Housing Report 2021-22 A small part of what we do!

Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

The repair and maintenance of the HRA stock results in an annual spend of approximately £7.5 million.The repair and maintenance of the housing stock is undertaken by a workforce of approximately 80 building trades and further management support staff. The operations, and the financial flow it generates results in significant financial benefits to the local economy.

The Council retains a stock of 4,500 properties for rent. These properties contribute to meeting a substantial and growing demand for affordable homes and support a corresponding number of households, many on very low incomes. In so doing the Councils housing service makes a vital contribution to the diversity and strength of local communities.

The HRA is a ringfenced account funded by the rent paid by HRA tenants. Ensuring that HRA properties are repaired promptly and maintained in good condition reduces the time properties need to be kept vacant in which state they result in a cost through, for example, lost rent and increased costs of deterioration.

The delivery of the HRA repair and maintenance activity is currently subject of a transformation project to introduce digital technology to remove the onerous paper-based way of working.

Carbon Neutral?

The Council signed up to be Carbon Neutral this will have to include the HRA housing stock. The team and I have had meetings with other Registered Providers (RPs) on this subject and how to tackle the problem.

The consensus is to approach in a fabric first method to up the EPC rating first before adding modern heating methods as these need to be evaluated. Air Sourced Heat Pumps are expensive to run, will Hydrogen be introduced into the gas mains?

The cost of this must be borne by the HRA and cannot to passed on to the tenants. These works will run into multi millions a conservative estimate between £100-£150 million not to be found down the back of the sofa, so the money will need to be borrowed. This may also see us cut down on our extensive development programme you can only spend a pound once.

Development

We continue to develop new homes for the HRA, are most prestigious to date will be the passive house design on the former Deben High School Site in Felixstowe, 41 units to remain as Council Houses. Projects in Lowestoft and Beccles are being progressed and we are also purchasing 106 homes from developers across East Suffolk including Darsham and Woodbridge if planning permission is gained, we hope to construct or purchase a further 170 in the next two years.

Private Sector Housing in 2021/22

The private sector housing team deliver a diverse range of services that together can be considered as services that keep people safe at home.

The service is constantly evolving to meet the priority needs of the community and over the last 12 months some highlighted achievement include:

* Increasing the number of homes adapted for people living with a disability from 143 in 2020/21 to 331 last year. Independent Living East Suffolk provides a comprehensive support service which was brought back in house in 2020.
* Being awarded Government funding to deliver a Suffolk wide programme to raise awareness around energy efficiency in Private Rented properties. It is unlawful to rent out a home with a very poor energy rating of F or G. Alongside this we have also been able to secure Green Homes funding to offer free energy efficiency improvements to low-income households including wall and loft insulation, solar PV systems and heat pumps. A very important project in the light of rising energy bills.
* The Council has also agreed to resource a 3-year programme to tackle our most problematic long term empty homes which number 238. This work will commence later this year. A new member of staff will be joining the team to find and connect with the private owners and drive this work forward, bringing these wasted homes back into use.
* The Stepping Home service provides solutions to housing issues that are non-medical but prevent people from being discharged. The service does whatever is needed form moving furniture, clearing hoarding, deep- cleaning, fixing key safes and providing access ramps to help people get where they want to be and free up hospital accommodation. A highly commended finalist on the Municipal Journal Awards last year the service has also been selected as a finalist in the Local Government Chronical Awards.
* We also inspect homes owned by private landlords- licence Homes of Multiple Occupation (HRAs) sort out travellers home the homeless – clear cluttered and vermin infested homes – serve notice to private landlords who provide inadequate unsafe homes.

It has been an absolute pleasure to lead such a caring and conscientious bunch of officers that make up the housing team the largest single group of employees at ESC.

And yes, there is a housing crisis in this country that needs addressing along with the appropriate infrastructure.

Cllr Richard Kerry Cabinet Member for Housing Ward Member Orwell and Villages.