
MEMBER COMMITTEE UPDATE REPORT

1 COVID

- 1.1 SHG continues to respond to the challenges that Covid-19 presents, and services continue to operate well including reception and Windmill open as usual. In January, some SHG front line services such as Carecall and Repairs were affected by an increase in colleagues either off work with Covid or self-isolating. This was managed within the teams affected and emergency cover was not needed.
- 1.2 On the 27 January, Plan B 'work at home if you can' restrictions were removed. This means there have been more colleagues in Cornerstone and services are operating normally. Additional measures such as extra cleaning and sanitation stations will remain.
- 1.3 SHG continues to work with Stockport Council and Public Health colleagues to support local messages for regular testing and vaccine take up. Both have been promoted on social media platforms and leaflets have been distributed in relevant neighbourhoods. SHG will continue to work collaboratively and respond to any new challenges that emerge.

For more information, please contact Sandra Coleing, Assistant Chief Executive, Sandra.coleing@stockorthomes.org, 07800 617688.

2 UNIVERSAL CREDIT (UC) UPDATE

- 2.1 At the end of December 2021, the number of Stockport Homes' households claiming UC had increased to 4,194, which is 37 per cent of all households. There was an increase over the year of 781 and the average weekly increase in new claimants since April 2021 was 20 compared to an average of 25 per week during 2020-21.
- 2.2 Average arrears on UC claimant rent accounts¹ remain higher than arrears on non-UC accounts². Seventy nine per cent of total arrears balances were on UC claimant accounts by the end of December 2021 and 59 per cent of all UC claimants were in arrears with their rent, compared to 27 per cent of non-UC claimants.
- 2.3 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

¹ Average arrears UC claimants accounts £444

² Average arrears on non-UC claimant accounts £151

reduced by £60 per case in arrears and there were 5% fewer UC claimant accounts in arrears at the end of December 2021 compared to 12 months ago. Overall arrears balances on UC claimant accounts were £72k higher than December 2020.

- 2.4 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 December 2021, APAs were in place on 1,626 accounts.
- 2.5 Specialist Money Advisors continue to provide intensive support to all new UC claimants during the first six weeks of their claims. Of the 781 new UC claimants since December 2021, 88 per cent engaged with the team and paid as requested after receiving their first payment.

For further information please contact Christian Hartley, Head of Customer Finance, 0161 474 2824 or christian.hartley@stockporthomes.org

3 YOUR LOCAL PANTRY HALF-TERM PROJECTS

- 3.1 Your Local Pantry have received £32,000 in funding from Stockport Council to continue its holiday hunger initiatives until 2022. With some of this funding, Cracking Good Food and Your Local Pantry teamed up to create 250 free ingredients packs for pantry customers during the October half term. Each pack contained pre-made vegetarian shepherd's pies to feed a family of four, plus ingredients and recipe cards to make this dish at home. The packs contained healthier food alternatives, such as vegetables and legumes, encouraging customers to vary their diets and make healthy meals at home. Customers really welcomed this initiative, particularly as families had an activity to do with the children during the half-term. Some customers told the pantry team that they would never typically choose these ingredients but loved how the shepherd's pie tasted so would likely pick up these ingredients in the future.
- 3.2 Your Local Pantry also provided over 200 fresh vegetable packs for customers, on top of their weekly food shop. As well as the vegetable packs and ingredients packs, those customers on family memberships received an additional three lunch-type items. Customers were very grateful for all the free items, especially as it is an expensive time when children are not in school and receiving school meals.





For further information contact Elena Vacca, Food Project and Your Local Pantry Coordinator, elena.vacca@foundations-stockport.org, 0161 474 4760

