

**HOUSING INITIATIVES WORKING GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 5 JULY 2010 at 2.00 pm**

Present:- Councillor R H Chamberlain – Chairman.
Councillors J E Hudson, J E Menell and S V Schneider.

Tenant Forum representative: Mrs E Rogers and Mr S Sproul.

Officers in attendance: M Cox (Democratic Services Officer), Helen Harvey (Senior Sheltered Housing/Lifeline Officer) Roz Millership (Head of Housing Services Liz Petrie (Housing Management Manager), Judith Snares (Housing Options/Homelessness Manager), Suzanna Wood (Housing Strategy and Planning Policy Manager), Robert Crowe (Development Officer) and Russell Goodey (Building Services Manager).

HWG1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E Bellingham Smith and D J Morson.

HWG2 WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed Robert Crowe, the new Development Officer to the meeting.

HWG3 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 May 2010 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

HWG4 BUSINESS ARISING

i) Minute HWG41 – Council house gardens –allotment use

Councillor Menell asked for an update on the questions raised at the last meeting about the use of council house gardens for allotments. Legal opinion had confirmed that it would be too difficult to pursue this formally. However, with regards to reducing the size of gardens between tenancies, this was already accepted policy and garden land not required for any other purpose could potentially be leased to tenants until such time as it was required by the Council.

ii) Minute HWG47 – Anti Social Behaviour presentation

A presentation on this issue had been made to the North Area Community Forum and the Community and Housing Committee.

HWG5 HOLLOWAY CRESCENT UPDATE

Members were updated on the progress of the phase one development. Enabling works would shortly be underway and building was expected to start on site in the near future. Further information was awaited on the availability of the HSA grant, but it was confirmed that the development would go ahead, financed either by grant funding or from the Council's funds..

In relation to phase 2 officers were still waiting for a reply from the District Valuer and until that had received no further progress could be made. Members were concerned about the time taken to receive the valuation and asked that their concern be passed on to that office.

Regarding the parking situation at the site, it was confirmed that most residents were now using the alternative parking area. Those who were still parking on the site would be contacted once the enabling works were underway.

HWG6 DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME UPDATE

Members were advised that it had not been possible to produce a development schedule for this meeting because the Development Officer post had been vacant. The position had now been filled and officers would be meeting with the Housing Associations over the next couple of weeks and the spreadsheet would be updated. There was no significant change to the previous programme although a number of new developments appeared to be coming forward.

HWG7 UPDATE ON NEW ALLOCATION POLICY

The new allocation policy had been agreed by the Community and Housing Committee in June. Officers were now concentrating on the implementation and were talking to software providers and liaising with consortium members.

The meeting was informed that there had been a move from within the consortium for the distribution of the free sheets to outlets in the district, showing housing vacancies, to be discontinued. This was partly due to financial saving (circa 80K a year across the consortium) and also due the fall in demand because of the increasing use of the online facility. The full free sheet would still be available on-line and to subscribers. Officers asked members for their views on this proposal but pointed out the consortium would take a decision based on the majority view.

So as not to totally withdraw the service, it was suggested that the vacancy sheets could be printed off from the council's website and delivered to the existing outlets. These sheets though would not include any properties from outside the district.

Effy Rogers said that she would like the free sheet service to continue as she thought they were well used and gave residents the opportunity to view all properties across the consortium. Other members said that there were other

means of obtaining the information, mainly through the web, or requesting a brochure to be sent. Also, it was estimated that this would save the council around £15,000 a year, which was not insignificant and it appeared that the demand for the sheets had fallen. Members thought that the alternative suggestion for distributing the vacancy lists was a good compromise as long as it didn't involve too much additional work for the housing staff.

The next consortium meeting would be in a couple of months and it was suggested that before then the comments of the tenant forum should be sought. Members indicated that they were generally in favour of withdrawing the free paper.

HWG8 TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION FACILITY MOLE HILL GREEN

The Building Services Manager reported that the new temporary accommodation at Mole Hill Green Takeley would shortly be completed. It would comprise 4 units, 2 bed sits and 2 one bed apartments. The units had cost in the region of £60,000 and will be would be completed on time and within budget.

Members asked for a visit to be arranged to see the units once they had been completed.

HWG9 HARROGATE CONFERENCE

Sam Sproul reported on the recent Housing Conference in Harrogate that he had attended with Councillor Barker and the Housing Options/Homelessness Manager. The tone of the conference had been down beat due to the cuts in public spending and the possible implications for the housing service. However, he had found the event to be very informative and felt that it would be useful for the council to send a representative to next years conference.

HWG10 OTHER BUSINESS

Sam Sproul mentioned a problem that had been raised at the Sheltered Housing Task Group in relation to invalid scooters and the arrangements for storage and charging of batteries.

HWG11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

A meeting of the working group would be required to consider the new conditions of tenancy. Officers would liaise with the Chairman and arrange a meeting once this had been prepared.

The meeting ended at 2.50pm