

Report for	Adult Services & Housing Policy and Scrutiny Panel (ASH)
Date of meeting	21 st March 2024
Subject	Alliance Homes Update
Status	For information and discussion
Presented by	Iain Lock – Chief Operating Officer
Executive summary	<p>Following recent communication with Elected Members and Senior Council Officers, it has been agreed that Alliance will report an update to ASH on matters affecting housing services and maintenance across the Alliance Homes portfolio.</p> <p>This paper provides a high-level strategic context and aims to support a proactive, transparent conversation.</p>

1. Our strategic ambitions



PLAN A 2.0 2022-27

WHO WE ARE
We're a housing association that exists to make a positive difference to people's lives.

WHY WE EXIST
To create great places to live that our customers are proud to call home.

OUR PRINCIPLES

- Leading with our values
- Putting customers at the centre of everything we do
- Being a trusted partner
- Embracing innovation, change, technology
- Being commercially adept and financially resilient

OUR VALUES

- Ambitious for all
- Genuine
- Awake to opportunity
- Make the difference
- Effective

OUR FOCUSED FIVE STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- Delivering a great customer experience
- Building more affordable homes
- Being a green and ethical business
- Investing in existing homes and neighbourhoods
- Being a great place to work

- Our strategic plan – **Plan A 2.0** – sets out our ambitions against five core objectives.
- We anchor what we do (and what we don't) against **Plan A 2.0**, aligning our KPIs, risk and priorities too.

2. Our operating framework



1 KEEP THINGS SIMPLE

- Simplify our structures and how we are organised
- Simplify and connect our systems of work
- Simplify our service offer to customers`

2 BE BRILLIANT AT THE BASICS

- Be consistent
- Be data and feedback led
- Be awake to future innovation – but not yet

3 BUILD RESILIENCE

- Right people for the right job
- Right measures for colleagues with clear expectations
- Right resources, effectively planned

- We have developed a three-point operating framework to underpin how we work.
- This framework helps to build accountability.

3. Operating environment

Macro environment

The context for social housing has never been tougher. Changes to housing policy at a national level has resulted in new requirements for regulation and in particular safety and consumer standards, along with more scrutiny, increased demand for services and competition for resources.

This macro-operating environment, together with an ongoing recovery from Covid (which meant we had to change how we work and defer investment in homes), has created a compounded challenge for housing associations, including Alliance. This is further exacerbated by public service funding pressures more broadly.

As a result, there is a considerable strategic landscape working against housing, making the delivery of excellent service a bigger challenge.

Local environment – Alliance context

Our customers

Customers are at the centre of our business, both in terms of our ambitions and how we design services. However, we know that we do not always get things right.

Through our extensive and evolved customer engagement and segmentation work, we know our customers are experiencing life differently, with more customers presenting with complex cognitive and physical disabilities. This creates a new dynamic for us in terms of customer / landlord relationships and the types of services we can and cannot support. At times, the changing customer profile places additional pressures and requires more intensive management, but we are adapting our approaches in response.

Customers rightly deserve their landlord to be accountable and transparent. We have a range of feedback mechanisms both formal and informal that we encourage customers to utilise, including: our Housing Ombudsman compliant complaints process, our contact centre, social media channels, through our community investment work in our core neighbourhoods, satisfaction surveys, our online customer engagement platform HIVE and at every point of customer contact.

What is important, though, is not only how we listen, but how we capture learning, map trends, and take meaningful action. We have already taken steps to increase our resources in our feedback team to ensure complaints are resolved to service standard.

Our homes

We also know that a quality home, in good condition that is well maintained unlocks customer satisfaction and better life chances.

We have seen a significant and material increase in demand for our property repairs and maintenance services over the last three years.

The effects of under delivery of planned investment during the Covid-19 pandemic, the five years of rent cuts in the years preceding Covid, an ageing stock profile and more media interest in housing and housing condition, has been a catalyst for that spike in demand. The compound impact has directly affected our ability to respond, causing some challenges in efficiency, and this means we have a backlog that we are working through.

Key challenges in the repairs arena have included the increased prominence of damp, mould and disrepair cases. We know this is a sector-wide issue and we have taken steps to improve our practices.

As a responsible landlord, we invest a range of services and spend millions every year in repairing homes, improving homes when they are empty for new customers, upgrading homes with new kitchens, bathrooms, roofs, windows, and doors etc. We strive to achieve a standard higher than the minimum required by the Regulator of Social Housing.

4. Performance

Despite some of the operating challenges outlined above, we have continued to focus on performance improvement and investing our resources in improving quality of our homes.

As requested, we have included some key metrics below that summarise key areas of enquiry requested by ASH.

<p>Stock condition</p> <p>Compliance with Decent Homes 99.12%</p>	<p>This is a measure of stock condition and the core benchmark for housing associations. We employ three stock condition surveyors who complete routine surveys of all homes every five years to understand investment needs.</p>
<p>Complaints</p> <p>Stage 1 resolution time 42 days</p> <p>Stage 2 resolution time 47 days</p>	<p>We are experiencing more formal complaints than ever. We are not where we want to be but have approved resources to build a bigger feedback team to help improve performance.</p>
<p>Investing in new homes</p> <p>Forecast completions (all locations) 136</p> <p>Forecast spend to YE 23/24 £50.3m</p>	<p>We continue to invest in new homes, with 80% of our total programme in North Somerset. We prioritise social rent, balanced with Shared Ownership to create diverse communities.</p>
<p>Maintenance spend (forecast YE 2/24)</p> <p>Responsive maintenance £5.25m</p> <p>Planned investment (major works) £10.050m</p>	<p>We are spending more each year to meet maintenance demands which has increased by 30% year on year. Our budgets for next year have increased further again, above inflation, to continue our investment in existing homes.</p>

Maintenance plans

We develop investment plans based on stock data and using customer insight. Priorities include tackling damp and mould, energy investments / affordable warmth, major component replacements, safety servicing and safety projects and routine repairs.



We know building more affordable homes is essential to support the nation, regional and local housing crisis. We are ambitious and have delivered at scale, especially in North Somerset.

An example here is 125 new affordable homes being delivered in partnership with Keepmoat Homes, Homes England, and North Somerset Council at Winterstoke Gate (Parklands Village).

5. Evolving our engagement

We recognise that elected Members and the Council are important stakeholders. With challenges to tackle, we will commit to evolving our engagement.

The start of this is our attendance and reporting to ASH, which will provide a forum for proactive discussion about how we can work in partnership to address issues, against a wider understanding of our operating environment and regulatory pressures.

Additionally, we already work with Councillors on topical matters. As an example, a recent petition concerning customers at Milton Rise and Charter Road has been the catalyst for thinking differently about how relationships need to evolve. In this instance, we have met with Senior Council Officers, Ward Councillors and cabinet members to agree a way forward that will include local engagement events and greater information sharing.

We recognise that local political changes can make engagement harder. However, we are developing a stakeholder map of North Somerset, using ward boundaries to map against our housing portfolio. This will then allow us to be proactive in how we engage, when and with the right people. We intend to evolve this further with specific 'ward profiles' that gives Councillors more insight into the number of Alliance properties in an area, the type and tenure as well as key contacts.

Our Councillor enquiry process has not always been followed fully and this can sometimes lead to delays in responding to emails or letters. We will refresh and re-publish that process, along with suggested service standards for replying that will help to manage expectations and avoid duplication or repeat enquiries, which we know adds frustration.

6. Summary

We welcome ongoing communication and engagement. There is a lot to do operationally, and we need the support of our key strategic partners and stakeholders to achieve success. We welcome feedback on this report and look forward to future opportunities to engage.