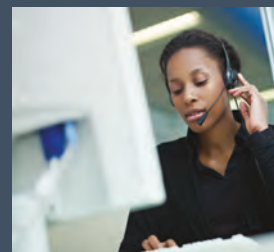


HOUSING AND CUSTOMER SERVICES DIRECTORATE



ANNUAL REPORT 2017 - 2018



City of
Stoke-on-Trent

an Inn

Shop



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
DEVELOPMENT AND REGENERATION	6
HOUSING ASSETS & NEW REPAIRS COMPANY UNITAS	8
HOUSING GROWTH	11
HOMELESSNESS, ALLOCATIONS AND VOIDS	12
HOUSING MANAGEMENT	14
ENABLING AND PROJECTS	16
PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING	18
ICT	20
CUSTOMER ACCESS	22
LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES	24

INTRODUCTION



Councillor Randolph Conteh

Cabinet Member for Housing,
Communities and Safer City



Carl Brazier

Director of Housing and
Customer Services

Welcome to this year's End of Year Report, where we have taken the opportunity to present the successes of the Directorate's achievements over the last 12 months and set out our aspirations for the year ahead. Over the course of the year we have successfully completed many projects as we continually work to improve services and housing for the residents of the city. All of this has been achieved within budget. The Housing Health Check conducted in 2016 gave us a good platform from which to improve what we were doing. We took a step back to scrutinise how we did things and asked ourselves how we can do things better. A year on from the first Health Check, many areas within the Directorate have seen improvements, as we strive to work smarter and more efficiently to provide the best possible service we can offer our residents. The recent Health Check re-inspection has shown that we have made huge progress. The improvement journey has been speedy and effective, and could not have been achieved without the hard work and dedication of all those involved.

The Directorate is responsible for a wide range of services, covering all aspects of housing across our council stock and within the private sector as well the full range of customer access services, ICT, libraries and archives. This includes the management of our housing stock, the allocation of council houses, assisting those in housing need and the planned investment, repairs and maintenance of our council stock. Within the private sector, services extend to improving housing standards and improving the quantity of decent housing. To give people a chance to get their first foot on the property ladder, helping maturing families to find their perfect home and allowing our older residents to live independently for as long as possible, the teams have worked to develop and regenerate a range of housing provision.

Throughout 2017-18, there has been a continued commitment to invest in the housing stock. Officers have worked hard to ensure that our tenants are safe by having the right fire safety measures in place and making fire safety reassurance visits to all residents including full tenancy audit visits to all tenants in our high, medium and low rise blocks. In February, 2018 we saw the successful transition to the new repairs and maintenance company, Unitas which has also provided local contractors with work – keeping the Stoke pound in the city. During the year, the Housing Solutions Team invested in training and staffing to get ready for the major changes in the approach to dealing with homelessness, with the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act in April, 2018.

Through Fortior Homes, the private housing company wholly owned by the council, the first developments of residential homes have been completed with an aspiration to deliver more than 400 homes over the next three years. Within this service area, we are looking carefully at what needs to happen in our residential areas and maximise the potential of all of our assets in order to meet housing needs and drive the city's economic growth. Through the Housing Revenue Account we are developing sites for new build social housing.



Preparations are taking place this coming year and we look to complete the building of new council homes the following year, increasing our stock and housing offer.

The Directorate's achievements have been recognised nationally, with the Housing Growth Team being shortlisted for 'Strategic Local Authority of the Year' category in the 2018 UK Housing Awards. To make it to the final at the UK Housing Awards is a fantastic accolade for Stoke-on-Trent and is testament to the hard work and dedication of the work that is taking place within housing across the city. Our teams continue to develop innovative projects, for example with the second phase of the Reviving communities project, opening up opportunities for people in the city to own their own home at the same time uplifting the area.

The successful bid to 'Homes England' to the Housing Infrastructure Fund has seen a £10 million award, to be used to kick-start some challenging sites and start to bring forward residential-led regeneration. The Private Sector Housing Team have been successful in securing £245,000 from the National Grid Warm Homes Fund to provide heating systems for residents in the city with no heating or partial heating over the next three years. An additional £400,000 has been secured from the Better Care Fund for 2018/19 for investment to make homes warm and safe.

With customers at the heart of what we do, we have worked on improving and modernising how our services are accessed, helping customers to access services first time using on-line forms when it's convenient to them. This has seen an increase in email correspondence and website transactions in the first six months of 2017/18. The service has expanded over the year to include more service areas, handling even more calls and enquiries than ever.

The Library and museum services continue to enhance the lives of the residents of the city with a range of cultural events delivered this year, including performances from high-profile poets and best-selling novelists. As well as delivering many clubs and activities, the service continues to provide new and innovative ideas to promote the love of reading.

To support the Directorate's work, we are continually investing in upgrading and modernising our ICT infrastructure and systems. Over the course of the year, we have been preparing for the biggest change in Data Protection in 18 years, by providing guidance and information so that we are now ready for the requirements of the new legislation. This coming year, our focus will be on implementing a business change programme, by undertaking a business process review across all service areas to identify and deliver improvements.

DEVELOPMENT AND REGENERATION

Delivering improvements and driving up standards in housing quality by investing in new and existing council homes.

What we promised...

As part of our major investment programme in older people's housing, we set out to clear the site at Queen Elizabeth II Court in Fenton, ready for construction of a brand new sheltered housing scheme.