4 EMPLOYMENT

- 4.1 In partnership with GMCVO, Stockport Homes Employment Team have been successful in securing £16,150 of grant funding from the Community Renewal Fund to continue to provide the Hidden Talent Programme. The programme delivers bespoke employment support for young people in Stockport. The funding has been allocated to support 10 young people between the period of Jan – June 2022 into employment & training opportunities.
- 4.2 The Employment and Training team engaged over 120 customers in a range of Employment, Health & Wellbeing and Community training in Quarter 3. In October, the training programme was adapted to focus on customers specifically affected by end of the furlough scheme and the withdrawal of the uplift to Universal Credit.
- 4.3 The Employment Team worked in partnership with the Council's Jobs Match website to participate in the virtual careers event from the 11-15th October. The event showcased Stockport Homes as a local employer and the range of careers and roles available in addition to the values and ethos of the organisation. Staff took part in an online interactive session to share information on the organisation and careers available.
- 4.4 The Kick Start scheme, providing work placements and employment support to young people aged 18-24 on Universal Credit, is now entering its final phase with Stockport Homes currently advertising a final eight vacancies. The Employment Team have also worked closely with Council colleagues to identify and register 21 Kickstart vacancies, with the team providing the wraparound employment support on behalf of the council.
- 4.5 A bid has been submitted to the National Lottery to develop a Working Wardrobe. The funding would enable Stockport Homes to deliver a styling

service to male customers as part of the wider employment support offer. Smart Works currently provides this service to women in the local area however there is no equivalent provision for men. A successful bid will ensure men in the Stockport region are provided with a holistic personal styling and interview preparation service.

For further information contact Amanda Ward, Employment Support Manager, amanda.ward@stockporthomes.org, 0161 474 4148

5 HEALTH

5.1 Talk, Listen, Change (TLC)

- 5.1.1 The counselling service delivered by TLC is offering both face-to-face and remote sessions to ensure customers can access their preferred method of counselling. 970 counselling sessions have been delivered to 176 different customers up to the end of December. An additional venue at Disability Stockport offices in the town centre has now been secured offering another option for customers wishing to access face-to-face sessions. Customer feedback received in recent months includes:

“Feel relieved to talk about things I had bottled up for a long time; feel more prepared to start making changes; feel able to talk about things more”

“The client said that he had felt very sceptical about counselling and said he wasn't expecting anything from it. He said he didn't expect to open up as much as he had. He said he'd never spoken to someone he didn't know before. He described himself as 'old school' ie private. He said it made him think more about his illness, how to live with it. He said he knows he's not going to get rid of it, so it's about how he lives with it.”

5.2 Housing Options for Older People (HOOP)

- 5.2.1 SHG's HOOP service continues to be successful. From April 2021 to the end of December 2021, SHG's dedicated HOOP service has given bespoke advice and information on 1,107 occasions to customers and internal/external colleagues. The service has made 79 referrals for extra care housing so far this year, as well as providing information and advice to 39 more. The service has also supported 53 customers with issues such as benefits, money management and affordability, 18 with adaptations and 43 with other concerns to support independent living (e.g., accessing care or giving information about Carecall). Three customers with a terminal diagnosis have been supported with advice about their housing options. The service supported nine people to move out of hospital and stepdown accommodation into more suitable accommodation, thereby preventing continued bed blocking. Joint visits with external agencies have now been able to restart.

5.3 Independent Living Update

- 5.3.1 The Independent Living Team are carrying out the annual programme of Winter Welfare Visits to older people. Visits are prioritised to those older people with additional needs who do not live in specialist accommodation or have a Carecall service. As at mid-January 287 visits have been completed out of a planned 507. These will continue through February to ensure all identified vulnerable customers have been contacted.

5.4 Youth Work

- 5.4.1 Foundation for Fun (F4F) was delivered face to face to 53 young people on three days in October half-term at Bridgehall Community Centre. The young people targeted for attendance were aged 11-17 and known to be vulnerable as already engaging with SHG's Youth Officers or via referrals from Stockport Family and others. Activities were based on prior consultation with the young people and included graffiti T-shirt making, DJ skills and pottery.
- 5.4.2 The Mental Toughness programme engaged with 57 young people from Werneth, Marple Hall, Bredbury Green and Priestnall schools. Feedback from those participating from September to December 2021 included, *"I used the colouring and it helped a lot with calming me down"*, *"...it gave me ideas about how to help my mental health and it helped with my sleep, I'm sleeping full nights now"*, and *"I only came in on Tuesdays so I could come to the programme"*. As at January 2022, the Youth Engagement Officer is working in five schools (Werneth, Pendlebury, Bramhall, Priestnall and St Anne's) with six groups of young people, as well as delivering one to one mentoring for the most vulnerable individuals.
- 5.4.3 The Youth Diversionary work continues to be successful, with a full case load of 12 young people being supported on a one-to-one basis with tenancy sustainment, behaviour management and accessing appropriate support. This has included working on routine and structure where the young person is struggling to attend appointments, access employment etc, as well as improving self-esteem and confidence via activities such as sports, art or volunteering. The detached youth work sessions have engaged with 521 young people over the period, delivering sessions four nights per week in Edgeley, Brinnington, Swythamley and Lancashire Hill.
- 5.4.4 As part of their commitment to social value, local school uniform supplier One&All (formerly known as Rawlinsons) has funded Foundations to deliver a pilot holiday project in one primary and one secondary school in February half term holidays to the value of £2,500. The programme will run for four days during that week, targeting young people accessing benefits related free school meals or otherwise classed as vulnerable by their schools. Half-term programmes are not included in the Government's HAF (Holiday Activities and Food) funding programme, so this provision will fill a gap for parents and students.

