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## MEMBER COMMITTEE UPDATE REPORT

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### 1 UNIVERSAL CREDIT (UC) UPDATE

- 1.1 At the end of August 2021, the number of Stockport Homes' households claiming UC had increased to 3,987, which is 35 per cent of all households. There was an increase over the year of 868 and the average weekly increase in new claimants since April 2021 was 20 compared to an average of 25 per week during 2020-21.
- 1.2 Average arrears on UC claimant rent accounts<sup>1</sup> remain higher than arrears on non-UC accounts<sup>2</sup>. Seventy per cent of total arrears balances were on UC claimant accounts by the end of August and 53 per cent of all UC claimants were in arrears with their rent, compared to 20 per cent of non-UC claimants.
- 1.3 Monitoring of accounts over time, however, continues to demonstrate that average arrears reduce where households have been claiming UC for over three months. Over the last year average arrears on UC claimant accounts have reduced by £99 per case in arrears and there were 7% fewer UC claimant accounts in arrears at the end of August 2021 compared to 12 months ago. Overall arrears balances on UC claimant accounts were £66k lower than August 2020 despite the 868 increase in claimants over the year.
- 1.4 Where rent arrears represent eight weeks or more of outstanding rent, or where tenant vulnerability issues can be demonstrated, landlords can submit a request to the DWP for the housing element of a claim to be switched back to the landlord. This is known as an Alternative Payment Arrangement (APA). At the end of August 2021, APAs were in place on 1,391 accounts.
- 1.5 Specialist Money Advisors continue to provide intensive support to all new UC claimants during the first six weeks of their claims. Of the 868 new UC claimants since August 2021, 87 per cent engaged with the team and paid as requested after receiving their first payment.
- 1.6 The £20 weekly UC uplift introduced in March 2020 in response to coronavirus will expire at the end of September 2021. The uplift was extended in April 2021 for a six-month period. The Government confirmed recently that there will be no

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<sup>1</sup> Average arrears UC claimants accounts £456

<sup>2</sup> Average arrears on non-UC claimant accounts £287

further extension beyond September 2021. A communications campaign has been in place throughout September to ensure that customers are aware of the changes and all will have received a direct notification from the DWP via their online UC journal. Support will be targeted to customers affected, to access the Discretionary Housing Payment scheme, advice around energy and water bill reduction as well as access to employment support services.

For further information please contact Christian Hartley, Head of Customer Finance, 0161 474 2824 or [christian.hartley@stockporthomes.org](mailto:christian.hartley@stockporthomes.org)

## **2 EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS**

- 2.1 The Employment and Training Team are delighted to be named as finalists for two upcoming awards. The TPAS awards in the category of Excellence in Employment, Skills and Training and UKHA Housing Awards in the category of Resident Employment and Training Award.
- 2.2 Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council requested that Stockport Homes employment support team provide employment support for the Kick Start placements based at the Council. After achieving consistent success with the current cohort of SHG Kick Start placements the team have demonstrated the efficacy of the employment support package created to run alongside Kick Start placements. Recent months have seen 2 SHG Kick Starters move through to SHG Apprenticeships and a further 4 progress to employment with other organisations
- 2.3 Providing face to face training opportunities for customers and the local community has been a priority this quarter. Since the start of July 111 customers have attended a large variety of sessions covering themes of Employment, Wellbeing and Community. In addition, the employment team have worked closely with Three Sixty and the Stockport College to offer T-Level placements for students in the coming academic term. Stockport Homes are proud to play a part in the delivery of this new qualification which will offer a blend of classroom-based learning backed up by practical experience with Stockport Homes' construction team.

For further information, please contact Amanda Ward, Employment Support Manager on 07971106491 or email [amanda.ward@stockporthomes.org](mailto:amanda.ward@stockporthomes.org)

## **3 CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT AND INCLUSION**

### **TLC**

- 3.1 Since the start of the financial year to the end of August, the counselling service has delivered 601 sessions to 103 customers. Face to face

appointments are increasing in line with restrictions easing. A counsellor has been recruited to deliver bespoke youth counselling sessions based at Strathclyde Temporary Accommodation (TA) scheme. The project will focus on young care leavers and young people in TA under 25.