What we achieved...

- We were granted planning permission in May 2017 to demolish the existing Queen Elizabeth II Sheltered housing scheme and to replace it with 57 units of high quality Sheltered Housing. Galliford Try Partnerships were appointed in January 2018 to carry out first the demolition, and having completed the demolition of the old scheme in February, have now started construction of the new building.
- Cabinet approved in principle our proposal to develop two housing sites in Fenton. We are looking to provide apartments for the over 55's on the former Workshop for the Blind site, and further general needs housing and apartments on the former Local Centre site.



Artist impression of the redevelopment of Queen Elizabeth II Court, Fenton

- We obtained £770,000 of funding from Homes England to contribute towards 14 new units of purpose built high quality supported housing for adults with complex needs, at the Abbots House site in Abbey Hulton. The purpose built homes have been designed working closely with colleagues in Adult Social Care and will offer residents independence but with support when needed. Planning permission for the new build was granted in December 2017. The existing building was demolished and the site was cleared by January 2018.
- Under the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Estate Regeneration initiative, we successfully received funding to invest in improving our estates. In June 2017 we began talking to local residents on the Bucknall New Road estate, giving them the opportunity to input into the 'masterplan'. We wanted their ideas on how to we could increase the choice of housing offered, improve the quality of housing, reinvigorate the public realm and regenerate the City Centre estate. The final masterplan of the estate was completed in February 2018.



Artist impression Abbots House

What we want to achieve in 2018-19

This year we want to be well underway with the construction of the new scheme at QEII, with a weathertight building by December 2018 and homes ready for new occupants in May 2019. We want to start on site with the construction of the units at the Abbots House site in April 2018, with new homes for residents ready in spring 2019. Having completed the master-planning exercise for the regeneration of the Bucknall New Road estate in February 2018, we now want to cement possible funding and delivery mechanisms to enable proposals to be reviewed and formulated.

As well as offering housing, the development will include the relocation of the market traders to an area closer to Albert Square, offering a prominent central location.

We will respond to information gathered by our recent consultation with older people to find a site that best suits where there is a demand. We want to be ready to start on site in the 2019-20 financial year.

We want to continue to design and develop the two housing schemes in Fenton. This will involve undertaking detailed consultation with all Stakeholders and achieving approved planning applications on both of the sites. As well as offering housing, the development will include relocation of the market traders to a new public car parking area around Albert Square, offering a prominent location with improved public realm areas. The local centre service will be relocated in a central building in Fenton.

Continuing with our long term plan to provide housing for the over 55s, we want to develop another housing scheme, in the north of the city. We will respond to information gathered by our recent consultation with older people to find a site that best suits where there is a demand. We want to be ready to start on site by March 2019.



Artist impression of the improved quality of housing, reinvigorated public realm and regenerated City Centre estate



Housing Assets & New Repairs Company Unitas

Maintaining and improving housing standards through the investment and repair of our council housing stock and public buildings.

What we promised...

We said we would establish the new repairs company, called Unitas Stoke-on-Trent Ltd to deliver the repairs and maintenance service.

We said we would finish the external improvements to Lindop Court and St Luke's Court with the completion of cavity extracts and fitting external wall insulation.

We said we would continue to maintain an effective and value for money service, working on reducing the length of time a council-owned property is unoccupied for, whilst still achieving a good standard in terms of creating a home and within our budget.

We said we would have a new IT system for the new company, Unitas that will enable us to better plan and track our investment programmes, improve the scheduling our works and streamline our financial reporting.

What we achieved...

In February, 2018 Unitas commenced delivery of the repairs and maintenance service to council housing and council owned public buildings. Around 450 Kier Stoke staff transferred to the new company and were joined by a further 30 city council workers. The new company will be carrying out an average 600 responsive repair jobs a day under a £42 million annual budget, with plans to refurbish 1,500 void properties a year.

We published our Housing Asset Management Strategy 2017-2022, setting out our plans how we can better understand our asset base through review and grading, look at how we can deliver value for money services and how we ensure compliance with statutory obligations around safety issues such as gas and asbestos.



Launch of Unitas

This year we have completed a survey on the condition of our council stock. We now have 75% of stock surveyed which will help us to plan our maintenance investment requirements for the next 30 years, giving us a greater understanding of where investment needs to be focused.

The first phase of works to the externals of Seddon, Lindop and St Luke's Courts are now complete. All three blocks have had new windows, roofs, External Wall Insulation with a silicone render finish and structural repairs.

Throughout 2017, 16 apartments across 3 of the high rise blocks have benefited from a complete remodel, comprising of an open plan kitchen and living room, brand new fitted kitchen and bathroom and upgraded central heating system.

The Phase 2 Programme of new lift installs has seen the completion of new lifts at high rise blocks in Stoke, Burslem and in Blurton.

We are currently in the midst of providing significant fire safety enhancements across our apartment blocks, including fire door installation and smoke detectors installed and annually checked in all homes.

A programme of complete internal and external refurbishment works has been carried out at Perry Close, Wainwright Walk and Wellington Street.



53 apartment blocks across the city have now been upgrade to a GPRS Cloud door entry management system. Our housing local centres can now activate and deactivate fobs remotely, which will improve the management of the fobs.

The first phase of works to install CCTV wireless cameras has begun at various apartment blocks within the city. All of the footage that is recorded feeds wirelessly to the city councils CCTV control room and also directly to appropriate housing local centre.

