have needed to shield is currently 20.
- 3.4 A number of staff have been volunteering to help marshal vaccination centres in the Borough. This has been ongoing for a number of weeks, but is now coming to an end as the Council have been able to resource this from volunteers. SHG are in close contact with the organisers and will provide

further help in the future, if needed. Those who have volunteered have found this a very rewarding experience.

- 3.5 Vaccines for specific roles that are come under the 'health and social care' classification have been undertaken, which has been appreciated by those staff involved.

4 STAFF ENGAGEMENT

- 4.1 Maintaining high levels of staff engagement is challenging under the current restrictions. As a consequence SHG have continued to use Best Companies pulse surveys to monitor and manage the situation.
- 4.2 Following the third lockdown announcement Best Companies have given organisations the opportunity to either re-survey in February 2020 or enter their October 2020 Best Companies Index (BCI) score for entry into 2021 Best Not for Profit to Work for and Times 100 List. SHG are conscious of 'over surveying' as it is only three months since the last survey, therefore have decided to enter the October BCI. An additional pulse survey will take place in April/May time to check-in on team members, in the meantime welfare calls, Active Listener conversations and catch up with Managers are taking place.
- 4.3 To ensure team members are kept up to date and have the support they need a forward plan of activities has been developed focusing on mental wellbeing and connectivity. Highlights include; 'A Time to Talk' ASPIRE Day, a Wellbeing Letterbox Gift, an SHG Colleague Update (March) and Colleague Festival (September).

5 NEW OPPORTUNITIES

- 5.1 The Carecall Service has been awarded funding to support patient flow activities under the GMCA Winter Discharge Programme for Mental Health Services. This will involve supplying patients who are being discharged from hospital with a mobile or home 'device' with which they can access 24hr help and support from Carecall. The team will listen, support and signpost patients to the relevant person(s) and they will offer patients regular welfare calls to check how they are adapting, having left hospital. This aims to reduce the opportunities for crisis to occur and minimises the risk of a person returning to hospital, by providing them with the necessary community support.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 SHG continues to adapt and respond to the challenges faced by Covid 19 and the restrictions that are part of the government's response. Services continue to be delivered and support provided, especially to some of SHG most vulnerable customers.

7 RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 Members Committee are asked to note the report, providing any further comments for consideration.