
STOCKPORT HOMES MEMBER COMMITTEE UPDATE REPORT

1 UNIVERSAL CREDIT (UC) UPDATE

- 1.1 At the end of May 2022, the number of Stockport Homes' households claiming UC had increased to 4,382, which is 39 per cent of all households. There was an increase over the year of 580 and the average weekly increase in new claimants since the beginning of April 2022 was 16 compared to an average of 19 per week over the same period in 2021-2022.
- 1.2 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 at the end of May 2022 and 50 per cent of all UC claimants were in arrears with their rent, compared to 17 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 £10 per case in arrears and there were 2 per cent fewer UC claimant accounts in arrears at the end of May 2022 compared to 12 months ago. Overall arrears balances on UC claimant accounts were £84k higher than May 2021.
- 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 May 2022, APAs were in place on 1,606 or 37 per cent of UC claimant 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 580 new UC claimants since May 2021, 86 per cent engaged with the team and paid as requested after receiving their first payment.
- 1.6 Managed migration, the final phase of the roll out of UC, recommenced from the beginning of May 2022 with an end date set as December 2024. Rather than waiting for existing legacy benefit claimants to make the move over to UC because they have a change in their circumstances that triggers a claim, or because they are better off and choose to claim, the DWP are starting to 'invite' people to move on to it. On 9th May 2022 the DWP announced that managed migration would initially only start in Bolton and Medway and to start with only 500 claimants would be contacted. Legacy benefit claimants chosen to be part of this process will be issued with a formal 'migration notice'. They will need to

¹ Average arrears UC claimant accounts £456

² Average arrears on non-UC claimant accounts £227

claim UC within 3 months of the letter being issued. Even if they fail to make a claim for UC their existing legacy benefits will eventually stop.

- 1.7 There are currently 2,427 working age households still receiving Housing Benefit living in Stockport Homes managed properties, many of these households will be invited to UC as part of this process. We are working closely with the Partnership Manager at Stockport Job Centre to ensure that effective support arrangements are in place in readiness for this phase of the roll out starting in Stockport.

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

2 EMPLOYMENT

- 2.1 In January Cornerstone welcomed 99 customers to the first Stockport Homes Employment & Careers Fair. Delegates had the opportunity to engage with managers and departments leads from all areas of the business and discover information on current vacancies and learn about potential career pathways in housing. Multiple interviews were completed on the day and many people took the opportunity to be supported to apply for the current and upcoming vacancies.



- 2.2 The Employment & Training Team have delivered 36 customer training sessions between January and March with 316 attendances at sessions themed on Employment, Health and Wellbeing and Community. A focus since the start of 2022 has been to work closely with local employers and the DWP and deliver exciting sector-based opportunities for customers seeking employment. In depth work with Sky, Smyths Toys and a local restaurant resulted in the team designing unique employment events for our customers. In total 65 customers attended the assessment sessions with 48 progressing through to training and interviews and 21 securing employment



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training sessions please contact the Stockport Homes Employment
Team on Email employmentsupport@stockporthomes.org
or call **0161 474 2862** to book a place!

   

- 2.3 March 31st marked the cut-off date to onboard the final cohort of Kick Starters. Stockport Homes embraced the scheme and recruited in total 16 young people as part of the Government programme. SHG introduced some new roles as part of this final cohort including plumbing, employment team admin and a construction planner. The SHG Employment team supported SMBC to recruit 20 Kick Starters, in addition the SHG Employment & Training team provide wrap around employment support to SMBC Kick Starters for the 6-month duration of their placement. All the young people have now commenced training sessions and one to one employment guidance as part of the scheme.
- 2.4 The partnership with GMCVO to provide the Hidden Talent Programme to supporting 10 young into employment & training opportunities draws to a close in June. To date SHG have engaged 10 young people onto programme. Negotiations continue with GMCVO and partners to identify additional funding routes after the Community Renewal Funding ends in June.
- 2.5 Stockport Homes are proud to launch the SMBC commissioned Steps to Work Programme. This programme supports young people from challenging backgrounds to secure employment and provides employers with a £4500 grant incentive to employ a young person for 6 months. High levels of promotional work have been undertaken since the start of the year to ensure that young people from SEND, Care Leaver and NEET backgrounds are engaged on programme and provided with this unique opportunity. Employers have been engaged via the SKylight website and promotional activity has created a vibrant network of exciting vacancies for young people to transition into.