In April 2017 we introduced our new lettable standard for all empty council properties which has been a great success. We have seen vast improvement in both re-let times and the reduction in the number of empty council properties. Re-let times (both minor and major works) have reduced from 71 days in April to 39 days at end of December 2017.

At the end of December there were only 174 active empty council properties, this is a huge reduction from the start of the year when this was at 407. The number of voids has not been under 200 since December 2007.

This reduction has a huge impact on the amount of rent lost through properties being empty. Over the last year this has been almost halved.

In September 2017, we commenced morning, afternoon and all day appointment slots. This has been a great success and we arrive at 96% of appointments on time. We also introduced Saturday morning appointments for certain trades. This has seen an average uptake of 14 appointments each Saturday.

Our average End to End time at the end December 2017 for all repairs (minor and major repairs) is 110 hours or 4.6 days, which is a leading nationwide figure, and our customer satisfaction rating for repairs is 98%.



Fire Risk Assessments for high rise are now undertaken every 12 months by an independent organisation

What we want to achieve in 2018-19

We continue to develop a new Asset Management IT Suite to manage information around the condition of our stock gathered through the stock grading exercise and stock condition survey. This will be installed in this coming year and will help us plan our work programmes as well as complete servicing, monitor health and safety and order works with contractors.

We want to commence a second phase of works, mainly to the communal areas of Seddon, Lindop and St Luke's Courts. This will include new main entrance doors, internal decoration, new signage, redesign of the caged areas and improvements to the bin store areas.

We are committed to installing the first sprinkler system at Seddon Court during this year

We want to recommence another phase of the remodelled works across the apartments within Seddon Court, Lindop Court and St Luke's Court. The third phase of the lift replacement programme will see the commencement of the installation of new lifts at the final five high rise apartment blocks in Hanley – Lindop, Seddon, St Luke's, Wellington and Westwood Courts.

We want to continue enhancing our fire safety measures. The council has already commenced work on sprinklers and enhanced fire safety measures in some low-rise blocks. As part of this investment programme, we are looking at all the options around sprinklers and we are working with Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service to understand what is appropriate for each type of housing.



HOUSING GROWTH

The Team delivers a stepped change in the speed of housing growth in the City with a range of developers and other partners. They do this by delivering Market Rent and Market Sales properties through Fortior Homes and the management of Housing Zones, Housing Infrastructure Fund and other programmes.

What we promised...

We promised to set up a new housing company, Fortior Homes to enable the council to design, build and manage its own portfolio of properties.

We said that Fortior Homes would work with developers Keepmoat Homes to start on site at Wellington Road – a housing development that will provide 169 new homes by 2019, as well as attracting the associated new homes bonus and increasing the council tax base for the council.

We are committed to installing the first sprinkler system at Seddon Court during this year.

We said we would start on site at Smithfield on the 11-storey city centre residential development.

We said we would aim to commit HIF funding to at least two sites. We will continue to talk to the landowners of the other identified sites, in order to allocate funding so that work on the sites can begin.

What we achieved...

Fortior Homes' business plan was approved in July 2017. Our first tenants have now moved into properties we own at Lyme Gardens (Wellington Road site) and at Bucknall Grange.

In December 2017, planning permission was granted to build a mix of one and two-bedroom private rented apartments at Smithfield.

We worked with developers and completed a deal with Barratts to develop the former Churchill Pottery site. Fortior Homes exchanged contracts to own 9 units on this development, for private market rent. These will be built by end of 2018/19.

We applied for and were awarded £10 million from the Government's Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) to remediate 9 housing sites in Burslem, with the potential to delivery over 1,000 new homes.

What we want to achieve in 2018-19

In 2018-19 we want to see the first completed homes on the former Churchill Pottery site. We also want to widen Fortior Homes property portfolio by buying properties across the city to be available for private rental. We want to have planning permission in place so that a developer can start building new homes on the site of Lichfield St, adjacent to the Emma Bridgewater factory.

We are looking for building to start on site at Smithfield of an 11-storey city centre residential development. Fortior Homes will own the site and work in partnership with building developers Genr8. The Smithfield residential scheme will provide 277 'build to rent' flats and include substantial additional amenity provision for the prospective tenants, including cycle storage, function rooms, a roof terrace with barbecue facilities and a contemporary private, landscaped courtyard.

The HIF funding has been committed to at least two sites. We will continue to talk to the landowners of the identified sites, in order for them to commit funding so work on the sites can begin.



HOMELESSNESS, ALLOCATIONS AND VOIDS

Supporting people at risk of becoming homeless to remain living in their current home or helping them find suitable, sustainable homes, where this is not possible. Working with partners to tackle rough sleeping and provide supported accommodation for vulnerable households such as care leavers. Helping those who are in need of accommodation, through the allocation of the council's housing stock and by making referrals to other Housing Associations in the City.

What we promised...

We said we would embark on the 10 local challenges which will assist us in working towards a continuous improvement approach and achieve the National Practitioners Support Service's (NPSS) Gold Standard.

We said we would continue our work to improve the re-letting of our vacant council properties, better understand the reasons why properties are refused by applicants and extend the marketing of those properties that are hard to let through the use of social media, estate agents and advertising.

What we achieved...

We completed our first module of the 10 local challenges: "Not to place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation". This led to the Council being "Bronze" status with the aim achieving Gold by March 2018.