*“Since counselling, I have made progress with my anxiety, and have learnt to slow down and let my body rest. I have been able to listen to my body more and have been able to put on 10lb in the last month (I am underweight) and had more sleep. I have also moved from sleeping in my lounge to sleeping in my bed and started to reconnect with friends and look at restarting my hobbies. Overall I am feeling better and Gudrun has helped me approach my social anxiety through teaching me about anxiety and I have been gradually exposing myself to what I have previously avoided.”*

### **Independent Living Update**

- 3.2 New walking groups have been organised by the Independent Living Service, meeting every two weeks and attended by customers from the sheltered schemes and the wider community. As Covid restrictions have eased, indoor activities have been able to restart, including coffee mornings and afternoon tea sessions. As well as an opportunity to meet and socialise, these events incorporate raising awareness around a variety of conditions such as stroke awareness, Mental Health Awareness, and World Alzheimer’s Day. In addition, the team plan to revisit each scheme with the Dementia Pod.

A new role of Lifestyle Coach is now in place in partnership with A Better Life (ABL). This role is focusing on nutrition and men’s health (aged 65+).

### **Mental Health and Housing Support Officer**

- 3.3 A new role has been developed in SHG to focus on supporting homeless customers with their mental health. Since the post holder joined in March, a referral route with relevant partners has been established as has partnership working with a range of internal and external colleagues to support customers to achieve positive outcomes, including chairing multi-disciplinary meetings for high-risk and complex cases where appropriate.

### **HOOP**

- 3.4 From April to June 2021, SHG’s dedicated Housing Options for Older People (HOOP) service has given bespoke advice and information on 346 occasions to customers/ internal and external colleagues. Successes include providing advice and support to 45 customers to inform or access ‘extra care’ housing to prevent the need for residential care. 39 customers received other advice about issues such as benefits, money management and affordability, 11 customers were supported to access assessments for adaptations and 16 customers were supported with issues related to sustaining independent living (e.g. accessing care). The service supported five people out of hospital and stepdown accommodation into suitable accommodation, preventing ongoing bed blocking.

### **Youth Holiday Provision**

- 3.5 Foundation for Fun (F4F) is a new and exciting project delivered over the school Summer holidays which offered children accessing free school meals, or who were classed as otherwise vulnerable, a free day of fun activities including breakfast, healthy snacks, and lunch. F4F was delivered in three priority one areas in the borough: Offerton, Bridgehall and Brinnington. This project was run with Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) funding.
- 3.6 Foundation for Fun is an innovative programme with a range of activities which sets out to inspire young people by building their self-esteem, self-confidence and academic attainment. Children aged 10-17 years came from across Stockport to attend the 11 sessions delivered over four weeks. Consultation took place with young people in advance of the sessions to design activities of interest to them. Activities included music production, rapping and beatboxing, graffiti art, plant pot decorating, cooking, and baking in the afternoon. Young people were able to participate in a range of games and relaxation time, as well as having the opportunity to learn about topics such as CV writing, housing, food and nutrition. Over 55 different children accessed Foundation for Fun over the Summer, with most children attending multiple sessions.
- 3.7 Hungry 4 Fun, formerly known as Holiday Kitchen, was able to run this Summer, although in a slightly different format to previous years. Hungry 4 Fun (H4F) is a collaborative project delivered in partnership with Startwell Centres to provide a day of fun activities and food to vulnerable children aged 0-5 years and their parents. Four sessions were held in Brinnington, Offerton, Adswold and The Heatons. This year's theme was Teddy Bears Picnic and children were encouraged to bring a teddy or toy with them to the session. Activities included nature crown making, planting flowers and vegetables into pots to take home, free play activities, a sensory area for younger children and story time. The libraries were invited to read teddy bear themed stories for the children attending. Parents and children were provided with a healthy breakfast and lunch. 43 families attended the sessions.

