

Committee: COMMUNITY AND HOUSING COMMITTEE

Agenda Item

Date: January 21, 2010

5

Title: LEAD OFFICER'S REPORT

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Item for information

Summary

- 1 This report updates members on matters that are not otherwise on the Agenda and provides information items.

Recommendations

- 2 That the report is noted.

Situation/Update

3 Vacant Council Homes (Voids)

Officers are continuing to work with the Business Improvement & Performance Team to identify ways to minimise rent loss due to voids and reduce the time taken to re-let empty properties. Recommendations from the team will be reported to a future committee meeting.

A new Voids Surveyor is in post and a new letting standard has been written and adopted. Void turnaround figures are improving and have been reduced from 73 to 39 days (this figure includes all properties receiving decent homes works - in future these will be separated out) however void workload continues to be an issue. There has been a large increase in numbers of new tenancies each month and a survey is being carried out to assess reasons for this.

An increase in sheltered accommodation vacancies is having the biggest impact on void losses. A feasibility study has been carried out on unpopular bedsit accommodation however it is unlikely that the cost of these works can be funded from existing resources therefore external funding is being sought from the HCA and the PCT.

4 Red Telephone Kiosk Adoption

At the last Committee meeting Members agreed that they would not object to Parish Councils progressing with adoption of their kiosk where they have a desire to do so. Of the 42 red kiosks made available for adoption, Parish Councils have expressed a wish to adopt 12 of them. Therefore Uttlesford District Council's response to the BT consultation agreed that Arkesden, Felsted, Great Canfield,

Great Hallingbury, Great Sampford, Hadstock Henham, High Roding, Littlebury Green, Littlebury and Stebbing could all be progressed to permit the Parish Councils to adopt the red kiosks and for the payphone within to be removed.

5 PLACE Scheme

The Council have recently benefited from the successful refurbishment of a long term empty home in Silver Street Stansted using funding from the PLACE scheme with a young family from our waiting list moving in at the beginning of November. Following the recent allocation of capital funding for the renovation of long term empty properties which have been the subject of EDMOs, officers have been in contact with a number of owners with a view to building up the necessary evidence to start the formal process.

6 Recession Impact – Housing Options/Homelessness Update

It has again been a busy quarter for clients seeking housing advice.

Quarter 3	No of people seen for Housing Advice
2008/09	117
2009/10	209

Many of the clients seen have come in because they are concerned about paying their rent because of reduced or lost income. This can also be seen by the increase in the number of housing benefit claims received by the Council.

Quarters1-3	New Housing Benefit Claims
1 April 2008 – 31 Dec 2008	1528
1 April 2009 – 31 Dec 2009	1941

The homelessness figures for 2009/10 continue to remain similar to those for 2008/09, again due to the prevention work being carried out by the housing options/homelessness team. We are currently working with 3 clients who may be candidates for the government's mortgage rescue scheme however Local Authorities may see less potential cases for this scheme now as the Government have set up a national fast track team to take referrals direct from Lenders.

7 Community Achievement Awards

At the last meeting of this Committee, Members enquired about the possible reinstatement of the Community Achievement Awards. Officer discussions have concluded that this is indeed possible and plans are being brought forward to reintroduce a bi-annual event starting this summer. Traditionally this event has been in February but it is felt that a summer event will add to its success.