In August 2017, the Government announced its intention to implement the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017 from April 2018, introducing new duties on the local authority and fundamentally changing the way we support households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

In the light of this it has been decided to put work on the Gold Standard on hold to enable us to focus on delivering the HRA. A decision on whether or not to continue with the Gold Standard will be made later in the year.

Our focus on empty council properties has been highly successful this year with significant reductions achieved in the number of vacant properties, the length of time taken to re-let homes and the rent loss incurred as a result of homes lying empty.

In less than 12 months the number of empty homes has been reduced by over 50% from over 358 in March 2017 to 174 at the end of December 2017. This is the lowest number ever recorded. The time taken to let empty homes not needing major works, has fell from just under 53 days in January 2017 to under 40 days in January 2018. Rent loss due to empty homes was reduced from over £23,000 a week to under £13,000 in the same period.

Other work over the last 12 months has included the production of a clear 'Lettable Standard' setting out the standards tenants can expect when they accept a void property. We also looked at the reasons why properties were being refused so that we can consider how we allocate properties going forward. We have made improvements to the on-line application process for the housing register and in the marketing of hard-to-let properties.



What we want to achieve in 2018-19

The Homelessness Reduction Act is the most significant change to homelessness legislation for more than 40 years. We want to ensure that we and our partners are prepared for its implementation on 3 April 2018, including ensuring we have changed our processes to reflect the new requirements of the Act and our IT systems allow us to report our performance internally and to Central Government.

It is proposed to relocate the Commissioning Team for Housing Related Support from Public Health to Housing Solutions and we want to ensure this occurs seamlessly. We believe having all elements of homeless prevention in one place will help protect and enhance existing services, especially those around rough sleeping and enable us to respond swiftly to emerging challenges for our most vulnerable communities.

We want to continue improving our services by further reducing re-let times, particularly around hard to let properties and newly acquired properties by using benchmarking to learn from class leaders in this area and customer feedback to inform improvements.



HOUSING MANAGEMENT

Providing efficient management of our Council Housing Stock and its tenants by offering a more proactive and effective service.

What we promised...

We wanted to set up a specialist income team that delivers a targeted well-designed approach to rent arrears management. We also wanted to look at the way we dealt with Anti-Social behaviour (ASB).

What we achieved...

We moved to specialist teams in May 2017 creating a 'Rents' team and a 'Tenancy and Estates' team but housing officers are still able to move between the Rents and Tenancy roles. One benefit of this was that we were able to maintain a focus on rent arrears recovery work, whilst still prioritising fire reassurance visits and complex ASB cases. The teams continue to work closely together to jointly manage each tenancy and share information. This has helped during the transition towards the new Housing Management Structure.

Arrears performance has been very good, with arrears being £48,717 lower in March, 2018 compared to the previous year. (This compares to the previous two years where arrears for the same period had increased by £155k and £129k). Rent collection rates are higher than last year. There has been an increase in formal legal action but also an increase in referrals for support. The Income Advice and Rent Accounting Teams joined the housing management team in September. They have been supporting tenants who have been affected by welfare reforms.

We provided training for our staff so that they are equipped to better deal with the Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) cases. At the same time, we reviewed our procedures and updated our ASB policy for Housing, aligning it with the draft Corporate ASB policy. We have improved our IT systems so that we manage our cases better, helping officers to correctly prioritise cases.

We have streamlined the way we record any action and case notes, making this easier and more accurate. This helps to reduce time spent on updating cases and makes it simpler to do quality-checks, ensuring a consistent approach. We have also developed a tool to assess and categorise the levels of risk of reported ASB complaint, called an ASB Risk Management Matrix. This helps staff to decide on the best action to take in terms of both prevention and support.

During the autumn all Housing Officers, Housing Team Managers and Operational Leads received ASB training and 'Housing and Mental Health' training delivered by the Chartered Institute of Housing as part of a series of tailored training.

This complemented the Tenancy and Estate Management procedures being updated in line with policy revisions, included all ASB procedures and is included in the Operational Guide for staff. We also introduced a quality assurance and approval framework to ensure management oversight and accountability, in respect to all casework.

We have been using a mobile overt CCTV surveillance and foot patrols using external security companies to gather intelligence and act as a deterrent and professional witness on estates and within apartment blocks.



What we want to achieve in 2018-19

We will prepare for the full service roll out of Universal Credit from 13th June 2018 by working closely with DWP and supporting tenants to ensure they make their claims timely and pay their rent to mitigate the risk of rent arrears increasing.

We want to promote direct debit as the preferred method of payment by investigating the use of incentives and offering any day direct debits. To do this we will carry out targeted campaigns throughout the year.

We want to improve the approach we take to estate management and the management of high rise blocks. As part of this we want to tackle Anti-Social Behaviour and improve community engagement.

We will put in place processes to proactively identify and manage tenancy fraud to ensure that properties are not sub-let or misused.



ENABLING AND PROJECTS

Providing a strategically focused vision within Housing Services through strategy and policy development. Ensuring implementation and progress of those plans and actions through monitoring and performance management. Facilitating and supporting tenant involvement, dealing with Right-to-buy applications, managing contracts relating housing management services and providing a service to leaseholders

What we promised...

We said we would review the HRA Business Plan and seek Cabinet approval of the revised business planning and investment decisions in our council housing stock.

We said we would survey our council tenants to understand how satisfied they were with how the council delivered its services to them. We said we would learn from this feedback to inform service improvements.