### **Schools Work**

- 3.8 The Mental Toughness programme restarted in schools following the Easter holidays. Between Easter and the end of the school year, 37 young people have been supported across four different schools. Schools have been very positive about the programme and have welcomed an initiative that supports young people's mental health. To support Youth Mental Health Day on 7<sup>th</sup> September 150 wellbeing packs were created for young people and given out at Stockport Academy, a school supported through the Mental Toughness programme. These

contained a range of information leaflets and resources to support young people. These were gratefully received by the young people.

### **Detached Work**

- 3.9 The Youth Diversionary work continues to be successful. Nine young people are supported on an individual basis with a wide range of issues from mental health, and behavioural issues through to employment support. The detached work continues across Brinnington and Edgeley with an additional weekly session developed in Brinnington. Engagement is positive each week with 337 young people attending since the sessions began. A successful Football Unity project was run over Summer attended by 56 young people. This project was run in partnership with RTime with funding and support from Stockport County, Nike and the GM Police Giving Back fund.

For further information contact Julie Nelson-Hall, Customer Engagement & Inclusion Team Leader, [Julie.nelson-hall@stockporthomes.org](mailto:Julie.nelson-hall@stockporthomes.org) 0161 474 3728

## **4 AFGHAN EVACUATION**

- 4.1 Manchester Airport has seen the arrival of over 1000 people during the recent evacuation from Afghanistan, with families dispersed into hotels across the sub-region and beyond. 77 people (including 33 children) are being accommodated within bridging accommodation at a Stockport hotel, this is post quarantine accommodation whilst longer-term accommodation options are explored and secured. SHG are working closely with the Council and other partners to support the families placed there.
- 4.2 It is a fast moving and constantly changing situation, the bridging accommodation is currently booked until the end of November and two households have already moved to other areas to reunite with wider family members.

For further information, please contact Geoff Binns, Head of Homelessness and Rehousing on 0161 474 3721 or email [Geoff.binns@stockporthomes.org](mailto:Geoff.binns@stockporthomes.org)

## **5 DEVELOPMENT AND SALES**

- 5.1 In general, the development programme is progressing well. There have been 12 new houses for shared ownership and 19 new houses for social rent completing at Bergara Close, Edgeley in July. All new homes have been occupied with happy customers following the official scheme opening on 20<sup>th</sup> July, pictured below.



- 5.2 At Hexham Close in Offerton, a development of 24 apartments for affordable rent will complete in the next few weeks.
- 5.3 At Andrew Street, Compstall, a development of 29 properties for shared ownership and 3x four bed houses for social rent started on site in June with completion expected within 18 months.
- 5.4 The bid to the Homes England and MHCLG Rough Sleeper Accommodation Fund for £360,000 in capital grant to acquire and refurbish 6x one bed flats and £105,000 in revenue funding to cover the cost of a support worker was approved. Of the six properties one is now acquired, refurbished and ready for let, and four are in the conveyancing process.
- 5.5 Unfortunately, there have been further delays incurred at the Melford Road, Hazel Grove site. The delay is due to NHBC unexpectedly being unwilling to issue the final building control notice whilst the pumping station is powered

from a compliant but temporary electricity supply. This means that the newly installed substation must be energised to provide the permanent supply leading to a delay of c12 weeks.

5.6 There has also been further delay incurred at the Hempshaw Lane, Offerton site due to the electricity supply not being connected. Further work is required on site to re-lay damaged cables before the connection can be made.

5.7 Sales are progressing well as can be seen below:

- Of the 39 apartments at the Davenport Road site, 15 are now sold, 21 are under offer and only three remain for sale.
- All 34 properties at Melford Road that have been released for sale of plan, are under offer. However, there have been delays on site which has impacted negatively on forecasted completion dates.
- At Hempshaw Lane, 49 of 53 properties that have been released for sale off plan, are under offer. The unreserved properties are for outright sale. There are many shared ownership customers who await the release of further phases. There have been delays on site which has negatively impacted on forecast completion dates for this scheme.

In summary, there is no shortage of demand for new homes and mortgages are available, but delays are pushing back forecast completion dates.

