



Report to:	<b>STOCKPORT HOMES MEMBER COMMITTEE</b>  <i>15 October 2024</i>
Report of:	<b>DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER SERVICES</b>
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Type of Report	<i>Assurance</i>
Title of Report:	<b>SERVICE REVIEW &amp; MANAGEMENT OF HIGH RISE (BLOCK) ACCOMMODATION</b>
Purpose of Report:	To provide an update on progress with the Review of management of High Rise blocks and some background data for context.
Recommendation(s):	That Member Committee note and discuss SHG's approach to the Service Review and any additional considerations which need to be included.
Confidentiality	Non-Confidential
Resource Implications	Significant staffing resources are dedicated to providing intensive management of the Blocks across Stockport on a day-to-day basis, in addition to the capital investment made to date. Many improvements that would be ideal require additional resources.
Impact on Risk Appetite and Risk Register	This report highlights the challenges and opportunities in managing the blocks and demonstrates how risks are managed regarding building safety. This therefore fits with SHG's minimal risk appetite in this area

	Risk No.	Risk Description	Risk Mitigation
	7	SHG does not deliver excellent customer service and does not deliver customer expectations around accountability	Neighbourhood plans underpin how homes, and the 'Place' agenda will be met. All teams need to ensure customer expectations are managed - this translates into all working practices
Customer Voice	The paper sets out how customers are engaged in ensuring that excellent services are delivered and highlights how actions will have a positive impact on services delivered to existing and new customers.		
Equality, Diversity & Inclusion implications	All services are delivered based on the requirements of the blocks but also recognising that the experience can be very diverse depending on the location, design of the blocks and customer behaviour.		
Regulatory compliance	<p>From April 2023, Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) form part of the Regulator of Social Housing's (RSH) regulation of Social Landlords in England and assist with monitoring compliance with the consumer standard.</p> <p>The TSMs seek customer views on how Landlords manage their neighbourhoods and homes, with the intention to make landlords more accountable to tenants and their performance in key areas more transparent and comparable.</p> <p>Some results below relevant to the report:</p> <p>Multi-storey properties score lower in terms of overall satisfaction (TP01) than bungalows, flats, and houses 86.86% vs 91.26%.</p> <p>Multi-storey properties score lowest in terms of customers feeling safe (TP05) in their own homes. 78.11% vs 91.75.</p> <p>Satisfaction with ASB handling (TP12) is higher in the multi storeys, maisonettes, and all flats than houses - 85.78% vs 84.67%.</p>		

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This report provides Members Committee with information on the management of high-rise accommodation over the last year\* (all statistics unless otherwise stated relate to 2023/24) and provides an overview of progress on the current review. Central to all neighbourhood activity is collaborative work with key partners such as Stockport Council, Elected members, the Safer Stockport Partnership, Greater Manchester Police, Youth Offending Services, Probation, other Greater Manchester housing providers, voluntary sector organisations and customers.
- 1.2 SHG Blocks consist of circa 2000 homes (including those purchased through Right to Buy), within 27 different blocks with three or more floors. Any building over 18 metres in height / with seven floors is classified as a high-rise, with 24 of the 27 blocks falling into this category and the remaining blocks classed as Mid-rise. The blocks are in the following areas:
  - 5 in Edgeley Ward
  - 11 Brinnington and Central Ward
  - 6 Reddish South
  - 2 Manor Ward
- 1.3 On average, turnover for SHG managed homes was approximately 6.5% with each home receiving 200+ bids when advertised. For houses this was 2.7% for the same period. All SHG managed homes are let in accordance with the Council's approved Allocations Policy via the Choice Based Letting system and allocation is based on the number of points. By virtue of supply being significantly outstripped by demand in the Borough, most homes are being let to those in highest housing need, frequently those who have experienced homelessness, are vulnerable and receiving support from other services. This therefore correlates with the increasingly complex demands and issues being managed on the estate.
- 1.4 All neighbourhoods with blocks are managed intensively through regular walkabouts, new/current tenant visits and partnership working with stakeholders such as the Council and other statutory agencies. The Housing Management and Safer Neighbourhood teams manage blocks intensively (compared to individual homes) due to the density of the estates, the challenges of communal living and the complex needs of the residents who live there.