6 SWAPPING HOMES TO MEET HOUSING NEED

- 6.1 Secure or assured tenants of Stockport Homes, other councils and housing associations (Registered Providers) have the right to carry out a mutual exchange. This is when they take over the other persons tenancy under the same terms and conditions and, in effect, swap tenancies and properties.
- 6.2 Stockport Homes has a dedicated team to support tenants who want to apply for a mutual exchange as for many, a mutual exchange is the only viable way of moving home. With the demand on the housing register remaining around the 7000 applicants and the supply of empty Stockport Homes managed properties being around 700 properties per year, the opportunity for tenants to transfer into an empty home is small with only those most highly in need being successful in pursuing this option.
- 6.3 Mutual exchanges normally involve two tenants 'swapping' homes with this sometimes involving a third tenant and resulting in a three-way exchange.
- 6.4 September saw an incredible five way exchange take place following some detailed matching up and coordination by the Mutual Exchange team and some finely timed process administration by the Neighbourhood Housing Officers putting tenants in touch with other tenants who had requested a mutual exchange but simply could not find anyone they wanted to exchange with. The resulting five-way exchange enabled tenants to move to areas that they wanted to live in, to be in a property better suited for their family size, nearer to schools or in a property which met their changing personal needs.
- 6.5 In addition, the cost saving when facilitating mutual exchanges, in comparison to tenants terminating their tenancy and leaving the organisation or transferring to another Stockport Homes property, is on average £2,300³ bringing an efficiency of approximately £10,000 by this five way exchange.
- 6.6 Work continues to encourage more tenants to choose mutual exchanges as the way to move home. Further details on the Mutual Exchange service and support available to find a mutual exchange is available from the Mutual Exchange Team.

For further information, contact Emma Crick, Head of Property Management, emma.crick@stockporthomes.org

7 ENVIRONMENTAL & ENERGY

- 7.1 In the last three years, the Energy Advice Service (EAS) has successfully completed 2375 customer energy cases, generating £344,905.85 worth of saving for customers. The service has dramatically evolved since its

³ Average void cost of £3000 when compared to average costs of a mutual exchange £700.

inception. The next step for the service to become a fully holistic in-house customer approach is for the Energy Advisors to carry out EPC assessments. Not only does this add extra value to the customer visit and experience, it also enables the team to bring further services in house and ensure the EPC is accurate and updated as soon as energy efficiency works are carried out at the property or highlight further areas for program works. This commenced from September 2021 once both advisors were fully trained, and software updates had taken place.

8 CUCKOOING – EXPLOITATION PROTECTION PROJECT

- 8.1 Over the past decade cuckooing has become a nationally recognised issue for community safety partnerships and communities. During 2020/21 SHG and Greater Manchester Police (GMP) has dealt with an increased number of cases where “cuckooing” had taken place.
- 8.2 Cuckooing is a form of exploitation whereby drug dealers take over the home of a vulnerable person (who may be a drug and/or alcohol user themselves) in order to use it as a base for drug dealing. The level of exploitation involved in cuckooing can vary but often involves manipulating the victim, sometimes with ‘free’ drugs at the beginning, to secure the use of dwellings, the storage and/or supply of drugs, and the movement of cash proceeds from deals. Individuals or groups of perpetrators use intimidation, violence and weapons, including knives, corrosives and firearms to keep control of the property. Cuckooing is a phenomenon seen across the country and Stockport is no exception.
- 8.3 In order to undertake some targeted proactive work to address this issue, external funding has been secured to deliver a tenure neutral pilot project to support victims of cuckooing. The project which is due to start in December 2021 will have a dedicated officer within the ASB Service, who will work alongside the Police and other agencies/teams to support victims of cuckooing, other drug users accessing the premises, and where appropriate perpetrators if they are drug and alcohol users.
- 8.4 The objectives of the project are, through specialist assertive outreach are to:
- Establish an increased understanding of the extent of the problem of cuckooing in Stockport
 - Provide immediate support system to victims of cuckooing including visiting clients in custody, providing pay-as-you-go phones, practical help and support
 - Provide harm reduction and facilitate access to substance misuse treatment, wider health services, support and recovery for victims
 - Support the victim within with the criminal justice process
 - Support the police or Council with partial or full Closure Orders if necessary