We said we would look at how tenants could get involved, we wanted to recruit new tenants and leaseholders to participate and get involved in the service. We said we would continue to arrange and deliver appropriate training to all involved tenants and leaseholders. We wanted to continue to encourage and support the development of new voluntary groups across the city.

We said we would undertake research into the housing and accommodation needs of young people aged 16 to 25 in the city so that we could make informed investment decisions into what housing provision they needed and aspired to.

What we achieved...

The updated HRA Business Plan was approved by Cabinet in June, 2017. In it we highlighted our ambition to build more new homes and to further improve and remodel our existing estates and pursue funding opportunities to deliver more. We started a full review of how we engage tenants and leaseholders and how we could improve and increase tenant involvement in a more meaningful way.

We consulted with the remaining few tenants who were still subject to the old tenancy agreement and now all our tenants are signed up to the new 2017 tenancy agreement.

We continued to develop and update our policies that help staff and tenants alike understand the council's position on things like tenancy and estate management and value for money.

We continued to improve the way the Directorate presents information on its performance and now we present Business Critical measures on a monthly basis allowing service areas to understand their business and monitor performance in a consistent way.

We commissioned a stock condition survey to improve what we know about our council stock asset base. This information will help us plan what investment we need to do to keep our stock up to a good standard. We also worked with the Private Sector Housing Team to commission a stock condition survey within the private sector so that we understand the condition of all types of housing across the city. This information will be used to plan how we can improve housing conditions for people in their own homes and in privately rented accommodation.

The research into young people's housing needs was undertaken and the findings were shared in a report with senior managers and elected members. Recommendations have been included within the Homeless Strategy Action Plan and the Housing Strategy Action Plan. As a result, Adult Social Care has made changes to their IT so that they can monitor housing and support needs of all customers in the city accessing support. This will be implemented from July, 2018.

What we want to achieve in 2018-19

Data from the study has also been used by the Development and Regeneration Team to inform their work on the development of supported housing for people with disabilities in the city.

To help strengthen our involvement structure, we arranged TPAS (Tenant Participation Advisory Service) training for our Tenant Board members. We have also provided in house training on Data Protection, Equality & Diversity and Complaints Handling.

We have set up 4 new Residents Associations and 2 new Voluntary Groups bringing the total number of groups we support to 30 Residents Associations and 29 Voluntary Groups across the city at the end of March 2017.

We organised events across the City to include a Leaseholder Information Day in May 2016 and a series of Information Roadshows in August 2016. In addition we held a Tenants and Leaseholder Awards Day in December 2016 to recognise the time and commitment of our tenants and leaseholders given in order to improve the services we deliver to our communities.

We have completed an independent review in consultation with the Chartered Institute of Housing of our tenant and leaseholder involvement functions in order to improve service delivery.

We wanted to continue with the implementation of the improvements identified from the review completed by the Chartered Institute of Housing.

We will reach out and engage with our diverse and hard to reach tenants, leaseholders and community groups.

We will improve the way we communicate with our Tenants and Leaseholders incorporating more use of digital communication such as email and social media such as Facebook and Twitter.

We want to continue to support Housing Services by renewing and updating policies and procedures, in order to provide clear guidance to staff and tenants alike. We will manage the project to review service charges across our council stock so that the council has a transparent and fair service charge model.

We will help the Private Sector Housing Team to manage the contract to deliver out a range of energy efficiency measures, such as new boilers in the private sector, using the Warm Homes Fund. We will review the contracts that deliver cleaning and garden services within the HRA Business, to ensure value for money and increase customer satisfaction. We will continue to support teams in understanding their performance, producing detailed reports that may assist them to understand where service improvements can be made.

PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING

Working to improve the condition, quality and quantity of decent housing in the city and to provide aids and adaptations to enable residents to live independently and safely in their own homes.

What we promised...

We promised to revive deprived communities through the launch of the "Reviving Communities" project (a similar initiative to the successful £1 homes scheme). This will involve the acquisition, refurbishment and sale of additional long-term empty homes in the city.

In preparation for the launch of the second phase of the 'Reviving Communities scheme', we have been communicating and negotiating with owners of empty properties in the Portland Street area, Hanley. To date we have purchased 13 long-term empty homes with the aim of acquiring up to a maximum of 25. The council will renovate the homes and the new owners will agree to repay the costs of acquisition and renovation (capped at the market value of the property) through a low-interest loan. We consulted across the city about the criteria to be eligible to buy one of the properties. We received 78 responses, vastly in agreement with the proposed criteria. Following this, we launched the Reviving Communities scheme, inviting people to apply to buy one of these properties and received 560 applications.

We launched city wide consultation for introducing Selective Licensing across 14 areas of the city to improve property conditions and management of tenancies in the private rented sector. There are conditions that have to be met for the designation of an area for Selective Licensing to be considered such as low housing demand or likelihood of it becoming such, significant and persistent problems caused by ASB, poor property conditions and high levels of deprivation and crime. We used intelligence gathered from the private sector stock condition survey as well as data from the census and other sources to choose where we might introduce this.

What we achieved...