## **2. REVIEW OF BLOCK MANAGEMENT**

- 2.1 A review of how Stockport Homes manages High Rise Buildings began in late Spring 2024. All 12 Councillors where there are blocks were contacted and seven took up the offer, two on Lancashire Hill, two at York Street and three at Victoria Park.
- 2.2 The sessions allowed members to share their thoughts and concerns, show key issues which residents raise with them and have a broader discussion on the improvements they would like to see. The scope definition agreed was:

**To review the way that Stockport Homes manages  
High Rise Buildings and identify Actions for Delivery and Options for  
Appraisal which will make it better for Customers, simpler for Colleagues  
and more efficient for the Business.**

2.3 The seven headline objectives are as follows:

**Objective 1** - A review of what and how we communicate with residents living and colleagues working in the buildings.

**Objective 2** - A review of the team around the buildings to understand any duplication, identifying opportunities to reduce this where possible.

**Objective 3** - A review of whether demographic changes in residents is causing differences to the provision of services.

**Objective 4** - A review of the approach to Security and anti-social behaviour in High Rise Buildings, incorporating the OOH provision.

**Objective 5** - A review of customer engagement aiming to identify opportunities to reduce instances of no access for critical services like compliance and building safety which ensures the safety of residents and the buildings

**Objective 6** - An understanding of what future needs for HRB's may be, including general asset information

**Objective 7** - Comparisons of how Stockport Homes manages multi-storey properties compared to other landlords in Greater Manchester and beyond to identify any potential learnings and improvements.

2.4 To date the Change and Improvement team have:

- Conducted seven group discovery sessions.
- Facilitated 10 Colleague focus groups.
- Benefited from five shadowing days.
- Attended three resident engagement sessions.
- Engaged with 11 other Landlords and three contractors.
- Undertaken a detailed review of available data, incorporating complaints, recent engagement surveys and performance data.

It is expected that a final report will be completed in late Autumn.

### **3. MANAGING THE BLOCKS – WHAT DOES CURRENT SERVICE PROVISION LOOK LIKE?**

#### **Repairs – Maintaining Homes**

- 3.1 Stock condition surveys are currently being undertaken across all SHG homes including the blocks. These surveys will inform future investment plans, but also highlight any immediate issues that need to be addressed. These surveys commenced in September 2023 and to date, **672** surveys had been completed at the blocks.
- 3.2 Over **6000** repairs have been completed in the last year at all the blocks, approximately two thirds of these to communal areas and the fabric of the building. The Neighbourhood Intervention budget is used to address any design features that are quick fixes that have a high impact and higher value works are addressed through neighbourhood plans and working with colleagues in Assets.

#### **Safer Neighbourhoods (formerly Anti-Social Behaviour Team)**

- 3.3 Colleagues from the Safer Neighbourhoods team attend all Resident meetings to understand and respond to customer concerns directly. Colleagues also attend quarterly task meetings with GMP to share information and to work jointly with the police on different operations.
- 3.4 There were reports of **309** ASB related cases at the blocks ranging from lifestyle clashes to serious reports of violence.
- 3.5 The highest number of ASB reports was received from Lincoln Towers (**38**) and the lowest at Norris Towers (**3**). The average for each of the blocks has been **12** throughout the year.
- 3.6 During this period the team have secured **12** injunctions, issued 34 warnings, five Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABC's), three possession/closures/demotion of tenancy, one Community Protection Notice and **24** Community protection warnings. Initial action is swift with possession or closure orders a last resort, only utilised in the most serious of cases.
- 3.7 There have been **16** cuckooing cases dealt with across the blocks and **17** cases of suspected tenancy fraud. Of the **17** cases, three households gave up their tenancy following a fraud interview with another expected in the next month. One Right to Buy application was stopped. In addition to this, two offers of new tenancies were prevented from going ahead due to intelligence collected by the team and one fraudulent succession application was prevented.
- 3.8 In response to the Housing Ombudsman spotlight on noise which highlighted that not all noise should be viewed as anti-social behaviour, a 'Resolution Officer' role was created to solely focus on resolving issues of noise between families. Since March 2023 the officer has dealt with **353** reports with **151** of these being in the blocks.