- Engage with other drug users using the premises via texting to offer access to prescribing services and other support services
- Prepare other civil enforcement action including but not limited to Civil Injunctions.

8.5 Each of these measures is aimed at reducing the client's vulnerability and increasing their resilience, thereby reducing the opportunities for offenders to exploit them, and reducing the likelihood that they will become the victim of cuckooing again in future. Homelessness will be prevented from occurring by helping to safeguard homes at risk as a result of the anti-social behaviour associated with cuckooing.

8.6 Currently there is very little in the way of pro-active or preventive measures in place and agencies are largely reliant on intervening only after cuckooing had already taken place and vulnerable individuals have been exploited and presenting as homeless etc. The work of the project will also be able to add to police knowledge and intelligence to benefit and protect the community.

For further information, contact Liz Smith, Head of ASB,
liz.m.smith@stockporthomes.org

9 IMPROVING OPTIONS FOR THOSE ACCESSING PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR

9.1 Stockport Homes, as part of Let Us, the Ethical Lettings Agency for Greater Manchester, has a collective aim, with four other GM housing providers, to improve access to, quality and affordability of accommodation in the private rented sector. To achieve its aims, Let Us is working with Resonance, a social impact investment company, with Resonance purchasing properties that meet the needs of the housing organisation, refurbishing the accommodation and then leasing the properties to the local Let Us housing provider under a 'long lease' arrangement.

9.2 Stockport Homes, through Three Sixty Living, has been the first housing partner across GM to take handover of a property and start a tenancy. In addition, the tenant and Stockport Homes are being used as a positive case study by Resonance with work ongoing with the BBC for a positive documentary around private rented housing sector and the work of Resonance. Further properties are due to be handed over imminently providing effective housing solutions with a reputable landlord. Read the full story here <https://resonance.ltd.uk/news/news/julies-story>

For further information, contact Emma Crick, Head of Property Management,
emma.crick@stockporthomes.org

10 AWARDS

- 10.1 In October, Your Local Pantry won 'Team of the year' at the TPAS Awards - the team won the award for providing local people with an affordable food offer whilst they were shielding or self-isolating. The team also set up a delivery service during the pandemic, to enable the service to reach more vulnerable customers.
- 10.2 In October, Home Marketing won 'Marketing Team of the Year' at the Stockport Business Awards; these celebrate, recognise, reward and showcase the very best that Stockport has to offer.
- 10.3 A further accolade in October – Home Marketing won a Bronze Award in the 2021 Communications Excellence Awards in the global 'Globe Awards' ..
- 10.4 In November, Stockport Homes Group won three awards at the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) Northern awards; for the high-quality service delivery through the pandemic and for 'Young Achiever' of the year award – a prestigious title which highlights Eleanor Edgars commitment, passion, and flair in putting customers first in her role as Temporary Accommodation Manager. The third award win was for the continued focus at SHG for the health and wellbeing of colleagues - winning 'The Excellence in Health & Wellbeing Award' for leading operations through the pandemic, resulting in top performance, reduced sickness, and maintaining the highest levels of engagement.



- 10.5 Also, in November, Stockport Homes Group won the Bronze award at the International Customer Experience Award for the response and service delivery throughout the pandemic – side by side with large organisations from across the globe.
- 10.6 Stockport Homes Group was Highly Commended in the Landlord of the Year category at the North West Energy Efficiency Regional Awards 2021. The category celebrates organisations that deliver excellent services to ensure tenants are happy, healthy, and safe in the comfort of their own home.

- 10.7 In January, Three Sixty Living won Letting Agent of the Year for Stockport in the British Property Awards, an award that showcases customer service excellence.



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