In preparation for the launch of the second phase of the 'Reviving Communities scheme', we have been communicating and negotiating with owners of empty properties in the Portland Street area, Hanley. To date we have purchased 13 long-term empty homes with the aim of acquiring up to a maximum of 25. The council will renovate the homes and the new owners will pay a £1 deposit and agree to pay the costs of acquisition and renovation. The council will renovate the homes and the new owners agreed to repay the costs of renovation through a 10-year low-interest loan of £30,000. We consulted across the city about the criteria to be eligible to buy one of the properties. We received 78 responses, vastly in agreement with the proposed criteria. Following this, we launched the Reviving Communities scheme, inviting people to apply to buy one of these properties and received 516 applications.

We launched city wide consultation for introducing Selective Licensing across 14 areas of the city to improve property conditions and management of tenancies in the private rented sector. There are conditions that have to be met for the designation of an area for Selective Licensing to be considered such as low housing demand or is likely to become such an area, significant and persistent problems caused by ASB, poor property conditions or high levels of deprivation and crime. We used intelligence gathered from various sources to choose where we might introduce this.

We have concluded the first stages of a study into a council owned private lettings agency to provide an alternative offer in the City. The facts and figures are now being consulted to see if this is cost-effective for the council at this time.

We have provided 299 adaptations to council properties and 207 to private properties to date. The pilot Occupational Therapist (OT) Team have helped to bring the waiting times down to 2 months for an OT assessment and have introduced a number of service improvements, such as redesigning the assessment form to enable more efficient updating and to obtain sign off from the customer at the assessment. This eliminates the need to send letters updating the customer after the assessment; this will help to sustain the low waiting times as well as save public funds for printing and postage.

What we want to achieve in 2018-19

We want to tackle poor landlords in the city who provide unsafe and inadequate housing to residents through the use of new and existing enforcement powers where the landlord fails to voluntarily remove serious hazards and do not comply with the requirements set down by law.

We want to license all Houses in Multiple Occupation in the city in accordance with the new regulations of 2018.

We want to revive a deprived community through the delivery of the Reviving Communities scheme. This will involve the acquisition, refurbishment and sale of up to 25 long-term empty homes in one area.

We want to bring 200 long term problematic empty homes back into use.

We want to improve the quality of privately rented properties and tenancy management practices in the private rented sector to deliver better conditions for tenants.

We want to help households who are threatened with illegal evictions; harassment in the private rented sector

To help improve the health and wellbeing of our vulnerable residents, we aim to provide 200 council property and 150 private property adaptations to enable residents to live independently and safely.

We want to deliver £400k worth of investment to improve the condition of homes in the private sector through energy efficiency measures, including new heating systems and insulation

We want to deliver £100k worth of investment to bring properties owned by vulnerable home owners up to a decent home standard



ICT

Covering Business Engagement & Systems, Application Support & Development and Information Assurance, Infrastructure , Networks and telephony, Data Halls and Operations and the Print unit managing the Councils applications and data in line with external and internal regulation and the delivery of ICT programmes and strategy.

What we promised...

We said we would build on the success of the new website by adding more services end to end on line services with higher levels of automation. We also promised to deliver a web portal so citizens can access tailored web services such as their Council Tax bill and benefits information.

We promised to establish an IT service and systems for Unitas ensuring business continuity in the transition

We also said we would bring IHMS up to a supported version and upgrade and implement many other systems including Bartec, Business Objects, Taranto, ICON.

What we achieved...

The website is now fully live and it was recognised last month as the most improved site in the quarter by SiteMorse , an independent company providing automated web based auditing, moving up 209 places in the INDEX. We also moved from a one star rated website to three out of a possible four stars by SOCITM a professional body for IT professionals in the public sector. We will have live citizen portal by the end of the month which will enable fully integrated end to end service delivery. We have also added more services online and are continuing to do so.

We implemented two new systems for Unitas, Callsys and Servitor; we migrated them to Council infrastructure and connected the interfaces back up which was incredibly complex with challenging timelines. We also set up and rolled out 350 mobile phones, 41 PCs, 67 laptops and 4 Multi-Functional Devices as well as moved 181 GB of data.

What we achieved...

Northgate IHMS is now in support and we have an ambitious plan to really take the system forward. Throughout the course of the year we also completed upgrades and implementations in Waste Management, Parking & Finance as well our reporting system Business Objects.

We implemented new SQL infrastructure to provide more resilience to a number of systems and ensure that the systems were housed on hardware that complied with PSN security standards.

We have progressed with the hybrid mail service with revenues and benefits. All daily letters and bills are now delivered electronically via our partners PSL. As a result post is arriving much more quickly to our customers and there has been a reduction in the number of data breaches using this service.

We have migrated our email service onto new hardware and upgraded to Exchange 2013. We have built and configured new Oracle servers. This hardware houses some of our largest IT systems such as Revenues and Benefits, Housing and Payroll. Work will continue this year to migrate these systems onto the new infrastructure. Unitas software (Servitor) already resides on these servers.

What we want to achieve in 2018-19

In 2018/19 there will be a strong focus on Business Change. As part of this we will look to improve service delivery across the Council with a strong emphasis on customer service, digitalisation, commerciality and efficiency.

Along a similar line we will also look to implement online modules of IHMS, the housing system and introduce other system improvements. We'll also kick off the Servitor/Kirona project introducing further online features and dynamic scheduling and finally we will continue with the work to implement the Housing Asset system, Asprey which will introduce efficiencies and rationalise ICT systems.