3 HEALTH UPDATE

Housing Options for Older People (HOOP)

- 3.1 From April 2021 to end of March 2022, SHG's dedicated HOOP service has given bespoke advice and information on 1,576 occasions to customers and internal/external colleagues. The project has made 103 referrals for extra care housing. Referrals for extra care can prevent the need for people to move into more costly residential care provisions.
- 3.2 The project has also provided advice and support to 68 customers about issues such as benefits, money management and affordability, 25 customers have been supported with information about adaptations and 52 about other issues to support independent living (e.g. accessing care or giving information about Carecall).
- 3.3 The project has supported five customers with a terminal diagnosis with advice and support about their housing options, supported 14 people out of hospital

and stepdown accommodation with the process of moving into suitable accommodation, thereby preventing ongoing bed blocking.

TLC Counselling service

- 3.4 The counselling service provided by Talk, Listen, Change (TLC) has delivered 1,254 sessions to 240 customers over the previous financial year. TLC used the HACT³ social value calculator to estimate a social value of £298k associated with this improvement in emotional wellbeing.

- 3.5 The following is some feedback from SHG customers who have completed counselling sessions with TLC.

“Honestly I am much better with the people around me. I am more motivated. I am looking forward to the future more than I was. You have changed my perspective on everything, and you have given me a whole new outlook on life. I am more positive. I am no longer having self-destructive thoughts.”

“I feel like a weight has been lifted from my shoulders straight after my counselling sessions. They have really helped me see things from different perspectives, re-evaluate what is important to me, introduce boundaries in relationships and get clarity when I was doubting myself. Counselling has helped me listen to my inner gut instinct and see through change, and I have removed myself from a violent relationship which I had been in for 3 years. I have tools and techniques to help me moving forward. Thank you”

- 3.6 The existing tender of four years comes to an end in August 2022, so the service was put out to tender in April. A new provider, Beacon Counselling, has been appointed to deliver the new counselling service from 1st September 2022, which will include a greater focus on more complex cases following feedback from professionals and clients.

Mental Health Support Worker

- 3.7 The Mental Health & Housing Support Worker received 105 referrals last year from a wide range of sources. 49 people were supported to engage with primary care after discharge from inpatient treatment at Stepping Hill Hospital. 36 people from Temporary Accommodation were supported to access mental health and social care assessments. There was active engagement in two serious anti-social behaviour cases where mental health issues were a major contributory factor. By supporting the perpetrators, the Worker helped avoid eviction and minimise harm within the community.

Youth Work in Schools

- 3.8 The Mental Toughness programme has engaged with 131 different young people from seven different schools across the last financial year. In addition to the group sessions, 24 young people have been supported on a one to one basis.
- 3.9 SHG relaunched and refocused the holiday offer to focus on secondary school aged children, delivering over three school holidays in August, October and February, with a total of 244 places for young people aged 11-17. Following consultation with the young people, the offer included a healthy breakfast, structured activities aimed to develop resilience and personal confidence including cooking, drama and art, with additional non-structured options for young people who prefer it. A hot meal is provided and ingredients packs for the

³ HACT is the Housing Association Charitable Trust, which has developed a set of measures to place a monetary value on the impact of social investment work on individuals and communities.

young people to make at home. Over the Easter 2022 holidays, provision also included trips out for the young people for the first time; these proved very successful with 29 young people participating.

Youth Diversionary Work

- 3.10 The Youth Diversionary work continues to be successful, with 12 young people aged between 11-23 supported on a one-to-one basis during 2021/22 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 education and employment etc, as well as improving self-esteem and confidence via activities such as sports, arts or volunteering. The detached youth work sessions have had engagements with 1,697 young people over 148 sessions over the last financial year, delivering sessions four nights per week in Edgeley, Brinnington, Swythamley and Lancashire Hill.

Health Related Funding

- 3.11 Several health-related funding bids have been successful this year.
- Social Events Activities (SEA) are a voluntary group who continue to support people aged 50 years and older. SEA's aim is to support older people who are experiencing isolation, loneliness and poor health by organising trips out and group activities. Up to 30 members meet every Thursday in the Windmill Coffee shop. The group received £7,000 of funds from the National Lottery Awards for All fund, £1,000 from the One Stockport Local Fund and £500 from ASDA Foundation to continue their work.
 - DryWave Recovery supports people who are experiencing or recovering from physical and mental health challenges due to substance abuse. With help and support from the SHG Funding Officer the group have won over £50,000 of grants. Most recently they were awarded £4,238 from the Trust House Foundation and the group have made their way to stage 2 of the National Lottery Reaching Communities Fund with a three-year bid for £180,000.
 - St Mathew's Church have been supported with a range of applications for grants including £2,000 from the Bruce Wake Foundation to pay for wheelchairs for disabled members of the community to take part in local events and Awards for All to pay for a number of physical and mental health related activities at the Church.

