

Report to Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Board

Tuesday 26 September 2023

Subject:	Sandwell Council Housing Asset Management Strategy 2024 - 2029
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1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Board considers and comments on the Sandwell Council Housing Asset Management Strategy 2024 - 2029.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The aim of Housing Asset Management Strategy in general is to guide the future shape and direction of the property assets to ensure that they meet corporate objectives and customer expectations.
- 2.2 This strategy sets out how we intend to address the key asset management challenges affecting our communities over the next five years. It sets out the council's priorities and objectives for meeting housing need and working with tenants and residents to build sustainable and cohesive communities across the borough.
- 2.3 The key objective of the council's Housing Asset Management Strategy is to ensure that we utilise our assets in the most effective way for the benefit of both its existing and potential tenants and leaseholders.






2.4 The National Housing Federation definition of property asset management is:

‘Asset management is the range of activities undertaken to ensure that the housing stock meets the needs and standards for the future’.



The principles of effective asset management therefore go beyond just investing in good repairs and improvements and must consider reviewing the overall asset base to ensure it achieves the right balance between need and quality.

2.5 The Housing Asset Management Strategy 2024 - 2029 will help meet the needs identified in the council’s Housing Strategy, Housing Revenue Account 30 year Business Plan, Climate Change Strategy and Regeneration Strategy but also other emerging strategies and plans where housing has a part to play in meeting the needs and aspirations of our communities.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>The Best Start in Life for Children and Young People Good quality and suitable housing are essential to delivering this objective. For instance, the Housing Asset Management Strategy will help to steer this objective by dealing with damp and mould – the health risks are particularly rife for young children who may have weakened immune systems.</p>
	<p>People Live Well and Age Well The Housing Asset Management Strategy meets this objective by considering the types of housing needed to support people at each life stage. The document particularly addresses the housing needs for older people within dwellings. Quality homes will have a positive impact on the lives of children and adults and help residents maintain their independence as they get older.</p>
	<p>Strong Resilient Communities Housing and the quality of the neighbourhood contribute to delivery of this objective. Sandwell has diverse communities made up of differing socio-economic status, race, ethnicity and disabilities. The document recognises Sandwell’s responsibility to invest in housing assets within the Borough to promote wellbeing and help people live healthy lives - this will continue to create mixed and sustainable communities.</p>



	<p>Quality Homes in Thriving Neighbourhoods</p> <p>The Strategy links directly to this priority in the Corporate Plan and expands on how we will deliver and shape future asset management investment and highlights the importance of raising standards of design, quality and sustainability across the Borough.</p>
	<p>A Strong and Inclusive Economy</p> <p>The Strategy outlines how we will lead our partners in Sandwell to make the most of all our assets and make long-term investment decisions that benefit our borough. In addition, the document outlines how we will work with local providers to ensure local spend also has green outcomes.</p>

4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The Housing Asset Management Strategy is an important document in setting out the council's priorities and objectives for meeting the housing asset needs of our communities.
- 4.2 Although not a statutory document, it is nevertheless a key strategy in articulating what actions we will take to work towards maintaining and improving Sandwell's own HRA stock. An action plan will be developed to sit beneath the strategy.
- 4.3 This 2024-29 Strategy will replace the 2017-20 Asset Management Strategy which set out several priorities that remain highly relevant today, namely:
- Providing homes which will be more affordable to our customers.
 - Developing a more environmentally sustainable asset base.
 - Reducing the 'whole life' running costs of our properties.
 - Demonstrate value for money through collaborative procurement & partnerships.
 - Investing strategically in our homes and neighbourhoods.
 - Improving our financial strength so we deliver a sustainable programme of improvement.
 - Appropriately disposing of assets, enabling investment in new homes & reinvestment in existing homes.
 - Create homes and neighbourhoods that meet our customers' needs and expectations both now and in the future.
- 4.6 We have engaged with Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Central Bedfordshire Council and Charnwood Borough Council to discuss their



own recent experiences in creating and implementing their own published Housing Asset Management Strategy documents and what some of the challenges and lessons that have been learnt during and after this project. This has produced some really informative feedback through collaboration with other local authorities.

4.7 The key objectives of this strategy are:

- 1) **Planning and service delivery:** Understanding our properties and tenants to drive constant performance improvement and innovation.
- 2) **Modern homes:** Providing homes which are warm, secure, high quality and affordable.
- 3) **Energy Efficiency and Decarbonisation:** Improving the energy efficiency of our homes whilst supporting those tenants in Fuel Poverty.
- 4) **Asset Compliance and Building Safety:** Ensuring our properties are safe, secure and compliant, meeting all our landlord obligations.

4.8 Housing Asset Management Strategy Workshops

Throughout May to July 2023, we carried out 5 feedback workshops with over 40 attendees to understand what our Asset Management services currently look like and to establish the approach we need to address the key asset management challenges affecting our communities over the next five years. The consultation workshops included representation from both Asset and Housing Management staff, tenants and leaseholders and an elected member to understand what issues meant the most to them.

4.9 Summary of workshop feedback:

- Overall, support across the strategy document and action plan was relatively high, with a large proportion of the respondents either tending to agree or strongly agreeing with the strategy's overarching objectives.
- Generally, respondents felt that the document needs to acknowledge that there are a number of possible scenarios around asset investment with competing priorities. Whilst some investment is essential and non-discretionary (e.g. statutory compliance activity or work to maintain Decent Homes), other investment is more discretionary.



