

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (REGENERATION AND SKILLS)		
COUNCILLOR	PORTFOLIO	DATE
Daren Veidman	Cabinet Member Highways and Housing	25 June 2024

Housing Strategy

As colleagues are aware the Council adopted its new Housing Strategy Action Plan in April 2023, and following the first anniversary of this officers have been reviewing progress and refreshing the Action Plan. I am happy to report that the plan is on schedule to deliver a number of housing initiatives that will help our communities and I recently approved the updated Action Plan which will be published on the Council's website.

Care Experienced Young People

The Housing and Investment Service recently held its first Strategic Housing Partnership (SHP) event which brought together a range of stakeholders, including registered housing providers, to discuss the housing experiences of our Care Experienced Young People.

Several Care Experienced Young People also attended the event so that those involved delivering housing services to them could hear directly about their own personal experiences. The feedback and discussion at the event was very positive and officers are currently compiling this into a plan of further action to ensure that care leavers have the best possible housing experience when leaving care.

Housing Standards Team

As colleagues will be aware in March 2023 the Council recommissioned its Selective and Additional HMO Licencing Schemes. I am happy to report that we have received over 2,664 licence applications, which is 77% of the expected number of applications. To date 1155 licences have been issued and 441 compliance inspections have been carried out.

The team has taken a very strict approach with landlords that provide properties or services that fall below the expected standards. Since our last update 3 prosecutions have commenced against one LL for failure to licence 2 properties and failure to comply with notice requesting documents. Officers have worked closely with the police on a number of problematic properties in the licensing areas. This has resulted in service of an Emergency Prohibition Order and a Prohibition Order, preventing 2 properties from being used as habitation due to the serious failures of housing standards, along with 2 further pending prosecutions.

The team continues to receive large number of service requests from residents concerned about poor quality housing. Each of these requests is followed up and where landlords fail to comply with informal action, the team continue to take formal enforcement action. Since 17 March 2024 other enforcement action has included 1 Improvement Notice, 1 Notice for failure to have smoke alarms fitted and 1 Notice for breach of Electrical Safety Regulations.

Work to reduce the number of long-term vacant homes has continued, with responses to 3 new Service Requests relating to problematic empty homes. One new Enforced Sale has commenced on a long-term vacant property.

Extra Care Housing

As colleagues are aware based on our housing need evidence the Council has set a target to deliver 1306 new Extra Housing units before 2036. In addition to evaluating the direct delivery of Extra Care Housing we continue to engage the market to meet the need for this type of accommodation and work continues to progress on a number of schemes across the borough, including:

- 503 Hawthorne Road (91 x Extra Care, 67 General Needs Onward/Housing 21) - the provider is currently in the process of discharging the pre-commencement planning conditions and the intention is to start on site over the coming months.
- Sandbrook Road (Riverside 90 x Extra Care, 40 General Needs, 8 Learning Disability) – Construction is now underway with the demolition of the disused building on the site underway. Anticipated completion expected in March 2026.

The Planning Service is set up to operate the Council's regulatory functions in relation to the development and use of land. The report looks at key areas of activity and successes over the past 3 – 6 months and challenges for the few months ahead.

A Planning Services Charter was published in May 2024 [Planning Services Charter 2024 \(sefton.gov.uk\)](https://sefton.gov.uk). This sets out our values, our service standards, our priorities and how we are accountable.

1. Development Management

- Numbers of planning applications have settled at just below pre-Covid levels
- 100% of major and minor applications we determined 'in time' between January – March 2024, and 98% of 'Other' applications (mainly householder)
- This high level of performance is dependent on staff agreeing 'Extensions of Time' which the Government is proposing to severely restrict
- Without using EoTs, our performance would be 24% of Majors (national target 60%), 'Minors', 39% against a target of 65%, 'Other' applications 61% against a target of 80%.
- The number of complaints received by the Enforcement Team in 2023-24 has increased to 697. Most have been dealt with without resorting to formal action.