4 FOUNDATIONS UPDATE

Foundations Stockport becomes SKylight from the 1st June 2022

- 4.1 The name 'Foundations Stockport' has been subject to a legal challenge by a company who also have a subsidiary arm called Foundations. Attempts were made to resolve the challenge informally and agree a mutually acceptable way forward for both parties, however this proved unsuccessful. Advice secured from both SMBC Legal Services and a Trademark specialist concluded that although the company did not submit a challenge as part of the original trademark registration process, if SHG continued to use the 'Foundations Stockport' name then there was a high likelihood that the company would be successful in any legal challenge, with significant costs likely to be incurred by SHG.

- 4.2 SHG has therefore sought to find an alternative name for Foundations that is suitable for the audience, fitted within the Group's brand family and minimised the risk of a similar challenge in the future. Extensive research was undertaken, with over 100 names considered and discounted for a variety of reasons, including potential risk of a further future challenge and many being already in use, prior to the name 'SKylight' being selected. The SK of SKylight represents the organisation's Stockport home and heritage, and is expected to resonate with local people and communities. 'SKylight' itself is a more aspirational name which represents many of the services delivered by the charitable arm in terms of people looking forward and progressing in their lives. Over the next few weeks the rebranding will be complete, including the necessary amendments with the Financial Conduct Authority, all digital channels and print material, HR/IT and internal systems and processes.

Foundations Annual Report Summary

- 4.3 Foundations second Annual Report and Accounts has been completed which gives detailed information on the key achievements and outcomes of the charitable arm during 2021/22, as well as a breakdown of all financial accounting for the subsidiary. A summary of the report has been produced which provides customers, partners and stakeholders with an overview of activities during the year around key themes such as Employment & Skills, Homelessness, Youth work and a range of services which support people and help tackle poverty and inequality.

5 HOUSING OMBUDSMAN VISIT

- 5.1 The Housing Ombudsman for England visited with three colleagues (including their Chief Operating Officer and their Head of Communications) on 2 March, to meet some of our customers. The ostensive purpose of the visit was for the Service to hear directly from customers what it is like to make a complaint about housing service issues, the themes of those complaints, and to promote the Ombudsman Service.
- The session went well, though the Ombudsman did go off-piste (which they had proposed) and also asked about services at SHG
 - 20 customers attended the event
 - The Ombudsman actively prompted customers what could be improved, and it was encouraging that in answering, customers repeated, "SHG are good but..."
 - Issues raised ranged from ASB, living in multi-storey blocks, concierge services, improvement works and making a complaint to Stockport Homes
 - The Ombudsman also asked customers about their awareness of their Service (with a positive rate of about 25-30%), with a wider sentiment from customers that "we would just ask SHG at the time" if they needed to know more
- 5.2 In reply to one question the Ombudsman said that last year SHG had only 5 cases raised to the Ombudsman and this year so far only 5. He did not say this specifically but was implying this was good. [One of his team had said this to Si earlier]. In reply to a question of "which cases concern him the most" he spoke of another organisation where the Ombudsman joined nine separate cases

together because they were on a similar theme and it demonstrated a real failing of service.

- 5.3 Talking with the Ombudsman staff after the event they were really pleased with how the event had gone and stated that they thought we were really open and listening to customer's views. More generally, they commented how impressed they were with the reception area and the meeting room/facilities and the overall organisation of the event and commented it will be the model for future events elsewhere.

6 'MAXIMISING OUR POTENTIAL'

- 6.1 This pilot was introduced in August 2021 following consultation with unions and colleagues. Since its introduction there has been lots of positive feedback from colleagues on the impact more flexible working arrangements has had in enabling them to achieve a work life balance. This approach has also supported a smooth transition from mainly home working during the Pandemic to returning to the office and being able to find a balance between the two. This has enabled SHG to capture all the positive experiences from lockdown, maintaining connectivity and the culture that makes SHG the successful organisation it is. There is evidence from Best Companies that this pilot has been mutually beneficial for SHG and colleagues from the high levels of colleague engagement that has been maintained. SHG has also been at the forefront of introducing "hybrid" working within the Greater Manchester Housing Providers (GMHP) group and has been a key player in working through some of the issues with the GMHP HR/OD Group and providing feedback to the Chief Executives Group.
- 6.2 There have been some challenges trying to ensure consistency in approach to implementing these new ways of working and HR Business Partners have worked closely with managers to support more remote working. Building more flexibility into the working arrangements for some services, particularly front-line services, continues to be the biggest challenge for SHG and something that will continue to be a focus for the remainder of the pilot and beyond, with workshops planned for managers that will include discussions on this issue. How success is measured is also a focus for SHG to be able to show in tangible terms the outcomes achieved by adopting this approach, with customer satisfaction levels and colleague engagement being key metrics.
- 6.3 SHG will continue to review "MOP" through HR business partnering, providing opportunities for feedback from colleagues, for the remainder of the pilot. There will be a final review in August, as the pilot draws to a close and a decision is made about whether this is the approach that will be adopted longer-term for SHG. The indication at this point is that both the business and colleagues benefit from these working arrangements, this approach has positively impacted SHG's ability to attract, recruit and retain the best talent, as flexible working arrangements are high on the list of criteria for people looking for new roles. The challenge will be to maintain connectivity and the strong inclusive culture SHG has that makes it successful, whilst working in new and different ways.