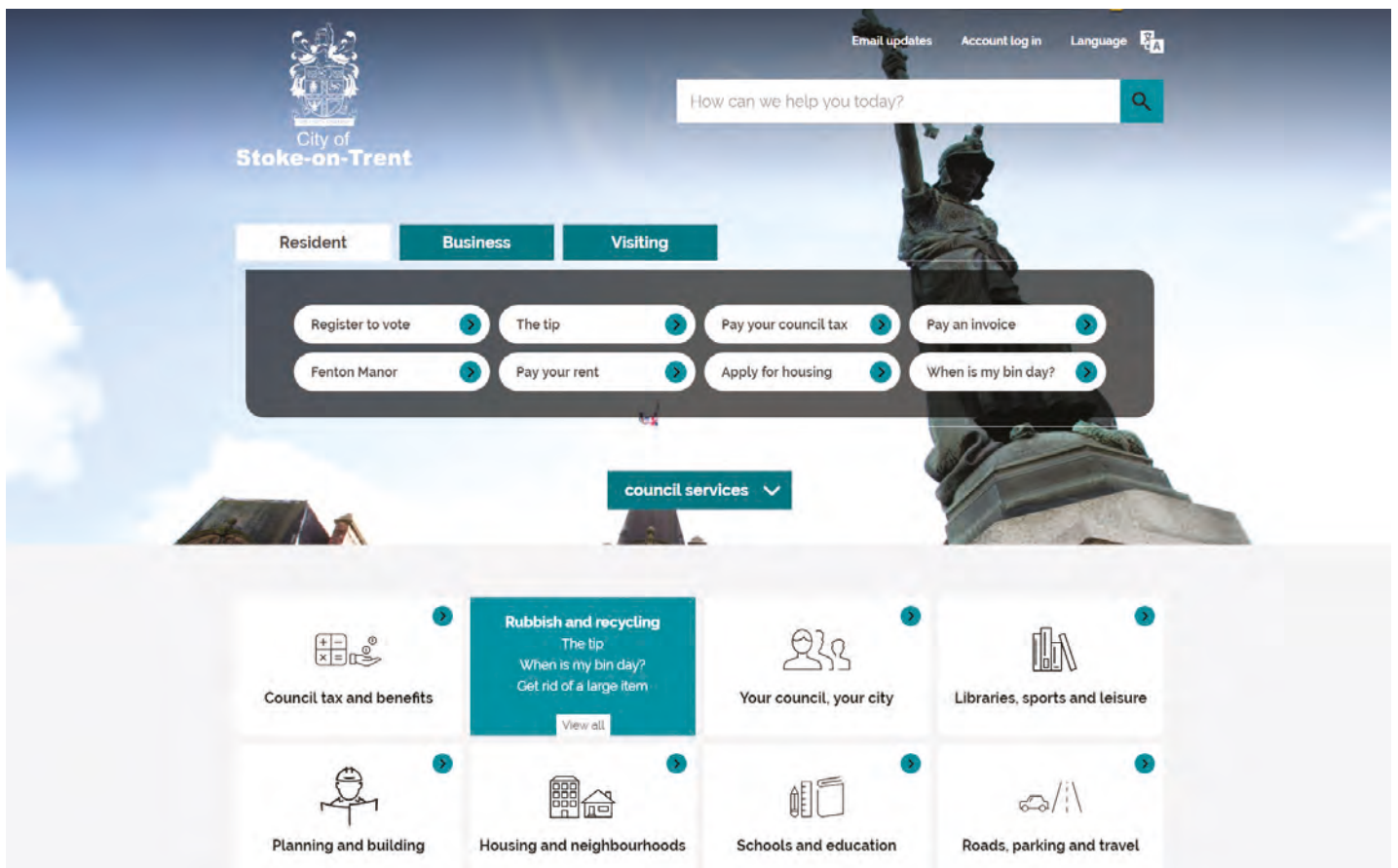
We intend to expand the hybrid mail function. Housing and Unitas will be using this solution during the early part of the New Year. Work to progress to other Directorates will continue.

What we want to achieve in 2018-19

This year we will be doing a large number of core infrastructure upgrades. Core infrastructure is basically the backend systems that keep everything else working. This includes Network infrastructure, SAN infrastructure (where your systems live) and Active Directory (the gatekeeper). This infrastructure manages what you can and can't see using your corporate login.

The print unit will continue to expand its services to ensure that as much work as possible is produced in-house. The production of banners, signage and posters has increased tenfold since we purchased the machinery.

We plan to investigate the roll out of a new version of Office to our desktop estate (pcs/laptops)



CUSTOMER ACCESS

Providing an excellent and accessible front door service to the residents of the city through face to face, telephone and all digital channels.

What we promised...

We said that following Cabinet approval to do so, we wanted to look at our local centres and ensure that we provide value services where they are best needed within the localities. This would include a review of the services and operating hours and undertake consultation with service users to understand service needs, with a clear aim to provide a modern fit for purpose facility and an enhanced customer experience.

What we want to achieve in 2018-19

We have set out our plans to undertake major restoration to both Longton and Tunstall Town Halls and also to refurbish all of the Local Centres throughout the city.

What we achieved...

Development meeting and programme team are now fully underway to create asset designs and a programme of work is in plan for the development of all Local centres, some require minor works where as some require full scale heritage redevelopments.

The customer feedback team has developed good working relationships with management and officers across the Directorate and now regularly shares the learnings from complaints so that we can respond with improving service delivery. The team delivered training on customer feedback to all frontline staff within the Directorate to drive up the standard of feedback handling and raise the profile of the value of listening to our customers.