Challenges

- If the Government's reforms are introduced this will limit then opportunity to negotiate improvements to schemes and is likely to lead to more refusals. This could damage our reputation with agents as agents they would either have to appeal our decision (which is time-consuming) or submit a fresh application.
- We regularly receive proposals for children's homes which are often difficult to resist purely on purely planning grounds but pose challenges corporately. We are working closely with colleagues in Children's Social Services to improve how we respond to these proposals.
- Securing fast responses from statutory consultees, in particular some of our internal consultees

2. Building Control

- The Building Control Team continues to meet its key statutory targets in relation to plan-checking, carrying out of site inspections and percentage applications given full or conditional approval.
- The Team's market share remains just above the national average for local authority building control teams.
- In June 2024, the Building Control Team is to hold interviews, for a vacant permanent Senior Building Control Officer position. A further vacancy has arisen for a Building Control Officer and it is hoped that this post will be advertised and filled in July/August 2024.

Challenges

- The Team is struggling to meet its locally set plan-checking targets due to long-term staff absence and dealing with on-going staffing vacancies. Over the last 12 months, market share has reduced with the recent loss of some key members of staff to private sector and taking key clients with them.
- The biggest challenge is the implementation of the Building Safety Act, which requires all Building Control Bodies and their individual team members, to undergo an assessment of competency, which needs to be completed by 6th July 2024.
- Sefton's Building Control Team is due to be assessed by the newly established Building Safety Regulator, sometime in mid-2024, in order to confirm they can continue to operate as a Building Control Body.

3. Local Planning

- The Council, in its recent Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA), have been able to demonstrate a 8.7 year supply of deliverable housing land significantly exceeding the Government's required 5 year supply.
- Sefton have also recently passed the latest Housing Delivery Test (published December 2023), having had 142% of the required homes completed over the previous 3 years.
- A number of Supplementary Planning Documents are currently being progressed:
 - Developer Contributions to Southport Tourist Infrastructure
 - Nature (update)
 - Boundary Treatments
 - Short Term Holiday Lets
- The Combined Authority have recently published a draft Spatial Development Strategy. The policy team co-ordinate a Sefton response which was submitted to the Combined Authority in February.
- Bootle Area Action Plan - The policy team is assessing all comments submitted and will use these to help update the final draft of the Bootle AAP which is planned to be taken to Council for approval in July.
- The Local Plan team have recently completed its second Movers' Survey. This looks at where people moved to newly built homes in Sefton and why.

Key challenges

- Getting the Bootle Area Plan finalised, approved for publication, submitted to the Secretary of State and examined in public.
- Taking account of the various government guidance in relation to planning and plan-making.

4. Heritage and Conservation

- 10 Listed Buildings were removed from the Listed Buildings at Risk register through enforcement, repair and restoration as part of development proposals.
- Site surveys of 152 Listed Buildings and Heritage at Risk Assessments were carried out - this amounted to 27% of the total Listed Buildings within the Borough, exceeding the target of 20% per year.
- The capital build part of the Southport Townscape Heritage project is progressing - 509-515 Lord Street, a long term vacant grade 2 Listed Building, has been restored and repaired and removed it from the Council's Buildings at Risk Register. The second project has now been completed at 4a Bold Street including a new traditional shopfront and tidying up the verandah

Challenges

- The key challenge is to unlock difficult Heritage at Risk development sites and facilitate their sustainable future.

5. Technical Support

- Performance in completing searches has been consistently above target throughout the year until a slight reduction in performance in quarter 4 here due to staff availability in other feeder departments
- Performance in validating major applications in quarter 4 is below target. This shortfall is due to the retirement of a key member of staff. We are currently in the process of recruiting for this post
- A key success has been consistently in the HMLR gold standard of best performing Local Authorities for maintaining the Local Land Charges register.

Challenge

- The key challenge for the Technical Support team over the next 12 months are ensuring adequate staff levels and training.