7 GENDER PAY GAP

- 7.1 The Gender Pay Gap for Stockport Homes at April 2021 was 5.8% - this reduced from the previous year when it was 9.4% (median). The ONS (Office of National Statistics) calculated that the National Gender Pay Gap in April 2021 was 15.4%.
- 7.2 Societal trends relating to gender continue to be strongly influential and there are demonstrable gender influences on career choices nationally and within the

Organisation. Stockport Homes has a strong focus on delivering services that support customers to improve their lives and these roles are much more prevalent in the workforce than for many similar organisations. Such roles tend to be female dominated and nationally usually attract salaries of below average earnings – this influences the gender pay gap at Stockport Homes. There is also strong male gender segregation in some trades, technical and construction roles (which are higher paid) and there has been a focus on recruiting more women into such vacancies. There has been some notable success compared to the sector with this in staff roles such as site managers (50% female), maintenance planners and quantity surveyors. A colleague group is being set up to help learn from female staff in these traditionally male roles and to see what more can be done to encourage diversity.

- 7.3 As well as calculating the Gender Pay Gap the opportunity was taken to do a deep dive into analysis of all progression / promotion and development activity by gender. This evidenced a favourable position for women for all activity analysed which is a positive demonstration that once in the workforce the opportunities for women to succeed are as good as for male counterparts overall. Stockport Homes also further embedded flexible / agile working further via the “maximising our potential” approach – relevant as perceptions of flexibility between work and home is a factor that is an enabler of female progression.

8 GAZPROM – UKRAINE INVASION

- 8.1 Stockport Homes purchases gas from Gazprom Marketing and Trading Retail Limited who are based in the UK with offices in central Manchester and London, however, this company is part of the wider Gazprom group based in St. Petersburg, Russia.
- 8.2 Gazprom supplies gas for 28 district heating and communal boiler sites across the SHG managed housing portfolio with an annual communal gas budget of around £400,000; the current gas contract expires in March 2023. Communal electricity is supplied by SSE, a different energy provider. In addition, SHG have brokered energy deals on behalf of 45 schools in the Borough who also use Gazprom for the supply of gas with an annual budget of £405,000.
- 8.3 Gazprom also supplies energy to many other public sector organisations across the UK such as NHS trusts, housing associations and Councils, including Stockport MBC.
- 8.4 Since the invasion of Ukraine by Russia questions have been raised about the continued use of Gazprom by public sector bodies, therefore officers have sought advice from SHG’s energy broker regarding the risk to continued gas supply and cost increase in relation to possible Government sanctions or breaching the current contract.
- 8.5 The broker does not currently feel that Gazprom Marketing and Trading Retail Limited will be subject to sanctions or actions imposed by the UK Government. They also advise not to breach the contract currently as this could increase costs significantly and result in termination fees and other associated costs.
- 8.6 There have been some suggestions that the Government may issue an edict requiring public sector organisations to cancel the contracts with Gazprom. As a result, SHG’s broker is working on a procedure which would enable SHG to move suppliers within a reduced timeframe under the ‘Procurement in an Emergency’ policy. Evoking the Emergency Procurement Policy would ensure the gas supply to communal areas and schools is maintained but costs are still likely to increase as SHG currently have very competitive rates that are unlikely

to be matched in the current climate. Any increase would have an impact on service charge charges going forward.

- 8.7 The full impact of the invasion of Ukraine by Russia on UK energy supplies is unclear therefore officers and SHG's broker will continue to monitor the situation and will seek to take action if required to safeguard gas supplies for SHG customers whilst ensuring the most competitive rates available are secured.