For further information, please contact Chris Munby, Head of Development by emailing [Chris.munby@stockporthomes.org](mailto:Chris.munby@stockporthomes.org)

## **6 COVID-19**

6.1 SHG continues to respond to the challenges that Covid-19 presents, and services continue to operate well. The last of the Government's National Roadmap was hit on the 19 July and the majority of restrictions were lifted. The country has now been living with more freedoms over the last two months and people are getting readjusted.

6.2 From an office perspective, all social distancing has been removed from Cornerstone but colleagues are encouraged to still keep space between each other and to wipe surfaces before and after use. This has allowed more colleagues to be able to come into the office, which has improved team collaboration. Colleagues with Covid still remain low and currently there are only two colleagues off sick with Covid.

6.3 Colleagues are being asked whether they have been vaccinated and while this is a voluntary request, it is being encouraged so that SHG understand

the levels of vaccination in the workplace. This can then be considered as part of updating Covid Risk Assessments.

- 6.4 Over the last month, the infection rates in Stockport and Greater Manchester have increased significantly and SHG continue to work with the Council and Public Health colleagues to support the local messages for regular testing and vaccine take up. Both have been promoted on social media platforms and SHG have distributed leaflets in relevant neighbourhoods.

For more information please contact Sandra Coleing, Assistant Chief Executive, [Sandra.coleing@stockorthomes.org](mailto:Sandra.coleing@stockorthomes.org), 07800 617688.

## **7 BOARD CHANGES**

- 7.1 The Board was pleased to welcome two new Board Members to Stockport Homes: Priti Butler and Anila Khalid. Both Board Members join as 'Stakeholders' following the departure of Alanna Vine from the Board as she had reached the maximum term. The Board undertook a targeted recruitment exercise earlier in the Summer that elicited a positive response, with a high percentage of candidates from diverse backgrounds. These two candidates brought outstanding qualities but from differing backgrounds and perspectives.
- 7.2 Priti Butler is an Executive Director of the Big Life Group, a social enterprise operating in Greater Manchester and the North West, that work to overcome inequality. Her current key areas of responsibility are skills and employment services, plus health and wellbeing services. Priti has 29 years' experience of leading and developing public services.
- 7.3 Anila Khalid is Head of Neighbourhoods at Great Places Housing Group, having worked in the social housing Sector in the UK since the late 1990s, including working at Your Housing and Harvest Housing Group. Anila spent two years working as a Program Director for a Healthy Families program in the Maryland, USA.

For further information contact Jonathan Vali, Governance Manager [jonathan.vali@stockporthomes.org](mailto:jonathan.vali@stockporthomes.org) 0161 474 2850

## **8 AWARDS**

- 8.1 In June, SHG was placed 7th in the Top 30 sustainability Housing providers in the UK, giving recognition or its goal of becoming an entirely carbon-neutral organisation by 2038. The annual list developed by 'Housing Digital' showcases the providers that have shown a genuine commitment to the green agenda, actively communicating with staff and residents to keep them informed and engaged every step of the way.
- 8.2 In July, SHG achieved a 'ROSPA Gold' award in recognition of good health and safety management practices and achievements in ensuring the safety of its Repair 1st and Three Sixty employees, customers and contractors. As



a ROSPA Gold Award winner SHG demonstrate a very high level of performance, and a well-developed occupational health and safety management system and culture, outstanding control of risk and very low levels of error, harm and loss.

- 8.3 Also, in July, SHG won silver place in two categories in the UK Customer Experience Awards, recognising the group as 'Best large organisation to work for', and 'Team of the Year' for Your Local Pantry. These awards recognise the groups innovative approach to supporting the most vulnerable in their communities when they needed it the most and organisations that have handled crisis management among employees with flair.
- 8.4 In September, SHG won the Regional Energy Efficiency Awards for their extensive support of vulnerable customers, along with being highly commended as Landlord of the Year for their innovative approach to guiding and advising tenants throughout the duration of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 8.5 Also in September, 'Home Marketing' won Marketing Team of the Year at the Greater Manchester Business Awards, competing against other highly reputable nominees that had been in operation for many years.

For further information contact Verity Calderbank, Head of Marketing and Communications [verity.calderbank@stockporthomes.org](mailto:verity.calderbank@stockporthomes.org) 0161 474 2863.