- 3.9 The domestic abuse officer has dealt with **416** reports domestic abuse and **38** of these have been in the blocks.
- 3.10 Lancashire Hill and the Heatons has been the pilot area for an out of hours mobile security patrolling project. This has given the area some much needed proactive monitoring to increase community confidence and encourage reporting of ASB. The pilot will be evaluated, and further consultation undertaken with residents. The patrolling officers are regularly ensuring doors are secure, moving on anyone causing a nuisance and dealing with any health and safety concerns.
- 3.11 The Control room manages **1259** cameras in and around the blocks and these are monitored 24 hours a day with successful joint working with the police as a result. There are however some blocks like Heaton and Norris Towers that do not have any cameras and York Street with the least number of cameras compared to the other blocks.

## 4. HOUSING DEMAND AND SUPPLY

- 4.1 There are approximately **8542** applicants on the housing register. Of the 8542 households **4912** are categorised as having 'reasonable preference', which in essence means they are in urgent housing need (for example homeless, sofa surfing, at imminent risk of eviction, statutorily overcrowded). The most common type of need amongst housing applicants is medical need and the second being overcrowded. This overcrowding is true across all the blocks, and it is recognised that this is frustrating and waiting times are long.
- 4.2 Due to demand for social housing far outstripping supply, SHG's Property Management Team are proactively promoting mutual exchanges to all the block residents wanting to move and dedicated officers have been supporting access to a national database. **15** mutual exchanges have been completed across **11** of the high-rise flats. There are **1085** households (SHG and other landlords) registered for a mutual exchange and wanting to live in Stockport which is the reason why across all areas there are on average **200+** bids for the flats within blocks.
- 4.3 In addition, the organisation's 'rightsizing' project commenced in April 2023 which is aimed at supporting those who are under occupying family accommodation to move to smaller properties. **36** have been completed to date with a further **12** awaiting an offer. This is important because the overcrowding in the flats contributes to the noise nuisance and dissatisfaction that some households feel about their home. Managing expectations remains challenging as due to the acute shortage of accommodation the reality is that many families will have to stay where they are for many years.
- 4.4 Mutual Exchange is a quicker way to move when people are adequately housed or have low priority, and 8% of all successful Mutual Exchanges were in the blocks. Although there is less demand for flats generally, this option is still widely promoted. In 2024/25, there have been 15 moves completed through this mechanism to date.
- 4.5 Some of the blocks have flats that are used as Temporary Accommodation for homeless households, with **21** self-contained flats and seven three-bedroom flats

used as shared accommodation for this purpose. The remaining are self-contained maisonettes across Stockport. In total, there are **63** dispersed units utilised for this purpose, with households placed in such provided with support from the Temporary Accommodation team.

## **5 ONE TEAM APPROACH**

### **Building Safety**

- 5.1 Building Safety inspections are completed at all blocks every three months by SHG's Building Safety Technician. All building safety equipment is checked such as firefighting equipment, ventilating windows, emergency lighting and fire doors. This equipment is electronically tagged and when scanned prompts a series of questions specific to that asset which are answered and saved on the system. Should there be any repairs required then these are raised accordingly.
- 5.2 In addition to the regular inspections the Building Safety team have visited the blocks across **69** working days (this does not include emergency inspections). These visits can be broken down into **33** days spent on individual appointments in customer homes, **20** days where they have door knocked every single property within a block and **16** days having a presence in the foyer/walkabouts with residents. Engagement rates range from 53% -94% across the 27 blocks. Although a range of information on building safety is available on SHG's website, SHG recognises that some customers are not digitally engaged or prefer a conversation directly with an Officer hence resources are dedicated by the team to sharing information about building safety in this way.

### **Caretaking / Housing Management Services**

- 5.3 Daily inspections of each block, via a full walk through are conducted by the Caretaking Service, 365 days of the year. There are 21 caretakers, managed by two team leaders across the blocks. Monthly inspections are also conducted by the Caretaking Team Leader for each of the blocks on the estate.
- 5.4 An APP called SWEEP is used daily by all caretaking team members to manage the team resources on a daily basis, team members also complete and record tasks at each location and raise and record issues on the App. The system is also used to undertake inspections, manage equipment, supplies, and vehicles.
- 5.5 SWEEP is also used as the tool for communicating with other services across SHG, including work with Neighbourhood Housing and Building Safety Officers, enabling two-way communication for each to raise, monitor and report on issues.
- 5.6 The caretaking service have reported **7378** issues. The issues that the caretakers highlight are wide and varied. Examples include:
  - 2776 incidents of fly tipping
  - 1,882 repairs