We have worked with the Learning and Development Team to ensure that we have a fit for purpose programme for Customer Access staff to improve quality and provide an exceptional level of customer experience access all access channels. We have reviewed the Contact Us page via the website to ensure that we promote all available eforms to our customers to ensure that we deliver first time resolution at every opportunity.



647,833

Customers were helped by us



Monday

Was our busiest day



Longton

Was the busiest centre



596,614

Calls were presented to the contact centre



1.9 million minutes

The time we spent taking calls



69%

Of presented calls were handled

March

Was our busiest month



6 Minutes 27 Seconds

The average length of a call



104 Compliments

Were received from customers



These figures represent the full year 2017-18 across all channels

LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES

Placing libraries at the heart of locality working, supporting the cultural and educational life of children and young people and providing a gateway to employability and empowerment.

What we promised...

We said we wanted to promote a love of reading in all adult groups, and to support writing groups to develop their own events and activities. We promised to continue to contribute to the IT literacy up-skilling agenda by working with Food banks to increase the opportunities for those people attending there to help them develop ICT skills, which in turn will enable them to apply for Universal Credit, jobs and be part of the e-government agenda.

What we achieved...

We held a number of events for adults to promote the love of reading and poetry, with performances in libraries from high-profile poets and best-selling novelists, plus a fantastic poetry, song and story workshop for adults with learning disabilities.

We supported local writers and poets including support for the popular 6X6 Reading Café, connecting writers with their readers and providing opportunities for local authors to promote their work.

We said we wanted to encourage children and families to read for pleasure, to share stories and to visit the library.

We gifted Time to Read packs to Reception children in over sixty primary schools in Stoke-on-Trent, and 3,700 Nursery children received free Bookstart Treasure packs. Over 3,000 one-year-olds received free Bookstart Baby packs, ensuring young families throughout the city have books in their homes. We encouraged families to share stories and reading activities in their local library and the Little Library Van. Roadshows took place during school holidays, with visits to locations across the city. Over 1,500 adults and children visited the van to listen to stories and join the library.

What we achieved...

The very first Makefest took place at City Central Library in May, bringing together makers from a range of fields and industries to celebrate the wealth of creativity in the city, encourage the next generation of makers and provide a fantastic day for families to visit the library and be inspired.

We established Code Clubs in two libraries, where children aged 7-13 work together to solve problems, improve literacy and develop coding skills. Supported by Arts Council funding we partnered with the British Ceramics Biennial to deliver a fabulous clay books art installation based around the Six Towns Collection of local studies books. Children, adults with learning disabilities and people from the community created clay books, which were fired during the exhibition.

Supported by Arts Council and Children in Need funding we partnered with B-Arts on the Little School of Improbable Cooking, where families created food-inspired arts activities and ate the products of their cooking experience.

We supported people to seek work, learn ICT skills, improve literacy skills and learn how to job search for best results in libraries across the city through workclubs and one to one sessions.

We supported people to access the Universal credit website and applications forms assisting our colleagues in Housing and Revenues and Benefits by providing ICT access and staff trained to assist and support people with no access to ICT in the home.

In the City Archives, the Doulton Described Project received funding from the National Archives, after a competitive process against 54 other projects. A two year project to catalogue the very large archive of Royal Doulton and predecessor companies began in April and is on schedule.

What we want to achieve in 2018-19

We want to reach out to new audiences and encourage children, young people and families to develop new skills in a fun, informal environment. To do this we will continue to develop Makefest and Code Clubs, and will establish Lego Clubs and STEAM Saturday events in libraries.

We will appoint the first Poet Laureate for Stoke-on-Trent, providing an exciting opportunity for a local poet to raise the profile of poetry in the city.



Stoke-on-Trent Libraries presents

longfella

An evening of world-class poetry with Tony Walsh, one of Britain's most renowned professional poets

Friday 29 September, 2017
7.30pm
City Central Library, Hanley
Tickets: £3 per person (includes refreshments)

To book tickets please contact
City Central Library on:
01782 238455
or by email:
central.library@stoke.gov.uk

"He is the real deal!" Benjamin Zephaniah
"Fired and inspiring" John Hegley
"Absolutely brilliant!" Sir Alex Ferguson

This is an event for adults and may contain adult themes
stoke.gov.uk/libraries
01782 238455
STOKE-ON-TRENT FOR CITY-OF-CULTURE-2021

POETRY ON LOAN

City of Stoke-on-Trent

What's going on in Stoke-on-Trent Libraries...
Monday 14 August - Saturday 19 August 2017

Monday 14 August - 11am-12noon - City Central Library
Canine Partners

Monday 14 August - 2-3pm - Longton Library
Canine Partners

Tuesday 15 August - 11am-12noon - Meir Library
Canine Partners

Tuesday 15 August - 2-3pm - Bentilee Library
Canine Partners

Wednesday 16 August - 11am-12noon - Bentilee Library
Exotic Zoo

Wednesday 16 August - 2-3pm - Stoke Library
Exotic Zoo

Saturday 19 August - 11am-12noon - City Central Library
Summer Fun

Saturday 19 August - 11am-12noon - Longton Library
Have You Seen Elephant?

Places are limited - arrive early to avoid disappointment
Children under 8 years must be accompanied by a parent or carer

stoke.gov.uk/libraries
01782 238455

City of Stoke-on-Trent





City of
Stoke-on-Trent