- The strategy needs to show how we currently maintain our assets, and how we will invest in these in the future.
- National context and strategic context will help to set the narrative for readers and should be included, especially in the constantly changing world of policy and legislation.
- TLSG members in particular stated that the full document is not very resident friendly and that a summary version should be produced – this should be at least half the length of the full document.
- All workshop attendees felt anything proposed needs to be actionable and realistic.

5 Implications

Resources:	Delivery of the Strategy will be through existing resources including the Housing Revenue Account but is also based on being able to attract funding from external sources such as Homes England and West Midlands Combined Authority as well as Government funding towards retrofit of homes.
Legal and Governance:	<p>There are a variety of legal factors that have to be considered which underpin the strategy. For instance, there have been significant changes to our legal obligations which became law during 2021 because of the Fire Safety Act 2021 and the Building Safety Act 2022.</p> <p>The Housing Asset Management Strategy Action Plan will provide oversight ensuring implementation of the Housing Strategy 2023-2028, including monitoring of the delivery of actions against the key objectives. Unless there are major legislative changes or significant service changes this strategy will be reviewed every five years.</p>
Risk:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial resources available to deliver the strategy, including inflation. • Data quality (stock condition) in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the HRA assets and a robust evidence base on which to make informed decisions about future asset management investment. • Future changes to national policy and requirements (particularly on planning) that could impact on the



	<p>Council’s ability to deliver new housing that meets locally identified needs. For instance, Right to Buy proceeds, climate change and materials used for new homes and retrofits, etc.</p>
<p>Equality:</p>	<p>The Housing Asset Management Strategy is key to reducing housing related and wider inequalities and addressing the diverse housing needs of our communities.</p> <p><u>Age:</u> A strategic approach is necessary to meet the housing needs of Sandwell’s older population. The document considers the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older people will have improved supply of suitable and accessible homes where they in particular feel safe and can maintain independence for longer. <p><u>Disability:</u> The numbers of disabled people or those in poor health in Sandwell is significantly higher than the national average. Outlining our priorities for safe and well adapted housing is essential to help people remain independent if they experience health problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tackling the shortage of accommodation for people requiring disabled units. • Greater utilisation of Disabled Facilities Grants – this will provide more housing options and enable disabled residents to remain in their own home for longer. <p><u>Race:</u> The strategy will have an impact on ethnic minority groups in several ways. These households have distinct characteristics in terms of their housing needs which may leave them disadvantaged in some way. How the strategy will address this housing inequality is outlined below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our Housing Strategy 2023-2028 commitment to ‘make the best use of the homes we have’ will benefit ethnic minority groups particularly. These households typically live in poorer housing conditions than white households.



Health and Wellbeing:	<p>The proportion of those in poor health in Sandwell is significantly higher than the national average. With the significant health issues in the borough, we know the Strategy can play a key role in ensuring homes help people to maintain independence and quality of life. For instance, we will continue to improve our home adaptations service to enable people to remain at home if mobility becomes an issue and also work to provide new homes that are designed to be adaptable for changing health and mobility needs. In addition, we will aim to be as proactive as possible with ensuring we meet the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS).</p>
Social Value:	<p>A large part of social value in this Housing Asset Management Strategy is about creating communities in which people want to live and spend their time. Local areas that cover every need, providing access to all the necessary services and resources, and promoting greater wellbeing and satisfaction will provide social value. Through procuring services to maintain and improve council housing, social value considerations are built into the tendering process to maximise use of local labour, offer apprenticeships to local people and reduce climate change impacts. Additionally, engaging with Sandwell's tenants and residents e.g. through public consultation generates social value through interacting and empowering the community to help shape the Council's HRA asset aims and aspirations for the next 5 years.</p>
Climate Change:	<p>Housing and its additional assets plays a key role in addressing climate change due to its strong environmental impact. The document links to the council's Climate Change Strategy, based on the need to reduce carbon emissions from housing and ensure homes are well insulated. It outlines our commitment to identifying funding to help improve the energy efficiency of our own stock, build new homes to carbon neutral standards and help tenants with the transition to a net zero carbon future.</p>
Corporate Parenting:	<p>Not applicable.</p>



6 Appendices

- Appendix One: Sandwell Council Housing Asset Management Strategy 2024 - 2029

7 Background Papers

- Sandwell's Housing Strategy 2023-2028
https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/downloads/file/34255/housing_strategy_2023_-_2028
- Sandwell Regeneration Strategy 2022-2027
<https://www.bigplansforsandwell.com/media/9575/sandwell-regeneration-strategy-2022-2027.pdf>
- Sandwell 2030 Vision: Corporate Plan 2021-2025
https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/downloads/file/29963/corporate_plan_-_big_plans_for_a_great_place_for_the_people_of_sandwell
- 2021 Census for England and Wales
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E08000028/>
- Climate Change Strategy 2020-2041
https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/31151/climate_change_strategy.pdf
- Housing Revenue Account 30 Year Business Plan 2023-2053
<https://sandwell.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s12434/05a%20Appendix%201%20Draft%20HRABusinessPlan%20100123.pdf>
- Adaptations for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing Policy
https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/downloads/file/34372/adaptations_for_disabled_tenants_in_council_housing_policy_-_june_2023
- Building Safety Act 2022
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/30/contents/enacted>
- Fire Safety Act 2021
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fire-safety-act-2021>