- 80 incidents of homelessness / rough sleeping
  - 763 collections of large items (bulky collections)
  - 320 biohazards
- 5.7 The above demonstrates the intensive nature of the work undertaken by the caretaking team and the proactive approach taken to highlight and address issues within the blocks.
- 5.8 Seven Caretakers have been moved across the different blocks to bring ‘fresh eyes’ to the neighbourhood. Positive feedback has been received from residents about the work of the new caretakers and their overall approach.
- 5.9 A pilot project was carried out to increase the use of battery-operated equipment to replace traditional methods of cleaning. Feedback has been positive both from those using the equipment and residents who have commented on the improved cleaning standard.
- 5.10 A customer satisfaction survey is sent to all customers at least twice a year. 535 customer returned surveys, with overall satisfaction with the block caretaking service at year end of 85%. The team is now focussing on the 15% of customers who are dissatisfied with the service and understanding better how this varies between blocks.
- 5.11 In addition to the above inspections, Current Tenancy Visits (CTVs) are carried out by Housing Officers. Customers who are identified as being vulnerable are prioritised for these visits. The visits are designed to pick up any support needs, check property condition and help people to access services and information on-line. The team have completed **595** current tenant visits across the blocks – with **140** referrals to support services, both to internal teams and external organisations as appropriate.
- 5.12 The Housing Team have taken enforcement action where individual gardens have not been maintained and have recharged residents for fly tipping where there is evidence of a perpetrator. As always, the need to strike the right balance between support and enforcement is key for the housing management team at all blocks.

### **Greenspaces – Managing the ‘Place’**

- 5.13 Active management of the Ground Maintenance Contract continues. The contractor undertook works in accordance with SHG’s specification. Inspections are carried out each month with SHG’s Greenspace Officer and contractor to check on the condition of the estate and the quality of their work.
- 5.14 In accordance with SHG’s Tree Policy and Procedure, trees are inspected on a three-year cycle. In addition to cyclical inspection, a yearly inspection of trees identified with Ash Dieback was completed. A monitoring programme is in place with annual inspection taking place where ash trees are present in communal greenspace areas around the blocks.



- 5.15 There are three play areas within proximity of the blocks providing space for children to play, this includes Brinnington (The Three Sisters) Moat Walk Play Area, Lancashire Hill Play Area and Mottram Street Play Area. These are maintained as part of a Service Level Agreement with SMBC. This includes fortnightly inspections of the site and equipment and undertaking any repairs and maintenance required. Minor repair works, and improvement works were carried out to play equipment.
- 5.16 Additional Greenspace improvement works have taken place at Hollywood Towers, with landscaping scheme works to the external environment and improvements to recycling centre access completed in May 2024. There was also some additional planting completed at Moseley Street in Edgeley, Victoria Park and Mottram Street during the year with an ongoing review of planted beds to ensure the appropriateness of location and species.

### **Support and engagement with the Community**

- 5.17 SHG manages the Community Centres that serve the blocks across the neighbourhoods – work is ongoing with SHG’s Customer Engagement Team to promote the use of all the centres.
- 5.18 Housing Support has been delivered to a total of **1323** customers across Stockport – **572** in the blocks and the Employment Team have worked with **521** customers – **129** in the blocks\* (\*data recorded since June 2023 due to changes to the IT system)
- 5.19 There have been 31 Meetings/Drop in organised and 10 Family themed fun events across the blocks. The meetings have a ‘You Said, We Did’ feedback style shared with all the customers who have raised issues.

### **Support for Vulnerable Customers**

- 5.20 There are some residents who have identified themselves as having a vulnerability and that they are unable to open the communal door via the handset. These addresses are then ‘tagged’ on the control system and any visitor call comes through to the team and the door is opened remotely. Since March 2024, the control room have received approximately 6000 calls from across the blocks linked to door entry.
- 5.21 There have been **223** Energy Advice referrals for the blocks, resulting in a home visit, phone advice or funding application. In addition, Energy Advisors have attended (eight in 2023 and 15 in 2024) of residents’ meetings, coffee mornings and Pantry events, with another surgery drop-in scheduled which is to be confirmed. The next campaign is the Winter is Coming campaign scheduled after October 2024.