9 EXTERNAL FUNDING SECURED

- 9.1 SHG have delivered capital programme enhancements to the heating system at Lancashire Hill to move customers from standing charges to a heat metered arrangement as well as design alterations aimed to reducing legionella risks.
- 9.2 To complement these works, external funding was secured in December 2021 which provided additional energy efficiencies to the heat network and to approximately 300 homes at Lancashire Hill. This involved the removal of existing hot water cylinders, pipework and radiators within all low-rise flats and the installation of new pipework, radiators, and heat interface units. This will provide a more energy efficient solution as well as reducing the risk of legionella within the existing systems.
- 9.3 These improvements will bring energy savings to customers of around 15%, equating to between £52 and £119 per year and per household (dependent on the size of the property). There will be an 'overall' network efficiency saving of 45% reduction in energy consumption.
- 9.4 The successful funding bid was made possible through advanced planning and a collaborative exercise completed by the Asset and Customer Safety Teams at SHG as well as a private consultant called Re:Heat.
- 9.5 The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy have awarded SHG a Grant of £257,000 (45% of the total project cost) allowing SHG to divert savings into other capital investment projects that can be completed during the current financial year. To supplement the project, SHG made a successful bid for funding for the design specification of the project and received a further £24,000 grant.
- 9.6 The project is being delivered by the Dodd Group with the works being completed during 2022.

10 ENVIRONMENTAL AND ENERGY

- 10.1 Within the Environmental & Energy Team, the Energy Solutions Advisors are now fully qualified to carry out EPC assessments, thereby creating a more holistic customer approach. Not only does this add extra value to the customer visit and experience, but also ensures the EPC data held by the team is accurate and updated as soon as energy efficiency works are completed at the property or where further areas for programme works are identified.
- 10.2 In addition to this, the team are also part of the HACT (Housing Associations' Charitable Trust), which is a fuel voucher scheme for the second time running. The scheme is there to support those customers on prepayment or credit meters that are in danger of dropping off supply or are struggling to top up their meters/ pay a recent energy bill due to unforeseen circumstances.
- 10.3 Depending on the size of the household, customers may be eligible for a voucher of either £28 or £49, determined by a conversation with the Energy Advice Team. Since the start of the scheme on 13th December 2021, a total of

£3,087 vouchers have been issued by the team.

11 REPAIRS SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

- 11.1 Last year the repairs team were experiencing a backlog of larger repairs that had built up during the various lockdowns and the increased demand on the service. This led to customers having to wait longer for repairs to be carried out and this in turn had a detrimental effect on customer satisfaction. The average wait time peaked in August and customer satisfaction dipped to 95% which is below target. Since then, the team have been working hard to reduce this.
- 11.2 The team focussed on recruitment of additional resource at a time when the sector was facing significant labour shortages. Employment fairs and open evenings took place, and a concerted effort was made via social media which enabled additional resources to be successfully recruited. The team also focussed on operational activity by re-configuring some priorities within the planning phase which allowed for more flexibility whilst scheduling works that were not emergencies but could not wait for more than a few days.
- 11.3 Over a number of months, as a result of the above and the commitment of the whole team, the situation has gradually improved. The appointment wait time for most repairs is now within or very close to the agreed service standard and work is continuing to ensure that this is the case for all repairs going forward.
- 11.4 Most importantly, customer satisfaction is now cumulatively over 97% year to date with the last month being 100%. Despite the difficulties this year, over 99% of all 9,800 emergency repairs have been attended to within timescale and over 94% of all routine repairs, 18,800 in number have also been completed on time.

12 THREE SIXTY LIVING – BEST LETTING AGENT IN STOCKPORT

- 12.1 The Sales and Lettings Team within Three Sixty have been awarded Gold Winner by the British Property Awards for their work in lettings within Stockport.
- 12.2 This is the second consecutive year that the team have won this unsolicited award, being assessed alongside many other reputable and long-standing High-Street agents within Stockport. The award is assessed through mystery shopping and tests the services offered to both landlords and tenants alike, and the team received specific praise for their attention to customer service.
- 12.3 The team have recently launched a Facebook page to help grow the sales and estate agency aspect of the business. Please give the page a like and share to enable more customers to experience the gold standard service from Three Sixty Living.



13 AWARDS

- 13.1 Stockport Homes have been recognised once again within the North West Energy Efficiency Awards receiving a the Highly Commended award in the 'Housing Association of the Year' category.

- 13.2 In May Stockport Homes won the 'Best Retrofit Initiative' category at the Northern Housing Awards, judges mentioned they were impressed with the fantastic work Stockport homes has done within the community and for tenants.