- 5.22 The team have supported a wide range of customers through allocated funds from the council's Household Support Fund. 284 customers were supported with a total amount of **£43,039**, broken down into Fuel vouchers £13,257, Grocery Vouchers £28,584, Cash Vouchers £1198 and in 2024: 361 customers with a total amount of **£39,943**, broken down into Fuel vouchers £19,065, Grocery Vouchers £18,358 and Cash Vouchers £2520
- 5.23 Your Local Pantry offers access to affordable food for a £4.50 weekly membership fee. There were **8,658** pantry visits in total to all the food Pantries and two of the Local Pantries are based within the blocks at Lancashire Hill and Mottram Street. There are 296 members in total, 165 of whom are SHG tenants and of those **28%** reside in the blocks.
- 5.24 **31% of the 321** Furniture recycling customers lived in the blocks and received a wide range of furniture/white goods.
- 5.25 There are 36 addresses across the blocks that receive the Carecall service, which is a personal alarm monitoring and fall response service which supports people to live independently in their own homes and avoids moves to residential and nursing care.
- 5.26 Dedicated Housing Support Officers often base themselves at the blocks due to the high number of referrals made and the complex needs of the residents living there. Individual and bespoke support is provided, and all residents are encouraged to seek support should they need it.
- 5.27 Neighbourhood Housing officers hold a weekly surgery at some of the blocks so that customers can raise issues face to face. They are also present at all resident meetings.

### **Customer Finances – what do SHG know and deliver in response?**

- 5.28 A higher proportion of customers living in multi-story properties are in rent arrears compared with other property types - **52% vs 48%**.
- 5.29 Customers living in multi-storey properties have higher average arrears balances compared to other property types - **£355 vs £236**.
- 5.30 The proportion of households receiving housing cost benefits (HB or UC) is the same across all property types at **81%**.
- 5.31 A greater proportion of customers in multi-storey properties were subject to arrears escalation due to rent arrears over the last 12 months compared to customers living in other property types - **10% vs 5%**.
- 5.32 Average arrears levels are highest in the 16-24 age group, followed by 25's-39's
- 5.33 12% of referrals to the Money Advice Team were for households living in multi-storey properties.

5.34 17 Referrals were for affordability checks.

5.35 103 Referrals were for support with Universal Credit claims.

5.36 114 Referrals were for support with other welfare benefit claims.

5.37 Financial gains totalling over **£828k** were obtained for customers living in multi-storey properties.

## **6. FUTURE PLANS FOR THE BLOCKS**

6.1 It is recognised that managing the blocks is challenging both in terms of the physicality of the buildings and the increasing vulnerability of many of the customers living within the blocks. The Service Review will identify areas for improvement both on a day-to-day basis as well as potential long-term recommendations.

6.2 All types of customer feedback positive and negative whether formal or informal, this includes complaints, feedback from walkabouts and resident meetings are used to inform change within service delivery. The Data team are creating some reports to look at TSM / Complaints / Councillor Engagement at Ward / Block level so services can better interrogate where issues are and look beyond the “95%” satisfied. There have been 55 formal complaints in the period which equates to 2.75% of the total number of homes in the blocks. This compares with 274 complaints across the remaining stock (not including blocks) which equates to 2.6% of homes managed.

6.3 Following customer consultation, a planned replacement of handsets will commence at Ludlow Towers providing a tablet in all the homes which will enable customers to see who is at the communal door and the ability to open it, adding an extra layer of security with visuals. This solution is being piloted with a view to roll out further whenever future replacement is needed. Work with customers and stakeholders is also underway at several blocks to enhance the CCTV offer. CCTV can be a deterrent and provide reassurance and York Street has been determined as high priority for cameras with phase 1 of this work this financial year.

6.4 In April 2024, the Employment Team recruited a new Employment Officer – Complex Needs. This post has recently commenced drop-in services at SHG Temporary Accommodation with a view to deliver bespoke employment drop-in sessions in the community centre at Lancashire Hill later this year.

6.5 In July, ‘The Stockport Social Supermarket’ project launched with Lottery Funding, the ‘working wardrobe’ aspect of the project will be delivered from the Community centre at Lancashire Hill. Customers are currently being engaged onto this programme.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

SHG dedicates significant resources to the pro-active management of blocks across the neighbourhoods but recognises challenges and dissatisfaction remain. This report provides a progress update in the Review and an overview of the key activities and work streams which impact and can play a part in the experience within High Rise.

## **8. RECOMMENDATION**

- 8.1 That Member Committee note and discuss SHG's approach to the Service Review and any additional considerations which need to be included.